ACTION RESEARCH AND SOCIO-PRACTICAL ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING: A THEORETICAL APPROACH

Elisa Zwick [1]
Rosangela Violetti Bertolin[2]
Mozar José de Brito[3]

ABSTRACT

The general objective of this essay is to present an approach between the methodological perspective of action research and the organizational learning in the social practice perspective. Specifically, it aims to (i) verify action research as a methodology which purposes are, themselves, transformers of reality and (ii) demonstrate the relevance of the proposed approach to emancipatory processes, including the ethical plan. It was constructed a synopsis of the origins, the profile and the development of action research, making clear the differences between action research and classical research, as well as the reversal of the relation between subject and object, in which that becomes subject of the own knowledge and its reality, never presuming neutrality. The findings point to the uniqueness of the approach between action research and the socio-practical organizational learning process, constituting itself in a multiparadigmatic approach capable of engendering emancipation through the articulation of critical and reflection spaces. It is an approach not only restricted to technical and abstract concerns, but with emancipatory character, that needs to be integrated into the organizational studies agenda.

Keywords: Action research. Organizational Learning. Social Practice Perspective. Emancipation.

1Adjunct professor in Public Administration, graduated in Administration at the Regional University of the Northwest of Rio Grande do Sul State, UNIJUI, master and PhD in Administration at the Federal University of Lavras, UFLA, PhD student in Sociology in University of Campinas with Sandwich in progress in Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst, Leipzig – Germany. Varginha-MG. Brazil.
E-mail: elisa.zwick@unifal-mg.edu.br
2Graduated in Administration at the Federal University of Viçosa, UFV, master and PhD student in Administration at the Federal University of Lavras, UFLA. Lavras – MG. Brazil. E-mail: rosangelabertolin@yahoo.com.br
3Titular Professor in Administration, CNPq 1B researcher, graduated and master in Rural Administration at the Federal University of Lavras, UFLA, PhD in Organization and Human Resources at the University of São Paulo, USP. Lavras – MG. Brazil. E-mail: mozarjdb@dae.ufla.br

INTRODUCTION

Traditional science, since Newton, has worked with the idea of an objective knowledge, especially by experimentation in laboratory, with the disconnection between subject and object of the research. The ideal type of scientific study was based on the assumptions that science plays a role of neutrality, where there is total exemption of the researcher from social issues and the reality was only considered by the results of research based on the inductive method.

The idea of scientific neutrality comes from positivism, which proclaims that society is governed by laws that act independently from the will and action of man, and, therefore, can be studied by the same methods employed by the natural sciences and explain the phenomena by a neutral and casual form (OLIVEIRA, 1988). By adopting an anti-positivist stance, Oliveira (1988) affirms the non-neutrality of individuals, understanding the human and social sciences as full of more dynamic methods. Likewise, by critically reflecting on the epistemological problems of research, Japiassu (1975) had anticipated the problem of science objectivity. For him, sciences geared to the study of men are presented as techniques of intervention in reality and, therefore, are far from impartiality. In this way, he qualifies scientific neutrality as a myth, since the scientist dialogues with political and ideological interests, which govern even the selection of his study object. Habermas (1980) advocated a similar thesis in his study named as *Knowledge and Interest*.

Such questions, pertaining to the unfolding of science as a whole, are necessary to be positioned, because their discussion has introduced the development of more daring research methods. Among them is the action research, which starts from the assumption of changing the relation between subject and object from the traditional research, valuing the object to be researched and also considering it as a knowledge subject. Hence, perspectives that are averse to more daring forms of research and stuck to positivist questions still contest their scientific validity.

However, the human and social sciences, as carriers of completely different research objects from the natural sciences, have contributed to the weakening of positivism and the emergence of other methods. Allied to the complexity of human facts, arose the need for the researcher to be an actor, exercising his influence on the social sphere, which made research move towards the development of other paradigms.

In this sense, action research has become a methodological approach that is particularly interesting for Management, and has been developed as a critical unfolding of participant observation and was established as an innovative trend in scientific research. The reason is because it is a perspective that allows researchers to fill in the gaps inherent to the transposition from positivist epistemology to the applied social sciences and to choose alternative research paths that can attend to the nature of socio-organizational arrangements. The scientist not only uses theories and bibliographic researches, but also acts interactively in organizations, building knowledge also from practice. The approach from the principles of action research to socio-practical organizational learning is an innovative contribution to the advancement of Management knowledge, since it is possible to better recognize the subjects involved in the research and to identify more appropriate ideas to understand and manage the organizational reality issues.

Encompassing this propose, in this essay, the general characterization of action research in its subject-object relation is recovered, differentiating it from other methodologies that are based on the disconnection between these two dimensions. Next, we seek to relate action research to the socio-practical organizational learning process, constituting a multiparadigmatic approach. Making this approach is relevant to the Management area, considering both its socio-

logical dimension - which values social and human in the organizational space - and the attention given to alternative research perspectives.

The general objective of this essay is to present an approach between the methodological perspective of action research and the organizational learning in the social practice perspective. Specifically, it aims to (i) verify action research as a methodology which purposes are, themselves, transformers of reality and (ii) demonstrate the relevance of the proposed approach to emancipatory processes, including the ethical plan. Therefore, the development of this essay is organized in three central sections beyond this one.

