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## Action Research as Process-Based Knowing

Kenneth J. Gergen

**Abstract:** Action research has long been treated as a marginal methodology in the social sciences, largely owing to its lack of fit with modern assumptions about the nature of scientific research. These assumptions, however, are specific to an empiricist paradigm. My aim in the present offering is to lay out the logic of an alternative paradigm, a *process-based* paradigm of knowledge, adequate to the practices of action research and its relatives. This logic touches on issues of pragmatic potential, ontology, epistemology, and ethics. Such a paradigm legitimates an enormously important form of knowledge, otherwise obscured by empiricist hegemony, and opens a generative link between action research and a vast array of inquiry and practice in the social sciences. I shall also propose that the forms of research favored by a process paradigm – and most fully realized in action research – are arguably more significant in their potentials than those available within empiricist tradition. In the contemporary context of rapid change and global peril, the potential contribution of such research is unparalleled.

**Keywords:** action research, process philosophy, social constructionism, pragmatism.

### La investigación-acción como conocimiento basado en procesos

**Resumen:** La investigación-acción se ha considerado durante mucho tiempo una metodología marginal en las ciencias sociales, en gran medida debido a su falta de adecuación a los supuestos modernos de la investigación científica. Sin embargo, estos supuestos son específicos del paradigma empirista. Mi objetivo en el presente trabajo es exponer la lógica de un paradigma alternativo, un paradigma de conocimiento basado en procesos, adecuado a las prácticas de la investigación-acción y sus afines. Esta lógica aborda cuestiones de potencial pragmático, ontología, epistemología y ética. Dicho paradigma legitima una forma de conocimiento enormemente importante, de otro modo eclipsada por la hegemonía empirista, y establece un vínculo generativo entre la investigación-acción y una amplia gama de indagaciones y prácticas en las ciencias sociales. También propondré que las formas de investigación favorecidas por un paradigma de procesos —y que se materializan plenamente en la investigación-acción— tienen posiblemente un potencial mayor que las disponibles en la tradición empirista. En el contexto contemporáneo de rápidos cambios y peligros globales, la contribución potencial de dicha investigación es incomparable.

**Palabras clave:** investigación-acción, filosofía de procesos, construccionismo social, pragmatismo.

## Introduction

Action research (AR) has always had a puzzling relationship with the dominant research methods in the social sciences. To be sure, AR was *called* research, but its contours bore little resemblance to the accepted practices of modern times. This alienated relationship can largely be traced to the difficulties of incorporating action research practices into the network of assumptions presupposed within contemporary social science. The rationale undergirding the long-dominant paradigm of knowledge – namely *empiricist* – had been richly deliberated, with its two major variations represented by positivism and interpretivism (hermeneutics). While the former promised an objective mapping of the publicly available world of human behavior, the latter primarily focused on the subjective realities of the individual or shared within culture. Contrastingly, for action researchers there was neither behavior nor subjectivity to be illuminated through research. The warrant for employing the term “research” to the activities of AR have thus remained obscure, largely eliminating such initiatives from the canons of research methodology.

Yet, it must also be realized that this exclusion does not mean that action research is without deliberation on a justifying rationale (cf., Eikeland, 2015, Coleman, 2015, Toulmin, 1996). However, rather than trying to “save the scientific legitimacy” of action research by resorting to conventional methods and theories (Eikeland, et al. 2022), the aim of the present offering is to build from these earlier discussions toward an alternative: an integrated, *process-based* paradigm of knowledge, adequate to the practices of action research and its relatives. Such a paradigm would stand in contrast to empiricism, legitimating an enormously important form of knowledge obscured by the empiricist hegemony. I shall also propose that a process-based paradigm opens a generative link between action research and a vast array of inquiry and practice in the social sciences, and the form of knowledge created in these activities is arguably more significant in its potentials than what is available within empiricist tradition. In the contemporary context of global peril, the potential contribution of a process-based paradigm is unparalleled.

