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Editorial

This issue of the *International Journal of Action Research* presents three articles and one report that express the "applicability" of action research in different social and organisational contexts, as well as its continuing strength. In times when much of research is market oriented, action research seems to be recovering much of its initial impetus for social change, for humanising work conditions, and for alternative ways of producing relevant knowledge.

The article "First person action research in complex social systems: Three stories of praxis" by Patricia A. Wilson, Elizabeth Walsh, and Alan Bush addresses the questions: "In a world increasingly characterised by uncertainty, social inequality, and ecological degradation, how can action researchers engage in ways that support regenerative systems change in the living systems of which they are part? How can the inhabitants of living systems co-create experiences and conditions of thrivability?" The authors reflect on their action research experience in three different social and political contexts, one in Mexico and two different North American cities (Austin and Asheville). Having as basic reference the concept of thrivability, the authors conclude with practical propositions for action research in the context of social complexity.

João Alberto Arantes do Amaral and Aurélio Hess, in the article "The dynamics of providing support to crack cocaine addicts in open-air drug scenes: the lessons learned by the 'Helpers' intervention project" analyse the relation between the support team and crack cocaine drug addicts in the city of São Paulo (Brazil). They highlight the need for a multidisciplinary approach, and the openness to understand the complex process that involves different, sometimes conflicting, interests. The authors, based on a systemic approach, attempt to understand the dynamics of the intervention that influences and is influenced by several other dynamics. As they conclude: "We advise that drug addiction intervention programmes must be grounded in a systemic model that includes actions that are responsive to all the dynamics, especially the threats associated with drug dealers and the dysfunctional behavior of users."

In the article "A Practical Model for Integrating Action Research Time into Second Language Education Schedule" Vahid Rahmani Doqaruni, Behzad Ghonsooly, Reza Pishghadam address the issue of time limitation in conducting action research in the field of

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second/foreign language teacher education. Seven Iranian teachers of a private English language teaching institute participated in the present study that used first- and second-order action research. As result of the study, the authors point out that effective action research should be concerned with issues such as empowering teachers in dealing with a particular problem, creating a sense of belonging to a professional community, and helping them to value time allotment. These conclusions may also apply to other action research contexts and practices, where time limitation usually constitutes a hindrance for effective participation.

This issue of the *International Journal of Action Research* also presents a report that highlights some of topics discussed at the conference Action Research Network of the Americas (ARNA) under the title "Participation and Democratisation of Knowledge: new convergences for reconciliation", in Cartagena de las Indias (Cartagena), June 12-16, 2017, following two important preceding conferences (1977 and 1997). Sandro de Castro Pitano, Cheron Zanini Moretti, Alfonso Torres Carrillo and Danilo Streck registered key concepts and attempted to organise them in topics: consolidation of values and principles of participatory research, decolonisation as an ethical, political and aesthetic commitment, the role of universities in relation to innovative and transgressive practices, epistemology from below and the transforming potential of systematising experiences, social and political context and action research.

Danilo R. Streck
Editor-in-chief

First Person Action Research in Complex Social Systems: three stories of praxis

Patricia A. Wilson, Elizabeth Walsh, and Alan Bush

Abstract
In a world increasingly characterised by uncertainty, social inequality, and ecological degradation, how can action researchers engage in ways that support regenerative systems change in the living systems of which they are part? How can the inhabitants of living systems co-create experiences and conditions of thrivability? These questions animated the reflective practice of the authors as they each engaged in collaborative action research projects in three different, socially complex and contested contexts.

The article explores the dialogic methodologies the authors employed, the impacts and outcomes experienced by the participants, and the evolution of the authors' own practices as action researchers and catalysts of change. Wilson draws on a three-year action research project in peri-urban Mexico on sustainable community development. Bush explores a year of engagement fostering resilient urban systems in Asheville, North Carolina. Walsh reflects on her ten-year praxis of fostering regenerative dialogue amid social conflict and vulnerability in a gentrifying neighbourhood of Austin, Texas. The comparative analysis of the three stories concludes with propositions for action research praxis in the context of social complexity.

Keywords: action research, distributed leadership, generative dialogue, thrivability, regenerative design, complex social systems, situated spiritual practice.

Investigación-acción en primera persona en sistemas sociales complejos: Tres historias de praxis

Resumen
En un mundo caracterizado cada vez más por la incertidumbre, la inequidad social y la degradación ecológica, ¿cómo los investigadores de acción pueden involucrarse de forma que apoyen el cambio de los sistemas regenerativos en los sistemas vivos de los que forman parte? ¿Cómo pueden los habitantes de los sistemas vivos co-crear experiencias y condiciones de *thrivability*? Estas preguntas animaron la práctica reflexiva de los autores, ya que cada uno participó en proyectos de investigación-acción colaborativa en tres contextos diferentes, socialmente complejos y disputados.

El artículo explora las metodologías dialógicas que los autores emplearon, los impactos y resultados experimentados por los participantes, y la evolución de las propias prácticas de los autores como investigadores de acción y catalizadores del cambio. Wilson se basa en un proyecto de investigación-acción de tres años en la zona periurbana de México sobre el desarrollo sostenible de la comunidad. Bush explora un año de compromiso fomentando sistemas urbanos resilientes en

Asheville, Carolina del Norte. Walsh reflexiona sobre su praxis de diez años de fomento de diálogo regenerativo en medio de conflictos sociales y vulnerabilidad en un barrio gentrificado de Austin, Texas. El análisis comparativo de las tres historias concluye con propuestas para la praxis de la investigación-acción en el contexto de la complejidad social.

Palabras clave: investigación-acción, liderazgo distribuido, diálogo generativo, *thrivability*, diseño regenerativo, sistemas sociales complejos, práctica espiritual situada.

Introduction

In a world increasingly characterised by uncertainty, social inequality, and ecological degradation, how can action researchers engage in ways that support regenerative systems change in the living systems of which they are part? How can the inhabitants of living systems co-create experiences and conditions of thrivability? These questions animated the reflective practice of the authors of this paper as they each engaged in collaborative action research projects in three different, socially complex and contested contexts. This paper explores the dialogic methodologies they employed, the impacts and outcomes experienced by the participants as leaders and innovators of systemic change, and the evolution of the authors' own practices as action researchers and catalysts of change.

The emphasis on personal reflective practice in this paper is consistent with the emergent discourse on thrivability, which embraces a "spirituality that re-instills a sense of the sacred in the universe" and calls for integrating multiple systems perspectives in the process of making meaning and initiating transformational change (Laszlo 2014). As Laszlo (2014) has asserted, "By keeping the four levels of systemic thrivability: the intra-personal, the interpersonal, the trans-species, and the trans-generational, present in our thoughts and perceptions throughout our individual and collective meaning-making efforts, we will be able to create a shared sense of meaningfulness, and this will further emerge the conditions of hyper-connectivity and flow" (Laszlo 2014, p. 589).

This is easier said than done. We find that while practices for thrivability are in many ways transferable, they are also inherently contextual and experiential. As such, we offer three personal, contextual stories of praxis from which we offer four propositions that may be useful to others in cultivating situated leadership practices for thrivability.

Wilson's Story: Emancipatory Practice in Peri-Urban Mexico

Setting the Stage

Clinging to the edges of deep ravines or clustered near abandoned landfills on the peri-urban fringe of the sprawling Mexico City conurbation, the self-built homes of some 15,000 settlers, mostly refugees from gentrification in Mexico City, comprise the so-called 'irregular' communities of El Tráfico and Llano Grande. With neither clear title nor basic water and wastewater services, the occupants have made these contested landscapes home over the last ten to twenty years, with more arrivals every year.

The local watershed commission, a decentralised body of the federal water commission, CONAGUA, treated such communities as a problem. It was not their illegality, i.e. the lack of proper land titles, that was the problem, but rather the fact that these peri-urban communities were the primary source of the untreated wastewater and trash entering the streams and killing the manmade jewel of the region, the Presa Guadalupe Lake. But try as they did, the watershed commissioners' policies, programmes, regulations, community trainings, and environmental awareness campaigns did nothing to diminish the flow of garbage and untreated waste from the informal settlements.

In 2013 the director of the watershed commission sensed that a new approach to dealing with the informal settlements was needed. She invited me to introduce a collaborative and participatory form of engagement with the communities, using participatory action research (PAR). Accompanied by my students and teaching assistant in Community and Regional Planning at the University of Texas, I would facilitate a field-based workshop with local government professionals and educators involved in sustainable development in the Presa Guadalupe watershed. We would engage with two of the informal communities where the leaders had invited us: El Tráfico and Llano Grande.

That two week workshop has developed into an ongoing programme of participatory sustainable development led by a local university and the watershed commission, with annual visits from my students and me. The two communities can now boast of greater agency and participatory capacity, as well as visible strides in the productive reuse of materials once destined for the creeks and ravines. The story I wish to tell from these experiences, however, deals with the transformation of the practitioners themselves in our first workshop: how the twenty four professionals, when shorn of their customary titles, positions, and roles could face their vulnerability and build respectful, trusting, and horizontal relationships of collaboration and creativity with community residents and fellow teammates. The rocky road to transformation also left me with some valuable self-reflection about my own blind spots, the implications for my practice of participatory action research (PAR), and the meaning of emancipatory practice.

Leadership and Performance Stories

The 24 Mexican professionals invited by the watershed commission had expected another top down seminar given by an outside sustainability expert, along with a few excursions to nearby communities. What they got was an intense immersion in participatory action research aimed at identifying, in tandem with the community, the emergent edge of change using rapid cycles of action and reflection. The professionals would be the facilitators and collaborators, not the purveyors of answers or directors of projects. Their individual expertise would come in only if and when needed to add value to the collective efforts. There was no pre-defined game plan, no concrete objective, no performance evaluation criteria, and no designated team leader!

Insecurity welled up in the Mexican professionals from Day 1. The tension crescendoed on Day 2, especially when their first engagement with the communities did not go as the teams had planned, and discord broke out over how to respond. By Day 3 the tension had become overwhelming for some of them. Different people tried to step into authority roles in their groups, generating more friction and tension. The last straw seemed to be embarrass-

ment: they thought they looked unprepared and foolish in the eyes of the community residents and leaders.

At first the tension seemed productive to me: alive and generative. As a practitioner of PAR, I know that tension is a valuable motivator, and a great foil for questioning one's own assumptions, opinions, and judgments. In fact, the art of holding tension is a major skill of the PAR practitioner: to be comfortable with X and Not X at the same time, knowing that a higher synthesis is already emergent, to not rush to relieve or resolve tension but rather to trust in process. In fact, the moment that tension peaks and an impasse is reached can be the moment of presencing (Scharmer 2009): the creative reframing that opens the way to a new synthesis, the emergent edge, and generative action.

Well, I was told, this tension was unbearable, and I needed to do something. They wanted me to resolve the tension by doing what they were accustomed to: to have me step into the authority role and tell them just what to do. I was tempted to become the saviour, play the hero role, wield the authority they longed for, and resolve the tensions by laying out the answers. Yet I knew that doing so would undercut the very takeaways I hoped for them to experience.

At the same time I suspected that I had already failed at something really important. I had not created a safe enough container to hold the tension in the group: a space where people know they are loved and cared for, despite all difficulties. In my desire not to control I had appeared aloof. I had not built a heart space of caring that could hold the insecurity and vulnerability when frustration was high.

Rather than claiming the authority role, I chose to bring the uncertainty out into the open for collective reflection. Through dialogic inquiry, we examined the two teams' unfolding experiences in order to "become uncertain together" (Philippson 2009 p. 29). The tension became held collectively, rather than individually. But the real turning point happened after lunch on the fourth day. Inspired by Otto Scharmer's social presencing theatre and Augusto Boal's theatre of the oppressed, I asked each team to come up with a skit in which they would portray—literally, act out—their experience in the field for the other team to see.

The resulting participatory theatre became the alchemical agent of transformation through levity and perspective. By co-creating a skit about their experience, they learned what each other saw as the difficulties, challenges, and also successes. They realised they were not alone. The enactment got people to see themselves with perspective, and thereby reflect on their own experience as others might see it. It let them see their own roles in creating the difficulties and successes, individually and as a group. It gave them compassion for each other's experience. It allowed each other to step outside of themselves, see the larger picture, and recognise the folly of their group's collective dissonance. Most important, they got to laugh about it! Doing the skit got people out of their heads and working together. It allowed them to act foolish in front of their peers in a field of safety. They got to see that it was OK when others made 'fools' of themselves. By the end of the skits the tension in the room had melted: vanished! Afterwards the teams appeared galvanised, productive, and happy.

Reflections on Performance Stories

By the end of the two weeks many of the professionals expressed their amazement at how much they had been able to accomplish, from bridging a long standing community divide and collaboratively designing an ecological park and playground in one case, to fostering a women's initiative to transform plastic bags and discarded tyres into productive reusable resources in another case. For some of the professionals the most important dividend was earning the trust and respect of the two communities where we worked, something they had not felt before in their work with communities. They were struck by the pride and ownership the community members took in the accomplishments of the two weeks, and the warmth they showed toward the professionals. For other team members it was realising the prejudices and assumptions they had carried unknowingly about the informal communities and their residents, and now they could see them with respect and recognise their knowledge, abilities, humanity, and dignity. For some of the professionals, the key takeaway was learning teamwork: not just following orders but engaging horizontally and realising their own capacity to contribute and collaborate. Many of them would take this experience back to their agencies, treating colleagues and communities differently. (Wilson 2015)

Two of our participants described a level of awareness that few achieve, but that signals the emancipatory potential inherent in participatory action research: the realisation of participatory consciousness. One expressed a profound expansion of sense of self. Months after the workshop she wrote the following:

During the five months since the workshop I have continued reflecting on the extraordinary experience we had. I learned a lot, mostly intangibles, since this work is about living the experience, being engaged, person to person, with an open mind and open heart, getting a felt sense of the conditions that the community is living…. It's not about carrying out procedures. I learned to listen to the community members and to my colleagues, to recognise and relate to the different ways of thinking, interpreting, and analysing of each one, to understand their actions and reactions. I learned to wait to really understand, while at the same time I learned that you don't need to know everything before acting. This work is about how to work in teams, to generate ownership of the work, to exchange ideas and constantly adapt roles and functions to meet the larger objectives.

This experience underscored for me the importance of empathy. If we realize that we are all human beings with feelings and needs, we change our way of seeing and doing things. Our intentions become better. We lower our defensive postures and open our hearts. ***Then the sense of oneness, of being part and parcel of that larger system, emerges almost automatically. My intention from here on is to engage myself: my whole self, completely in what I do, to make it mine—mine in the larger sense of ours, beyond us and them…*** .

The satisfaction that comes from this kind of work is very profound. Involving yourself so personally, so directly and openly, creates a sense of belonging and a sense of potential unfolding and manifesting. Each success achieved is not just another objective fulfilled, but quite the contrary: each achievement is a step forward towards personal success, because you have become part of the community for whom you are working. And there's a sense of trajectory or evolution here. ***You have become part of a living evolving system that generates its own evolution every moment.***

While this participant highlighted the inner dimension of emancipatory practice, another focused on the outer dimension: the practitioner's ability to see the potential for changing social systems of power, domination, and paternalism by introducing new self-organising self-replicating patterns of interaction. This participant articulated how he could see this fieldwork as a moment in the emergence of systemic change in the relationship between civil society and the state. He recognized that the work in El Tráfico had interrupted a pattern of paternalism that characterised the relationship between the community and the local

state. He saw that the experience in El Tráfico had introduced a new pattern of empowerment and efficacy that was impacting not only the residents directly involved, but also the community as a whole and its environment. The new pattern was changing the relationship with the local leader from the party in power, not in a confrontational or oppositional way, but in an organic self-organising way. He could see this bigger picture, the picture of a dynamic living system moving beyond calcifying relationships between state and civil society and evidencing signs of evolutionary emergence through self-organized civic initiative.

He and the other members of his workshop team had been the catalysts, he recognised. They had opened the space for change; they had introduced the 'loving disruption.' In Meadows' (1991, 1997) terms, they had found an effective leverage point for self-organising systems change. This participant had experienced emancipatory practice as an emergent systems change process (see Holman 2010, on facilitated emergent change processes).

For me the two weeks were an embodied felt experience of something larger working through me and our group. It was the sense of being an instrument in a larger outworking that I could trust but not fully grasp. What occurred was far beyond what I could have planned or engineered. In Scharmer's terms it was an experience of presencing, where the vibrant emergent edge of a living system becomes manifest and the field of possibility becomes grounded. To trust in that outworking and focus on the heart had been my greatest takeaways. We had experienced together the undefended openness to possibility in the moment that characterises emancipatory practice. The two week experience in participatory community development using PAR had touched us at the level of values, attitudes, feelings, and relationship. We had skated on the edge of emergence and had come out changed.

Bush's Story: Reflections on the Unexpected in Asheville, NC

Setting the Stage

Things do not always go as planned when conducting participatory action research embedded in complex social systems. Things did not go as planned in Bush's work with the Residents' Council for Public Housing in Asheville. There are some insightful reasons as to why, and explicating those lessons is the purpose of this section. The first half describes the context for engagement and narrates how that engagement unfolded, contrasting the planned collaboration with what actually happened. The second half reflects on the experience of engagement, offering three lessons learned.

One community and one organisation are relevant to this story. The community is the public housing residents of Asheville, numbering about 6,000 people living in roughly 1,500 units in housing projects across the city. The organisation is the Residents' Council of Asheville Housing Authority, a 501(c)(3) registered nonprofit corporation dedicated to representing the residents of public housing in Asheville. This is a separate organisation from the Public Housing Authority of Asheville, the government agency charged with the management of public housing. As part of the bylaws to the Residents' Council, its mandate includes the maintenance, management, and administration of public housing building and grounds, the education of residents, working to ensure the quality of life for residents,

conducting community engagement on various issues, and providing job services to residents (RCAHA Bylaws).

Many winds of change were blowing through public housing in Asheville in 2014. One came from the federal government and HUD, from a programme called RAD, the Rental Assistance Demonstration. The goal of RAD was to enable cash-strapped housing authorities to conduct much-needed refurbishment to the public housing stock. Because the implications of RAD for public housing residents have been unclear, the programme has been a source of anxiety for them. The likely renovations and demolitions of existing housing projects will cause disruption and displacement. The nature of public housing within the city of Asheville is set to change, based on decisions and actions taken in the RAD programme, resulting in an intense and potentially volatile time within the public housing community.

Another wind of change was blowing within the Residents' Council itself. After years of relative inactivity, conflict was stirring among the Council members. During twelve years with the same set of leadership, the Residents' Council had gained a reputation for "backroom politics and a talking shop." Newer members wanted to position the organisation for greater impact, and were challenging the leaders on both their leadership style and focus. Over the course of two contentious meetings, the President and Vice President of the Residents' Council resigned. At the October meeting of the Residents' Council, a new slate of officers was elected.

At this point the researcher enters the story, having been an observer for this election meeting. The researcher was present at the invitation of a social service organisation that linked city staff and the Residents' Council. The staff anticipated that this meeting might signal a sea change in years of consisted patterns of relating among public housing residents and their elected representatives. In the weeks that followed, conversations with the executive staff of the Residents' Council made clear their interest in developing 1) a deeper understanding of the needs and interests of the residents, and 2) closer working relationships among the associations that represented each individual housing development. I offered to work with the Residents' Council to develop a way to better understand residents' priorities, for the Council to use to guide its work in the coming years. To this end I offered to conduct a distributed ethnography of public housing residents across the city. This distributed ethnography would involve the executive committee of the Residents' Council, the community association of each public housing development, and 200 to 300 public housing residents.