ACTION RESEARCH: ORIGINS, PROFILE AND DEVELOPMENT

In the origin and evolution of action research are included its main characteristics as a research methodology that transforms reality and produces knowledge regarding changes. It is also discussed some of the aspects of studies conducted in the management field based on action research. Action research is already, itself, a methodological perspective preconceived from a critical point of view. So, this section aims to emphasize it as a promoter of the critical interaction and the integration between subject and object.

Its origins are located in Anthropology, a science that historically consolidated from the ethnographic method, which had as one of its pioneers Bronislaw K. Malinowski (1884-1942), founder of the participant observation methodology. By physically approaching the peoples over whom anthropologists wrote but had often never seen, Malinowski (1978) promoted a true revolution in anthropological literature. Traditionally, the native peoples were treated in a vertical way, as savages and colonial, in a process of spiritual conquest in which the peoples of the old world dominated the peoples of the discovered continents. They tried to impose their culture, especially the religious creed.

Even though Malinowski (1978) was bound to certain limitations of the functionalism of his time, he opens the possibility of thinking under a progressive bias the notion of function. Thus, the author's studies presupposed an understanding of the values and the internal constitution of different cultures based on the practical relations they had and how they truly functioned. Malinowski devoted attention to the role that culture really fulfills within communities, as he sought to intensely experience it.

In this sense, the idea of institution as a social and political organism, which systematizes and configures the life of ancient peoples and villages, is conceived by him as a social environment of research, accepted as a way of generating new categories and new concepts. This fact opened the possibility for cultures to be respected in their plurality and differences, in which the idea consolidated in Eurocentrism was softened in thinking a culture as being inferior or superior. With this initial demystification, it was promoted an opening of the research itself, since it was given the deserved recognition of the studied object, in a movement that gave these communities an otherness consideration.

The first studies specifically situated in action research are attributed by the literature to Kurt Lewin - a German psychologist naturalized as American and the promoter of the experimental approach (BURNES, 2004; CASSELL and JOHNSON, 2006) -, although literature differs and also attributes action research as an earlier characteristic of the studies from the anthropologist

John Collier (BARBIER, 2004; TRIPP, 2005; DIONNE, 2007). Developed in the United States during World War II, action research emerges as a response found by Lewin to concrete problems and the effectiveness will, constituting a true plan of social action and human behavior modification (DIONNE, 2007).

Gustavsen (2008) points out the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations as a pioneer organization in adopting action research, being strongly influenced by Lewin's social psychology research. The Institute has worked on organizations and issues about post-war labor, aiming to meet the challenges of reconstruction and productivity. Thus, in this period, action research was used more to the purposes of instrumental rationality by having as one of its first jobs the optimization of labor in the extractive industry.

However, as its most genuine foundation, action research has always had a social purpose, in which it is worth noting Schmidt's study (2006) that underlines the position of Carlos Rodrigues Brandão. For this author, Anthropology created a participant method, the participant observation, however, without having become itself politically participant. Under the influence of Marxism, participant observation, which sought "to know to explain" the other, is transmuted into participatory research or, as other theorists prefer, into action research, seeking "to understand to serve". In this way, it constitutes the construction of an articulation to give meaning to a scientific practice that participates in the social and political life of the popular classes. With this, it is given a militancy character to action research, generally associated with left-wing thinking, including actions linked to the Liberation Theology.

In turn, the study by Novaes and Gil (2009) proposes the differentiation between action research and participatory action research. According to the authors, this differentiation must be applied due to the diversity of modalities of this type of research, since each one implies different ends and terminologies that need to be clarified. This thesis is mainly defended because the authors point out that action research itself arose to serve the interests of post-war specialization and was based on North American and Scandinavian influences, whereas participatory action research had its origins in educational programs in Latin America, linked to rural workers. Hence, participatory action research, when originating in the educational action, assumes a greater effort of formation of critical consciousness and collective knowledge creation.

Although it is recognized that these diverse origins are based on competing philosophical assumptions and the perspective of greater interest here is the one developed in Latin countries, it is not intended to adopt in this essay a different nomenclature of action research to treat it as a distinct thing from participatory action research, because, as has been stated, action research is itself critically preconceived. In this line of analysis, what is important is to understand its central purpose, highlighted as the promotion of human emancipation through the articulation of critical and reflection spaces (NOVAES and GIL, 2009; CHIU, 2006). Moreover, when the origin of action research is understood, it is possible to distinguish which aspects differentiate it from less interactive approaches, such as participatory research.

Some authors deal with the specificities of action research, highlighting its role in achieving social objectives. Thiollent (1994) analyzes that action research and participatory research are often taken as synonyms, suggesting that it is not correct, since the former presupposes a planned form of social, educational, technical action and is based on participation, which is not always found in the proposals of the second, although the two are alternatives to the standard of traditional research. Dionne (2007, p. 76) follows the same idea in pointing out that the objectives of action research, while an intervention instrument in reality, are different from those of classical research, because they aim at "a change to be made, a situation to be modified". This

implies the fact that, generally, it is not possible to define universal laws of explanation, which is one of the main features that characterizes action research as antipositivist. It is important to note the differences between action research and classical research, systematized and compared by Dionne (2007):

Table 1 - Comparison between action research and classical research

	Classical Research	Action research
Objective	Generalizable wisdom through knowledge.	Specific wisdom by action.
Researcher/actors Relation	Researcher out of action. External actors, separated from the researcher.	Researcher involved in action. Actor in continuous communication.
Choice of research subject	Interest field from the researcher. Scientific relevance.	Understanding or contract with a specific social group.
Object Formulation	Continuity of previous research (documentation and scientific communication).	Conjuncture relevance. Continuous validation through practice.
Planning	Linear process.	Interactive process.
Research Techniques	Qualitative and quantitative.	With qualitative predominance.
Processing and analysis	Application of planned procedures, external to the action. Concern about generalization.	Debate, discussions with actors inserted in the action. Concern about relevance.
Conclusions	Theoretical reinsertion (or applied conclusions).	Direct reinsertion into practice.
Diffusion	General, free. Uncontrolled use.	Specific, linked. Control based on action.

