

AUTOBIOGRAPHIC NARRATIVES AND FORMATIVE PROCESSES OF EXISTENTIAL TRANSFORMATION

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INTRODUCTION

After the second world war, took great height the study of the existence of the man (understanding it in generic sense), being authors like: Heidegger, Jasper, Marcel, Sartre, Abbagnano o Foucault, among others, which wrote about it. Actually, existence, the sense we give life, keep having great importance for people and environment around us. And especially if we consider that, the vortex of the daily life is the cause that takes us to have anguishes by lack of time.

“The world is suffering the pulsing death became in power and although a lot of people fight (...) death is present in our daily life (...) the desire to eliminate himself (...) this impulse of destruction that humanity still does not manage to digest taking in serious its existence” (Escobar Guerrero, 2005: 61).

Hardly we left any time and space to watch us, understanding or to scatter us. But if we don't want to be robots that enter to form part of social and mental systems, that would carry us in an opposite direction that we have considered or projected, we have to work on ourselves. Therefore, the narrative autobiographical research is a tool that allows us not only to leave constancy of experiences or social and historical trajectories, psychological, anthropological or educative and researching, but also can get to become a self-educational average, through we can question our own existence, taking conscience from whom we are, what place we occupied in the world or what we want to be and because.

We need to retake this type of works to clarify our vital rates, our interior and the conformation of relation styles that we maintain with other people; with the objective that it could help us to take more independent and coherent positions in the daily actions of our life. Since,

“The Itself and the Other become in the relations that create and recreates them. Each one constructs the other in the self-construction process (...). All our lives happen in relations. We don't be, we don't exist outside of relations we have created and by we are included, protected, tormented and what we enjoyed or we detested” (Montero, 2002: 48).

THEORIES TO DEVELOP THE RESEARCH

From more than twenty years ago, authors like López Górriz (1986), already pointed towards one “science of the singular”, are rescuing the importance of the narrative and autobiographical researches in education. Later, authors like Bolívar, Domingo and Fernández, raise the specificity of conferred methodologist principles which they denominate “biographical-narrative research”, exposing that:

“Each individual represents a singular re-appropriate of the social and historical universe in which he has lived, reason because we can know the social thing starting of the irreducible specificity of an individual practice. This means to restore the subjectivity in social science: a unique action or an individual history is an average access— and sometimes only the possible one to the knowledge of the social system. Nevertheless it’s not an easy way, often cryptic, reason because it requires new specific approaches and investigation methodologies” (Bolívar, Domingo y Fernández, 2001: 141).

This singularity urges still more if we carried out a research where the own investigator is simultaneously subject and object of this research, although this one also conforms other subjects that elaborate their autobiographies (being they also subject and objects of its works).

This is a research that take distance of another type of researches, essentially, for the strong implication that it requires of the people who integrates it and because the thematic to study comprise not only cognitive or analytical dimensions, but also and essentially emotional, introspective, clinical, etc. These dimensions are essential for the development of an education or integrating and integral formation that aims at a creation of emergent knowledge for a significant change of the interiorized modelling. This research is reconstructed constantly, not being “a registry result <objective> of the facts, but a construction to give the meaning to our own life” (Bolívar, Domingo y Fernández, 2001: 141).

THE CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

Is in this frame of complexity from which we expose a synthesis of the thesis that we are carrying out, and that has been coming being developed for almost nine years in the Faculty of Sciences of the Education of the University from Seville, slope of presentation like Doctoral Thesis in the Department of Methods of Research and Diagnostic in Education under the direction of the Doctor Isabel López Górriz.

With our work we try to describe and to explore through the narrative autobiographical research, the case of a person who lives a process that aims

towards a transformation through the personal reconstruction, formative and investigating. We try to develop through the autobiography a specific conception of existential education, self-education and research, understanding that the narrative autobiographical research is potential of that conception.

