Book reviews

Bártolo, Emília (2007). *Formação em contexto de trabalho no ambiente hospitalar* [Training in the workplace in a hospital environment]. Lisbon: Climepsi Editores.

A HAPPY PREGNANCY

Nine months was the time the author kept up an intellectual umbilical connection to her field of study — the intensive care unit of a children's hospital. The idea was to generate knowledge about the training processes of doctors and nurses in the workplace and she opted for a naturalist research device, with an ethnographic approach as solid as it was captivating. The solidity derives from the theoretical network she falls back on to underpin her options, but also, and above all, from the transparency with which she presents her tools, both as regards data collection and data analysis. The project has two distinct points of interests, although parallel and complementary: the knowledge that we see constructed about the training processes in the workplace and the construction and application of a research device which, although necessarily unique and personal, leads to extremely enriching methodological solutions. And what stands out overall is the amplitude and coherence in structuring the device, meticulously planned in which nothing is left to chance, and we are even more convinced the hesitation, insecurity and fine-tuning that the process involved is revealed to us: "what do I register, how can I remember things?" (p. 77).

Indeed, and as many writers point out, namely those mentioned by the author, ethnographical research presents several facets that may put at risk the reliability of the results deriving from the fact it is not tightly structured, above all in terms of data collection. But at the other extreme one also risks excessive prior structuring, letting data escape that do not fit neatly into

this framework and thus making it impossible to obtain certain findings. The author, owing to her lucidity and probably her intuition, does not run either risk. She prepares to go to the field and constructs her network, but does not allow herself to become entrapped by it. She releases herself, withdraws, reformulates, goes back, but secure in the knowledge because the external and internal contexts are no longer mysteries: "Progressively (...) we advance into new fields (...) because we feel more inside the team (...) because we gradually learn and consolidate our role of the observer" (p. 82).

In this progression it is clear that speaking to herself becomes an important aspect, conveniently registered in her "fieldwork memorandum" and translated into a self-questionnaire and a self-script as simple as the following examples: "How do I observe?"; "Where to I stay?"; "Where do I register?"; "What posture should I adopt?"; "How should I be dressed?"; "Which actors should I focus on in the observation?".

This self-questionnaire reflects the dilemmas a participant observer faces, aware of the crucial importance of his role in the research and the decisive interference of small gestures in the social relation that will be a determining factor in "releasing" the data. Given that the researcher is a nurse, this relation becomes even more complex and calls for great care in the integration and manner of looking at the subject matter. If on the one hand these aspects are made easier by the physical nearness to the scene, on the other hand the possible preconceptions of superiority of the researcher must be diluted — given that they are suggested and captured among the two professional categories that this research project is targeting: "...I don't feel comfortable with the fact that the nurses think we want them to play the role of doctors." (p. 80); at the same time the "preconceptions" constructed by the professional herself must be dropped. By including herself as the object of research,

questioning herself and supplying data, the investigation takes on three dimensions — that of the actors, her own and ours.

The data collection techniques initially planned covered the main concern to access the "multiple dimensions of the object of study", as well as triangulation, and hence guarantee the "scientificity of the research" (p. 62) — participant observation, interviews and document analysis. Meanwhile, this effort towards scientificity goes much further in the organisation and processing of the data. The author orders her entire *corpus* of analysis chronologically and into five categories: the memorandum, with the most objective context data; the observation reports, comprising thirty hours of registry; informal conversations, both recorded and only registered; the actor's diaries, which are unedited registers in the first person from an agreed participation with two actors; the scripts corresponding to four relevant episodes with authentic descriptions extracted from the reports; and finally the six interviews. Also here there is a balance between structuring and creative freedom that enables an ethnographic approach. The opportunities arise and are grasped — conversations, diaries episodes — but at the same time they are differentiated, earning a place in their own right, and the bundle of intertwined feelings are compacted. Meanwhile, and in confirming the trustworthy relationship established with the actors and the ethical as well as the scientific concerns, the author explains that not all the data collected were included in the *corpus* of analysis; she eliminates everything that appears less objective or symptomatic of greater affective involvement, as well as anything that could compromise confidentiality and anonymity, or which refers to more delicate or critical situations (pp. 72-75). The thin dividing line between scientific compromise and ethical compromise is not always easy to walk, but it is a quality that deserves to be highlighted in the researcher and a quality that is also transparent.

Content analysis, based on the guidelines of the most well-known theorists among us (Bardin, 1977; Bogdan & Biklen, 1994; Vala, 1986), is carried out through the categorisation and definition of units of analysis, to which the whole selected *corpus* is submitted. The complexity of this "trail and error" process is admitted, again in a balancing act between the need for structuring meaning and the danger of forcing the data in a certain preconceived direction. The categories and sub-categories of the reception of the data are not outlined, but the organisation of the text of analysis and interpretation enables us to infer and situate them in the two axes identified in the research questions — the training paths and processes.