Over the course of the next fourteen months, I had episodic contact with the Residents' Council team. Plans to design and administer a distributed ethnography were laid out three separate times. Each time, the design was developed in partnership with the leadership team. Each time, the activities expected by both researcher and the leadership team failed to materialise as imagined.

Why didn't things happen as imagined? An exploration from four angles seems useful: looking at the internal challenges for the Residents' Council staff, the broader context in which we were embedded, the relationship between Residents' Council and myself, and the internal challenges for myself as the researcher.

Residents' Council

The new guard of officers joined the Residents' Council with the vision of transforming it as an organisation and using it as a vehicle to empower residents. The reality has been far messier. Shortly after elections, the Residents' Council executive team took to their work full time. They initiated three projects, each to varying degrees of success. Each initiative also generated significant internal friction among the staff and encountered significant obstacles. The early period of this new leadership team went through a kind of forging trial by fire. They emerged as a team, but one that had acquired scars along the way. The Residents' Council story is narrated and explicated more elsewhere (Bush 2016).

Memes, Asheville & Public Housing

Part of my learning from engaging with public housing was how powerful memes reproduce culture and reproduce themselves. This can be seen in the particular relationship between public housing in Asheville and the larger city. White mainstream Asheville holds a meme that public housing is a mess to steer clear of. There is a pervasive belief by public housing residents themselves that nothing ever changes.

I watched these memes grinding down members of the Residents' Council executive team. Outside groups and individuals were reticent to consider working with an organisation enmeshed in public housing. The staff regularly encountered residents who simply could not believe the staff was interested in change, or if they were, that they might accomplish it. The staff initiated a broad range of projects. Administering multiple new kinds of efforts tested their managerial skill. Priorities internally were not mutually held; projects encountered external scepticism and resistance. The resulting spectrum of internal and external conflicts tested the emotional resilience of Residents' Council staff.

Relationship between Residents' Council and Researcher

The relationship between the Residents' Council and the researcher was layered from the outset. The President was generally distrustful of white outsiders and, given previous experiences, was particularly wary of journalists or others interested in obtaining stories from residents. Despite a number of conversations, his initial skepticism and resistance to the proposed distributed ethnography did not seem to shift. In contrast, the vice president and secretary were enthusiastic about the joint research.

Despite enthusiasm, there was limited bandwidth from staff to assist in the work. I held the belief that if I did field collection exclusively, my intentions would be misunderstood (meme: white outsiders have no business being here). If my intentions are misunderstood by residents, or residents believe others will misperceive my intentions, residents will be reluctant to participate. When I believe residents won't participate, as the researcher I become unmotivated to initiate the field collection. And thus I have a self-fulfilling prophecy about engagement.

White Fragility & the Researcher Practitioner

Upon reflection, I perceive my experience as a manifestation of white fragility, where white identity is fragile against opposing views and conflicting perceptions (DiAngelo 2011). That said, the challenge of maintaining poise amid conflicting perceptions is not a challenge that is confined to the experience of white action researchers. And, for myself, that fragility is context-dependent. In other points of my life as a practitioner, I have been quite willing to lovingly disrupt. My previous work as a practitioner has mostly been abroad, in southern Africa, India, & Mexico. I have faced repeated experiences of being perceived as the outsider, coloniser, oppressor, capitalist, "Mzungu." Outside of my own cultural context, I was aware enough to understand the cultural memes but did not feel bound by them. I felt free to act (more) curiously, generously, and disruptively. I trusted that over time as the true character of how I engaged came through, they could come to trust my intentions and actions. Gradually the story would change. Why did white fragility manifest in engagement in Asheville, NC with residents of public housing, but not previously? I can discern three memes that I had internalised that contributed to this. I can give these in shorthand in the following form: we expect you to screw this up, don't screw this up, and there's no way you can't screw this up because you've already screwed this up.

Meme: The IRB Expects you to Fail

One is the self-doubt I developed going through the IRB approval process. The process is framed in terms of risk and harm. The value that a collaborative process with the community could have seems unrecognised, aside from the form of knowledge generated. The IRB process communicated scepticism of the researcher's abilities, or at least of mine. The process conveys in so many words "we expect you to screw this up, so we're going to micromanage you in thinking through the risks so that when you screw it up, it doesn't do all that much damage." Through a focus on risk and harm, the IRB approval process creates a narrative of fear, distrust, and a presumption of antagonism and fault on the part of the researcher. This is the context created for academics to engage in collaborative work with communities.

Meme: High-Wire Dissertation Research

The second meme is about tone and implicit cultural norms around PhD research. I am sure that PhD candidates have quite a range of experiences in doing that research. The story about PhD research reproduced by PhD candidates with each other is this: it is high-stakes, your career depends on it, and you are being judged all the way along. The story about the oppositional nature of PhD research is hard to shake, regardless of the actual experience and support I received in my programme. The story encourages the paralysing belief that I should only take actions that are safe. As Wilson and Walsh both emphasise, choosing to trust others and taking consistent risks to trust are essential aspects of leadership for thrivability.

Meme: White Guilt

The third meme is about the experience of working with African-American disenfranchised populations as a white middle-class academic. White guilt is a strong meme. Part of my inheritance as a native of Cleveland whose parents were active in the civil rights movement, whose father did voter registration and cross racial work in Louisiana during the 1960s, is a set of parallel values: gratitude and responsibility. As a white person, being aware of the role of white privilege in American history makes it hard not to feel some personal responsibility for the seemingly intractable situations that public housing residents find themselves in. Working within public housing I did not grant this trust to myself. How can I act in ways that do not reproduce the stories about power, oppression, and instrumentalism? I do not have control over how my actions are perceived. More importantly, I cannot ensure myself that my actions don't contribute to those stories. Hearing this narrative in my head produced a fear of acting. This meme short-circuited my will to take risks and act, not just in ways that exercised my privilege.

Lessons for Practice

From this experience, I draw three lessons for practice. The first is about the role of a situated spiritual practice within our work as reflective practitioners. The second uses the cynefin framework (Snowden 2002) to interpret my behaviour and offer lessons for similar future scenarios. The third focuses on a rule of thumb: commitment, not attachment.

Situated Spiritual Practice

There are two potentially useful dimensions to add to traditional definitions of reflective practice. We can think of reflective practice as a set of habits of mind whose intention is making sense of experience. I came into my work with the Residents' Council with a set of reflective practices. I will highlight one: running meditation. Like walking meditation, running meditation uses the repetitive motions of the body, focus on breath & release of thoughts to create a state of flow or focus. I have run more than 6000 times in my life, so the motions are deeply entrained, allowing my mind to relax. My experience of running meditation is that it brings my conscious and subconscious perceptions into closer orbit, enabling sparks to jump from the subconscious to the conscious. Many of my moments of insight, when new ways of thinking about the world create a Gestalt shift in me, come from running meditation. What I discovered during my research was that my existing reflective practices were not sufficient for me to engage effectively and foster leadership in this new environment. To enable sustained engagement with uncertainty, vulnerability, and mystery, my reflective practice needed to be spiritual. A consistent spiritual practice can anneal our core sense of self amid the unexpected experiences of field work. Moreover, my reflective practice needed to be situated. To be an effective action researcher, I needed to hold consciously and carefully the internal tensions and dissonance I felt in the context in which I was embedded. I needed both a spiritual and situated reflective practice.

Cynefin: Probe, Sense, Respond

Another way to think about the participatory action research process is in terms of the cynefin framework (Snowden, 2002). Cynefin is a Welsh word, which roughly translates to *oikos* in Greek, or *habitats* in English. The cynefin framework divides operating environments into four kinds: simple, complicated, complex and chaotic (Snowden 2002).

In complex social environments, it is impossible to know what the effect of any intervention is beforehand. As a result, the effective leadership is to probe, sense, and respond. The primary act is probing. To probe is to introduce an intervention that you believe will improve operating conditions. Sensing is listening to the many signals a complex systems produces, and sense-making from them to discern which were generated by your intervention, and if you like that or not. Responding is acting to dampen patterns that have been determined to be counter-productive, and acting to amplify patterns across the system that have beneficial consequences.

One way to read my experience is to say I was not giving myself permission to probe. In the public housing case, practically anything that I might try to do would be disruptive. My intentions would be read with suspicion. I was aware of how this could take reasonable ideas and turn them into contentious, disruptive ones. This made me afraid to act.

Another way to read my experience is to say that the attempt at a distributed ethnography was a kind of probe. I sensed that it was not effective and needed to be dampened. Moreover, there were no strategies available to me at the time that seemed appropriate to probe further. What I needed was to let go of attachment, of not only working with the Residents' Council, but doing a distributed ethnography at all. I needed to ask how else might I follow through on my commitment to support Asheville's African American community in cultivating resilience?

Commitment Yes, Attachment No

I wish to offer a quick epilogue on my engagement with the Residents' Council. By October 2015, I was feeling frustrated and panicky about my dissertation research. It seemed clear that the collaboration with the Residents' Council wasn't going anywhere. Next, I met Sheneika Smith, a staff member at Green Opportunities, an organisation in the public housing ecosystem that does workforce training.

When we met, Sheneika wished to create conditions for a different kind of leadership in the African American community, but was not sure quite what that would mean. The African-American community held caustic memes around individual leadership. Its existing leaders had a history of infighting and old antagonisms. They needed a new kind of leadership, not from charismatic individuals.

In the course of our conversation, I felt kinship and attunement. As we talked, we developed ideas about ensemble leadership. This led to Sheneika applying for and receiving a foundation grant to host a leadership retreat. I and a few colleagues worked with Sheneika to help her and a team design the retreat, and support them in facilitating it.

Arriving at this opportunity to follow through on my commitment to the public housing community required letting go of attachment: attachment to working with them directly, attachment to how I could help them (through a distributed ethnography). The ability to hold commitment, not attachment, seems a critical state of being for leadership for thrivability.

Walsh's Story: Regenerative Praxis in Austin, Texas

The theme of "commitment, not attachment" also runs through Walsh's story of regenerative neighbourhood development in the Holly Neighbourhood of Austin, TX from 2006 to 2015. Walsh grounded herself in a commitment to environmental justice and neighbuorhood regeneration, but often found herself stuck when she became attached to community projects and collaborations looking a certain way. Through her story, Walsh shares her situated perspective as a white, female urban planner, academic, and community organiser who engaged with the particular set of challenges facing her predominantly working-class, Hispanic neighbourhood in one of the fastest gentrifying zip codes in the country, 78702 (Hawkins & Novak 2014; Petrilli 2012). Although her experience is particular, common themes are shared with Wilson and Bush, and have general value to others in the field who share a desire to advance thrivability: the possibility for all people to inhabit, experience, and steward flourishing social and ecological living systems over time.

Setting the Stage

In 2006, I moved to the Holly Neighbourhood in East Austin to better understand the challenges of environmental justice as I started my graduate studies in Community and Regional Planning at the University of Texas. In the past, the key barrier to environmental justice was environmental racism. The City's first comprehensive plan in 1928 relegated unwanted land uses and unwanted people east of East Avenue, now IH-35. In 1960, the Holly Street Power Plant was established in the predominantly working class, Hispanic neighbourhood. The key barrier to environmental justice today is environmental gentrification. Located just east of downtown, central East Austin became part of the desired development zone as part of the City's Smart Growth plan. By the time I moved in plans were underway to decommission the plant and turn the property into lakefront public parkland.

Would this opportunity for regeneration of the landscape enhance ecological and social resilience, or would the new environmental amenities accelerate processes of gentrification? On the one hand, I saw that the neighbourhood's residents were more diverse than they had been in fifty years. As an urban ecologist, I believed that the social and cultural diversity of the neighbourhood would be a great asset for community resilience just as genetic diversity contributes to the resilience of ecosystems. On the other hand, I quickly learned that diversity can also foment fragmentation, competing claims, and contested landscapes. Our neighbourhood was notorious in the city for its highly confrontational public neighbourhood planning meetings: at one meeting I attended a frightened neighbour called the police into the elementary school where we met. This tension seemed almost inevitable at these public meetings, given the historic relationship between the city government and the neighbors, and the threat of gentrification. Participation in the meetings seemed to erode community and social capital more than cultivate it.

Aware of my own complicity in the forces of gentrification, as my partner and I renovated our 1907 home, I still intended to use my professional skills and academic expertise to contribute to the social and ecological resilience of my neighbourhood. I wondered, are there other ways the neighbourhood could bring its long-time and newer residents together? Are there things I could do together with my neighbours that would relieve some of the

pressure? With the power plant coming down, could we forge a path that would enhance the social and ecological well-being of residents and supporting ecosystems?

These questions opened a powerful inquiry for me as I pursued my doctoral studies and engaged in community life. Seeking to develop myself as an instrument of positive change, I encountered helpful frameworks, fields of study, and opportunities for collective action with local collaborators. I drew significantly from academic literature in regenerative design, sustainability science, environmental justice, and social learning, which all share a commitment to integrating expert and local knowledge for place-based transformational action research (Walsh 2015). Drawing on these fields: especially the Theory U framework of MIT's Presencing Institute and the LENSES framework of CLEAR (the Center for Living Environments and Regeneration), I employed a methodology for regenerative dialogue assessment to better support me and collaborators in using ourselves as instruments of regeneration. Integration of third-, second- and first- person inquiry helped me identify my own place and power in existing systems, and listen with a more deliberately open mind, heart, and will for clues about how I might contribute. From a third-person "objective" view from above, I observed the existing assets and dynamics of the neighbourhood. From a second-person, intersubjective view, I engaged in empathetic dialogue with other neighbors to understand their aspirations and concerns for the neighbourhood. From a first-person, intra-subjective view from within, I practiced generative listening, paying attention to my reactions, and choosing to suspend my automatic voices of judgment, cynicism, and fear that kept me from connection with the highest potential in myself, others, and our neighbourhood ecosystem.

As I engaged in these ways, I stepped out of my comfort zone as the outside observer-researcher and conflict-averse new kid in town to co-initiate regenerative projects with my neighbours and outside partners. We initiated prototypes of a green home repair programme designed to serve as a leverage point for thrivability in the complex neighbourhood. Through this design, we intended to bring new and well-established neighbours together to help another neighbour with improvements to help them reduce utility bills, increase health and comfort, and mobilise assets to better serve the household's vision of thrivability. The specific scope of work for each home was developed through a regenerative dialogue assessment, which integrated objective observations about the site's building and ecological systems with subjective knowledge from a generative dialogue with the household. In creating a deep dialogue, residents were invited to imagine what it would be like to thrive in their home: from their house to their neighbourhood. The team leaders used their technical knowledge and assessment of household and community assets to determine which interventions would most contribute to the household's vision. Local green builders would teach volunteers how to make these green home improvements and provide an overview of other strategies for household, neighbourhood, and planetary thrivability, and volunteers were invited to make written and public commitments to actions they would take on. We hoped that the dialogue about practices might support cultural adoption of pro-environmental values and habits, and also lead to new work opportunities for the local green builders. Most importantly, we intended these events to be generative places where neighbours could get to know one another, discover each other's gifts, and develop as a community.

Leadership and Performance Stories

I have written about the results of the programme elsewhere (2015, 2016), including the transformational effect of the regenerative dialogue assessment for the first of three households we served. However, in telling that story, I glossed over my own crisis of faith after the first project, and the serendipitous chain of events that led to a shift in direction for the second and third projects, which in turn led to a movement to establish a food forest in the neighbourhood park (the first in the city and the state of Texas). This crisis moment and the critical connections that followed it reveal important insights about anticipatory, regenerative design and leadership practices for thrivability.

ACT I: From Crisis to Creative Collaboration

As a whole, the first demonstration project was tremendously successful. However, we failed with regard to my originating intention: cultivating relationships among established neighbours and recent arrivals. Despite our recruitment efforts, most volunteers were new to the neighbourhood. We also discovered that our partnering nonprofit's requirement of a criminal background check for volunteers was an impediment to cultivating trust as we invited neighbours to join a community event. It was also a direct barrier to some who had felony convictions back in their past, when the neighbourhood experienced significant crime. Efforts to engage one of the long-established neighbourhood associations at the outset of the project had led to conflict and a veiled threat from one neighbour. Frustrated, I began to question the potential of the project. I felt stuck. Fear of social conflict and failure to meet my community goals led to thoughts of quitting, while fear of abandoning a major case study of my dissertation on home repair (including fear of professional failure) fed attachment to the project.

How did I handle these opposing fears that were nearly paralysing me? First, I sought feedback from the volunteers about addressing the problem: I talked with my collaborators one-on-one in direct reflective dialogues; I facilitated group debriefings; I conducted post-event surveys. Second, I sought out a 'committed listener': someone who understood the context but was separate from it, someone who could hold me and my core intentions in a space of loving honesty, while serving as a mirror to help me see my own blind spots and hidden shadows. Third, I engaged in my own situated, spiritual practices. In the face of fear, I consciously attempted to keep myself open and grounded. When I felt fear arising in my body, I reminded myself of my core intention: a commitment to being loving (and cultivating loving relationships) in the face of conflict and engaging in neighbourhood life with an open mind, heart, and will. This practice empowered me to remain committed, yet adaptable and unattached to outcome. As soon as I was willing once again to embrace the tensions and take risks, three unexpected moments and movements emerged that helped shift my experience from one of crisis to creative collaboration.

Movement One: Frank's Laundromat

One drizzly June day while waiting for my clothes to dry outside of Frank's Coin Laundry, I sat writing in my journal, hoping to find answers or at least vent frustration. Why was it so

hard to find long-time neighbours who wanted to help lead this project? Was this a quixotic endeavour doomed to fail?

As I wrote, a man on a bike pulled up in front of me, dismounted, and asked me if I was a writer. I responded a little defensively at first, but chose to suspend my cynicism. I soon found myself in a deeply generative conversation. This man, Gabriel Galvan, grew up in the neighbourhood, having moved there in the late 1950s. In the 1990s he had been a community organiser focused on addressing gang violence. He moved away, but returned after he lost his home in a fire. He wanted to get involved in the neighbourhood again, he loved the idea of our Holly Neighbors Helping Neighbours (HNHN) initiative, and was a handy-man by vocation. He recounted stories of the rose bushes he'd planted in neighbours' yards throughout the area over the years, many of which he can see thriving today. Yet, I was wary. He was a friend of the neighbourhood leader who opposed me and the project. He also never set foot in the laundromat: he only stopped to approach me. As a woman, this unexpected approach by an older man aroused fears around gender dynamics and sexual harassment. Even so, he seemed to share my vision of a socially integrated, flourishing neighbourhood. I chose to suspend my fear and trust him. My choice to cultivate a co-creative relationship with Gabriel opened up new opportunities. He became an invaluable member of the core leadership team, especially because he was known and trusted by established neighbours. Also, he became a key advisor to a team of graduate students from the University of Texas Public Interest Design programme who responded to an invitation to build a mobile toolshed for HNHN. With my intentions grounding me, I took the risk to work with Gabriel and it was worth it.