To achieve these ends, I divide the analysis into four parts, each treating a specific assumption central to the articulation of a knowledge generating paradigm. The analysis thus places in focus assumptions regarding *pragmatic potential*, *ontology*, *epistemology*, and *ethics*. While issues of ontology and epistemology are fundamental building blocks in any account of knowledge, the inclusion of pragmatic potential and ethics might be subject to question. Concerning pragmatic potential, both positivist and interpretivist methodologies have largely been guided by truth-dependent justifications. That is, the generation of empirically grounded accounts of the subject matter constitutes the existentially sufficient goal of the science. Whether such accounts are useful to the culture outside science is a secondary matter. As traditionally proposed, the attempt of science is to determine what is true; it is the task of practitioners to deduce promising applications of this knowledge to problems of pragmatic concern.

However, after the postmodern debates of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is safe to say that there are few scholars who would wish to justify scientific research on the basis of this logic. As we have come to see, knowledge claims are made within particular communities, lodged in the assumptions and practices of those communities. Claims to truth are legitimate only within the discourse and rationales shared within the community. Thus, for example, biology creates

# Systematisation of Experiences and its contribution to Action Research: Transformative knowledge in a process of territorial development in Latin America

Erica Porras and Mariana Chrestia

**Abstract:** Systematisation of Experiences (SE) is a methodology originating and widely used in Latin America, which allows for the generation of knowledge from practice. This article seeks to contribute to demonstrating the value of SE for researchers who legitimate experiences and practices as sources of scientific knowledge production, and to recognizing the potential of SE to complement processes addressed through Action Research (AR).

To this end, the main characteristics of the SE methodology are presented and the similarities, differences, and complementarities with AR are analysed. Likewise, the systematisation of a strategically planned participatory territorial development process is presented, which takes place in a medium-sized municipality in the southwest of the Province of Buenos Aires (Argentina). This case demonstrates the capacity of SE to generate collective learning, strengthen local capacities, and improve the future approach to similar experiences in other territories.

**Keywords:** Systematisation of experiences, action research, territorial development, participatory strategic planning

## **La Sistematización de Experiencias y su contribución a la Investigación Acción. Conocimiento transformador en un proceso de desarrollo territorial de América Latina**

**Resumen:** La Sistematización de Experiencias (SE) es una metodología originada y muy empleada en América Latina, que permite generar conocimiento a partir de la práctica. Este artículo busca contribuir a evidenciar el valor de la SE para investigadores que legitiman las experiencias y prácticas como fuentes de producción de conocimiento científico, y a reconocer su potencial para complementar los procesos abordados desde el enfoque de la Investigación Acción (IA).

Para ello, se exponen las principales características de la metodología de SE y se analizan las similitudes, diferencias y complementariedades con la IA. Asimismo, se presenta la sistematización de un proceso de desarrollo territorial participativo, planificado estratégicamente, que tiene lugar en un mediano municipio del sudoeste de la Provincia de Buenos Aires (Argentina). A partir de este caso, se demuestra la capacidad de la SE para generar aprendizajes colectivos, fortalecer las capacidades locales y mejorar a futuro el abordaje de experiencias similares en otros territorios.

**Palabras clave:** Sistematización de experiencias, investigación acción, desarrollo territorial, planificación estratégica participativa

## Introduction

Systematisation of Experiences (SE) is a research modality originating in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s, in the field of social work (Barragán Cordero & Torres Carrillo, 2017; Jara, 2009, 2012) and increasingly used and accepted in other fields. It builds knowledge from lived experiences, recovering lessons and learning from the reflection of the intervening actors themselves (Sánchez Rodríguez, 2016). Its internationalization took place towards the beginning of the new century (Unday & Valero, 2017). With the ultimate goal of generating a social transformation, SE not only allows the practice to be improved, but also enriches the theoretical-conceptual reflections and proposals (Barnechea & Morgan, 2010).