Next, we expose essential characteristics of the investigating and methodologist procedures followed in our research. Supporting us essentially in the self-education process, like defends it Pineau and Marie - Michèle (1983), from her approach of experiential formation. That is to say, self-education understood like a way of appropriation of the own formation power. The self-education is understood like a tripolar process, in which not only it includes itself, the "self" pole (not understood only like individual), and the others, "heteros" (that would include the social influences, familiar, cultural, etc.), but also the things, "eco-formation" (physical, climatic influences, symbologies, etc.). (Pineau, 1985, 2005).

"This triple movement of getting conscience and taking power by the person about its own formation seems to be the base of a conceptual definition of the self-education. The self-education appears here like the emergency of an original conscience in the interaction with the context" (Galvani, 2005: 145).

And also we refer to López Górriz (1986, 2004, 2007), when she alludes to the construction of the autobiographical work from the existential and introspective formation and research.

THEMATIC OBJECT OF RESEARCH. A STUDY OF CASE: NARRATIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH, SELF-EDUCATION AND EXISTENTIAL

Our central thematic is the specific formation that generates the narrative and autobiographical research work from the educative area in human and social sciences. This study is not only a research process, but also a support process towards an existential and vital transformation. And although we are conscious that not in all the people who elaborate and analyze their autobiography causes a significant change, we think that it is possible to bet for that change through narrative and autobiographical research.

In this case, the narrative and autobiographical research, is the way through we entered ourselves to know more thorough the self-education process (in the sense that Gaston Pineau -1983-1993- gives him, that is to say, as a bio-cognitive joint of the lived thing and the produced knowledge) and investigator who has been generated and who aims towards a deep transformation. We understand that the autobiography can be potential of that conception and especially, considering that hardly, in these processes it can be theorized something that has not been triggered, that has not been experienced or lived (Lopez Górriz, 2007).

METHOD OF RESEARCH

We left from a conception of research method by the perspective that raises Morin when it exposes that:

“The method is a thought discipline that must help each one to elaborate its cognitive strategy locating and getting in context its information, knowledge and decisions, returning to each one apt to confront this omnipresent challenge of the complexity. One is very concretely a learning method in the wandering and human uncertainty” (Morin, 2003: 11).

Our pretension through this research is to show the transformation processes that can generate the narrative and autobiographical research and action research existential, if we consider that:

“A way to approach the action research existential is to undertake a research with the idea, at prior, to transform us, where we lean ourselves in a self-observation or in stories about those aspects, attitudes or behaviours that we want to change. Another form is to begin to elaborate our autobiography with the idea to know us; then in the measurement in which we are putting into, deepening, having a greater knowledge over ourselves, it is allowing us to have a greater taking of conscience of whose we are and of which are our qualities, and situations. As well as it helps us to create a greater evolution, because through the self-observation, in the measurement in which we want to deep into aspects of our life, we are touching those aspects that emotionally cause us difficult situations. When we watch face to face those situations, we revive the pain, although also it takes us to evacuate the pain and to rationalize the experience. This allows a significant change because it helps to expand us before that situation that can be given of similar form in other moments of our life. It is a way to prepare us for a meaning taking of conscience in depth that is taking that work, and the effort to make evolve those characteristics” (oral conversations, López Górriz, 24/March 2006).

SUBJECTS IMPLIED IN THE RESEARCH

We have chosen to work our autobiography, taking it as a central axis of the study. Authorizing us to an own elaboration that is contrasted in different occasions with other people and at the same time co-constructed with the person who has accompanied us throughout all the process of creation and analysis of the lived, felt, experimented, expressed and/or theorized. Helping it us to construct our singularity, at the same time that we grow in interaction and collectivity.

Also we have located ourselves in the distance, like participant observer, to understand better these processes. We have accompanied two students groups by the degree by psycho-pedagogy to create a research project whose central axis are their autobiographies. These students made a project of research as a fundamental requirement in two matters of this degree: "Methods of research in education" and "Methodologies of Action Research", both distributed by professor Isabel López Górriz, our companion. The thematic is for free election, decided beforehand with the professor.