Movement Two: From Facebook to Chapala's Restaurant

Social media was an important part of our outreach strategy. One of the co-founders of the project, Jorge, grew up in the neighbourhood and had a large Facebook network, Hermanos de East Austin. I regularly monitored our Facebook event page for new volunteers. One of the first people to volunteer was Joe Nova, whom I did not recognise from prior events. His profile revealed that he was in the building and construction trades, and that he had studied solar electric, solar thermal, and renewable energy at Austin Community College. He appeared to be a skilled green building professional who might be a perfect team leader and that he might be exactly the kind of local business stakeholder we wanted to support with the project.

I reached out to him and arranged to go for coffee to talk about how he would like to be involved as a volunteer, and how the opportunity could support him in areas of importance in his life. I listened with full attention. In our conversation he talked about the challenges of growing up in the neighbourhood and his desire to give back and be a role model. He wanted to make more professional connections and expand his career as an electrician into solar installations and green building. He discussed his high school experience as one of the first cohorts in the Casa Verde Builders programmes of American Youth Works in the 1990s: a programme that trains disadvantaged youth in green building. Even though he dropped out of the programme, it shaped his career trajectory. Given his expertise and his passions, I invited him to become a team leader and he immediately accepted. He was particularly interested in leading the Solar Screen team, even though he had not done a solar

screen installation since he had been a student with Casa Verde Builders in the early 1990s. The conversation was enlivening and established a strong connection.

Movement Three: Community Gardening

From the experience of the first work day, and the emergence of the mobile garden toolshed project and the new East Side Garden Exchange (ESGE) that managed it, it became clear that many new and established neighbours shared a love for gardening. We realised that off-site, front yard, vegetable garden box installations would be a great way to get around the criminal background check (which was required for people entering the home under improvement). Marked with a new logo of the East Side Garden Exchange, they could also be a lasting visible presence of neighbourhood action.

ACT II: Critical Connections: Solar Screens, Gardens & Catalytic Potential

Despite storms through the night and rain in the morning, 42 of the more than 70 volunteers arrived for the work day. Working in five tightly organised teams, they weatherised the home, installed energy-efficient appliances, installed solar screens (including screens on the home across the street), installed three garden beds in other neighbours' front yards, and completed other ad-hoc improvements. Volunteers had a great time, and many were inspired to take on projects of their own.

Interestingly, a few weeks later, I met one of the leaders of Casa Verde Builders. He approached me, and asked if we had installed the solar screens on the home of the family across the street from the Padillos. When I said yes, he praised the quality of the work. I was pleased to inform him that Joe Nova had led the team that installed those screens: and the last time he'd installed a solar screen was with the Casa Verde crew. He was delighted to hear that his former student was now licensed as an electrician and solar installer.

In the months after the volunteer event, another serendipitous event occurred. A childhood friend of Joe's from the neighbuorhood, Ruben Romero, was planning to move back to Austin from California. Browsing through Facebook, he stumbled on a picture of Joe leading the solar screen team. He was surprised, impressed and interested. As it turned out, Ruben had worked in architectural design, and was passionate about green building and affordable housing. He reached out to Joe, both to explore future partnership opportunities, and to learn more about the HNHN project. Through the connection with Ruben, Joe was able to land a job with a solar company, which also allowed him to go into private business as an electrician, something he'd long wanted to do. Encouraged by this momentum, Joe agreed to serve on the core leadership team for the third and final demonstration project.

Act III: Stepping Out, Open to the Next Project

When it came time to recruit the next household, Joe, Shiloh (our lead green builder), and I went door to door with the list of qualifying homes we received from the City. As we embarked on the block walk, Joe began to get uncomfortable. He had decades of memories from the streets of this neighbourhood, including difficult memories of harmful actions he had taken in the past. He wanted to make a new name for himself, but he was afraid of being remembered for who he once was.

Joe's discomfort grew as we encountered one confrontational neighbour who challenged us, asking each of us how long we'd lived in the neighbourhood. He was upset about the changes happening in the neighbourhood and how much he had to pay in property taxes. Joe felt like a traitor, walking around with the *gringos*, and began to question his new role.

Thankfully, in the same block as this man, we knocked on the door of Mrs. Virginia Romero. Not only was she friendly, we quickly ascertained a number of connections. She had participated in an ESGE compost workshop and recognised Joe from it. She was an avid gardener and her front yard was full of lovingly tended potted plants. She also happened to be Ruben's mother. She was a perfect fit for the programme. Through the regenerative dialogue, she envisioned her home as a place where she could feel peaceful, productive, and proud. At the household and neighbourhood levels, gardening was part of that vision. In addition to weatherisation projects, we installed a rain barrel to support her plants. At two nearby bus stops, we installed two new benches that doubled as low-water, wicking vegetable garden beds. Most of the volunteers for the garden bench projects came through the growing group of community members working to start a neighbourhood food forest, including Gabriel Galvan.

Reflections on First Person Practice in a Socially Complex Environment

Reflecting on my forays in regenerative praxis in Austin, I emerged a different person, as did other partners. It took courage and commitment for all of us to participate, especially in a landscape shaped by structural inequalities and social conflict. Well-established neighbours had reasons not to trust the city officials or new developers. To emerge as a leader, I had to shed my identity as an academic, sideline observer, and the planner who could figure it out. The strength of my leadership came from the clarity of my vision and intentions, my awareness of current social and ecological conditions, and a willingness to notice and suspend my automatic voices of judgment, cynicism and fear.

Without these capabilities and practiced vulnerability, I would never have had the fortune of knowing Gabriel Galvan as a treasured friend and collaborator. He also put himself in a vulnerable position by opening himself to me. Joe Nova expressed a similar experience of the challenges of leadership in a socially contentious landscape:

[Signing up on Facebook was] a leap of faith. Jorge, that was the only guy I knew. I know the neighbourhood my whole life … but I didn't really know anyone there. So, yeah, I was really nervous! I mean, I blend in well [reference to light skin], I didn't stand out or anything, but you know, I just have, me personally, doubtfulness, about what I could do, or how I could meet people. You know, not having the educational background that most do... . But this was an insecurity about myself. That kept me from going out.

In taking that step over the threshold of the unknown, he experienced significant changes:

It was like a different Joe, breaking out from the sheltered, you know, 'don't bother me or ask me for nothing Joe,' just to be myself … I was shedding the old me. I was introducing myself to the community and the people, to say, hey, look, I live in the neighbourhood, I care about my community too, and I have these talents, you know, What's up? How are you? Nice to meet you. Just putting myself out there. You know, it was hard. And it was exciting. …

My whole life I've always … carried myself somewhat to myself. You know, if I'm ever going to reach the ideas and dreams that I have, I'm not going to be able to do it myself. I'm going to have to do it with people.

Although Joe's struggle was different from my own, we both had to step over a threshold into the unknown to contribute our gifts to the project. He said it was "hard," and that "it was exciting" to let go of the old Joe: the Joe who got in trouble in high school, dropped out of Casa Verde Builders, and stuck to himself. He was concerned about the changes happening in the neighbourhood, and he wanted to be part of a solution. He had first discovered the project through his childhood friend, Jorge, and was inspired by what he was doing in the community. If Jorge could do it, he could do it too. Taking action helped him assuage the stress of neighbourhood changes and position himself as a leader. Fear repeatedly showed up as he navigated the contentious terrain, and he repeatedly moved through it. New opportunities opened up. He finally broke into the solar field, and was able to start his own business as an electrician. Soon thereafter, he got his first gig on a building project through a connection he made at the work day.

Looking back on the green home repair project, we achieved many of our original goals. New relationships among neighbours formed; homeowners who received support had an excellent experience, and their homes became more resource-efficient, comfortable, and affordable; a local green building professional experienced breakthroughs; and new spinoff projects developed that embodied shared values and amplified community assets. All of these outcomes were anticipated through third-person systems analysis, but none of them could have been predicted or controlled. They depended on the moment-by-moment choices of collaborators who dared to engage vulnerably with one another in service to a shared vision of a thriving whole community.

Although we completed only three home repair projects, and did little to stem the tide of gentrification pressure in Central East Austin, critical connections and conversations took root. In the fall of 2015, the Festival Beach Food Forest became the first permaculture food forest established in a public park in Texas. Friendships spanning previous social divisions in the neighbourhood endure. Like Wilson, I had the experience of "being an instrument in a larger outworking that I could trust but not fully grasp." As in her case, "what occurred was far beyond what I could have planned or engineered." The ultimate effects are unknown, but as Grace Lee Boggs has noted, critical connections have been made:

Changes in small places affect the global system, not through incrementalism, but because every small system participates in an unbroken wholeness. We never know how our small activities will affect others through the invisible fabric of our connectedness. In this exquisitely connected world, it's never a question of 'critical mass.' It's always about critical connections. (Boggs 2007)

Synthetic findings: Self as an instrument for thrivability in complex systems

Reflecting across the three praxis stories, common themes emerge regarding regenerative, emancipatory practices for action research in socially complex systems. From our experiences, we offer four key propositions for first person practice in socially complex environments:

1. Embrace tension, conflict, and vulnerability as opportunities.
2. Develop a reflective practice that is situated, dialogic, and spiritual.
3. Observe, relate to, and act in a living system, using self as an instrument for thrivability.
4. Foster leadership as an emergent property of human systems.

All four of these propositions are mutually supportive and interrelated. We found Propositions 1 and 2 to be essential for the practice of Propositions 3 and 4.

In all three of our cases, we stepped into contested landscapes with long-standing structural inequalities and social conflict. Based on past negative experiences in these environments with people who looked like us, our potential collaborators had reasons not to trust us. Some had reasons from the past not to trust each other. Through each of our stories, we learned we could expand our potential to advance thrivability by *noticing* and *embracing* that tension, as well as our own vulnerability.

Our effectiveness in doing so was related to a reflective practice that uses the self as an instrument to foster leadership and thrivability. This reflective practice is at once spiritual, situated, and dialogic. By spiritual, we refer to practices that enable us to observe our thoughts and emotions as they arise, embrace vulnerability, and act in the face of uncertainty. (See W.R. Torbert & Cook-Greuter 2004; W. Torbert & Taylor 2007). Spiritual reflective practice helps us suspend the automaticity of our patterned voices of judgement, cynicism, and fear (C.O. Scharmer 2009). It fosters an expanding sense of self that connects us to the wellbeing and emergent potential of the larger community or ecosystem in which we work. As such, it is a situated practice in which we engage a particular context on a relational, phenomenological, and material basis. Finally the practice is dialogic, in that we engage with others through deep listening to understand the ecosystem from multiple viewpoints, not just intellectually, but with a sense of caring, and a will to act for the wellbeing of the whole. These practices empower us to ground ourselves in the face of social conflict and uncertainty, enabling us to harness the power of our own vulnerability. In doing so, we foster emergent leadership among our collaborators. We ourselves become instruments for thrivability, toggling between observing, relating, and acting in the living systems of which we are part.

Foster Leadership as an Emergent System Phenomenon

In all three stories, the quality of outcomes generated was the result of many individuals stepping into unfamiliar terrain, engaging vulnerably and empathetically with one another, and answering a call to serve something greater than, yet essential to, each person. From planning professionals outside of Mexico City to neighbourhood volunteers in East Austin, individuals found that they let go of some aspect of past identities in order to invite new possibilities in: even when that possibility represented uncertain terrain. When others witnessed these acts of courage, they were often emboldened to do the same. Leadership for thrivability necessarily involves risk. It means letting something go (e.g. outmoded, fixed frames about identities and roles), and letting something new come into being. It requires the courage to step over a threshold into the unknown, in order to serve a greater whole and

a greater self. Although each choice to let go and step forth was a personal one for each individual, they became steps taken in solidarity. In our willingness to step forth, we created room for others to step forth as well. This basis of leadership and power is both profoundly vulnerable and enlivening. Practice of this distributed, collaborative power enables regenerative performance through both means and ends.

Use of Self as Instrument: Personal Awareness and Spiritual Practice

Although leadership for thrivability is ultimately a collective practice, it is an emergent one that cannot be predicted or controlled. It is both intentional and incidental. The stories underscore that each individual can profoundly shape the field, inspiring new vision and collective action. For practitioners who wish to establish conditions for thrivability, this is an essential leverage point for emergent systems change. As Donella Meadows (1997) points out, the consciousness of the individual—i.e. the individual's sense of self and capacity to notice and transcend mental models—, is the most powerful place to intervene in a complex system. This sense of self includes both the inner-subjective self (the experience of 'I') and the inter-subjective self (the experience of 'we'). Drawing on Gestalt therapy and inter-subjectivity theory, the self can be seen as emergent in relationship to other. In other words, the self evolves through interaction with others (Philippson 2009). The self creates his/her world by engaging the field. That larger field in turn creates one's self. The self arises from the field, and the field arises from the many interactions of the constituent selves. The definition of self grows more spacious from attunement with a larger field, creating a sense of 'field membership.' "I" is and is not. Emancipatory practice, if it is to be experienced fully, requires adaptability and openness. Ghaye calls upon the practitioner to let go of fixing, judging, and seeing lack, and instead look with an 'appreciative gaze' (Ghaye et al, 2008, and Ghaye 2011). He or she is willing to be touched, to be vulnerable, to question his or her own assumptions and stories, and to be uncertain. In doing so, the practitioner may become 'field emergent in the moment' (p. 29). These moments of self-awareness, transcendence and deep connection were a theme in the stories shared. Our own situated spiritual practices enabled us to experience these moments.

Use of Self as Instrument: Interpersonal Awareness & Generative Dialogue

Similarly, the capacity to cultivate genuine, caring relationships with others is essential for emancipatory practice. In the post-development tradition, Gustavo Esteva, Westoby and Dowling describe the practice as "a vocation of solidarity…. that infuses community work with love" and welcomes the 'other' (Westoby and Dowling 2013, p. 211). Drawing on the 'affective' turn in social sciences, scholars of critical studio pedagogy emphasise that love, which includes but transcends respect, is the vital connector between the practitioner and the community members that opens new spaces for dialogue, reflection, and action (Porter,

Sandercock, Sletto, Erfan et al 2012). Hustedde (1998), drawing on Wendell Berry and Thomas Merton, calls on the practitioner to create a climate of hospitality, to share stories of joy and sorrow, and practice stillness amid action. In the traditions of Buber, Bohm, and also Freire, the practitioner engages in and fosters dialogue as a loving disruption of old patterns that catalyses new ways of seeing, understanding, and generating collective creativity and action (Westoby and Dowling, 2013). The experience of love permeated the communities of practice reviewed in the case studies. By holding a space of care and inviting others to do and be the same, Wilson, Bush, and Walsh engendered a climate for collective courage.

Cultivating such authentic relationships in a world shaped by structural inequality and paternalism is a significant challenge, as revealed in each of the cases. With the risk comes great reward, as suggested by indigenous educator, Lila Watson: "If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time; but if you are here because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." With participatory consciousness, the practitioner discovers that the community is not 'other,' just as the community discovers that the larger ecologies are not 'out there'. All is in relationship. The emancipatory practitioner becomes aware of his or her membership in, and identity with, each larger sphere. There is no separation. That awareness is participatory consciousness (Reason and Bradbury 2008). It arises from the meaning that the practitioner ascribes to his inner- and inter-subjective experiences. "We create the stage," says Farmer, for people "to go beyond themselves to focus on who they are becoming." (Farmer 2005, p. 2)

In addition to creating a climate conducive to dialogue, practitioners must set up deliberate structures to support cycles of dialogue and action in community. Reflecting the action turn in social sciences, participatory action research (PAR) has emerged as a leading methodology in emancipatory practice (see Guba & Lincoln 1994). A cycle may begin by collectively identifying an issue, deciding what information is needed, gathering that information, constructing meaning from the information, choosing and planning an action or series of actions, carrying out the action, and reflecting upon and learning from the action, then moving forward to another cycle of action and reflection. Wilson, Bush, and Walsh each employed various PAR methodologies. Wilson's story showcased the value of social presencing theatre, or theatre of the oppressed, through which individuals were able to newly understand the complex dynamics of community challenges and identify new opportunities for action. Bush's story showcased the value of a cynefin approach to engagement in complex systems, through probing, sensing, and responding adaptively with potential co-creators. Walsh shared how regenerative dialogue assessment: at the household- and neighbourhood-levels, could support community members in developing awareness of their hearts' desires and collective assets, taking action to advance collective well-being, and reflecting on performance.

Use of Self as Instrument: Ecological Awareness from "Outside"

Leadership for thrivability calls upon the practitioner to sense what is emergent in a community in the present moment, and then to make space for those emergent properties to

come forth. To practice at the emergent edge of a community, the practitioner must start with existing patterns (Westoby and Dowling 2013). Begin where people are; start with what is possible. An essential aspect of understanding existing patterns is to understand patterns of the past, as well. Traditional roles of the expert as outside observer of systems are particularly helpful here. As Walsh's neighbourhood story revealed, systems analysis of social, ecological, and technological dynamics from a third person/outsider perspective helped her understand the neighbourhood's complex history and identify potential intervention points that could help leverage regenerative outcomes. It also helped her understand the constraints and opportunities of her multiple roles in larger systems (privileged gentrifier, neighbor, academic, activist). By noticing these contradictory identities and accepting them, she was better able to relate authentically and responsively with others, sometimes in spite of their first impressions. Yet, although this third-person analysis helped her identify leverage points and anticipate regenerative outcomes, very few could have been rationally planned or predicted at the outset. They were made possible through moment-by-moment choices of the actors involved. The third-person awareness of the ecological whole enabled anticipatory design, beginning where the system is and inviting new possibilities. From that space the practitioner builds trust, creates a new conversation, and fosters agency.

What emerges is a new pattern, potentially self-organising and self-replicating, able to affect not only the immediate participants but other people and spaces as well. Each time one person chooses to take a step over the threshold in service of our greater potential, they make room for others to do the same. Together they can initiate a culture of thrivability. This cultural space offers a sense of belonging and unfolding, as Wilson described. In this space, as Wilson put it, members "could face their vulnerability and build respectful, trusting, and horizontal relationships of collaboration and creativity with community residents and fellow teammates." Together, they may experience being part of a "living evolving system that generates its own evolution every moment" through the choices we make and the attention we bring forward.

While the possibility of belonging and unfolding in a living system is attractive, the leadership practices for thrivability explored above come with a price. They are almost certain to introduce a new level of insecurity, uncertainty and discomfort, as the standard procedures for interacting with the public give way to being in the moment, sensing what is possible, and working with what is arising. Using theatre analogy, Farmer calls this practice "improvisational ensemble performance" (Farmer 2005, p. 5) because the situation is constantly changing as the actors discover and create new possibilities. "As a profession," Farmer warns, "we have not [yet] learned to use the discoveries of the unexpected and unplanned for community development practice" (Farmer 2005, p. 1). The three stories presented, along with the embodied knowledge of an expanding community of practice and supportive literature, suggest that the risk is well worth the reward.

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The Dynamics of Providing Support to Crack Cocaine Addicts in Open-Air Drug Scenes: the lessons learned by the 'Helpers' intervention project

João Alberto Arantes do Amaral, and Aurélio Hess

Abstract
Providing support to crack cocaine drug addicts who inhabit open-air drug scenes is a challenge requiring a multidisciplinary support team with the necessary resources and capabilities to provide effective help. The dynamics of interactions between the support team and the addicts can be very complex, and may involve several stakeholders with different perspectives and, sometimes, conflicting goals. We describe the Helper's project, an intervention project which worked with a group of seventy people: most of them crack cocaine addicts, between February 2009 and November 2009 in Cracolândia (a very run-down open-air drug area of downtown Sao Paolo, Brazil); the project was delivered by a group of fifteen volunteers. We discuss the nature of the intervention from a systemic perspective. We present our findings related to the dynamics of the intervention that influences and is influenced by several other dynamics. We discuss the interrelationships among these dynamics, to provide a deeper understanding of the intervention process.