In turn, one of the globally recognized research approaches is Action Research (AR). In Hernández Sampieri, Fernández Collado & Baptista Lucio (2014) it is considered as a one of the basic designs of qualitative research. Nevertheless, most authors place it within the interpretative and critical paradigms (Sandín, 2003, in Hernández Sampieri et al., 2014). This is due to the fact that, just like SE, AR seeks to understand and solve specific problems of a group of people linked to a certain environment, promoting the transformation of reality and social change. Another salient aspect of AR is to focus on the collaboration of participants and their awareness of their role in such a transformative process. In fact, a variant in which this last aspect becomes more prevalent is in Participatory Action Research (IAP in Spanish), an approach that emerged in Latin America in the 1970s, and whose most referenced exponents are Fals Borda and Freire (Costamagna & Spinelli, 2021a). In this modality, which is even more collaborative and democratic, members of the community involved can even act as co-researchers, actively participating in the research process (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2014; Jara, 2018). As can be seen, this perspective conceives the generation of knowledge as a collective construction process, or as a co-construction process (Costamagna & Larrea, 2015, in Costamagna & Spinelli, 2021a).

Whatever the nuance it takes, the distinctive characteristic of AR designs is that they investigate at the same time as they intervene. In contrast, SE historicizes, that is, it builds collective knowledge from and about lived experiences. Therefore, although there is a close relationship between both methodologies (Jara, 2018; Costamagna & Spinelli, 2021a), there are differences that give rise to a complementarity among them. The following section analyses such similarities, differences, and complementarities.

This paper aims to contribute to making the SE methodology visible as a way of producing scientific knowledge based on action. For this purpose, the systematisation of a participative local development experience is presented. The experience, which takes place in a medium-sized municipality in the southwest of the Province of Buenos Aires (Argentina), has been called “Sustainable Strategic Development Process of Tres Arroyos” (PRODESTA in Spanish). This process, which began in 2013 and is still fully and steadily operating, is promoted by the Municipal Government, methodologically coordinated by the Universidad Provincial del Sudoeste (UPSO), and still maintains an active participation of the civil society organizations throughout the district.

The experience has been systematised since 2019, guaranteeing plurality of voices, achieving collective learning, the empowerment of territorial agents and the strengthening of the way to approach similar experiences in the future.

# New cartographies of inclusive education through narratives and action research

Ignacio Calderón-Almendros, Teresa Rascón-Gómez, Luz Mojtar-Mendieta and Jesús Moreno-Parra

**Abstract:** This research paper aims to document narratives on diversity and inclusive education and to understand the collaborative mechanisms used by teachers and families seeking recognition of diversity and disability in schools in Spain. To achieve these objectives, over 700 people have collaborated to generate new narratives of resistance that make possible inclusive and critical encounters and processes. This collaboration has been carried out through methodologies such as Participatory Action Research (PAR) that, combined with biographical and narrative research, are nourished by individual experiences having as their axis the collective construction of meaning. As the results show, this interconnection between narratives that are normally condemned to exclusion and loneliness allows the complexity of reality to be understood through hope. At the same time, this turns teachers, families and students into activists, forming networks of mutual support and resistance that lead to resilience processes, aim at structural transformations and act for the benefit of the educational community.

**Keywords:** Inclusive education, diversity, inequality, disability, participatory action research, biographical research

## Nuevas cartografías de la educación inclusiva a través de narrativas e investigación-acción

**Resumen:** Este artículo de investigación pretende documentar narrativas sobre diversidad y educación inclusiva, así como comprender los mecanismos colaborativos que utilizan docentes y familias para buscar el reconocimiento de la diversidad y la discapacidad en las escuelas en España. Para lograr estos objetivos, más de 700 personas han colaborado generando nuevas narrativas de resistencia que posibiliten encuentros y procesos inclusivos y críticos. Esta colaboración se ha llevado a cabo a través de metodologías como la Investigación Acción Participativa (IAP) que, combinadas con la investigación biográfica y narrativa, se nutren de experiencias personales que tienen como eje la construcción colectiva de sentido. Como muestran los resultados, esta interconexión entre narrativas de personas que suelen ser condenadas a la exclusión y la soledad permite comprender la complejidad de la realidad a través de la esperanza. Al mismo tiempo, esto convierte a docentes, familias y estudiantes en activistas, formando redes de apoyo mutuo y resistencia que conducen a procesos de resiliencia, apuntan a transformaciones estructurales y actúan en beneficio de la comunidad educativa.

