

Recognition-based Action Research

Inspired by third generation critical theory and dialectic relationship theory

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Abstract: In action research the quality of the interpersonal relationship between the researcher and the practitioners is significant, as it affects which knowledge about the problem explored it is possible to obtain, just as the problem itself affects how that relationship evolves. The problem and the interpersonal relationship are thus dialectically connected. Therefore, the action researcher must have a dual focus concerned with generating knowledge and development in both areas. With that in mind, this article develops Recognition-based Action Research, where Axel Honneth's critical, sociological perspective on society is combined with Anne-Lise Løvlie Schibbye's dialectical relationship perspective on interpersonal relationships: with both perspectives grounded in Georg W.F Hegel's thoughts on recognition.

Keywords: Action research, recognition, interpersonal relationship, mutuality, dialectics.

Investigación-Acción basada en el reconocimiento

Inspirado en la teoría crítica de tercera generación y la teoría de la relación dialéctica.

Resumen: En la investigación-acción la calidad de la relación interpersonal entre el investigador y los sujetos involucrados es significativa, ya que afecta qué conocimiento sobre el problema explorado es posible obtener, de la misma forma que el propio problema afecta la evolución de esa relación. El problema y la relación interpersonal están, así, conectados dialécticamente. Por tanto, el investigador-acción debe tener un doble foco de preocupación: la generación de conocimiento y el desarrollo en ambas áreas. Con eso en mente, este artículo desarrolla una Investigación-Acción basada en el reconocimiento, donde la perspectiva sociológica crítica de Axel Honneth sobre la sociedad se combina con la perspectiva de la relación dialéctica de Anne-Lise Løvlie Schibbye sobre las relaciones interpersonales: con ambas perspectivas fundadas en los pensamientos de Georg W.F Hegel sobre el reconocimiento.

Palabras clave: Investigación-Acción, reconocimiento, relación interpersonal, mutualidad, dialéctica.

Action research: a normative research practice

Action research is development-oriented research in a field of practice, and is characterised by two related aspects. Firstly, action research is carried out *with* the subject area: not *about* or *on* the subject area (Heron & Reason, 2001, p. 179). This implies a different relationship between the researcher and the practitioner than the subject-object relationship traditionally found between researcher and research objects. Secondly, action research starts with the normative idea that knowledge about the problem the researcher and the practitioners are working on can contribute to a more free and democratic development of individual practitioners and of society (Nielsen, 2004, p. 522).

In action research, the practitioners become involved with the research, just as the researcher becomes involved with the practitioners. Action research is grounded in a participative world view:

action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowledge in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview, which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice while participating with others in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individuals and their communities (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 4).

Thus, the normative aspect of action research aims to foster growth for both the individuals and for the community (the social institutions), and considers participation in the processes together with other people the way to growth.

Recognition-based Action Research: a third tradition

In this article, we present a new action research tradition: *Recognition-based Action Research*. This new tradition is based on a dialectic understanding of the connection between individual and society, where mutual recognition, both psychologically and sociologically, is seen as a condition of individual and collective development. This recognition perspective is rooted in the thoughts of philosopher Georg W. F. Hegel and links psychologist Anne-Lise Løvlie Schibbye's dialectic relationship theory with sociologist Axel Honneth's third generation critical theory (The Frankfurt School), even though neither Schibbye nor Honneth are action researchers.

Recognition-based Action Research can be seen as a further development of two action research traditions which, according to Nielsen and Nielsen (2006) and Tofteng and Husted (2014) are also inspired by critical theory: The critical Utopian tradition of first generation critical theory (Adorno and Horkheimer), and the dialogue tradition of second generation critical theory (Habermas).

In the first tradition, the focus is on awakening critical consciousness and on changing societal power structures. Therefore, the dialogues set in motion by the researcher are "understood as scenes for critical re-orientations in a reified everyday life" (Nielsen & Nielsen, 2006, p. 68). The researcher plays an active role in this critical reflection, by contributing with her¹

1 For readability reasons we use 'she' and 'her' when referring to action researchers and practitioners.