Keywords: Systemic intervention, Crack cocaine addicts' dynamics, System Dynamics, Cracolândia, Open-air drug scene.

La dinámica de brindar apoyo a los adictos al crack cocaína en escenas de drogas al aire libre: las lecciones aprendidas por el proyecto de intervención 'Ayudantes'

Resumen
Proporcionar apoyo a los adictos al crack cocaína que habitan en escenas de drogas al aire libre, es un desafío que requiere un equipo de apoyo multidisciplinario con los recursos y capacidades necesarias para proporcionar una ayuda efectiva. La dinámica de las interacciones entre el equipo de apoyo y los adictos puede ser muy compleja y puede involucrar a varios actores interesados con diferentes perspectivas y, a veces, objetivos conflictivos. Describimos el proyecto Ayudantes, un proyecto de intervención que trabajó con un grupo de setenta personas – la mayoría de ellos adictos al crack cocaína - entre febrero de 2009 y noviembre de 2009 en Cracolândia (un área de drogas al aire libre muy degradada del centro de São Paulo, Brasil); el proyecto fue realizado por un grupo de quince voluntarios. Discutimos la naturaleza de la intervención desde una perspectiva sistémica. Presentamos nuestros hallazgos relacionados con la dinámica de la intervención que influye y es influenciada por otras dinámicas. Discutimos las interrelaciones entre esas dinámicas, para proporcionar una comprensión más profunda del proceso de intervención.

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Palabras clave: Intervención sistémica, Dinámica de adictos al crack cocaína, Dinámica de sistemas, Cracolândia, Escena de drogas al aire libre.

1. Introduction

Crack cocaine addiction is a problem that concerns governments and communities all over the world. It may ruin the lives of the addicted and their families; it can bring harmful effects to the economy and to the health system. Researchers (Ribeiro et al. 2015, p. 571) point out that "Brazil has the largest cocaine market the world, with 1 million users".

Crack cocaine addicts may lose control of their own lives; they can be at the mercy of drug traffickers, suffering all kinds of abuse and violence. This kind of drug addiction is a difficult problem to solve: the dynamic is very complicated once there are many stakeholders involved (the addicted, their families, drug traffickers, the law enforcement authorities, the communities affected, governments, the institutions that provide help to the addicted) with different and, sometimes, antagonistic goals.

Our research took place in the downtown area of Sao Paolo city, an open-air drug region known as 'Cracolândia' ('land of crack'). It is a region occupied by hundreds of crack cocaine addicts, who spend their days roving around the streets, consuming drugs, wrapped in dirty and ragged blankets. It is the scene of crack cocaine consumption and dealing. The dynamics of drug dealing triggers a wide range of illegal and criminal activities. It also a place of prostitution, therefore also bringing a proliferation of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

Cracolândia is a problem for the City of Sao Paulo; in recent years there were several interventions accomplished by NGOs, Sao Paulo State Government and the City Municipality of Sao Paulo in order to find a solution to it, by trying to stop the drug dealers' activities and to help the addicts to recover from addiction.

Our research focuses on the analysis of the systemic aspects of one intervention, named 'The Helpers intervention project'. The intervention project was delivered by a multidisciplinary team (physicians, lawyers, academics, economists, engineers, students and homemakers) and the targets of the intervention were seventy people (most of them drug addicts, but also small children and babies). The intervention purposes were to provide them food, medical care and guidance about the addiction recovery programmes available. The intervention project followed action research strategy.

We planned to accomplish an initial intervention in order to diagnose the problem and, after that, perform a series of weekly action research cycles. In each cycle, we would plan the intervention, accomplish the intervention, reflect on the results of the intervention and, based on the results, plan the improvements to be made in the following cycle (Figure 1). The process would be repeated until we figure out that we have achieved the results expected.

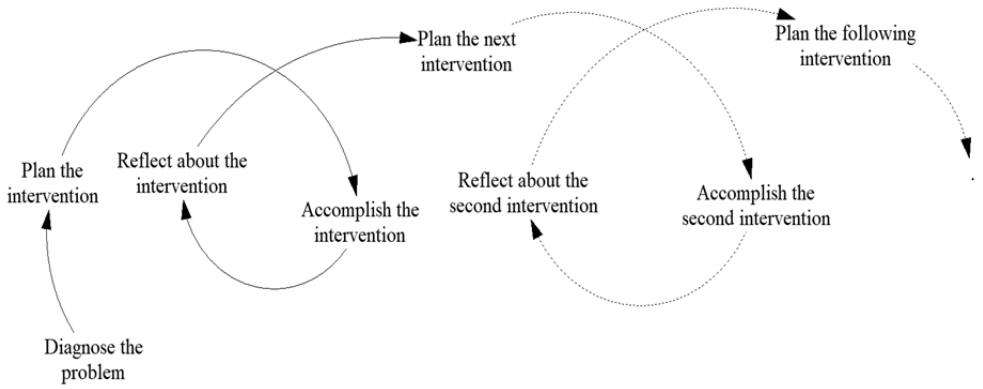

Figure 1. The action research strategy followed (based on Stringer (2014)).

The purpose of our research was to figure out the conditions under which the intervention project was effective, analysing, with a systemic perspective, the consequences of the actions taken for the people assisted and also for the intervention team. For this study we have used system dynamics models to represent the forces and societal issues related to the drug addiction problems referred to by Meadows and Wright (2008). System dynamics models can be useful to understand complexity in public health problems (Homer & Hirsch 2006). Such models can bring a systemic perspective of the drug addiction problem. The benefits of applying a systems perspective to action research are well recognized (Flood 2002, 2010; Barton et al. 2004; Marshall 2004; Ison 2008, 2010a, b; Midgley 2011; Burns 2007, 2012, 2014). We developed a causal loop diagram model to reveal the most common dynamics present in open air drug scenes. The model was created based on the literature review, and also in our practitioner experience in the field.

The model gave us insights to answer our research question, that was: *"What are the circumstances under which the intervention projects, aimed to give support to crack cocaine addicts living in open-air drug scenes, can be more effective?"*

We consider this question to be an important issue, because sometimes action research requires systemic interventions. An understanding of the systemic aspects of interventions, including cause and effect relationships, feedback loops and points of leverage, can be very useful to those involved in action research activities.

2. Literature Review

Open air drug scenes are complex systems; the stakeholders are interconnected and interrelated. The actions taken from one actor may impact all others, in several unexpected ways.

An ethnographic study of the Cracolândia area (Raupp & Adorno 2011; Rui 2014) highlighted the complex dependency relationships between crack cocaine addicts and other social players. Bossel (2007, p.39) pointed out that "dependence on others can become a

problem, if the dependence of an actor on the others reaches the point where he can no longer determine his own destiny autonomously".

In our research we interacted with crack cocaine addicts, but while we were trying to help them, others stakeholders acted in ways which were inimical to our goals. The dynamics related to drug addiction are very complex, as Meadows and Wright (2008, p. 2) point out:

> Drug addiction is not the failing of an individual and no one person, no matter how tough, no matter how loving, can cure a drug addict - not even the addict. It is only through understanding addiction as part of a larger set of influences and societal issues that one can begin to address it.

In this topic we make a synthesis of the existing knowledge about the dynamics of open-air drug scenes interventions. We will explain, based on relevant literature, what produces and sustains each dynamic, and how the dynamics are interrelated and interconnected.

We begin our review from the addict's perspective, explaining what causes the addiction, and why the drug user gets trapped in this cycle. Then, we exam the drug user problem from the traffic dealer perspective; discuss the dynamics that make the dealers dependent on the drug addicts, analyse the interrelationship between the two dynamics. Finally, we discuss how the two dynamics trigger several other dynamics that brings harms to the society. By understanding what makes and entrenches each cycle, the reader could be able to fully understand the dynamic of the intervention project described later in this article.

2.1 The dynamics of the addiction

In order to facilitate the understanding, we describe each feedback loop of the causal loop diagram presented in Figure 2.

There are several risk factors that lead one individual to make use of drugs, among those, crack cocaine. Researchers (Hawkins et al. 1992; UNO 2003; de Psiquiatria, 2012) point that risk factors include the individual factors (such as low self-esteem and sensation seeking behaviour, for example) interpersonal factors (such as association with friends who use drugs) and contextual factors (such as chaotic home environments, availability of drugs in the community).

Crack cocaine addiction is a vicious cycle: the more the user makes use of the drug, the more the drug's dependency increases (Cleck & Blendy 2008; de Psiquiatria 2012; Koob 2013), that leads the user to buy more drugs (Figure 2, feedback loop, "Addiction").

It is difficult to break the addiction cycle: it may require to motivate the individual to search for treatment. The government, the family of the addicted and NGOs may play an important role, helping the addicts to participate in recovery programs. In the recovery programmes, the addicts may be exposed to several treatments such as detoxification, motivational enhancement, social skill training, motivational enhancement therapy (Egeland et al. 1988; Boisvert et al. 2008; de Psiquiatria 2012).

As the treatment becomes effective, the addict may stop using drugs, therefore breaking the addiction cycle (Figure 2, feedback loop "Overcoming the addiction").

There is a connection between the dynamics of addiction and the dynamics of drugs selling. The addicts buy drugs from the drug dealers, therefore improving their sales. It triggers another reinforcing feedback loop: as the sales increase, the drug dealers' profits

increase as well. Therefore, the drug dealers may take different actions in order to get more addicts: such as dealing drugs to middle and upper class buyers (Van Nostrand & Tewksbury 1999). Increasing the number of addicts will reinforce the sales of drugs (Figure 2, feedback loop "Selling Drugs").

However, the increase of the drug dealers' profits can make the drug dealers gangs compete for territories (Nadelmann 1989; Levitt & Venkatesh 2000; Zaluar 2002), triggering wars among them (Figure 2, feedback loop, "Gang wars"). Gang wars may have two main consequences: an increase in the number of casualties, and the decrease of their profits. The increase of the number of killings is bad for the drug dealers: it triggers the police actions against them.

There is also a connection between the dynamics of the addiction and the dynamics of subsistence. The drug addicts are in constant need of buying food and drugs, but because of their addiction they are not able to hold down regular jobs. Some of them may try to make money by selling small items (candies, chocolate etc.) on the streets and to car drivers. Others may get money by performing small services, such as cleaning car windows. However, many of them get money by means of performing crimes such as selling drugs, using children to sell drugs, robberies, burglary, numbers running, prostitution (Goldstein 1985; Nurco 1987; Nadelmann 1989; Chaiken & Chaiken 1990; Hunt 1990, Anglin & Perrochet 1998; Gomes and Adorno 2011; Moyle & Coomber 2015; Raupp & Adorno 2015).

Therefore, the need of money also produces a feedback loop (Figure 2, feedback loop "Subsistence"). The greater the urge to buy drugs, the greater the need of money. Therefore, the drug addicts may perform illegal activities. Part of the money obtained may be spent on drug acquisition, action that reinforces the "Addiction" feedback loop, that leads to the reinforcement of the "Selling drugs" loop. Part of the money is spent on food acquisition, therefore closing the "Subsistence" feedback loop.

On the other hand, the increase of illegal activities leads to an increase in police actions against the drug users (Figure 2, loop "Actions against illegal activities"). It brings the reduction of the illegal activities performed by the drug addicts, reducing their sources of money, which impacts directly on their subsistence (Figure 2, "Subsistence" feedback loop) increasing the drug users' stress (Rui 2012).

The increase of illegal activities also triggers the police actions against the drug dealers (Rui 2012, 2013). The number of drug dealers arrested may increase, which may lead to decrease of drug sales, consequently reducing their profit. One possible consequence is the increase of drug dealers' actions against the police, which may increase the number of police officers killed or wounded (Figure 2, feedback loop "Attacking the police"). When this occurs, the police fight back, increasing the number of drug dealers arrested and the number of drug dealers killed (Figure 2, feedback loop, "Attacking the drug dealers"). These two dynamics may lead to an escalation of violence acts of both sides.

But attacking the police officers is not the only option the drug dealers have. It is more lucrative to the drug dealers try to corrupt the police officers, by offering them bribes (Liew 1992). When this happens, the police force reduces the actions against the drug dealers (Figure 2, feedback loop, "Corrupting the police").

Drug addicts may suffer multiple stresses: the need of money, the exploitation done by drug traffickers (Cruz Neto et al, 2001), police oppression (Fabrino Favato 2012) and the

societal discrimination and stigma (Ahern et al. 2007; Young et al. 2005). They may also stigmatize each other (Simmonds & Coomber 2009).

The greater the stress, the greater the probability of drug users to commit violence against each other. The violence may lead to fights, which may cause fight wounds that contribute to the increase of health problems and, consequently, to the increase of the stress (Figure 2, feedback loop "Drug user's stress").

In addition to the health problems caused by fights, there are also health problems caused by STDs. Research suggests that drug addicts may also become infected with a wide range of sexually transmitted diseases (Booth et al. 1993). Both problems may result in an increase in the number of deaths among drug users' population.

Figure 2 shows the connections of the dynamics we could identify by our literature review so far. The causal loop diagram created is a model, and as all models, it has its own limitations and deficiencies (Sterman 2002). However, this model was useful to make us understand the deeply entrenched relationships between the dynamics described.

Cracolândia is an open-air drug scene, therefore it has many of the dynamics presented. Consequently, it brings all kinds of harm to City of Sao Paulo. But how are the Sao Paulo community, NGOs and government dealing with this problem?

They deal with this problem with different kinds of systemic interventions. Intervention, in the context of this study, can be defined as "a purposeful action by an agent to create change" (Midgley 2000, p. 7). The interventions analysed in our research had the purpose of promoting change in the conditions of the drug users of Cracolândia area. Stephens (2014, p.311) defines systemic intervention as a "non-linear approach to interventions into complex and problematic situations, or sets of social systems, to generate new understandings".

We present our literature review of four interventions accomplished from 1998 to 2016 in Cracolândia: one accomplished by one NGO, one accomplished by the City Municipality of Sao Paulo, one accomplished by State of Sao Paulo Government and one accomplished together by City Municipality and the State Government of Sao Paulo.

2.1.1 Intervention accomplished by NGO "É de lei" (It's from the Law).

NGO "É de lei" (It's from the Law) is an organisation that promotes actions in Cracolandia in order to promote harm reduction for crack cocaine users. The NGO began its activities in 1998. Nowadays it has fifteen members, all volunteers. It has a community centre (just a small room and a bathroom). In this centre, the NGO members "provide orientation meetings to the addicts, about preventive sexual practices and the abusive nature of drugs" (Frúgoli & Spaggiri 2011, p.558). The goal of the NGO is to promote reflection and knowledge sharing, this way empowering the addicts (Godoy et. al. 2014). The NGO also provides them material resources (condoms, silicone cigarette holders, chopsticks and other materials). This kind of intervention has the merit of improving the life conditions of those assisted, and promoting culture change for drug addicts (Godoy et al., 2014). The drawback is that, by providing smoking material to the drug addicts, it may be contributing to the dynamic of the addiction.

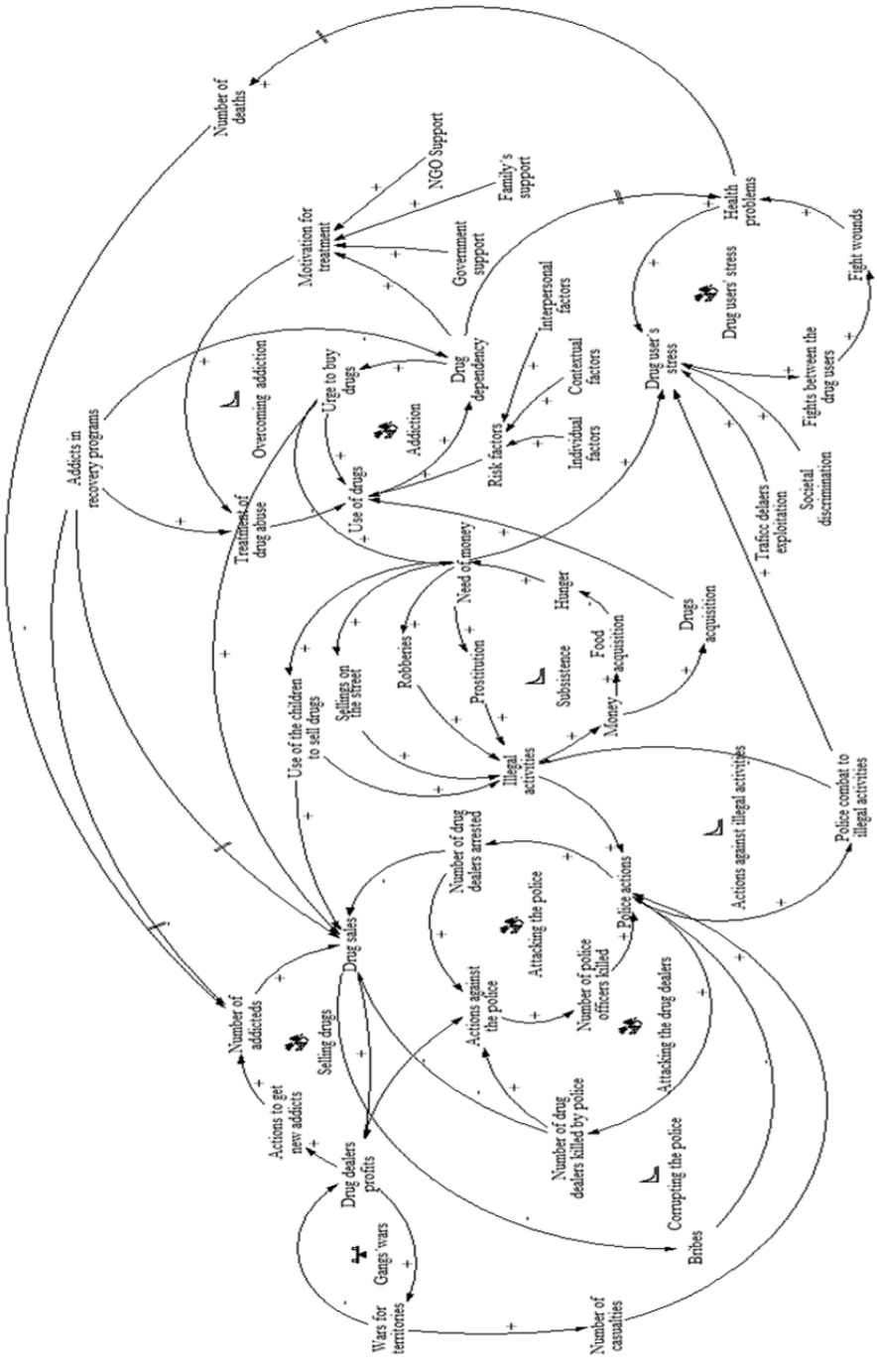

Figure 2. The main dynamics that may be present on open-air crack cocaine drug scenes. Source: the authors

2.1.2 Intervention 'Operação Sufoco' (Operation Choke)

In 2012, there was an intervention, conceived by the City Municipality and State of São Paulo Government named 'Operação Sufoco' (Operation Choke) accomplished by the military police. The intervention had the goal of breaking the traffic logistics by removing the drug addicts from the region. The operation also had the purpose of offering drug addicts treatment in the public hospitals and health centres. However, the intervention did not achieve any of its goals, mainly due to the lack of co-ordination between the stakeholders (Rui 2013). There were no health institutions ready to give the addicts the necessary support. Therefore, the drug users moved to the surrounding neighbourhoods, creating small open-air drugs scenes there. And most of them returned to Cracolandia after a few weeks.