This final part — the point of arrival of all the research, mirrors the overwhelming balance underpinned by a constructive process. Anchored on the theoretical network mobilised and outlined in the first chapter, and emerging from the methodological strategies explained in the second, the third chapter presents us with the interpretative text, brought to life by some transcriptions of the units of register and analysis, duly identified and varied. This "enlivening" should not be understood as accessory, but as enriching and vivid as one would expect from an ethnographical project. Taking words as the raw material of construction, they are also the key to the reconstruction of meaning, which we follow with interest and lightness, even if the starting context does not seem to interest us. By the author's hand we are led to view actors who are distant, in an empathetic light and with a desire to understand, giving us the sensation that we are in a "film".

While it is clear that it was the methodological nature of this work that aroused the interest, one cannot diminish the value of its contribution to the understanding of training processes in the workplace, and not confined to the hospital environment.

"I LEARNED BY DOING AND WATCHING OTHERS DO"

Using the research produced as the starting point and based not only on the importance of training in the workplace, but also the dilution between the borders of education and training, the author seeks to unveil and clarify the training potential of one of these contexts, entering through the perspectives of the actors and the organisational dynamics and attempting to identify strategies and modes of training, as well as the knowledge and skills developed. Two domains are focussed on, organised into "training paths" and "training processes". However, straight away in the paths that are intentionally accelerated to the context under study we see questions about training intertwined, when the actors link their options to the biggest challenges and demands involved in this service, as the starting point and the initial practical learning, as well as the arrival point of a path that gradually widens and consolidates this practical learning.

Although not diminishing the importance of the initial training, with scientific and technical preponderance, all the actors assert the crucial role of the training in context, especially for "relational, independence, creativity and accountability" skills (p. 163).

The author identifies and selects the four moments that she believes show themselves to have the most potential for training, based on rich interactivity and the twofold nature of the context — of production and training. She starts to leave behind the moments more easily associated with learning, such as meetings or training

initiatives, attempting to show how "training on duty", defined as the integration of practice and learning, although less valued formally and even by the actors themselves, contain greater potential. To activate it, and prevent the experiential knowledge from crystallising in the actors (p. 31), the organisational context plays a major role, encouraging interaction and reflection. In this context, "the problems, difficulties and new situations" (p. 141), in other words their exceptional complexity, will be the catalyst for this interaction, which in organisational theory would be formulated as the point of convergence of interests — everybody's a loser if no agreement is reached. If we think that complexity is today a major characteristic of the work contexts, we can question ourselves about the paths that other professionals would take and how they would articulate the individualist appeals with the collective appeals.

Shared management, with decision sharing and the systematic search for solutions (p. 135), is therefore presented as the training potential of the context, in the twofold individual and organisational dimension, linked to the expression of "learning organisation" (p. 155). Even training outside the context, generally of a more technical nature, is also inflated in the organisation itself, not only in the practical investment of the actor that received it, but in the internal doubling up of this training and the sharing of knowledge, a practice instituted among the nurses.

This point that leads one to the professional identities, theoretically constructed in the workplace and ordered around the field of practices — what the person does, how they see their profession and how others see it (p. 24). This study leaves another question hanging in the air, considering the trends that are gaining ground in the workplace, such as the valuing of differentiation and independence of and in organisational contexts: how does one combine professional identity with organisational identity? The relationship with a profession and the relationship with a work context? Is being an "intensivist" stronger than being a nurse or doctor? Is being a teacher of a given school more important than being a teacher? What changes can arise in the social and professional regulation?

THE RESEARCHER'S JOB

In spite of all the methodology textbooks and no matter how many classes are attended, all novice researchers suffer from the anguish and insecurity all new graduates feel when entering into the job market. Learning by doing. But few have the luck to learn by watching others do. In the academic world, which welcomes and blends into the researcher's world, there is a tradition of closure, associating the researcher's job to a test of

individual endurance to mobilise and create knowledge. Hence, what is disseminated outside the academic world through the widely distributed publications are the results of studies, which may or may not be based on existing or emerging theories. The meandering paths that lead to these results often encapsulate doubt, as if it was not decisive for the laymen to give their verdict on these results. It is common in the literature to find writings on methodology and the works of scientific dissemination. This is the out-of-the-ordinary aspect that should be reiterated in this project. One can learn how one did and how one can do from it. And this virtue is useful not only in ethnographical studies, in which one cannot discard the subjectivity, but only objectivise-it; this should be a requirement for all the studies, even for those which manipulate the quantitative, knowing how they, and probably above all else they, are rife at wide-ranging manipulations. As one cannot eradicate subjectivity, we leave all the data to allow the public also exercise their autonomy.

In this world in which affectiveness dominates in the name of more productive reasoning, it feels good that someone has practised the opposite — mastered the reasoning to free the productive affects. Some say this is a scientifically feminine quality...

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