Source: Dionne (2007, p. 49).

From its evolution, the action research, in its beginnings (in the 1960s) applied to the sector of coal mining by the Tavistock Institute, in the United Kingdom (VERGARA, 2008; GUSTAVSEN, 2008), takes on greater prominence in other areas. Currently, the approach has been used more frequently in the fields of education, communication, organization, social service, rural technology, political or trade union activism (THIOLLENT, 1994), and also in the socioeconomic and community field (DIONNE, 2007), as well as in health (HUZZARD and AHLBERG, 2010).

As Dionne (2007) argues, action research is the main methodology to support local development, since it focuses on the processes of solving peculiar problems. However, it is important to note that the undertaken topical changes, when taken together, can consolidate a cascade effect and change the whole configuration of a given reality. In this sense, the sociopolitical ambition as a tool of social transformation stands as the greatest discriminatory feature of the critique of action research and its performance in the real world. Indeed, the solution of concrete problems can lead to the questioning of other related, broader and more complex issues in a society.

By this view, Gustavsen (2008) points out that the tradition of action research is, above all, a form of local constructivism, and can provide important stimulus for local processes. For him, in 1950 the construction of this approach was established around systemic thinking. However, it went beyond not only to identify a universal reason, but also to larger aspects that resulted in a global development of the studied reality. Despite the fact that it is still attributed to it a neglect place in traditional science, action research has made a great contribution to organizational studies, based on several movements that intend to seek improvements in organizational development processes. But, as opposed to orthodox research, action research is considered

as a minority science, which is seen as having no standard or fixed norms, and has been considered as an inferior form of research, as discussed by Deleuze and Guattari (DRUMMOND and THEMESSL-HUBER, 2007).

On the other hand, Dionne (2007, p. 35) points out that the researcher in action research, while implicated in social change, "can not be limited to the 'positivist' purpose of neutrality, nor does it pretend to isolate itself from the social fact". Insofar as it establishes a relation with the complexity of human life, the researcher is a social technician, being able to dialectically exercise his role, which implies his transit through different areas of knowledge (BARBIER, 2004). Thus, action research does not fail to contain in itself a method, defining investigation procedures. But it goes beyond, constituting a methodological perspective in which axiological, praxiological and epistemological presuppositions remain imbricated. Therefore, one must take into account its founding purpose of opening to social work, which minimizes human suffering by adopting a well-defined pedagogical and political praxis (BARBIER, 2004).

By playing a political role, the researcher also involves other individuals. And in an inter-organizational collaboration survey, these individuals can not claim to be politically neutral. This is why Huzzard and Ahlberg (2010) characterize the actors who operate with the researcher as frontier individuals, since they assume a role of constructors of the discourse underlying the development effort. The researcher does not act alone and can not be the only one who can or must convince the other research subjects of their purposes and needs. Thus, in an action research project, the relationship between the researcher and the respondent is necessarily the object of critical and dialogic reflection, linked to other individuals in which the construction of knowledge is a joint achievement.

For Huzzard and Ahlberg (2010), action researchers are connected to practice as actors among many involved in the production of common knowledge. They are part of a whole. When this whole does not move towards the same purposes of the action research, a resistance arises, derived from the lack of trust among the entities of the process (GUSTAVSEN, 2008). Therefore, in the case of traditional organizational spaces, such as those of private-equity firms, there are limitations on the use of the methodology, because certain contours must be respected. First, due to the institutionalization of procedures, in which there are management directions that follow political and symbolic aspects, often insuperable and that limit the use of action research. Secondly, due to the distrust that can be generated with the collaborators, subjects of the investigation.

By placing it in a more radical perspective - and not as a mere complementary extension of traditional research - action research is advocated by Barbier (2004, p. 17) as an epistemological revolution to be still widely explored, expressing "a true transformation of the way of conceiving and doing research in Human Sciences". According to Betti (2009), the French action-research approach, to which René Barbier belongs, turns to non-formal education, with the group as a target of awareness for joint action. Probably because of its strong tradition on social mobilization throughout history is why French thinking directly influenced the political sense that acquired the methodology in Latin America.

When referring to the academic position of the researcher, Barbier (2004) confirms the tendency above expressed, because he speculates that integral action research would still be in its early stages, tending to further deepen its contribution, towards a transpersonal research. In this sense, the author bets that action research would be conducted to paths that would lead to personal and community at the same time. This foreshadowing makes it possible to establish a link with the purpose of this essay, because of the defense of action research as a more appropriate methodology to the process of socio-practical organizational learning and for including

instruments that have in essence a more daring look at science, opening it to its context and functional-social role.

2.1. Reversal of the Subject-Object Relation and Emancipatory Perspective

Traditionally, in its valid historical struggle against metaphysics, traditional research presupposed a relationship that sought to catch and preserve the object itself. This was sought through the attempt of scientific knowledge objectivity, which took its first great steps especially when Francis Bacon criticized the theory of idols, or the set of beliefs and superstitions that could interfere in the results of knowledge, and then, when, Galileo complemented Bacon's experimental method, including the process of measuring by the introduction of mathematics in modern science (KÖCHE, 2009).