2.1.3. Intervention "Recomeço" (Start again)

There was a huge intervention programme accomplished by São Paulo State Government, in 2013, named "Recomeço" (Start again). There were several actions taken by the State Government, such as the installation of tents and mobile offices in Cracolândia region, with multidisciplinary teams (nurses, social workers and health agents) (Ribeiro et al. 2015). The state government provided a building with facilities that enable it to provide health care services, detoxication support, sport activities and job orientation to the addicts. This intervention has the merit of providing facilities and resources to those addicts that look for help. The drawback of this intervention is that the building was in the Cracolândia area. Therefore, the drug addicts attended were in the same environment of the other addicts and under the influence of the drug dealers.

2.1.4 Intervention "De braços abertos" (With open arms)

In 2014, there was another intervention taken, this time, by the City Municipality. The intervention was named "De braços abertos" (With open arms). Its goals were to remove the addicts' shacks from the streets, and to offer the drug users accommodation in local hotels, meals and jobs as street sweepers (Ribeiro et. al. p.571). However, this intervention had many problems: many addicts used the money they received as street sweepers to buy drugs. And the hotels, situated in the Cracolândia area, were in precarious conditions: many drug addicts used them as a space for drug trafficking and consuming (Cavalcanti et al. 2015).

What those intervention have achieved so far? Ribeiro et al. (2015, p. 571) point out:

> The great majority of drug users remains firmly based in the area, despite the offer of treatment, employment and accommodation. Cracolândia still attracts drug trafficking homeless people, former convicts and individuals unable to integrate main-stream society.

Why so? Maybe because the interventions did not address the problem in a systemic way, the interventions did not combat the vicious cycles adequately. It seems there is a lack of understanding about the main dynamics that drive the open-air drug scenes. In our research we try to contribute to the understanding of the aforementioned dynamics.

3. Methodology

In this section we differentiate the methodological approach of the intervention and the systemic approach (the case study).

3.1 The Methodological approach of the intervention

We followed a systemic intervention methodological approach (Midgley 2000). Midgley (2003, p.89) suggests the "methodology should be explicit about three things: boundary critique, theoretical and methodological pluralism, and action for improvement".

The boundaries critique (Midgley 2003, p.89) defines "what issues are to be included, excluded or marginalised in analysis and who is to be consulted and involved".

In our case study there were four groups involved: the researchers, the intervention team, the assisted community and the community partners. In our analysis we focus on the issues related to the consequences of the actions of the intervention team to the assisted community and vice versa. We did not focus our research on the relationships between the police and drug dealers. We described it, but did not deepen our research of it.

The second aspect of the systemic intervention (theoretical and methodological pluralism) concerns the choice researchers made with regard to "the most suitable and appropriate methods for the intended purpose of the research" (Stephens 2014, p.312). In our research, we followed action research approach; its advantages have been described by Stringer (2014, p. 5):

> ...action research provides a flexible and practical set of procedures that are systematic, cyclical, solution oriented, and participatory, providing means to devise sustainable improvements in practice that enhance the lives and well-being of all participants.

In addition to that, we also used system dynamics theory in order to create the models that represent the dynamics studied.

The third aspect of the systemic intervention methodological approach covers the actions for improvement. Midgley explains (2003) that actions for improvements can be achieved when interventions bring the desired consequences. In our study we analyse the actions taken by the intervention team in order to improve the conditions of the drug addicts.

3.2 The systemic approach of the intervention

The intervention consisted of several one-week action research cycles. At the beginning, the intervention team identified the problems to address, and then planned the first intervention. In the next week they implemented these actions and observed and reflected on the results. The findings from each cycle were used to improve the action plan for the following cycle; this way they were able continuously to improve the actions.

3.2.1 The researchers' roles

The second author worked as a field researcher. He was a member of the intervention team. His job was to assist the team members with all the activities they performed during the

project, and while doing so, to observe and take notes on the behaviour of all stakeholders. The first author supported the research by contributing to the analysis of data, including applying the systems perspective to the results.

3.2.2 The intervention team

The intervention team consisted of 15 members: two physicians, two lawyers, one economist, three professors, two engineers, three university students and two homemakers.

3.2.3 The assisted community

The people supported by the project (hereafter the Helped) were a group of around 70 people, approximately 55 adults and 15 children, including a small number of girls aged 10 to 12 years who were pregnant. All the adults were unemployed and suffered from drug addiction to some extent; they had all been abandoned by their family or lost contact with them. They lived in a very run-down empty building, without water, electricity, doors and windows in Cracolândia. They shared the building, competing aggressively for the scarce resources. They fought constantly with each other, and thus were frequently wounded.

3.2.4 The partners

Federação Espírita do Estado de São Paulo (Spiritist Federation of State of Sao Paulo, thereafter FEESP) offered its facilities for the meetings of the intervention team. This organisation offers free lectures, seminars and spiritual assistance almost every night, for anyone who is interested. The free lectures cover topics of general interest such as chemical dependency, domestic violence and sexual assault prevention, child neglect, family conflicts, and so on. Spiritual guidance is offered in counseling sessions in which FEESP's mentors speak with people who are experiencing financial, health, or social difficulties. The mentors listen attentively to the people and give them guidance and orientation. The intervention team had the support of a bakery and a drugstore in the Cracolândia area, both of which sold their products to the intervention group at a discount.

3.2.5 Data gathering

The researcher (the second author) collected qualitative, observational data whilst participating in the assistance cycles, taking notes of anything that might help interpret behaviours and attitudes. During the project he conducted short interviews when it was possible to do so. He asked questions about the needs of the assisted community, their feelings, the problems they were facing and the impact of the intervention actions on their lives. The researcher also observed the interactions of the Helped with other members of the community, in order to understand the dynamics of their relationships.

3.2.6 Data analysis

The research team applied systemic analysis to our data using the system dynamic modeling method described by Sterman (2000). The objective was to identify the system's structure that was responsible for the patterns of behaviour observed.

4. Intervention Description

The intervention began at the FEESP's facilities. Paul (fictitious name), a 72-year-old economist, was one of the FEESP's lecturers. After one of his lectures he was approached by an old man, in ragged clothes whose name was Carlos (fictitious name). Carlos told Paul that he was representing a group of drug addicts that lived in desperate conditions in an abandoned building in the Cracolândia area. He asked Paul if he could find some way of helping them. Carlos said the group, numbering about seventy people, was starving and that many of them were sick and injured. They urgently needed food and medicines.

Paul agreed to help. Next week, at the end of his FEESP lecture, he told his audience about the group and its problems. He asked for volunteers. Fifteen people raised their hands. Paul took their names, and invited them to join to an intervention project to help Carlos's community (thereafter 'Helped'). The intervention was named 'Helpers Project'.

The intervention had two goals. The primary objective was to help the addicts to find ways of leaving addiction, mainly by giving them information about the public programmes available to them. The secondary goal was to ameliorate their living conditions by providing food, medicines and assistance. The intervention team named themselves the 'Helpers'.

4.1 Diagnosing the problem

A group of 3 Helpers (including Paul) made the initial approach to the Helped. They visited the house where the Helped were living, taking with them some food, water, and medicines. During this visit the group realised that the problem was much worse than they had initially imagined. The conditions were terrible. The house was dirty, there were drugs and syringes everywhere, and insects and rats abounded. To make matters worse, the Helped community included 15 children of various ages, some only babies. Some of the females were pregnant. Many of the Helped presented signs of contagious diseases. All of them were starving, and they quickly ate the food the group had brought. The group noticed that many of the Helped had untreated wounds. Many of them needed a good bath, better clothes and a haircut.

Paul talked to the community about the Helpers Project, and asked their permission to visit on a regular basis, once a week. They welcomed the Helpers' team, and the intervention began.

4.2 Planning the intervention

The following week the full Helpers team met at FEESP again. The purpose of the meeting was to define the goals of the intervention, and the roles and responsibilities of the various team members, and to plan fundraising activities. It was decided that the Helpers would visit the Helped every Thursday night, after Paul's FEESP lecture. Before each weekly visit the Helpers would hold a short briefing session at which they would discuss the goal of that week's intervention. After the visit they would have a debriefing session and consider the actions for the following week. They decided that the expenses of the intervention would be shared among the Helpers, and agreed to seek support from Cracolândia's bakeries and one drugstore.

Paul was the leader of the Helpers' group; he was in charge of co-ordinating the Helpers during the visit. The lawyers would be responsible for providing legal support to the Helped. The doctors would examine them and decide what medication they needed. The women (homemakers and students) would be responsible for helping the children during the visit (changing diapers, providing milk for the babies). The second author was in charge of collecting information about the Helped, and providing other support as necessary. The others would distribute food, cut hair, perform basic first aid for the wounded etc. Everyone would offer comfort to the Helped.

They decided the Helpers would undertake the following actions on every visit:

a) distribute food and water (and in the winter, hot chocolate)
b) provide care (cutting hair, changing dressings on wounds)
c) provide personal hygiene orientation to both adults and children
d) provide guidance on free municipal services of relevance to the Helped.
e) provide information about the addiction recovery programs available
f) comfort anyone in despair, listening and empathizing with their anguish.
g) create a new list of needs in preparation for the next visit.

It was decided agreed each visit would not last more than 2 hours.

4.3 Delivery of the intervention

Forty visits were made to the Helped between February 1999 and November 1999. On the first five visits, the Helpers focused on developing a friendly and meaningful relationship with the assisted community. The Helpers presented to them the purpose of the visits, in an egalitarian and non-threatening way. The Helpers introduced themselves as persons that the community could ask for support. During the five visits, the field researcher focused on the understanding the community's dynamics and its history. He was able to learn about the community's past, how the group was formed and it developed. He was also capable of identifying the leaders. He realised the ways the community members interacted with each other. He figured out what were their concerns, fears, and needs. He also talked to each member of the community. They felt comfortable to share with him their lives' stories, what led them to the present situation. These conversations helped him to break barriers, to establish connections, and to have a deep understanding of the addiction vicious cycle.

During the five initial visits, the Helpers were still developing the procedures to be performed during the visits. After several trials, they realised that the food should be distributed right away, in order to reduce the nervousness and agitation of those served.

The Helpers also realised that attending to both children and adult in the same space was not a good idea. In order to protect the children from predators, the Helpers decided that the children and the adults should be attended to in different contiguous areas. The Helpers also realised the need for having a better organisation, defining the Helpers leaders. One leader would be in charge of organising the food distribution; another would be responsible for arranging the attending of the community members that were wounded. The third one was in charge of organising counseling with the lawyers for the purpose of providing guidance on free municipal services and addiction recovery programmes. The fourth one was accountable for co-ordinating the actions on behalf of the children.

The Helpers figured out how to co-ordinate these efforts to provide the maximum assistance in the short available time they had.

In the following visits the Helpers did not face any substantial problems: actions were implemented on a regular basis, according to the plans. The visit procedures were well defined, the community developed bonds with the Helpers.

By the 38th visit, however, there was a great problem: a group of drug dealers invaded the building where the Helpers acted, and behaved very brutally and aggressively. They made it clear to the Helpers that their actions were against the dealers' interests. The drug dealers made threats to the lives of the Helpers. Fortunately, some of the Helped intervened and threw the dealers out. The following two visits were tense: the drug dealers were nearby, offending and intimidating the Helpers. The Helpers began to fear for their lives. Carlos, the leader of the Helped, asked the Helpers to stop visiting because the situation was also dangerous for the Helped. The final visit took place in the fourth week of November 1999.

4.4 Results

The intervention project accomplished two goals, to a significant degree. The first goal (to help the addicts to find ways of leaving addiction by giving them information about the public programmes available to them) led to the realisation of more 40 hours of counseling activities. In consequence of that, we estimate that 10% of the Helped enrolled in drug addiction programmes run by the Sao Paulo Prefecture.

The second goal (to ameliorate the Helped's living conditions by providing food, medicines and assistance) was also achieved. During the intervention period the Helpers delivered approximately 350 kilograms of food, 1360 litres of water, 680 litres of hot chocolate and approximately US$ 30,000-worth of medicines.

5. Discussion: the dynamics of the intervention

During the visits the Helpers accomplished five different actions (obtaining support from community partners, donating food, donating of medicines, performing care and comfort actions and providing guidance and orientation), each action impacted the dynamics of the open-air drug scene in several different ways. In this section we discuss the merits and drawbacks of each action.

After the discussion of each action, we consider the longer-term sustainability of the intervention project. Finally, we compare with other interventions described previously in the literature review.

We make our discussion based on Figure 3, explaining the dynamic deployments of each intervention action taken.

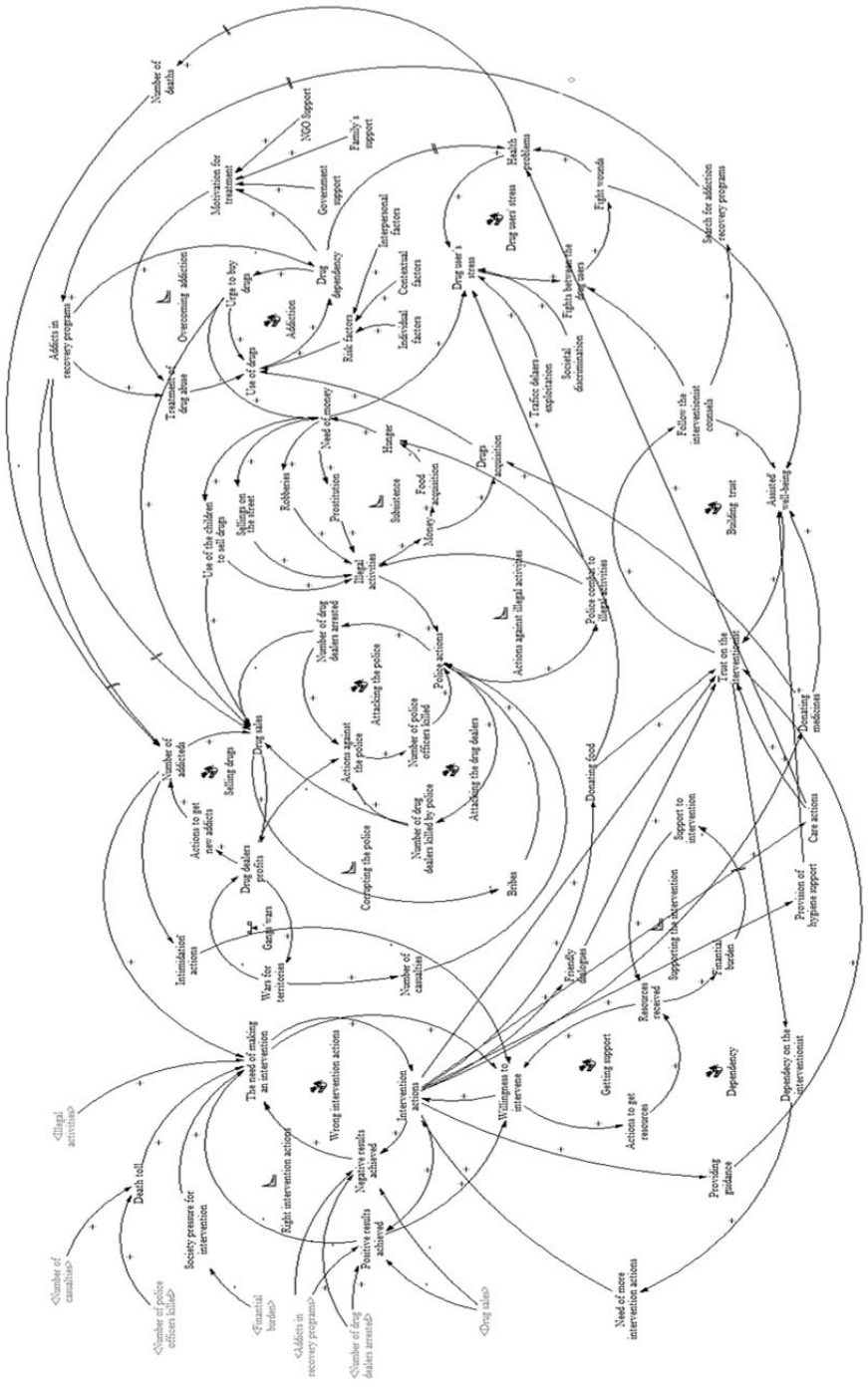

Figure 3. The dynamics of the Helper's intervention project

5.1 Action one: getting resources

The need to make the intervention stimulated the Helpers to intervene. They took actions to get support from local businesses (bakery and drugstore) that operate in the region. The support of the bakery and drugstore reduced the financial cost of the intervention, and enabled the Helpers to buy the necessary food and medicines. This action was easy to accomplish: the bakery and drugstore owners were people willing to co-operate, they wanted to do something in order to help the drug addicts. Getting the resources motivated the Helpers to continue the intervention week after week, creating a feedback loop (Figure 3, 'Getting support' loop).

One possible drawback of this action was the eventual future lack of support from these partners, once the intervention project created a financial burden to them (Figure 3, 'Supporting the intervention' loop). As the months passed, the bakery and drugstore owners would realise the reduction of their profits, therefore it reasonable to expect that their willingness to collaborate would reduce.

5.2 Action two: donating food

The donation of food addressed the most urgent needs of the Helped. They were always hungry, so giving them food was a way of providing immediate relief, therefore reducing the need of money to buy food (loop 'Subsistence', Figure 3) and, consequently, contributing to the reduction of their stress (loop 'Drug users' stress, Figure 3).

The donation of food also contributed to building trust between the Helped and the Helpers, creating another feedback loop (Figure 3, 'Building trust'). Building a trusting relationship provided a safe dynamic for the Helped to follow the Helpers' counsel.

However, the donation of food did not contribute to the reduction of the addiction cycle. On the contrary, some drug addicts used the money they got from illegal activities, now saved for not needing to spend it on food acquisition, to buy more drugs, therefore increasing their addiction (Figure 3, loop, 'Addiction'). Another drawback of this action is that donating food increases the dependency of the Helped on the Helpers, therefore generating a dependency feedback loop (Figure 3, loop 'Dependency').

5.3 Action three: donating medicines

The donation of medicines had a similar dynamic: in one way it contributed to the Helped well-being, contributing to the development of the trust between the Helped and the Helpers (Figure 2, loop 'Building trust'). On the other hand, some addicts stole the medicine from others, and sold them to generate money to buy illegal drugs, therefore increasing their addiction (Figure 2, loop 'Addiction').

5.4 Action four: providing care and comfort actions

The comfort actions can be divided in two different groups: the friendly dialogues and the provision of hygiene support.

The friendly dialogues were very effective; the Helped desperately needed to be heard, to talk about their anguish, torment and suffering. These conversations made it easier for

the Helpers to break down barriers and get closer to the group they were assisting. These actions reinforced the 'Building trust' feedback loop.