**Palabras clave:** Educación inclusiva, diversidad, desigualdad, discapacidad, investigación acción participativa, investigación biográfica

## 1. Introduction

Globalisation has enabled increased mobility, communication and interdependence between distant regions, bringing along accelerated social changes and a shift towards increasingly diverse societies. These changes have shown how vulnerable human beings are in times of crisis (such as those provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, wars...) and have challenged the learning experience, proving that it is possible to have new normalities (Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2021).

Schools have also tried to adapt to these changes despite obstacles and shortcoming, including: lack of human and material resources, training programmes that are not suitable for each school's needs, poorly adapted premises, lack of multidisciplinary teams to meet the different needs of students; a decline in the perceived social value of the teaching profession, an increase in bureaucratic tasks and policies that are slow to make changes for the promotion of inclusion and equity, to name a few. In addition to this lack of support and the additional workload responsibilities for teachers, there is an increasingly diverse student body, with different abilities and learning speeds, with different gender identities and sexual orientations, who come from very different places, cultures and socio-economic settings. This is why addressing this enormous diversity in a way that respects human rights has become one of the main challenges for education systems around the world in recent decades, as stated in Sustainable Development Goal 4 of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda.

Society evolves at a different pace from that of schools. This leads to major clashes between school culture and the culture of the different groups within it. In addition, teachers have to deal with subjects that are too long and decontextualized, increasing bureaucracy and new social demands, leaving them little time for dialogue, reflection and collaborative work. The capitalist culture of production has also contributed to the fact that our education systems reward productivity over social justice and equity (Košmer & Mikulec, 2021).

Since the 1994 UNESCO Salamanca Statement, inclusive education aims to reform educational systems in order to give effect to the United Nations' principle 'Education for all', trying to ensure that ordinary schools educate the entire community without exceptions, identifying local barriers that are limiting the presence, participation and achievement of some learners (Ainscow, 2020). At the same time, some authors like Slee (2011) argue that inclusive education needs to challenge the processes of educational exclusion. In other words, inclusive education cannot ignore the prevailing inequalities, which tend to legitimize and reproduce themselves. As pointed by Waitoller (2020), it is particularly remarkable the way in which 'neoliberal inclusive education', is appropriating the revolutionary project of making schools inclusive, colonising and stealing the deeply human meaning of democratising schools for all citizenship, including those whose humanity was denied (Goodley, Runswick-Cole & Lid-diard, 2016; Calderón-Almendros, 2014, 2018; Calderón-Almendros & Calderón-Almendros, 2016). The neoliberal inclusive education promotes a fictitious inclusion that, despite contemplating presence, does not alter the rules and traditions that permeate the school system.

The school as an institution is therefore faced with great contradictions between its—supposedly democratic—task and the unequal outcomes and experiences that it yields for the diverse groups and individuals whom it serves. It is necessary to support the struggles of subordinated groups such as students with disabilities, in order to challenge the functioning of a school that denies the legitimacy and value of difference. The struggles waged by mothers,



# Enabling Professional Development via Tertiary Action Research Praxis

Thomas G. Ryan

**Abstract:** This integrative review argues that professional development is accomplished within action research with its stepwise acting, reflecting, and revision not unlike praxis. Praxis, or the application of theory while practicing requires committed pedagogical action. I ask: Can praxis and action research be managed within professional development? Secondly, is there enough support within the literature to prove the supposition that AR can be praxis and vice versa? Findings suggest that within tertiary education, many teachers act as researchers of self, and practice, as there is an on-going need for professional development.

**Keywords:** Action research, professional development, praxis

## Facilitando desarrollo profesional mediante la investigación-acción en la educación superior

**Resumen:** Esta revisión integradora argumenta que el desarrollo profesional se logra dentro de la investigación-acción con su actuación, reflexión y revisión paso a paso no muy diferente de la praxis. La praxis, o la aplicación de la teoría durante la práctica, requiere una acción pedagógica comprometida. Pregunto: ¿Se puede gestionar la praxis y la investigación-acción dentro del desarrollo profesional? En segundo lugar, ¿hay suficiente apoyo dentro de la literatura para probar la suposición de que AR puede ser praxis y viceversa? Los hallazgos sugieren que dentro de la educación terciaria, muchos maestros actúan como investigadores de sí mismos y de la práctica, ya que existe una necesidad continua de desarrollo profesional.

