

Praxeological dialogues from within, handling tensions in dialogical praxis-oriented Action Research

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Abstract: This paper addresses the need to develop concepts and terminology more and better adjusted to knowledge production with and from within practices, and help handle tensions between research and practice in Dialogical Praxis- oriented Action Research. Building on Olav Eikeland's ideas of dialogues towards Praxis-based Theoria, supported by Hanna Arendt's perspectives on action, and based on experiences from a concrete project, the question explored, is whether Jakob Meløe's praxeological perspectives can give us concepts and terminology which can help us handle this challenge. After describing the ideas and methodology of the praxeology, the author discusses its potential impact; To support dialogical deliberative learning processes, acknowledging knowledge as an open-ended question of becoming, and praxis as a form of relational and ethical kind of knowing, empowering the subjects to create new beginnings, engaged in the never-ending process of change.

Keywords: Dialogical Action Research; Tensions; Praxis; Jakob Meløe; Praxeology.

Díálogos praxeológicos desde adentro: gestión de las tensiones en la investigación-acción dialógica orientada a la praxis

Resumen: Este artículo aborda la necesidad de desarrollar conceptos y terminología más y mejor ajustados a la producción de conocimiento con y desde dentro de las prácticas, y ayuda a gestionar tensiones entre la investigación y la práctica en la Investigación Acción orientada a la Praxis Dialógica. Construye sobre las ideas de Olav Eikeland en torno a diálogos orientados a la "Theoria" basada en la Praxis, apoyada por las perspectivas de Hanna Arendt sobre la acción, y sustentadas en experiencias de un proyecto concreto, la pregunta explorada es si las perspectivas praxeológicas de Jakob Meløe pueden darnos conceptos y terminología que puede ayudarnos a enfrentar este reto. Después de describir las ideas y la metodología de la praxeología, la autora discute su potencial impacto; Apoyar procesos de aprendizaje dialógicos deliberativos, reconocer el conocimiento como una pregunta abierta que esta continuamente convirtiéndose, y la praxis como una forma de conocimiento en la acción relacional y ética, empoderando a los sujetos para crear nuevos comienzos, comprometidos en el proceso de cambio sin final.

Palabras clave: Investigación Acción Dialógica; Tensiones, Praxis, Jakob Meløe, Praxeología.

Addressing challenges ‘with’ and ‘within’

After 15 years as a social work practitioner, I started my journey to become a researcher. Now, after 15 years as an Action Researcher, where I have been navigating between practice and research, aiming to understand and develop practice from within, I am filled with experiences of various tensions. This paper addresses the need to develop concepts and terminology more and better adjusted to knowledge production from within practices, and help handle tensions between research and practice in Action Research. “Within” challenges the traditional roles between researchers and practitioners and brings tensions to the surface. As dealing with power and change, tensions are a natural part of Action Research. Several studies describe various tensions, for example tensions that arise in the interplay between top-down and bottom-up dynamics, evidence based and reflective practice, individual autonomy and community practices, and tensions between different actors, dual purposes and expectations (Phillips et al, 2018; De Finney & Ball, 2018; Aas, 2014).

But what tensions are emerging, depends on ontological, epistemological and methodological viewpoints in play. In this paper, I am concerned with offering concepts and a theoretical framework that is particularly suitable for supporting the process and goal of Dialogical Praxis-oriented Action Research (DPAR). Building on Olav Eikeland’s (2007) ideas of dialogues towards Praxis-based Theoria, supported with Hanna Arendt’s (1958) perspectives on action, the outcome of dialogue become clear; It is directed towards praxis as phronetic and ethical action, deliberating the different subjects capacity to exercise human freedom and create new beginnings in dialogue with others. Then the tensions between subjectivity and plurality, becomes crucial.

In a DPAR project where I collaborated with practitioners and young people, I experienced tensions related to language, the goal of exploration, power and habituated expectations. It also became clear how we all were influenced of the modern society’s ideas of scientific research. I found that the Norwegian philosopher, Jakob Meløe’s praxeology helped me to explore practice both *with* my collaborative partners, and from *within* practice. His theory can be understood as a kind of ethnographic practice–philosophic framework. It has many similarities with Yrjö Engström’s (2001) cultural-historical activity theory, aimed at helping those involved in research to explore each other’s views in agentic collaborative action, through critical dialoguing that recognises and recovers each participant’s place and voice in the world. Common for them both, is that they offer perspectives and questions for examining practice from within, that they seek understanding of situated, historical and contextual practice, and that they are concerned with socio-materiality. In this paper I will explore whether Meløe’s praxeological perspectives can give us concepts and terminology which can function as a frame for DPAR, with and within practices, and if such an approach can be helpful, handling tensions between research and practice.

After focusing the dialogical tradition of Action Research, I will explore some of the tensions which come to the surface in such collaboration, as I try to answer *why* there is a need to develop concepts and terminology more and better adjusted to knowledge production from within. Doing this it becomes clear that both the ontological question of what counts as knowledge and the epistemological question of how we get knowledge about the world comes to play. From here I go into the idea of praxis and practical knowledge, guided by Eikeland’s idea of the Aristotelian concepts of Praxis-based Theoria, describing DPAR as research with