Abstract: In this article we discuss, from the experience of action research on organizational change in an NGO, how interpreting the concept of dialogue in organizational theory has impacted the way in which it has been understood and applied in the processes of change that organizations experience. The ontological relationship that has been established between dialogue and organizational change and the interpretative frameworks used, although they have represented a great epistemological and practical breakthrough, have also limited the potential of the concept of dialogue itself by oversimplifying it. The reflective analysis allowed by action research on the case leads us to propose dissensus as an alternative: recognizing dissensus as natural in the organizational context and as an engine of real change. Understanding dialogue only as a search for consensus leads people to hide differences and not properly manage them in the process of change, because talking about organization is talking about relational and communicative patterns that highlight the influence of power, internal asymmetry and diversity in the processes of change. This complexity demands a new look on how to read it and understand it properly without oversimplifying it.

Keywords: action research, dialogue, dissensus approach, consensus approach, organizational change
1. Introduction

Dialogue is one of the central concepts in action research as has been addressed by prominent authors such as Gustavsen (2007) or Freire (2012). It has also been a concept on which much has been written from very diverse perspectives to try to better understand what occurs in and through it. But what can happen when we focus too close on a single object? We run the risk of leaving everything else in the shadows. Perhaps with dialogue something similar has happened: so much light on it has obscured the remaining space. In this article we try to shed light on those dark spaces, on what has happened around dialogue while it was at the center of analysis. We consider this to be a particularly relevant debate for action research on organizational change processes.

The focus of our contribution to action research is therefore in the organizational field. Dialogue in organizational theory has been reduced to a communicative event focused on speech and idealizing the results it generates. An example of this vision is found in Ellinor and Gerard (1998) when they affirm that dialogue is a powerful practice of communication that transforms those who practice it. Knowing what meaning is given to dialogue in current organizational theory and how that dialogue has been carried out in the organizational contexts of change, allows us to better understand why dialogue has become such a commonly used word that it has been attributed a behavior oriented towards the search for mutual understanding, the achievement of consensus and the avoidance of dissensus.

This way of understanding dialogue has limited its potential in processes of transformation. In recent years, and influenced by Bakhtin (1985, 1993; 1986, 1994), we find proposals that question these approaches aimed at simplifying the complexity that limit the processes of change and their innovative potential. These proposals rescue the value of dissensus as an approach to understanding dialogue and are proposed as experiences of organizational innovation (Kristiansen and Bloch-Poulsen, 2010). Reflections on dialogue and consensus are also found in the literature on action research (Karlsen and Larrea, 2015). The objective of this article is to propose a strengthening of the value of dissensus in dialogue in association to action research in organizations.

And from this perspective, the article analyzes the experience of the research team in a process of organizational change in an NGO within the framework of action research. Through action research we discuss the dissensus approach as a way to interpret the role of dialogue in processes of organizational change through an organization in a process of change with failed results. It failed due to the inability of the participants to overcome the monological vision of how dialogue should be deployed, denying and rejecting the tensions inherent in communicative processes in general and processes of organizational change in particular.

After this first failed phase, the results of the experience, together with the experience of the research team and the information collected while accompanying the group, show a different and distant reality with respect to the prevailing theory. The tension between the observed, the experienced and what “should be”, generated a series of questions: To what extent has the mainstream concept of dialogue limited the process of organizational change? What was generating the emphasis on consensus when understanding dialogue? What is the transformative potential of the dissensus approach?

These questions, the result of the tension between what arises through the experience of change and what theory indicates, opened the possibility of exploring the theorization of the