**Palabras clave:** Investigación-acción, desarrollo profesional, praxis.

## 1.0 Introduction

At most tertiary educational institutions there is language within collective agreements and within various administrative tasks such as one's annual report that encourage and, in many cases, require that educators make efforts each year to professionally develop. I believe and have written about professional development (PD) as professional learning that results in alterations of teacher knowledge, practices and advances in student learning (Ryan, 2021b; Ryan, 2019). Professional learning and development can be a product of externally provided and job-embedded activities that increase teacher knowledge and can help improve teacher instructional practice in ways that support and enrich student learning. However, PD "enshrined in standards does not necessarily support and nurture praxis development for teachers and there is a real danger that it may even constrain praxis development by supporting and embedding a performance culture within education" (Francisco, et al., 2024, p.1). Addi-



tionally, “PD may not always be meaningful at the time it is experienced due to the change in the meaningfulness of the material. . .” (Ryan, 2019, p. 3). Therefore, I address reflexively professional development and my current position which has been shaped by my past and present experiential learning while teaching within the tertiary level.

As an instructor of research methods at the graduate level in education and Health and Physical Education at the undergraduate level I require students to investigate and study related literature, attend to theory that illustrates and demonstrates how to research, and apply new knowledge. Many of my students who are educators come to realize that most teachers want to investigate who they are and what they do daily to improve and develop personally and professionally. At the end of the research methods course many students who are teachers conclude that action research (AR) is a good method to investigate praxis while developing professionally. Praxis involves reflective action that can lead to change and transformation (Kemmis, 2011; 2012). Praxis involves experience and engagement with content that is transformational (Kemmis, 2012). Praxis within AR is necessary and creates a belief that AR is a complementary research mode because “action research combines a substantive act with a research procedure; it is action disciplined by inquiry, a personal attempt at understanding while engaged in a process of improvement and reform”(Hopkins, 1993, p. 44). Many of the educators interested in their role seek out a means to efficiently investigate their teaching while professionally evolving on the job to enhance their knowledge, praxis and identity (Ryan, 2021b; Vaughan, 2020).

Teacher knowledge is within oneself and only need be reflected upon, processed and documented to enable recursive revisitation and repositioning within the landscape of education. Being able to see oneself from any angle is a perspective and awareness that can overwhelm and obscure teacher identity. This is due to educators who consistently absorb and employ extant data to understand their role and themselves. Teachers work to realize curricular expectations and outcomes and often fall short as pedagogical outcomes may not meet personal expectations. It could be that there is too much data to process, comprehend and reflect upon while teaching. This is why PD is linked to praxis and curriculum; to help teachers manage. In one year, the PD target may be evaluation or mental health and in another it changes as societal pressures and educational trends emerge. I have learned via my experiences and listening to others that the PD approach utilized by institutional leadership is often just trendy, ill-timed and wanting.

To better understand our current position in tertiary education, it is necessary to investigate teacher training. I believe teacher education in Canada is somewhat standardized, yet no prescription exists instead teacher training programs present opportunities for Faculty to fill voids with personal theory and experience-based reflections (story). Pre-service teachers listen and learn about human communication which permeates pedagogical experiences (Murphy, 2008). “Pragmatists remind us that knowledge is an activity constructed within the context of our experience and therefore, knowledge cannot be predetermined or static; therefore, pedagogy cannot be predetermined or prescriptive” (Brown Varona, 2021, p.39). Student teachers investigate communication, experience pedagogy and work to document personal growth and change. These praxis-based actions illuminate personal beliefs and enhance perspectives (Fairclough, 2011) as practitioners and researchers. I have for some time now believed that these student teaching actions and experiences are impactful as teachers learn with their students and craft their practice (Ryan, 2021b). Many experienced teachers

# Temporality and Processuality in Narrative Action Research: Working with Collaborative ‘Reflexive Revisits’ in the Analytical Process

Charlotte Reimert Munch

**Abstract:** This article contributes methodologically to action research in the field of leadership development. It examines how narrative approaches can foster leadership development and how co-researchers may be actively involved in the process of analysis. The study was conducted in a large public institution with ten mid-level managers as co-researchers. The overall purpose of the project was to strengthen the leadership team and develop a relationally oriented leadership style.