The provisions of hygiene support (cutting hair, providing soap and shampoo) had the effect of alleviating Helped discomforts, increasing their well-being, therefore reinforcing the trust the Helped had in the Helpers (Figure 3, loop 'Building trust').

The care actions (treating their wounds), besides increasing the trust the Helped had on the Helpers, also had a direct positive impact on the health of the Helped, alleviating their stress (Figure 3, loop 'Stress').

The drawback of these actions was: increasing the trust the Helped had on the Helpers also increases the dependency relationship (Figure 3, loop 'Dependency loop').

5.5 Action five: providing guidance and orientation

The guidance provided by the lawyers and the physicians also helped the Helpers to gain the trust of the Helped (Figure 3, 'Building trust' loop). During the visits the physicians always counseled the Helped to resolve their differences without fighting each other and without violence. Following the physicians' counseling led to a reduction in the number of fights amongst the Helped, therefore reducing their wounds, their health problems and their stress (Figure 3, 'Drug users' stress' loop).

Throughout the visits the lawyers always gave orientations about the State and Municipality addiction recovery programmes available to the Helped. Over the course of the intervention, around 30% of the Helped followed the Helpers' counseling and guidance and sought addiction recovery programmes. During the intervention period, at least 10% of the Helped (seven people) joined recovery support groups and left Cracolândia (Figure 3, 'Overcoming addiction' loop). The Helpers celebrated each recovery; these milestones motivated them to continue with the actions.

However, the Helpers' actions did not go unnoticed, the drug dealers started to be worried about their impact. They felt the Helpers' actions were reducing the number of addicts in the region, and having a negative impact on their sales (Figure 3, 'Selling drugs' loop). They retaliated, taking actions to intimidate the Helpers.

5.6 Considerations about the longer-term sustainability of the intervention project

Was the Helpers' intervention project sustainable? Probably not. It relied solely on the goodwill of the Helpers, and the support of few community partners (the bakery and the drug store). The Helpers did not have any sponsor or Government funds. The intervention generated benefits to the Helped, but externalities (financial burden and psychological stress) to the Helpers and the community partners. More than that, the Helpers did not have any condition of facing the threats of the drug dealers. The project was doomed without some form of systemic protection and security.

However, the intervention project may not be considered a total failure. It partially achieved its goals, bringing benefits to the Helped (at least, while the project lasted). Probably the greatest strengths of this project were the academic findings that it helped to

reveal. The intervention project helped to reveal the systemic aspects of an intervention for providing support to crack cocaine addicts who inhabit open-air drug scenes.

5.7 Comparison with other interventions accomplished in Cracolândia

The Helpers' intervention dynamics shares similarities with the actions accomplished by the NGO 'É de lei' (Godoy et. al., 2014). Both interventions were carried out by volunteers, and both tried to empower the drug addicts. However, while the NGO 'É de lei' focused on harm reduction, the Helper focused on providing immediate hunger relief, medical attention, and orientation to the addicts to leave the addiction. The dynamics of 'Building trust' (Figure 3) were present in both interventions. However, the Helpers actions led to the reduction of the number of addicts, impacting directly on the dynamics 'Selling drugs' (Figure 3). We speculate that, due the difference of the focus, the Helpers were attacked by the drug dealers, and the NGO 'É de lei' was not. The Helper's actions could be seen, in the drug dealers' point of view, as a direct threat to their business. It is possible that the NGO 'É de lei' actions were not perceived as a threat to their activities. Probably the drug dealers see the NGO 'É de lei' actions as helpful to their business, once it can be seen as actions that lead to the increase in the addiction (Figure 3, Addiction).

We consider that the 'Operation Choke' (Rui 2013) failed due to the lack of systemic connections between the actions taken. The operation imposed pain and suffering to the drug addicts, since the addicts were removed from Cracolândia without being given the necessary health support. The dynamics of this intervention had no similarity with the intervention accomplished by the Helpers. This intervention reduced, for a short period of time, the force of the 'Selling Drugs' Loop (Figure 3).

We consider that the intervention taken by State Government (the 'Start again' Programme) and Helpers' intervention act on the same dynamics, differing only in orders of magnitude. While the State invested millions of dollars in creating a structure support attending hundreds of people, the Helpers relied on their own resources and supported just 70 people. The 'Start again' programme followed a top-down approach while the Helpers followed a bottom-up one. Both interventions aimed to empower the drug addicts, both tried to give them conditions to leave the addiction. Both acted on the 'Building trust' loop and on the 'Overcoming addiction' loop. However, we speculate that both interventions share the same flaws: both create cycles of dependency (Figure 3, 'Dependency' loop), in different orders of magnitude. And both generated externalities, the costs of the intervention (Figure 3, 'Supporting the intervention' loop). The costs of the Helper' intervention was laid on the shoulders of the Helpers and the community partners. The costs of the 'Start again' Programme was paid by the taxpayers.

The 'With open arms' intervention had systemic problems. The actions taken brought several unintended consequences, such as the use of the hotels as safe place for consuming and trading drugs, and the use of the money (given to the addict as salaries for sweeping the streets) to buy drugs. The intervention increased the drug addicts' dependency on the programme (Figure 3, 'Dependency' loop) and also increased the selling of drugs (Figure 3, 'Selling of the drugs' loop). And, of course, it generated costs to the taxpayers (Figure 3, 'Dependency' loop).

6. Findings

So, what did we learn from the Helpers' project?

Thinking at a different level of abstraction, we speculate that many of the dynamics studied may be present in other context of open-air drug scenes interventions.

We can also say that the model developed was a useful tool to compare different interventions accomplished in Cracolândia. We believe this model can be also useful to study open-air drug interventions elsewhere.

In all interventions studied, there were effective and ineffective intervention actions accomplished. The effective intervention actions may bring positive results (such as increasing numbers of the addicts in recovery programmes, increasing numbers of the drug dealers arrested, decreasing drug sales). Those results would eventually lead to the reduction of need of accomplishing new interventions (Figure 3, 'Right interventions actions' feedback loop).

On the other hand, the ineffective interventions actions may bring negative results (such decreasing numbers of the addicts in recovery programmes, increasing drug sales, increase in dependency). Those results would, eventually, lead to the increase of the need to accomplish new interventions (Figure 3, 'Wrong interventions actions' feedback loop).

All interventions studied lead to the need for support, creating a feedback loop (Figure 3, 'Getting support' loop), and the more support the intervention got, the more motivated they were to take further actions, and vice versa. In all interventions studied, someone paid the costs of the intervention: the businesses, the volunteers or the taxpayers. The payment of the costs of the intervention generates a negative feedback loop (Figure 3 'Supporting the intervention'); it is quite reasonable to assume that the support will not last indefinitely.

In all interventions studied the actions taken addressed only the consequences of the cycle of the addiction: none of them addressed the risk factors (Figure 3, 'Addiction loop') the lead people to become addicts.

In the case study we see that the Helpers' intervention disturbed the equilibrium of the system of which the Helped community was a part. It was predictable that the other stakeholders would act to restore the former equilibrium; the actions of the drug dealers were a consequence of the intervention that could have been anticipated.

We can also say that the planners of an intervention should carry out an analysis of the system within which they will be operating, before they act. Had the Helpers, when planning the project, created a causal loop model of how the dynamics of the system might play out in response to their actions, they would not have been surprised by the actions of the drug dealers. They might have been able to adjust their plans to avoid this threat to the intervention.

7. Conclusions

We think the lessons of the Helpers' project have a wider relevance. We have described a specific intervention process which took place in a specific context, but we think it likely that the primary dynamics we uncovered would be present in several other similar contexts.

We consider the discussion of the dynamics of the intervention The Helpers project contributes to understanding the complex connectivity among the actions of diverse stakeholders in open-air drug scenes interventions.

We can also say that action research approach followed by the Helpers' project was temporarily effective, but hampered for not being systemic in planning and intervention; the outcome for drug dealers was not predicted, and the dysfunctional behaviours of users sometimes resulted in ineffective support. The conceptual model of the drug addiction system was indeed effective for revealing all the dynamics, but the programme failed because it did not respond to all stakeholders. The use of short action research cycles helped the Helpers to improve the intervention processes, week by week.

We advise that drug addiction intervention programmes must be grounded in a systemic model that includes actions that are responsive to all the dynamics, especially the threats associated with drug dealers and the dysfunctional behaviour of users.

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A Practical Model for Integrating Action Research Time into Second Language Education Schedule

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Abstract
Time limitation has always been considered a major problem in conducting action research (AR) in the field of second/foreign language teacher education. In order to overcome the lack of time obstacle to research engagement, a comprehensive framework was set up in this study that allowed teachers the flexibility to plan and incorporate research activities into their current teaching schedule. Seven Iranian teachers of a private English language teaching institute participated in the present study. The structure of first- and second-order AR was used in this collaborative AR study. Qualitative modes of inquiry, including reflective journal and semi-structured interview, were used to elicit teachers' views about conducting their AR projects. Analysis of the data revealed three major themes about AR that concerned issues such as empowering teachers in dealing with a particular problem, creating a sense of belonging to a professional community, and helping them to value time allotment.

Key Words: first-order action research, second-order action research, reflective journal, semi-structured interview, teachers' views

Un modelo práctico para integrar el tiempo de la investigación-acción en el programa de educación de segunda lengua

Resumen
La limitación de tiempo siempre fue considerada el mayor problema en la realización de la *Action Research* (AR) en el campo de la formación de profesores de segunda lengua/ lengua extranjera. Con el fin de superar el obstáculo de la falta de tiempo para el compromiso investigativo, en este estudio se estableció un marco integral que permitió a los docentes la flexibilidad para planificar e incorporar actividades de investigación en su programa de enseñanza habitual. Siete profesores iraníes de un instituto privado de enseñanza de lengua inglesa participaron en el presente estudio. La estructura de la AR de primer – y segundo orden- se usó en este estudio colaborativo de AR. Modalidades cualitativas de investigación, incluyendo el diario reflexivo y la entrevista semi-estructurada, se utilizaron para obtener la visión de los profesores sobre la realización de sus proyectos de AR. El análisis de los datos reveló tres temas principales sobre la AR que se referían a cuestiones tales como empoderar a los profesores para enfrentar un problema en particular, crear un sentido de pertenencia a una comunidad profesional, y ayudarlos a valorar el tiempo disponible.

Palabras clave: investigación-acción de primer orden, investigación-acción de segundo orden, diario reflexivo, entrevista semi-estructurada, visión de los profesores.

Introduction

In recent years, applied linguists have paid special attention to foreign/second language (L2) teacher education and practice (e.g., Bartels 2005; Burns & Richards 2009; Johnson 2000, 2009; Tedick 2004). Classroom discourse has thus been a locus of interest for quite some time, as the literature has tended to focus on teacher development far more than teacher training. Richards and Farrell (2005) argue that the former aims at helping teachers understand themselves and their teaching, while the latter deals with basic concepts, strategies, and methodology, and therefore aims at short-term and immediate goals. Thus, since the issue of teacher development has become central to the field of L2 teacher education (Edge 2005; Richards & Farrell 2005), action research (AR) has gained its reputation as a reliable tool to this end (e.g., Atay 2006, 2008; Burns 2005, 2009; Campbell & Tovar 2006; Chou 2011; McDonough 2006; Poon 2008).

In spite of the fact that AR is a primary "vehicle for practitioners' personal and professional development" (Burns 2005, p. 70), time limitation has always been considered a major problem in conducting AR in the field of L2 education. Although time is more of a structural factor, which will not in and of itself guarantee that high standards of professional development will be fulfilled, reviewing the related literature shows that there has not been provision made for time within the workload of teachers to accommodate the necessary ingredients for conducting AR (see the literature review section). Dealing with the prominent dimensions of research communities, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) consider time to be one of the most important dimensions when teachers come together as researchers because they "need sufficient chunks of time in which to work and sufficient longevity as a group over time" (p. 294). At the same line, Firkins and Wong (2005), recognising research as a sign of professionalism of teachers, also assert that "educational authorities need to allocate resources to schools by way of time and funds" (p. 69). However, although many previous studies have introduced and blamed lack of time as a major obstacle in conducting AR, less has been said about how the kinds of conditions might be created in teachers' workplaces and workloads to support them in terms of time for carrying out their AR projects.

Clearly, unless teachers are presented with more concrete advice on how they might achieve this, they will struggle to apply the invaluable suggestions related literature offers. As Atay (2008, p. 140) rightly asserts, "although there is a growing literature on the positive outcomes associated with teachers doing [action] research, not much information is provided about the specific characteristics and stages of the [action] research process". This study is thus an attempt to provide teachers with a practical model for integrating action research time (ART) into their work so that it minimizes the extra burden it might create and maximizes the joy of a new journey in their professional development. In this way, the research questions that form the basis of the present study are as the following:

1) What practical model can be used to incorporate ART in the workloads of L2 teachers despite their busy schedule?
2) What might be the possible benefits of such a model for teachers?

Literature review

Professional development through AR

There is general consensus that teachers do not stop learning to teach during their lives (Atay 2006, 2008) and professional learning for teachers is an ongoing and lifelong process (e.g., Zeichner & Noffke 2001). The aim of in-service education and training (INSET) programs is thus to help teachers by stimulating their professional development (Kennedy 1995), improving their teaching practices and preparing them for higher-level educational policies (Roberts 1998), and providing them with lifelong education throughout their professional career (Sprinthall et al.,1996). As Atay (2008, p. 139) makes it clear, "providing meaningful professional development for in-service teachers is seen as central to this goal".

In order to achieve teachers' professional development, INSET practices have traditionally been constructed in the form of short-term or one-shot programs. In such programs, which have been designed by outside experts, knowledge has been disseminated almost exclusively by again outside experts (Craft 1996). These one-shot, knowledge-transmission INSET programs have been criticized for not affecting teachers in achieving a change in their professional practices (Hayes 1997) and incongruity of the knowledge transmitted and the reality of the classroom context (Atay 2008). According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993, pp. 1-2):

> In-service teacher education programmes are typically organized to disseminate a knowledge base constructed almost exclusively by outside experts. This means that through their careers teachers are expected to learn about their profession not by studying their own experiences but by studying the findings of those who are not themselves school-based teachers.

As a consequence, not surprisingly, the aim of achieving professional development by teachers is rarely fulfilled.

Due to such limitations, researchers and educators have tried to find new ways of teacher professional development so that teachers take a more responsible role for examining their teaching context to gain a deeper understanding of their own work on an ongoing basis (Edge 2005). AR has gained its reputation as a reliable tool to this end as it fosters meaningful professional development for teachers, especially in-service teachers (e.g., Atay 2006, 2008; Chou 2011; Dean 2006). It is a type of inquiry that aims at reflecting on teaching practices, examining beliefs, values and principles, and sharing with colleagues, all of which, according to Schon (1983), lie at the very heart of professional development.

AR as a form of professional development has been found to have numerous benefits for and a profound effect on teachers in the field of L2 education. It is now an established fact that the process of AR, if conducted systematically and extensively, enables the construction of teacher-generated knowledge, thus empowering teachers as the creators and not just the holders of such knowledge (Avgitidou 2010; Edg, 2001). Moreover, AR has been regarded favorably because it can help teachers develop in-depth perspectives about the process of teaching and learning (Lacorte & Krastel 2002). In addition, AR can help L2 teachers recognize the importance of learning how to seek answers to their questions (Tedick & Walker 1995), address and find solutions to particular problems in a specific teaching or learning situation (Hadley 2003), develop personal theories about L2 learning (Crookes,

1997), become autonomous (Tinker Sachs 2000), reduce gaps between academic research findings and practical classroom applications (Sayer 2005), and become familiar with research skills and enhance their knowledge of conducting research (Crookes & Chandle, 2001).

Time limitation problem

Despite such benefits, however, time limitation has recently been emphasized as one of the main barriers in conducting AR in the field of L2 education as has been echoed in some recent studies. For example, dissatisfied with this fact that neither pre- nor in-service teachers of English could do much research in Turkey, Atay (2006) used a collaborative AR model to help both in-service teachers fill the gap between research and teaching and pre-service teachers become familiar with research in real classroom contexts. Ten pre-service and ten in-service teachers participated in her study. After being provided with relevant theoretical knowledge on research, they collaborated and conducted their research in in-service teachers' classes. Although the findings of her study showed that participating in collaborative AR had a positive impact on the professional development of teachers, she concluded that teachers need to be given some time off to do research in the most effective way.

In another study from North America, Allison and Carey (2007) examined the views on research of teachers teaching at a university language center in Canada. A questionnaire was distributed to 22 teachers and 17 of them participated in the follow-up interviews. The respondents of the study mentioned lack of time and time-consuming demands of teaching as an impediment to conducting research. They stated that as their priority was satisfying immediate needs of learners in the classroom, they did not have time for any systematic enquiry. Borg (2009) also conducted a study on English language teachers' conceptions of research in different contexts. Examining the conceptions of research held by 505 teachers of English from 13 countries around the world, the results generally indicated that teachers' conceptions of research were aligned with conventional scientific notions of enquiry. Key ideas which resonated with teachers' notions of research were statistics, objectivity, hypotheses, large samples, and variables. The finding that is of particular relevance to the present study is that the teachers in Borg's (2009) study referred to lack of time by far as the most common reason for not engaging in research.

Finding different constraints on teachers' research activity, Barkhuizen's (2009) study also showed that time was a key factor preventing teachers from conducting research in their classrooms. Collecting data through a narrative frame during a professional development programme in China, he reported the findings of a course which aimed to introduce teachers to qualitative research methods. His study on different aspects of the research lives of a group of 83 tertiary English teachers in China during a 10-day teacher education programme revealed that time was a major constraint which prevented teachers from carrying out research.

Methodology

Method

The structure of first- and second-order AR (Elliott 1991) is used in this collaborative AR study. For the English language teachers in the study, the first-order inquiry included solving a problem in their own teaching practice. For the outside researchers, the second-order inquiry included facilitating the AR process and interpretation of the teachers' attitudes. This distinction between first- and second-order inquiry is of particular importance in the context of the present study because this distinction helps to deal with the ownership, as the research equally belongs to both the teachers and the researchers. In this study, the teachers had freedom to establish objectives and strategies to achieve them through conducting their own AR projects, however, the researchers' role was far from being trivial. In other words, although first-order AR was driven and directed by the teachers in the context of their collaborative AR project, second-order inquiry was conducted by the researchers to analyse and interpret the teachers' AR practices and experiences.

Participants

Being the conductor of the study, one of the researchers functioned as a participant observer. He invited eighteen teachers of a private English language teaching institute located in Mashhad (a northeastern city in Iran) to a meeting. After introducing and discussing the benefits of action research, he asked for volunteers to participate in an AR project as a venue for their professional development. He also distributed a research timetable to let them know about the research process. Unfortunately, due to the fact that most of the teachers could not devote time, only seven of them agreed to participate in this project.

The teachers were English teaching staff members who were recruited with the mission of teaching general English skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing) to various English language learners in terms of age and level. They had never gone through any AR process in their teaching career. All teachers were male, ranging from 5 to 12 years in terms of their experience in teaching. All of them had BA in English language and literature and were between 28 and 35 years old. To preserve their privacy, pseudonyms were used when presenting the results.

Data types

Qualitative modes of inquiry were used to elicit teachers' views about conducting this AR project in their classrooms. Data sources included reflective journals and semi-structured interviews. They are described in detail in the following.