However, the demanding level for an increasingly objective knowledge as the truth criterion of the experimental research through the inductive method had increasingly inclined towards a knowledge that sought to epistemologically neutralize both the subject of knowledge and the object to be analyzed. In this, evidently, qualitative research, more open to the social influences of the historical context, was put on a secondary position as unscientific, whereas the purity sought by traditional research regarding the apprehension of the object favored its analytical isolation and, consequently, its passivity.

It should be noted that the one-sidedness of this technical process of the modern science knowledge was harshly criticized by the philosophers from the Frankfurt School in the post-Second World War as a strategy which, instead of leading men to free themselves from fear and make them lords of their history, created a new form of domination of man by man and man's domination over nature (FRAGA, 2007, p. 424). Thus, one of the key points of action research, that is already perfectly visible and distinct in its origins in participant observation as in Malinowski (1978), was to reverse this vertical framework of the subject's relation with the object. The knowledge object was not only the quantitative element, biological or inanimate, but the social element of the way of life of human communities. Even with its limitations, Malinowski's functionalism was important in this opening, by re-placing traditional concepts of science no longer as abstractly and arbitrarily to frame the object to be known, but rather to note what function, that is, what role - in the sense of utility and necessity – a certain relation or element played in the logic of the social life in the studied environment, and not only in the a priori logic of a certain abstract methodology. Therefore, Malinowski's critique of the arbitrariness of the used categories revealed a concern with their adequacy and respect for the particularities of each culture (DURHAM, 1978).

Thus, in the sense of understanding the object as interfering in concepts, science undergoes on an epistemological rupture and inclines to take the object also as subject not only of its own reality but of own knowledge, opening the way to a reciprocal, dialectical commitment. So, action research rejects the idea of science as neutral and as a pacifier of its object, through a reversal of the traditional methodological question. It is precisely this reversal, also epistemological, that makes it possible to confirm action research as a promoting methodology for human emancipation, since the subject-object interaction of knowledge also becomes an interaction between theory and praxis, that is, between knowing and acting.

Praxis would be a reflexive application of theory, as Marx and Lenin would have conceived it, according to Ernst Bloch:

Theory and praxis constantly oscillate. Alternately and reciprocally oscillating, praxis presupposes theory, as much as it triggers and needs, in turn, a new theory to follow a new praxis. Concrete knowledge was never so valued as here, where it became the light for the act, and the act was never so valued as here, where it became crowning of the truth (BLOCH, 2005, p. 268).

To the extent that the researcher is no longer just the responsible for diagnose and the surveyed communities begin to be considered in their otherness it becomes possible to construct an emancipation ideal thought together. This was notably expressed in Latin America in the education area , especially through Paulo Freire. Like the critique to traditional science, the Freirean oppressed pedagogy refuses the unilaterality of the process of knowledge and teaching, criticizing vertical methods of learning such as banking education, since these methods presuppose the students as people without a prior knowledge to be considered and consequently, as passive entities in the knowledge process. By being influenced by the lord and slave dialectic of Hegel, by Marx's social being theory, and by some thinkers of phenomenology, Paulo Freire highlights the master thesis that "no one frees anyone, no one frees himself: men become free in communion" (FREIRE, 1987, p. 52). Therefore, the Freirean method provides important subsidies for the defense of action research as a theoretical-methodological proposal in terms of socio-practical organizational learning.

ACTION RESEARCH IN SOCIO-PRACTICAL ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

In view of the affinities that are present, the approach between action research and socio-practical organizational learning is proposed in this study in an innovative way, and its occurrence in the field of organizational learning or of epistemologies has not been verified. Being developed over the last thirty years, organizational learning (OL) is a relatively new field of knowledge in the organizational area. In this period, there were several analyses perspectives that these studies have aroused in the academic environment, raising, more and more, the interest of the organizational researchers. Studies about OL have been booming since the 1970s, especially with the publication of the pioneering study by Argyris and Schon (1978) about simple and double learning circuits. Over time, the research field on OL has opened up to a range of concepts and several focuses and perspectives of analysis have been incorporated into the study of the phenomenon.

For the purpose of this paper, we opted for the focus on the social perspective of organizational learning, because it stores closer relations to the perspective of action research once that is linked to the collective. Likewise Medeiros and Antonello (2008), it is not pretended to contribute to organizational learning in the sense of knowledge management, since it implies control and order, where problem solving emerges from external stimulus. In the perspective here defended, the OL seeks to emphasize learning within the collectivities and not generate knowledge restricted to economic value. Similarly, action research has as important parameters to consider elements such as participation, responsibility, reflection and cooperative questions, acting in order to promote transformation and social change, not capital accumulation. In view of these affinities, refining this approach is essential, closely monitoring the potentialities of action research in promoting organizational learning.

The social practice perspective argues that OL is not only a cognitive process or that happens inside the mind of people, but a collective realization, outgrowth of the interactions

among people, inseparable from the exchange of experience, knowledge and meanings about professional practices and processes (GHERARDI, 2000; GERGEN, 1985). Practice as an object of study can be seen under two approaches, one conceived as what the actors do and the other as a normative-epistemic concept, in which the generation of knowledge and learning resides in the practices themselves through participation (GEIGER, 2009; GHERARDI, 2000). Thus, the practice in the normative-epistemic perspective allows to understand the organizations in a broader conception, and not strictly rationalist, cognitivist or positivist.