The article outlines the theoretical framework, followed by an account of how the term ‘reflexive revisits’ was used in the analytical process. Hereafter is presented an example in which the co-researchers actively participated in the analytical work. The conclusion is that narrative action research with ‘reflexive revisits’ can work as a useful approach to co-create reflexivity, development, and cohesion in a leadership team.

**Keywords:** action research, narrative studies, leadership development, process theory, organizational learning

## **Temporalidad y procesualidad en la investigación-acción narrativa: Trabajando con ‘revisitas reflexivas’ colaborativas en el proceso analítico**

**Resumen:** Este artículo contribuye metodológicamente a la investigación-acción en el campo del desarrollo del liderazgo. Examina cómo los enfoques narrativos pueden fomentar el desarrollo del liderazgo y cómo los coinvestigadores pueden participar activamente en el proceso de análisis. El estudio se llevó a cabo en una gran institución pública con diez directivos de nivel medio como coinvestigadores. El objetivo general del proyecto fue fortalecer el equipo de liderazgo y desarrollar un estilo de liderazgo orientado a las relaciones.

El artículo describe el marco teórico, seguido de una descripción del uso del término ‘revisitas reflexivas’ en el proceso analítico. A continuación, se presenta un ejemplo en el que los coinvestigadores participaron activamente en el trabajo analítico. La conclusión es que la investigación-acción narrativa con ‘revisiones reflexivas’ puede ser un enfoque útil para co-crear reflexividad, desarrollo y cohesión en un equipo de liderazgo.

**Palabras clave:** investigación-acción, estudios narrativos, desarrollo del liderazgo, teoría de procesos, aprendizaje organizacional

## 1. Introduction

This article explores how insider action research, informed by narrative approaches (Boje, 2008; White, 2007), can support the development of a leadership team. It also examines how co-researchers can be involved in parts of the analytical process through “reflexive revisits” (author’s term).

The action research project took place in a Danish, nationwide, public pedagogic institution (located in one of Denmark’s five regions) with a unionized workforce of 500, most of whom are social care employees. In the institution, there are seventeen units where the residents live and spend their time. Each of these units is led by one of ten mid-level managers who are included in this project as co-researchers. The residents (all adults) are dealing with developmental disabilities and have committed serious crimes. The task of the employees is to support the residents, who are described to be and considered dangerous. The residents have an extensive need for social support around the clock. The chief executive and four sub-managers (each responsible for their own area, finance, administration, social work and treatment) expect the mid-level managers to provide a form of leadership that helps and sustains the employees in this demanding work. Due to national requirements, task performance and size, the organization also has internally employed specialists, such as HR, shift planners, nurses, social workers, psychologists and development consultants to provide professional support—for example to the mid-level managers, other members of the organization and several national operators. My role as action researcher was as an insider in the organization due to my position as an internal development consultant and specialist in the field of process leadership and organizational change.

The project aimed to create organizational movement and change, which was initiated to support a relationally oriented mode of leadership, through continuous dialogical processes (Hernes, 2014a) within a frame of a collaborative approach and “joint action” (Shotter, 2010b). As an internally employed development consultant I had facilitated a similar process before, and the mid-level managers had asked me to take the project lead, which the chief executive has supported. It was my task, among other things, to design the overall process and facilitate dialogical processes that could foster a common reflexive space for leadership development and contribute to organizational learning.

During the startup, co-researchers had made it clear to me that they were participating because of their shared interest in leadership, therefore I did not expect them to spend time engaging in my research interest. I was aware that I had to conduct a balancing act, for example, when I involved them in the analysis work, or presented new theoretical perspectives on what they were struggling with. In this study I show how I created a framework for analysis to actively involve them in analyzing selected transcribed excerpts from the dialogical processes. Drawing on a case from the project, this article explains how the framework, as a “scaffolding” tool (a concept from Wood et al., 1976), was applied as a process-methodological approach, both to strengthen the analysis and to facilitate the process with the team. Through the article’s case-based example, the continuous dialogical movements are studied, highlighting how past and future were brought into the narratives of the present.