Reflective journal

The teachers were asked to record their thoughts about their AR experiences weekly for ten successive weeks, making a minimum of two entries per week. We did not predetermine the number of required journal entries, but allowed the teachers to establish the minimum requirement through negotiation and consensus. In addition to prompts related to the focal

topics (e.g., advantages and disadvantages of conducting action research), the teachers were also encouraged to write about their own feelings in either English or Farsi (their first language to help them feel more relaxed and write more freely). The Farsi texts were then translated into English by the researchers. Each teacher made from 29 to 36 entries in his reflective journal, and the average entry length was 370 words with a range of 220 to 460 words.

Semi-structured interview

All of the teachers were invited and participated in a semi-structured interview to elaborate on their experience of conducting the AR in their classroom context. The aim of the interview was to get the teachers' insights into such a new experience in their career. In this way, during the face-to-face interviews, teachers were requested to elaborate on the questions such as the following: How do you describe the experience of conducing AR in your classroom? What are the benefits of doing AR in your opinion? What are its problems? What were your reasons for engaging in this AR project? Do you feel that you are now a better teacher as a result? Should AR be part of the teachers' teaching program?

Although there was a set of pre-prepared guiding questions and prompts, the format was open-ended, and the interviewees were encouraged to elaborate on their views and experiences of AR in an exploratory manner. In other words, although we provided guidance and direction, we were also keen to follow up interesting developments and to let the interviewees to elaborate on the issues of their own interest. Interviews lasted on average between 20 to 25 minutes and were audio recorded and fully transcribed. Farsi was used as the teachers felt they could express themselves better in their native tongue. All of the transcriptions were then translated into English.

Data analysis

As is typical in qualitative research, an inductive approach was adopted so that themes emerged from the data (Dornyei 2007). To begin, we read the entire corpus (i.e., journal documents and interview transcriptions) and coded chunks of text to make the data manageable. Then, we reduced and simplified the coded data while highlighting special features of certain data segments in order to link them to broader concepts. we coded and recoded the data several times until the initial descriptive and low-inference codes were gradually replaced by higher-order ones. As a result of revisiting the data a number of times, the data revealed some general themes. The findings related to each theme, with representative comments from the teachers' journals and interviews that exemplify each theme, are presented in the "Findings" section.

First-order inquiry

Procedure

To begin the study, the entire group agreed to read *Doing Action Research in English Language Teaching: A Guide for Practitioners* (Burns 2010) to provide guidance for the AR project the teachers wanted to develop and a common language from which we could begin our research efforts. The main reason for choosing this book, among other options, is that it is user-friendly and offers a step-by-step guide to the AR process especially for those who are new to this type of research. The book consists of five chapters which except for chapter one, which introduces and defines the concept of action research, the other four chapters "each take one phase of the [action research] cycle and discuss the decisions and steps that action researchers must make at that point" (Burns 2010, p. 9). The structure of Burns' (2010) book is based on Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) classic model of AR which is consisted of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting.

Each teacher selected one class at pre-intermediate level from his several classes. Each class had between 8 and 12 male students who were between 15 and 18 years old. The classes met twice a week, with 90-minute sessions each time. The courses lasted eight weeks, so resulting in 16 sessions. The teachers agreed to meet for ten consecutive weeks on a regular basis and discuss their AR projects, totalling ten meetings, each lasting almost two hours. This provided student-free time for the teachers to meet throughout the semester and was a key factor in enabling them to devote the necessary time and effort to their AR project and to communicate together. Each two weeks were devoted to one main phase of the AR process and the teachers were asked to read carefully the related chapters in the Burns' (2010) book before coming to each meeting.

Two caveats are in order. First, the mentioned time-line should not imply that the teachers only discussed their projects in those pre-arranged times. They had the chance to talk about their AR projects every time they met each other at work. Second, the time-line should not suggest that the AR project was inflexible as the phases of the AR naturally overlapped with each other during the AR process. However, the time-line was used to provide the teachers with a signpost to follow the order and be on the right track.

Plan

The AR project began by eliciting the wonderings of teachers: their own questions, their burning issues, in the first two weeks of the semester. As was expected, teachers struggled with this part of the process the most. When the teachers began, their initial questions lacked rigour and depth. This might be attributed to traditional teacher education system, especially in Iran, which presents teachers with very few chances to ask their own questions. Universities mainly focus on preparing teachers to answer L2 learners' questions most of the time. Not surprisingly, when teachers are in a situation which they should generate their own, they are confused what to do.

After lots of discussions they eventually began to understand that the purpose of this AR project is to learn more about something they really think is worth investigating. They gradually initiated discussions of topics about which they were concerned and on which

they might wish to focus their inquiry. Then they started to generate questions that were of considerable importance to them: What kinds of teaching strategies can I use to help learners make best use of different learning strategies? How can I create an environment that helps learners in my classroom to learn from each other? How do I engage my students as active partners and not passive learners? Having identified a range of issues, they were confronted with selecting an issue for immediate attention in their specific teaching context. Before making a final selection, they decided to reflect on each issue identified from personal and institutional perspectives with the aim to establish the degree to which it offers opportunities for personal growth and learning; the degree to which issue resolution offers the possibility of improving both their teaching and learners' learning; and the degree to which the issue may be resolved within available resources and time constraints.

Considering all of these criteria, they came to the conclusion that one of the most annoying problems in their classrooms was that some of their students were not active enough during the class, and did not speak most of the time. To set the scene, the learners rarely responded to the teachers or actively participated in discussions. They were quiet during the lessons and when they were called on, they just spoke in a barely audible voice. After reviewing a large amount of literature, they found out that various reasons had been proposed for this reluctance to speak in L2 classroom contexts; one of the most important ones was the lack of confidence (e.g., Burden 2004; Ewald 2007; Tong 2010; Yashima et al. 2004). They also found that many previous studies had shown that L2 students' lack of confidence was attributed to their lack of speaking practice (e.g., Benson 1991; Kubo 2009; Schneider 2001). Thus, the key research question that formed the basis of their AR project was as follows:

Does the EFL students' confidence in speaking in our particular classroom contexts grow, as a result of encouraging them to engage in pair/group work speaking activities through additional speaking materials?

Act

This phase started from the third week and continued to the end of the semester (i.e. week eight). During this period, extra speaking activities, based on an authorised book on speaking (*Speaking Extra* by Gammidge, 2004) on the market containing photocopiable materials for supplementary classroom work, were incorporated into the classroom to increase the students' performance in terms of pair/group work, and consequently, their confidence. What was of utmost importance in this phase was matching teachers' data collection methods with what they wanted to find out. At the same time, they should have looked for manageable and doable techniques which were cost-effective. In order to fulfill these needs, they decided to go through a convergent parallel mixed methods research design (Creswell & Plano Clark 2011). Convergent parallel design is a one-phase design, in which both quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analysed concurrently and are equally weighted. In order to best understand the research problem, a researcher collects and analyses both numeric and text data concurrently but separately. Mixing of the data occurs only after the quantitative and qualitative data are analysed, and the results are compared and contrasted to produce a final valid interpretation of the issue studied. In this AR study, quantitative data included a confidence questionnaire and qualitative data included reflective journals. Each data type is described in detail in the following.

Confidence in Speaking Questionnaire: Griffee (1997) designed the "Confidence in Speaking Questionnaire", and it is one of the first published questionnaires specific to L2 confidence. His questionnaire is based on three aspects of confidence, namely *ability*, *assurance*, and *willing engagement*, and it fits our research inquiry well, in that it has allowed the teachers to broadly examine their students' sense of confidence. At the beginning of the semester (week three), the teachers had students complete, with full anonymity, Griffee's *Confidence in Speaking English as a Foreign Language Questionnaire*. They re-administered the questionnaire at the end of the semester (week eight) to see whether students' sense of confidence in speaking English had changed.

The questionnaire consisted of 12 items, which elicited responses to statements, such as *I like speaking English*, or *I can speak English easily*. A 5-point Likert scale accompanied each item, requiring respondents to report degrees of agreement or disagreement. The quantitative analysis involved collating questionnaire results from the beginning and end of the semester, showing percentages of increases or decreases in confidence because of incorporating extra speaking activities into the classroom by mapping the Likert scale onto a percentage scale.

Reflective journals: Despite conducting the confidence questionnaire, we should note that unlike variables such as height or age, it is very difficult to deal with affective variables, such as confidence, directly (Lightbown & Spada 2006). In addition, the students' perception of their self-confidence was deemed to be worthy of consideration. Thus, the students were asked to record their thoughts about their L2 classroom experiences weekly for six successive weeks. The teachers agreed that they would not read the students' journals until after the course grades had been submitted, in order to allay any of their concerns that negative comments about their experiences or classroom context might affect their grades. The qualitative analysis involved reading the entire corpus of reflective journals and identifying general themes that illustrated the students' impressions about the extra speaking activities and their impact on their confidence.

Observe

Although the weeks five and six were devoted to this phase of AR in our earlier time-line, the teachers collected and analysed the data at the end of the semester (i.e., the week eight and afterward). This is because we had already decided to collect and analyze both the quantitative and qualitative data at the end of the semester (see the previous section). Also we should note that as Burns (2010, p. 135) rightly asserts, "like the AR cycle itself, data analysis [observation phase] is dynamic, cyclical and recursive" which makes the overlapping of the phases unavoidable. However, the teachers had already read the relevant chapter in Burns' book (chapter four) and had discussed this part of AR theoretically.

Quantitatively, the students of the seven classes felt on average 63% more confident in all three aspects of Griffee's (1997) confidence questionnaire (i.e., ability, assurance and willing engagement) at the end of the semester than the beginning. The qualitative data results were consistent with the results of the quantitative data. The students' reflective journal writings generally indicated that incorporating extra speaking activities into the classroom had a positive impact on their confidence development by providing them with more

opportunities to speak, appreciating the role of their classmates in facilitating the speaking tasks, and recognizing the importance of pair/group works in learning English. Overall, the findings showed that intensive pair/group work speaking activities result in students' heightened sense of confidence in L2 speaking.

Reflect

This part of AR was conducted after collecting and analysing the data, which was after the eighth week. In order to bring out their interpretations of what this AR project meant, the teachers extended their time-line two more weeks to review and synthesise their whole set of data. In this last phase of the AR cycle, the teachers shared with each other orally what they had discovered about the issue at hand in their AR projects. This allowed the insights they had gained through AR to go even deeper. Not only did they talk about the AR process and its results, but they also took the opportunity to express to other teachers what they had found to be important and meaningful about it.

Although teacher-centered instruction, typically utilising little interaction in English, is the most common in EFL classrooms, the teachers, after conducting this AR project, came to the conclusion that an instructional methodology stressing peer collaboration as a tool for increasing the ability of the students to speak is likely to result in confidence. Their findings suggest that they should seek ways to include students' collaboration in the subject language as part of their curriculum design to help them gain confidence in speaking English.

Second-order inquiry

Analysis of the teachers' data revealed three major recurring themes in terms of the effects of the AR process on them as the following: Empowering teachers in dealing with a particular problem; belonging to a professional community; and valuing time allotment.

Empowering teachers in dealing with a particular problem

Almost all of the teachers pointed to the empowerment role of AR in identifying and solving their own problems in their own specific contexts as one of the most important gains of their AR projects. A good example is found in the remarks of Siavosh, who writes about this advantage of AR in one of his late entries:

> It [action research] has radically changed my attitude toward teaching because I can no longer conceive of teaching without posing questions about my own teaching and trying to find answers to those questions…After eight years of routine teaching, I felt exhausted and didn't have any motivation. I think that my teaching behavior is now more fascinating and exciting in ways I had never considered…I have decided to make it part of my teaching and the core of my new career. I am now eager to systematically pursue action research projects at least twice a year to gain a deeper understanding of my own teaching and my students' learning.

Jamshid expresses the same idea in his interview where he emphasises that, "one of the most interesting aspects of this action research project was that it helped me focus more systematically on the important questions related to my own instructional practices and commit myself to find appropriate answers".

Belonging to a professional community

Many teachers considered themselves as belonging to a professional community through conducting this AR project in their own classrooms. For example, Ardalan describes the enjoyment of exchanging experiences and ideas with sympathetic colleagues in his journal in this way:

This collaborative action research made me feel I belong to a learning community. It helped me focus on my classroom and I had the chance to see what I was doing through new lenses by sharing my experiences with other teachers. These insights also came from other teachers' points of view. I began to see patterns that I even didn't know existed.

Kaveh expresses very similar ideas in his interview where he says, "this collaboration with my colleagues [in the action research project] created new opportunities and new understandings, allowing me to see my students and my teaching differently than I had before". Bijan also confessed in one of his late entries how conducting this AR project changed his attitude toward the professional community:

As far as I know myself, I'm quite happy to go ahead on my own. However, I found this project much easier to conduct collaboratively. In fact, doing this action research created a forum to talk about problems related to our teaching, to pass on our teaching ideas, and to voice concerns of our own classrooms. I would never have had such a chance to deal with all of these issues if I had been alone.

Valuing time allotment

Another important theme that was unanimously acknowledged by teachers was valuing time allotment in their teaching schedules for conducting action research. Sohrab who initially had doubts in conducting his AR project, explains in his interview how the model used in this study for conducting AR helped him change his opinion:

Honestly, before I do the action research project, I was afraid of putting extra burden on my shoulders. As we all know, new ideas require a lot of energy and extra work for which there is no time in the teachers' tight schedule. However, the idea to meet each other every week at a particular time put me at ease because I knew that I had to focus only on my action research project in those meetings and nothing else.

Ardalan also expresses the same concern in one of his journal entries, however, he, at the same time, values allotting a particular time for conducting AR in teachers' schedule:

We [teachers] are always asked to improve our teaching both to fit the new demands of our society and to be in line with new trends in education. Of course many of us want to be part of this new movement. However, every day we have to deal with a lot of work that does not let us think about our pedagogical practice, leave alone conducting action research in our classrooms. In my opinion, the only way we can overcome this situation is putting aside a special time for action research in our curriculum like what we did in this project.

Conclusion

This study makes a contribution to our understanding of English teachers' engagement with AR. It shows a problem the teachers in the present study would like to see investigated in their teaching context and explains how they actually did the AR to solve that problem. The present study then suggests that if AR and collaborative inquiry are to continue as trends of

teachers' professional development, teachers need to devote time, as they did in this study, or be provided time by their institutions to undertake AR. As Borg (2007, p. 744) mentions, "sustained and productive research engagement is not feasible unless the time it requires is acknowledged and built into institutional systems".

In order to overcome the lack of time obstacle to research engagement, a comprehensive ART framework was thus set up that allowed teachers the flexibility to plan and incorporate research activities into their current teaching schedule. Although time is a main practical difficulty, the present study, however, showed that there are noticeable gains that make AR attractive to teachers and change their attitude toward themselves as teaching professionals. As this study revealed, receiving release time for professional development activities such as AR increased teachers' commitment to solving their own problems in their own specific contexts, their sense of belonging to a professional community, and their awareness of valuing time allotment for conducting AR in their schedule.

Developing a culture of AR within an educational institution will likely require reducing teacher workloads to give him/her more time for research productivity. Burns et al. (2016) warn that, "while institutions may be reluctant to set aside time for teacher research, those wishing to create a productive research culture need to seriously consider the implications of not providing adequate time allocations" (p. 68) and meanwhile suggest that "building some research time into teachers' timetables both recognises the additional role teachers are being asked to take on and acknowledges that research has a distinctive role to play in teacher quality" (p. 68). Thus, institutions seeking to ensure teacher put effort into AR must balance the time of the researcher and other stakeholders.

While it is not difficult to see the beneficial effect of building in ART for L2 education, it is no challenge to recognise the increasing importance of having a culture of AR in the professional education in other fields. This is not surprising because a culture of AR results in a supportive context through which research is unanimously carried out and valued by all parties involved. Moreover, the increasingly competitive atmosphere has made research production vital for success. For example, it has been shown that increases in research productivity lead to favorable reputation (Dundar & Lewis 1998).

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Participation and Democratization of Knowledge: new convergences for reconciliation: a report from the 5th Conference of the Action Research Network of the Americas

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Abstract
In 1977 in Cartagena de las Indias, Colombia, an international conference was held gathering leading personalities in action research from all continents. The fifth conference of the Action Research Network of the Americas (ARNA), held in the same city, June 12-16 2017, sought to bring back the memory of this meeting and identify advances and obstacles to action research today. Under the title "Participation and Democratisation of Knowledge: new convergences for reconciliation", the event gathered people from different social contexts and fields of action from 60 countries, representing all continents. This report is based on notes taken by the authors during the conference. Fifty-two key words were identified that provided the base to systematise a few central topics of the conference, including the consolidation of values and principles of participatory research, decolonisation as an ethical, political and esthetic commitment, the role of universities in relation to innovative and transgressive practices, epistemology from below and the transforming potential of systematising experiences.

Key words: ARNA (Action Research Network of the Americas); IAP (Investigación Acción Participativa); decolonization; epistemological ruptures; popular education

Participación y Democratización del Conocimiento: nuevas convergencias para la reconciliación: un relato de la 5ta Conferencia de la Red de Investigación-Acción de las Américas

Resumen
En el año 1977 se realizó en Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, una conferencia internacional que reunió exponentes de la investigación-acción de todos los continentes. La quinta conferencia de la Action Research Network of the Americas (ARNA), realizada en la misma ciudad, entre los días 12 y 16 de junio de 2017, buscó rescatar la memoria de este encuentro e identificar avances y obstáculos para la investigación-acción. Con el título "Participación y Democratización del Conocimiento: nuevas convergencias para la reconciliación", el evento reunió personas de diferentes contextos sociales y áreas de actuación, procedentes de 60 países, representando todos los continentes. Este relato está basado en anotaciones realizadas por los autores en el transcurso de la conferencia. Fueron identificadas 52 palabras clave que sirvieron de base para la sistematización de algunos temas centrales de la conferencia, entre los cuales se encuentran la consolidación de valores y principios de la investigación participativa, la descolonización como compromiso ético, político y estético, el papel de las universidades frente a las prácticas innovadoras y transgresoras, la epistemología desde abajo y el potencial transformador de la sistematización de experiencias.

Palabras clave: ARNA (Action Research Network of the Americas); IAP (Investigación Acción Participativa); descolonización; rupturas epistemológicas; educación popular.

Introduction

The fifth conference of the Action Research Network of the Americas (ARNA) was held at Cartagena de Índias, Colombia, between the 12th and 16th of June, 2017.[1] Under the title: "Participation and Democratisation of Knowledge: new convergences for reconciliation", the event gathered people from different social contexts and fields of action, from 60 countries, representing all the continents. The central theme focused on reconciliation, considering the movement of approach between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Forças Armadas Revolucionárias da Colômbia – Exército do Povo (FARC-EP))[2]. Reconciliation is thus directed at the promotion of a peace process in the country, that began in 2016, when a ceasefire was signed between both sides.

With a massive international presence, the event appears to have achieved its objectives, above all the fourth and fifth which aimed respectively at: promoting the sharing of proceedings and results of the participatory approaches to research developed worldwide, reflecting the commitment to democracy and social justice to the dignity of individuals and communities, to the promotion of sustainability on Earth and to the promotion of peace and reconciliation between people and nations (4); also to dialogically connect interested people and researchers of the different theoretical and methodological frameworks and different approaches to research that are characterised by a relation between research, participation and action (5).