The notion of practice is directly associated to learning. Medeiros and Antonello (2008) consider that learning in practice is situated and socially constructed, occurring from the interaction and symbolic exchanges among individuals, from the perceptions among bodies, artifacts and objects, actions and activities. The concept adopted by the authors derives from other studies that had already announced the keynote about learning in practice, like Gherardi (2000, 2009) and Strati (2007), aiming what man is as creator. In this, action research has great value in being seen as a model capable of creating the theory based on practice, when actually considered as action-science or action-based (EDEN and HUXHAM, 2001).

The social perspective of learning seeks to explain the nature of social engagements that promote the context for learning (GHERARDI, 2009), focusing on the way how people attribute meanings to their work experiences, which can be derived from explicit or tacit sources. The way of meaning attribution is associated by Strati (2007) to the way people think about aesthetics in organizational life. Thus, in order to understand the needs of people in any social space, business or not, the researcher must take into account that he is not interacting in a fixed and objective situation, but with cultures and symbols of a given moment, which represent the image of a given reality in a given space of time.

Likewise, Drummond and Themessl-Huber (2007) highlight Deleuze's view that, while having two interactive dimensions (the real and the virtual), reality is not given as a static state, but is continually transformed. For Berger and Luckmann (2009), it is a socially constructed reality by intentional action, which is embedded in the inevitable historicity of human thought. Thus, it is noted the importance of face-to-face situations, which collaborate in favoring the continuous exchange between expressivities to the point that, when these situations become less intense, the typifications of social integration become progressively anonymous (BERGER and LUCKMANN, 2009).

From this, it is highlighted the relevance of action research in the OL process as its procedures are based on face-to-face contact between researcher and researched, favoring the understanding of organizational aesthetics by the former, and facilitating the interference in favor of change with the support of a group. This constitutes the balance of objectives as one of the fundamental steps for the success of action research, in which the researcher needs to be involved, committed and be a true *friend* of the problem in question, as pointed out by Drummond and Themessl-Huber (2007), based on Deleuze and Guattari. These authors define action research as a process of engagement with the addressed problems, with the extreme importance that the action researcher, besides promoting people involvement, also intensely inserts himself in the research work.

Then, action research brings a common element with learning regarding the reciprocal dialectic of continuous transformations, addressed by Deleuze and illustrated by Drummond and Themessl-Huber (2007, p. 445) by the idea that "the garden cultivates the gardener as much as the gardener cultivates the garden, for better or worse". From this, it can be deduced that the researcher transforms the organizational practice through its mediation in the process of aware-

ness of the action participants, as well as is influenced and learns with his involvement.

Taylor and Pettit (2007) point out that the world of fundamental practices is complex, disorderly and dynamic, and to achieve real learning requires the integration of different theories, disciplines and approaches, combining a wide range of capacities, concepts and skills, highlighting their development to respond to the dynamics of power. The authors further affirm the need to understand and work with multiple dimensions and levels of learning and knowledge involved in transformative action research.

In this way, the action research process must move through extended epistemologies of learning and knowledge, incorporating types of reflection that consider social, situational and dialogic aspects (TAYLOR and PETTIT, 2007; CHIU, 2006). Thus, it opposes classical traditional scientific procedures, such as experimentalism, which contains "an artificial logic about living reality" (BARBIER, 2004). Chiu (2006) updates this dimension when he is guided by the dialectical relation among reflection, knowledge and experience. Therefore, he argues that in the participatory worldview the nature of knowledge is multidimensional. Hence, reflection in action research requires multiple perspectives, being incorporated in the research process what the author qualifies as first, second and third person.

In the context of socio-practical learning, there is the contribution of the notion of reflexive collaboration as an adequate reflexive process for social practice environments, what means a socio-interactional process in which individuals not only rescue their personal repertoires of experience, but also activate the repertoire of social competences, favoring fertile contexts for the generation of innovative knowledge about a practice. In this sense, there may be organizational contexts more or less favorable to learning, with culture as mediator (SOUZA-SILVA, 2007; SOUZA-SILVA and DAVEL, 2007).

Souza-Silva (2007) proposes the notion of organizational culture of socio-practical learning and bases it on two categories of values and beliefs: valorization of socio-practical learning and appreciation of the human element. In this proposal, the organizational culture of socio-practical learning includes interpretative, socio-labor and concrete-economic aspects, and should gather elements inscribed in social practices that create favorable conditions for people to gather among themselves, willing to share their knowledge, practices and professional experiences, providing learning and knowledge generation. In the meantime, action research is supported as an important tool for the promotion of reflexive collaboration in organizational environments and, therefore, as a lever in the in-depth understanding (by the researcher and the researched) of organizational learning.

Both action research and socio-practical organizational learning are correlated to the sociology of engagement and it contributes to conceive them by the construction of a broader and more democratic view of science. Burawoy (2009, p. 237) defends the sociology of engagement (or public) as one that develops its activities in the "trenches of civil society", and therefore, it is linked to subjugated communities. It involves three sets of power relations: the academic community, the sociologist himself in his interactions and, the power relations in the studied communities (BURAWOY, 2009). Hence, the sociology of engagement continues to attend communities such as those that Paulo Freire recognized when he elaborated the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and also those that Allain Touraine proposes by the action sociology that deepens the perception of social activist movements through the discussions and interventions orchestrated by sociologists.

In its proposal to defend a common interest, engagement is defined as a reflexive result of a practice that is corporeal, collective, and orchestrated, regulated by methods that are con-

tinuously discussed within a community of practitioners. The sociology of engagement provides a theoretical and methodological framework adjusted to the study of practices because it is based on a set of changes that proposes a different conception of action (GHERARDI, 2009).

In order to understand the valuation of action research as a methodological perspective that contributes to socio-practical organizational learning, it is taken as reference for analysis the characteristics of socio-practical organizational learning described by Souza-Silva (2007): (i) is based on practice and on socio-interactional contexts; (ii) is mediated by material and symbolic artifacts; (iii) has a space-temporal nature; (iv) is enriched by disturbances of established orders.

Regarding knowledge as linked to practice and to socio-interactional contexts, learning is seen as a process. In this way, learning represents an integral part of everyday experiences and engagements in the daily practices of communities and organizations. The act of knowing is always conceived as a social ecology, sustained by belonging to social patterns such as local communities, systems of activities and cultures. In this way, the focus of the learning process migrates from the individuals' minds to participation structures, and learning is no longer understood as an individual event, isolated and particularized, but is understood as dependent on social contexts, where one collectively thinks, works, reflects and innovates (SOUZA-SILVA, 2007).

Among the aspects of socio-interactivity, questions concerning human emotions emerge, dimensions commonly overlooked by researchers and organizations. Both research using action research and organizational learning have found that emotions can contribute to or inhibit learning processes. Meynell (2005) highlights the excitement of enthusiasm as an appropriate indicator of possibilities, which may arise as a result of an organizational learning process. It is believed that the horizons, options, perspectives and capacities of the individual have the potential to expand through their relationships, interactions and conversations with and in relation to the other. On the other hand, frustration can limit organizational learning.

Based on the studies of Heron and Reason, Taylor and Pettit (2007) consider that the personal dimension is very restricted to the level of *self*, emotional, spiritual, artistic and psychological; they emphasize that learning experiences are much more about the macro than the micro aspects, so the personal and collective dimensions are in the background. According to Barbier (2004), it is inconceivable to think of action research without collective participation. In this plan, the understanding of the sensible world in the sense of integral involvement is essential, as the recognition of the other as a subject with desire, intentionality, and possible solidarity affects the way how he will be treated, bringing consequences for his own involvement in the interaction process.

Following Meynell's view (2005), action research can be viewed as a contributor to organizational learning by considering aspects of emotional and conversational dynamics. The approach implies a consideration of the other (searched subject) as engaged and co-participant in an interactive and mutual process, in which the observers choose to recognize the presence of each other with the awareness that each one has its own perspective.

It is necessary to look at material and symbolic artifacts such as those that are historically situated and play an important role in the action of knowing, because they are linked to the context of a practice (SOUZA-SILVA, 2007). However, the mediation of these artifacts, in the search for understanding social change, especially about power relations, complicates the process of organizational learning. According to Taylor and Pettit:

> People can have their own learning relationship for intentional social change, which reflection in experience is a vital component of learning. So, as a consequence, sharing experiences should facilitate the generation of knowledge. Learning happens in action,

however, the complexity of working with processes of social change and associated power relationships leads to the complexity of learning (TAYLOR and PETTIT, 2007, p. 239).

In this same line of analysis, Hilsen (2006) emphasizes that action research leads to the construction of categories, which are limiting for actions, because power on its multidimensional perspectives emerges as a marker of the research amplitude, influencing the production of results, controlling the access to processes, preventing conflicts and reinforcing their existence through the social process, through material and discursive artifacts.

The preoccupation with the place and the moment in which the socio-practical organizational learning happens presupposes that the action of knowing must be understood as produced within a geographically located practice, temporarily and relationally. Taylor and Pettit (2007) present action research as the most profound approach to learning, describing that the relation between action research and action learning generates new understandings around this relation, especially about space for relationship and construction of trust within which participants, co-learners, become more aware of their own identities and those of others.

However, there may be a disturbance of the established orders, about which Souza-Silva (2007) evaluates that in these moments the learning is intensified, generating fundamental opportunities of innovation. Action research promotes a similar reaction when, in communicative spaces, chaos and order coexist, because all inquiry subverts the established order of seeing and doing, whereas a sufficient condition of order is also necessary to contain chaos and confusion (GAYÁ WICKS and REASON, 2009). The authors emphasize that the practical and freedom orientation of action research always positions it as a perspective that aims to guide and solve practical issues, as well as emancipate people from oppression, fulfilling its double objective towards action and questioning or new knowledge (DIONNE, 2007).

Since scientific research has opened up to the possibility of recognizing the studied object as a subject of knowledge, it can be said that ethical issues have also become more prominent in the science field, being an important element in the interlinkages between socio-practical organizational learning and action research, since subjects in interaction constitute the tonic of this relation. Under the consideration that it is by practice that human beings live their ethics, Hilsen (2006) argues that, since life is relational, human practice becomes the center of attention, both for ethical and scientific issues, being unacceptable the notion of objectification of the other.

Given this context, the social practice of action manifests the relevance that the construction of knowledge is imbricated in social relationships. Therefore, the way it is conducted and achieved can have important implications and consequences for the collective universe, where the organizational learning will generate an organizational configuration, which, good or bad, will depend on how the choices are made.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The general objective of this essay was to present an approach between the methodological perspective of action research and organizational learning in the socio-practical perspective. In the debate on this theme, regard to the approaches and evolution of action research, there was a separation from traditional research, broadly based on positivism. The reversal of the subject-object relation introduced an epistemological rupture in which the object became subject, not only to its own reality but also to its own knowledge.