Considering the objectives proposed, especially the two presented above, the conference covered five thematic lines: (1) Participatory methodologies and epistemological issues, approaching both the legitimacy and the validity of cultural and intercultural modes of construction of knowledge worldwide, emphasising their diversity. This theme sought to problematise, among other issues, the types of data that could be obtained by means of participatory methodologies; the multiple aspects involved in the process of rendering a participatory methodology; the positioning on the academic allegation that participatory research is biased; (2) Transforming practices and policies, a line that, beginning with the connection between participatory investigation and the generation of knowledge for understanding reality and social change questioned, for instance, how the professionals could participate in the research processes in order to better understand and transform their practices, and how this can promote their political framework; (3) Promotion of the development of the community, educating popular movements, considering that people can improve their situation by knowing and analysing their own living conditions. These themes attempted to ask about the role played by the local activities regarding problems such as discrimination and social injustice, and also forms of expressing solidarity in the processes of community development through participatory actions; (4) Participatory approaches for the resolution of con-

1 Site of the event: Available at: http://www.arna2017.unal.edu.co/ accessed on Mar.2018.

2 Currently it is organized as a political party, maintaining the same acronym, but with a new name: *Fuerzas Alternativas Revolucionarias del Común* (FARC).

flicts and reconciliation, a theme directed mainly at the Colombian context, which questions how it would be possible to achieve reconciliation, and the role of research participating in this process, experimenting with new forms of interaction; and (5), Alternative globalisation in a sustainable world, based on the idea that globalisation is not merely free world markets for goods and labor, but also covers sharing wealth and knowledges. It problematises individuals, contexts and intentionalities involved in the production of knowledge when facing a challenging future in terms of hope and sustainability. Could we be advancing or retreating in this sense?

A large part of the questions previously elaborated by the conference organisers, contained in its planning, were perceived at the presentations and debates that occurred in the form of discussion panels, workshops and parallel sessions during the event[3]. Highlighting the work of the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda, it was also emphasised that participation and action are definitively brought closer in the form of the *Investigación Acción Participativa* (IAP). Affirmatively, we identified the presence of a concept of IAP characterised as a process of transformation, based on critical knowledge, constructed in such a way as to break with the hegemonic epistemological tradition. This process, identified with the liberating utopia, may be developed by multiple ruptures with the normative and impositive authoritarian tradition (colonial, patriarchal, capitalist) of the *world system.* Participation in the elaboration of knowledge on social issues is essential. As proposed by popular education, the active involvement of subjects in coping with their problems should be taken as an elementary challenge for a liberation project.

We followed the conference attentively, attempting to record the recurrent topics, the challenges that announced immediate coping, both old and new, as well as the reflections provoked in the different and multiple contexts of dialogue. One of these records was composed by a set of words[4], taken down since the opening ceremony, going through the dialogues and closing of the final works of the conference. From these words and other reflections that we registered, we extracted elements considered representative of the entire event, connected directly to the focus of its implementation and purpose, which are reported below.

3 In the Program of "Day 1", in the Main Dialogue ': *Space –time of this new meeting*, the following special guests participated:: Alfredo Molano (Colombia), Victor Negrete (Colombia) and Lola Cendales (Colombia) and as moderator Normando Suárez (Colombia); in the Program of "Day 2", in the Main Dialogue 2: *Epistemological and political issues in the new convergence* , the special guests were: Boaventura de Sousa Santos (Portugal), María Teresa Castillo (Mexico); Carlos Rodrigues Brandão (Brazil) and as moderator Oscar Jara Holliday (Costa Rica); in the Program of "Day 3`, in Main Dialogue 3: *Participatory approaches and democratization* of *knowledge*, the special guests were Joanne Rappaport (USA), John Elliot (United Kingdom), Michelle Fine (USA) and as moderator Lonnie Rowell (USA).

4 Fifty-two words were listed, namely: Action; Agency; Art; Autonomy; Peasant; Coherence; Commitment; Community; Connections; Conflict; Knowledge; Contradiction; Counter hegemony; Heart/Coraçonar; Everyday; Criticism; Dialogue; Dignity; Emancipation; Epistemology; School of Peace; Listening; Hope; Esthetics; Ethics; Feminism; Joy(immanent); Iconoclasty (radical); Ideology; Insurgent/Insurgency; Cognitive Justice/Epistemic Justice; Freedom; Mystique; Change; Women; Polítics; Practice; Process; Root; Rebel/Rebelliousness; Resistance; Rupture; Thinking/feeling (sentipensante); Solidarity; Subversion; Subjects (polítical); Territoriality; Transformation; Transgression; University; Utopia; Violence.

Emerging themes

The proposal of paths that lead to the consolidation of transforming principles/values, such as coherence, dignity, hope, solidarity, justice (cognitive, social...), freedom and others, was emphasised. The elaboration of transforming alternatives is not the work of isolated subjects, but of groups that are identified by world view, projects and ideologies that are somehow connected. Confronted in isolation, besides provoking little impact, they can be classified as absurd, marginal, and not providing the necessary support. However, in the collective dimension, the situation changes a lot, the shared problematisation and confrontation add quality, reinforcing the actions besides leading other subjects with similar attitudes and ideals to adhere.

Decolonisation as a political, ethical and aesthetic commitment of subjects who are solidary with their cultures and territories, assuming rebelliousness (fair anger) and subverting the colonial values. Fals Borda bet on a kind of own and popular science centered on community knowledge. The IAP presents a transgressive set of conventional principles of research and approach to the social reality, centred mainly on the rupture with classical disciplinary research and on a clash with the colonialist tradition of Latin America. It does not confer primacy on the academic way of knowing, because it seeks to answer, previously, what are the reasons and who will benefit from the research. The place of knowledge is displaced from the academy to the popular spaces, affirmatively enhancing the value of culture and people's knowledges, with which the academy does not often hold a dialogue. There is no value in itself if the investigation, even involving forms of participation, is not directly at the service of popular causes. The commitment reflects an elementary characteristic of this approach, especially by the researchers in solidarity with the other subjects. Therefore, the event enabled confronting the colonialist culture that is historically rooted in Latin American societies, affirming horizontality, in opposition to verticality of the colonial power relations.

Problematisation regarding the possible advances regarding participation, based on the experiences and studies presented and debated at the Congress If what research aims at is to learn more about reality, it is a matter of defining a specific claim of truth on which one operates from a given epistemological perspective. According to the speeches that we followed, this perspective will always be identified with a project of social transformation, designing the political character that constitutes it, refuting the principle of neutrality. The problematisation of reality occurs when the look, filled with curiosity, frames a certain existential dimension, understanding in another way what was formerly considered natural, reified. Once the problem has been sized, it remains to seek a more profound understanding and the respective coping which necessarily involves the construction and reconstruction of knowledge by means of the increasingly radical participation (authentically knowing is to know with, thus participation implies commitment). It is in this direction that we highlight the idea, launched at the conference, of bringing back values and characteristics of the original peoples, such as the indigenous ones, that are universal and at the same time reference our existence in the Americas historically. The redefinition of the forms of action of social movements and political parties was also emphasised. They were considered protagonists and formers (or not) of a participatory and active attitude of the social subjects. This is a

matter of problematising democracy permanently, seeking to complement the representative dimensions of participation with direct ones.

The role of universities and their subjects: transgression and epistemological rupture through transforming thoughts and practices. The "thinking-feeling being" and the "revolution of ideas", expressions that were strongly used at the conference, bring one to a rupture with the Cartesian tradition that separates reason and emotion. In the face of this understanding , there is an integrating concept between thinking and feeling, that constitute the human beings conceived as a mystic force and existential totality The impersonality of the objective and quantitative criteria of hegemonic science tend to be surpassed by the dialogical approach of everyone, sustained by the mutual commitment to reality. Without designing a rigid set of normative principles, doing participatory research and education is considered a courageous bet on the uncertainty that permanently permeates open processes. Without a single direction, these processes easily contradict and become distant from the institutional arrangement, especially the academic one and its hegemonic form of producing knowledge. Therefore, not infrequently they are academically marginalised, leading their protagonists to other meanders of transgression, which is their trademark. Similarly to what happens with popular education in relation to formal education, participatory research in its different forms of implementation clashes with institutional limits, true obstacles to be dealt with. However, based on the conviction that the transformation of reality depends on the transgressive posture of the subjects in relation to the conservative tradition, it is necessary to continue problematising processes and promoting displacements, which announce new possibilities.

Systematszation as production of knowledge regarding transformation practices Although *Investigación Acción Participativa* (IAP) is considered pioneering within the current of participatory methodologies in Latin America, the 2017 Congress enabled us to confirm the existence of a range of research proposals inspired by the so called foundational matrix. One of them is the so-called *systematisation of practices* or *systematisation of experiences*, a modality of knowledge production that was gestated in social work and has been under development together with popular education in response to several needs, such as: rendering visible the transformations generated by organisational practices, social projects and collective actions; recognising and consolidating the knowledge generated by these practices; a better understanding of the practices and projects of social transformation in order to strengthen them; contributing to the construction of the theory and critical thinking; and communicating to other collectives the knowledge and learning produced. In order to cope with these demands of the social organisations and processes, simultaneously in several countries of Latin America, complementary proposals arose that contributed to the construction of these methodologies that allow the production of systematic knowledge about social practices from the experience and knowledge of its protagonists based on their reconstruction, analysis and critical interpretation. There is also a consensus in the recovery of experiences about the shared practices which responds to the collective production of narratives about them, as well as the dialogical reflection on them. During the time of the ARNA congress, more than one hundred papers were presented resulting from systematisations in many different fields of action, such as adult education, formal education with children and youths, popular education, community work, public health and organisational processes.

Some of them show great creativity in using participatory strategies and techniques that serve visual and theatrical expression, group dynamics and social cartography.

Epistemology from below. Resistance, insurgence and transgression. There were recurring references to the pedagogy of the oppressed (Freire[5], 1968), to a popular science and intellectual colonialism (Fals Borda[6], 1970) and to liberation theology (Gutierrez[7], 1971), considering their impact, actuality and relevance. The main criticism may have come from Boaventura de Sousa Santos[8] who, during his exposition in the Main Dialogue 2- Epistemological and political issues in the new convergences, held on the second day of the congress, referred to the fact that Popular Education has lost insurgent force, since experiences have been systematised, but not enough has been disseminated. According to him, knowledge is a practice of life itself, and therefore, the practice of knowledges (wisdom). We can consider that, in general, the atmosphere of the congress covered the relationship between knowledge-life; in another way, it can also be considered that shared experiences acted against the "death of knowledge", which so pulsates in the colonial-imperial-patriarchal system. In practice one could perceive the call to "occupy the concept of epistemology" claimed by Sousa Santos at this discussion panel. However, there is a challenge to popular social movements: the production of a science that can articulate the anti-capitalist, anti-colonial and anti-patriarchal struggle; Paulo Freire, Orlando Fals Borda and Gustavo Gutierrez knew both how to interpret their own time and to go beyond it based on a different understanding of science, on an education that values popular culture and a theology of praxis. According to Sousa Santos, capitalism managed to become unified, whereas the social movements of the world became divided in the construction of procedures to validate the knowledge of the dominated groups. Nevertheless, popular education is still a reference. He proposes that the ecology of knowledge also be so, as well as the decolonisation of the university.

Maria Teresa Castilho-Burguette[9] emphasises that women have been stigmatised, humiliated, tortured and declared guilty of "witchcraft" since the 16th century, and that they have been condemned for the knowledge transmitted by generations of cooks, medicine

5 Paulo Freire was born in Recife, Pernambuco, on September 19, 1921 and died in São Paulo on May 2,1997; he was a Brazilian educator acknowledged for his contributions to critical education, especially, according to what we know as *popular education*, based on a method and an epistemology aiming to free men and women. Pedagogy of the oppressed is the most important of his vast work, and this year is its 50th anniversary..

6 Orlando Fals Borda was born in Barranquilla on July 11, 1925 and died in Bogotá on August 12, 2008; a Colombian sociologist acknowledged for his contributions to qualitative research, proposing participation and action in his methodological processes; he advocated a science that was committed to the popular causes, in brief, a *popular science* . Ciencia propia y colonialismo intelectual (1970) and Historia doble de la costa (1979) became classics of Latin American sociology.

7 Gustavo Gutiérrez Merino was born in Lima on June 8, 1928; Peruvian philosopher and theologian, one of the main referents of *liberation theology* in Latin America which joins together faith and politics. In a conference at the II Encuentro de Sacerdotes y Laicosheld in Chimbote, Peru, in 1968, he presented his theological proposal: "Hacia una teología de la liberación"; Teología de la liberación: Perspectivas was published in 1971 and is considered the main reference in the liberating praxis of theology.

8 Boaventura de Sousa Santos is the director of project ALICE- reinvenção da emancipação social (http://alice.ces.uc.pt/en/index.php/about/where-does-alice-come-from/?lang=pt), Retired Full Professor of Faculdade de Economia at the Universidade de Coimbra and director of Centro de Estudos Sociais (CES) of the Universidade de Coimbra.

9 Researcher who performs studies on community participation, gender relations and use of resources.

women, peasant women, caretakers, midwives, in other words, people who held and knew the past. The arrival of women in science, although late, has been necessary to include the "female look" to change the structure of the "scientific doing". In the approach by this researcher, attention is called to the fact that science has a gender, just as the topics and objects of investigation show a certain cultural asymmetry of gender in science. However, there is still a challenge: "To give a voice to those who have no voices" The criticism of a science which stands apart from the people, calls for the construction of bridges by *listening* since the "voices have not been very audible". Based on this perspective, we might think that criticism of science also requires the disposition to *listen* and openness to processes of sharing, and of generating them from the experience of women, of this collective subject. We can identify the potency between knowledge and transformation, between epistemology and pedagogy ("others"), and between the voices and looks of the excluded.

Finally, we must record the marked absences of a large part of the subjects present in the reports throughout the conference, such as the indigenous peoples and *campesinos* (peasants). These absences symbolise a contradictory dimension of an event that affirms, discoursively, participation and also the principles of solidarity, of hope and of confrontation with the colonial logic. Confronting the belief that popular culture knowledge are minor sustains the option for them as fundamentals of another epistemology, directed to social transformation. However, at the same time it reproduces the linear and excluding functioning that characterises the academic context.

The main discussion panel 3: *Participatory approaches and the democratisation of knowledge* clearly showed this contradiction. Michelle Fine[10], a researcher invited to hold one of the talks, created a space for these silenced voices. "Javier", a Colombian researcher, was invited to be seated and issued an important message: "whites have taught me that I'm different: I'm non-white", ie., a forceful call to the fact that convergences need to take place within the sphere of *human dignity*. Thus, an urgent challenge is spelled out to the conference itself: taking up, in the concreteness of its practice, the discourse that it sustains, under the risk of making even more fragile this space-time that is so rich in dialogue and critical reflection.

Research and the sociopolitical context: In Latin America and other parts of the world, there is a wave of conservative movements through which new and old forms of domination and exclusion are expressed and justified, ranging from xenophobia to the exploitation of work in semi-slavery modes. It appears that in these contexts action research in its different modalities is recovering its insurgent and transgressive force. This can be perceived in several aspects of the research, of which a few of the main ones are: 1) A radicalisation of the production of knowledge among subjects imbued with the intentionality of transforming their realities while knowing, and getting to know transforming. There is an awareness that the new insurgent practices require seeking new languages to gain a better understanding of them and to plan alternatives. 2) Action research or participatory research, when performed together with the practices, renders territoriality concrete. These are concrete men, women, families and communities that experience concrete situations which

10 Professor and researcher in the field of critical psychology, women studies, American studies and urban education. She considers herself an activist of education, and works and investigates topics regarding social justice with youths, women and men in a situation in which they are deprived of freedom.

they seek strategies to surpass through knowledge. 3) Looking at the practices, we also see the importance of valuing ruptures that, seen in themselves, may appear small or insignificant, but within a broader historical process they have the potential to signal new paths for social and political action.

As already pointed out before, the fact that the conference was held in Colombia certainly contributed to placing in the forefront the issue of participation and democratisation of knowledge in a context of convergences for reconciliation. For this, those present were called to focus on what unites them to deal with the forces that promote the fragmentation of social struggles. These convergences make themselves visible in various spheres. The most evident is the search for epistemological convergences that are present in expressions such as ecology of knowledge and dialogue of knowledge. This refers both the convergence between classical disciplines of the academic curricula, and the relationship with knowledges that are developed outside the academic world. Another important convergence is that of the modalities of research that compose the action research family, taking on different forms and names, such as participatory research, IAP, systematisation of experiences, community based research, militant research and others. Finally, it is the convergence of restless actors who ask questions in the style of those that Paulo Freire asked exactly 50 years ago, when he published "*Pedagogy of the oppressed*" (1968) and asked himself about the possibilities of humanisation:

"Once again men (sic!)[11], challenged by the drama of the current time, propose themselves as a problem. They discover that they know little about themselves, about their 'place in the cosmos', and are concerned with knowing more. Actually, one of the reasons for this search is the acknowledgment that they know little about themselves. On installing themselves in the quasi, if not tragic discovery of how little they know about themselves, they transform themselves into a problem. They ask, they answer and their answers lead them to new questions"[12] (Freire, 1981, p. 29).

Final considerations

In the main dialogue 1: *Space –time of this new meeting,* we were able to watch a video interview with Orlando Fals Borda, in which he reaffirmed the committed character of the IAP with the oppressed and exploited peoples. The research should be based on the *solidarity* learned from the indigenous peoples in the relationship with nature; in the *dignity* of the political struggle of the peasants; in the *autonomy* of the mixed blood *settlers*, and in the *freedom* of the black people. Not being only a set of techniques to act or participate, the IAP, or "reverse research", as Carlos Rodrigues Brandão[13], would tell us , "is a philosophy of life, in which the IAP, that implements it, is a thinking/feeling entity that knows how to

11 Later Paulo Freire will perform self-criticism of the male chauvinist language of his first books.

12 Freire, Paulo (1981). *Pedagogia do oprimido*. 9.ed. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra. This excerpt is the second paragraph of Chapter I, which was not translated in the English-language version of 1972 , published by Herder and Herder, of New York.

13 Professor Emeritus of Unicamp, Brazil,he is acknowledged for his career as an educator, anthropologist, environmentalist and poet and is considered one of the "pioneers of popular education"..

combine the heart and mind, and knows how to exert empathy and not only sympathy to others, and to us, that respects the differences and even appreciates them"[14].

For whom is our research relevant? For what? Social transformation, in what sense? Is the method compatible with the object to be known? Being consistent is still a great challenge for all of us. The words of Orlando Fals Borda continue to live since the first meeting, in the same Cartagena de Índias, in 1977. However, a small message pulsates among us. At the 1st Global Assembly for Knowledge Democracy, in 2017, at the end of the ARNA Congress, the Indian researcher Rajesh Tandon calls attention: "Within the economy of knowledge, we are the elite, even if we are workers of knowledge. There are many others who are not represented in this room. We change by acting and not by thinking about reality. Instead of cognitive justice, we should talk about epistemic justice". In this sense, the IAP continues to be a major reference in the decolonisation of knowledge, in its production, and in its fair distribution, until a new society and a new university are achieved. In the words of Fals Borda: "combining a well done investigation with well done action, praxis, and with a well done authentic participation establishes the foundations of a new university and a new society" [15].

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14 Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=op6qVGOGinU. Accessed on Mar 27,.2018.

15 Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=op6qVGOGinU. Accessed on Mar 27, 2018.

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