In this sense, the main aspects that differentiated classical research from action research were based on the value of action in the construction of knowledge, from a participatory and collective approach. Its central purpose is highlighted as the promotion of human emancipation, through the articulation of critical and reflection spaces, incorporating types of reflection that consider social, situational and dialogic aspects. From the point of view of critical reflection in action research, reflexivity presupposes that the research occurs in the first, second and third person.

The criticality of action research is a *sine qua non* condition of its existence as an emancipatory purpose. To paraphrase Deleuze, cited by Drummond e Themessl-Huber (2007), this classification directs it as a *friendly* methodology of the concrete demands of the social reality and the human constitution of the subjects who, while transforming reality, are continually transformed by it.

Faced with this dialectic of reciprocal transformations, the ethical instance emerges as an essential element in the configuration of reciprocity in action research, because through the connection with human interdependence, one can define the destinies by which the researcher is what he does. It is a principle that, by presupposing research through action, and not from formal criteria defined *a priori*, suffers a certain influence from existentialism, a philosophical approach for which the element of existence precedes the essence, as defined by Sartre (2010).

With this view, in this study, action research was identified and delimited as more than a carrier of a method and processes, but as a methodological perspective that in its epistemological roots, it carries on empowering purposes of emancipation with the socio-practical organizational learning. Both perspectives, in the Deleuzian conception are still *minority*, but converge in the same direction. This correlation needs to be expanded, being necessary to carry out studies regarding its ground as a multiparadigmatic approach, which may expand the perspective here presented.

In the perspective of this essay, it was possible to verify that depending on the characteristics of socio-practical organizational learning, the extent of such learning at organizational levels depends on a number of factors, be they political, social or structural. In this context, the quality of the adopted methods to promote this learning is fundamental, especially regarding the required skills from individuals who play the role of facilitators in the learning process. Action research, if well conducted, may be a sufficiently adequate methodology for the understanding of organizational learning in the socio-practical perspective.

Action research has been consolidated as a proposal of collective construction by carrying objectives that are not defined *a priori*. Thus, it is an approach that acts in defense of the fact that science is not an appropriation by elite groups, but is also constructed by the popular class, a position advocated by the sociology of engagement. In this sense, democratic, progressive and progressively, scientific fields such as Management need to recognize and develop itself, based on the concern and commitment to the future of the other and not only to move through a logic dominated by the market. Much can still be developed in organizations through the applicability of this method, so little disseminated and sometimes neglected in the understanding of organizational phenomena. Thus, it is also recommended to incorporate action research as part of the organizational studies agenda, which will be possible to the extent that researchers concerned with understanding organizational learning can develop it.

Such a direction is capable of positioning individuals and organizations for learning that is emancipatory and not only the carrier of a technical-abstract uneasiness of science. Finally, emerging as the carriers of an innovative proposal, both action research and socio-practical or-

ganizational learning are faced with challenges particular related to the power dimension, not only implicit in organizational dynamics, but also the power of science orthodoxy. Therefore, in view of the approach here proposed, it is essential to consider that, regard to their character of alternative approaches, they are required to have clear purposes and good articulation among the involved subjects. So that research procedures are understood, as about the assertion of its political objectives, otherwise it remains in the mythological ground of scientific neutrality, unsuccessful and supposedly apolitical.

REFERENCES

ARGYRIS, C.; SCHÖN, D. **Organizational learning:** a theory of action perspective, Reading, Mass: Addison Wesley, 1978.

BARBIER, R. **A pesquisa-ação.** Brasília: Liber Livro, 2004.

BERGER, P. L.; LUCKMANN. T. **A construção social da realidade:** tratado de sociologia do conhecimento. 31ª ed. Rio de Janeiro: Vozes, 2009.

BETTI, M. **Educação física escolar:** ensino e pesquisa-ação. Ijuí: Ed Unijuí, 2009.

BLOCH, E. **O Princípio esperança.** Rio de Janeiro: EdUERJ; Contraponto, 2005. v. 1.

BUCHY, M.; AHMED, S. Social learning, academics and NGOs: can the collaborative formula work? **Action Research,** v. 5, n. 4, p. 358-377, 2007.

BURAWOY, M. A sociologia pública em tempos de Barack Obama. **Caderno CRH,** v. 22, n. 56, p. 233-244, 2009.

BURNES, B. Kurt Lewin and the planned approach to change: A re-appraisal. **Journal of Management Studies,** v. 41, n. 6, p. 977-1002, 2004.

CASSELL, C.; JOHNSON, P. Action research: Explaining the diversity. **Human Relations,** v. 59, n. 6, p. 783-814, 2006.

CHIU, L. F. Critical reflection: more than nuts and bolts. **Action Research,** v. 4, n. 2, p. 183-203, 2006.

DIONNE, H. **A pesquisa-ação para o desenvolvimento local.** Brasília: Liber Livro, 2007. 132p.

DRUMMOND, J. S.; THEMESSL-HUBER, M. The cyclical process of action research: the contribution of Gilles Deleuze. **Action Research,** v. 5, n. 4, p. 430-448, 2007.

DURHAM, E. R. Malinowski (1884-1942): vida e obra. In: MALINOWSKI, B. K. **Argonautas do Pacífico Ocidental:** um relato do empreendimento e da aventura dos nativos nos arquipélagos da Nova Guiné Melanésia. 2ª ed. São Paulo: Abril Cultural, 1978. p. VI-XXIV. (Os Pensadores).

EDEN, C.; HUXHAM, C. Pesquisa-ação no estudo das organizações. In: CLEGG, S. R. e outros. **Handbook de estudos organizacionais.** São Paulo: Atlas, 2001. p. 93-117.

FRAGA, P. D. V. Autoconservação e sacrifício: o drama protótipico de Ulisses como dominação da natureza. In: POMMER, A.; FRAGA, P. D. V.; SCHNEIDER, P. R. **Filosofia e crítica:** festschrift dos 50 anos do Curso de Filosofia da Unijuí. Ijuí: Ed Unijuí, 2007.

FREIRE, P. **Pedagogia do oprimido.** 18ª ed. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1987.

GAYÁ WICKS, P.; REASON, P. Initiating action research: challenges and paradoxes of opening communicative space. **Action Research,** v. 7, n. 3, p. 243-262, 2009.

GEIGER, D. Revisiting the concept of practice: toward an argumentative understanding of practicising. **Management Learning,** v. 40, n. 2. p. 129-144, 2009.

GERGEN, K. J. The social constructionist movement in modern psychology. **American Psychologist,** v. 40, n. 3, p. 266-275, 1985.

GHERARDI, S. Introduction: the critical power of the "practice lens". **Management Learning,** v. 40, n. 2, p. 115-128, 2009.

GHERARDI, S. Practice-based theorizing on learning and knowing in organizations. **Organization,** v 7, n. 2, p. 211-223, 2000.

GUSTAVSEN, B. Action Research, practical, challenges and the formation of theory. **Work Research Institute,** v. 6, n. 4, p. 421-437, 2008.

HABERMAS, J. Conhecimento e interesse. In: BENJAMIN, W. e outros. **Textos escolhidos.** São Paulo: Abril Cultural, 1980. p. 301-312. (Os Pensadores).

HILSEN, A. I. And they shall be known by their deeds: ethics and politics in action research. **Action Research,** v. 4, n.1, p. 26-36, 2006.

HUZZARD, T.; AHLBERG, B. M.; EKMAN, M. Constructing interorganizational collaboration: the action researcher as boundary subject. **Action Research,** v. 8, n 3, p. 293-314, 2010.

JAPIASSU, H. F. **O Mito da neutralidade científica.** Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1975.

KÖCHE, J. C. **Fundamentos de metodologia científica:** teoria da ciência e iniciação à pesquisa. 26ª. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Vozes, 2009.

MALINOWSKI, B. K. **Argonautas do Pacífico Ocidental:** um relato do empreendimento e da aventura dos nativos nos arquipélagos da Nova Guiné Melanésia. 2ª ed. São Paulo: Abril Cultural, 1978. 424p. (Os Pensadores).

MATTOS, P. L. C. L. de. "Administração é ciência ou arte?" O que podemos aprender com este mal-entendido? **Revista de Administração de Empresas**, v. 49, n. 3, p. 349-360, 2009.

MEDEIROS, I. B. O. de.; ANTONELLO, C. S. A metáfora da dança nas organizações: uma auto-etnografia sobre aprendizagem na prática. In: V ENCONTRO DE ESTUDOS ORGANIZACIONAIS DA ANPAD, 2008. Belo Horizonte. **Anais...** Belo Horizonte: ANPAD, 2008.

MEYNELL, F. A second-order approach to evaluating and facilitating organizational change. **Action Research,** v. 3, n, 2, p. 211-231, 2005.

NOVAES, M. B. C. de; GIL, A. C. A pesquisa-ação participante como estratégia metodológica para o estudo do empreendedorismo social em administração de empresas. **Revista de Administração Mackenzie,** v. 10, n.1, p. 134-159, 2009.

OLIVEIRA, L. Neutros e neutros. **Humanidades,** v. 05, n. 10, p. 122-127, 1988.

SARTRE, J-P. **O existencialismo é um humanismo.** Rio de Janeiro: Vozes, 2010.

SCHMIDT, M. L. S. Pesquisa participante: alteridade e comunidades interpretativas. **Psicologia USP,** v. 17, n. 2, p. 11-41**,** 2006.

SOUZA-SILVA, J. C. de. **Aprendizagem organizacional:** desafios e perspectivas ao desenvolvimento de comunidades de prática. Salvador: Conhecimento Superior, 2007.

SOUZA-SILVA, J. C. de; DAVEL, E. Da ação à colaboração reflexiva em comunidades de prática. **Revista de Administração de Empresas,** v. 47, n. 3, p. 53-65, 2007.

STRATI, A. **Organização e estética.** Rio de Janeiro: FGV, 2007.

TAYLOR, P.; PETTIT, J. Learning and teaching participation through action research: experiences from an innovative masters programme. **Action Research,** v. 5, n. 3, p. 231-247, 2007.

THIOLLENT, M. **Metodologia da pesquisa-ação.** 6. ed. São Paulo: Cortez, 1994.

TRIPP, D. Pesquisa-ação: uma introdução metodológica. **Educação e pesquisa.** São Paulo, v. 31, n. 3, p. 443-466, 2005.

VERGARA, S. C. **Métodos de pesquisa em administração.** 3ª ed. São Paulo: Atlas, 2008.