At the same time, in different occasions we have registered or contrasted information with different key informants.

INSTRUMENTS AND TECHNIQUES USED IN THE RESEARCH

The instruments and the techniques used in this research have been different, according to the purpose:

- The personal daily writing of the investigator (Jurado Jiménez, 2007). It is a tool where we can reflect and analyze the social-mental and relational systems that we have constructed, in addition to the felt preoccupations, the experiences, anguishes, reflections, etc., that are which helps us to form our modelling of person and professional from the same construction of a more introspective and socializing knowledge. This personal daily writing has been contrasted with key informants in different occasions.
- Stories of life (as much oral as written):
 - Of the investigator, elaborated and contrasted with key informants
 - Of the people who we accompanied in the elaboration of its autobiographies.
- Auto and hetero-observation throughout all the process, registering the information at diverse moments and from diverse focus, according to we were advancing in the process of understanding and immersion in the complexity of this type of studies. Also, a participant observation occurred during the process of narrative and autobiographical research construction of both students groups of psycho-pedagogy during course 2005/2006. We used observation guides, at the same time that we leaned in a personal daily writing and registries of audio.
- Collective interviews in depth. This was made to the components of both students groups and students of psycho-pedagogy when finalizing their narrative and autobiographical researches.

- Also we have registered in audio conversations carries out in different times with two expert investigators and with our companion with the objective of contrast several aspects of our autobiography and personal daily writing. It has helped us to take distance as a subject of investigation and to analyze us from the perspective as an object of research.
- We have registered in audio diverse common putting with the person with whom we are constructed the study. It has helped us to deep in the meaning of the research process, where the implication that requires it is very strong as much of person who carries out the study as the person that accompanies him.
- Also, we have made interviews in depth to two key informants. One is a person, essentially self-taught, who has elaborated her autobiography, taking this tool to rescue the formative and labour experiential essentially. Actually, this investigator keeps deepen into the formation of narrative autobiographical research. And another one is a professor and investigator from the Faculty of psychology of Mexico (UNAM) who have been organizing factories of life stories for more than twenty years ago.

METHODOLOGY PROCEDURE AND PHASE FORMATIVE AND PHASE NARRATIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH

At the outset this study was only a work of self-knowledge, that later has been taking us to an action research existential process, we are entering him as we have deepened in our autobiography. This type of researches includes dimensions that go beyond the phases of construction/reconstruction/production of savers, but that, register: "the great principles of action characteristic of the situation of self-education, support, acquisition and production of savers: Rupture/Distance; Initiation/Rites of passage; Direction/Self-direction; Autonomy/Heteronomy; Temporality/Decantation" (Melyani, 2004: 1).

This research has not been guided by a unique methodologist procedure, but that have followed several phases, before which we have proceeded in different ways, according to the emergency of the study. We emphasized six phases that now we expose in order. To one of those we denominate X, because it crosses all the process and is the one that talks about to the accompaniment process and the narrative autobiographical research co-construction.

Phase 1: Experience and experimentation of an educative and investigating model where the daily of classroom and the formative and group

process are the axis of a constructive and innovating methodology in the university classroom (Course 1995/1996)

It is the first time in the academic route of life which we could experience a methodology and formation from the complexity, where the daily of the classroom and the group process have a great relevance as taking of conscience of our singularity/identity but also of the socialization. Professor López Górriz raised an education from a conception of the complexity and the research. (See: López Górriz 1997, López Górriz, Jurado Jiménez and Aparcero Martínez, 2006). This experience was the one that took us to the necessity of deepening in this methodology, because we understood that it was fundamental to develop a professionalisation in education.

Phase 2: Initiation in the knowledge, experimentation and construction, of the narrative autobiographical research. Courses of Third University Degree

We divide in two this phase, being two the courses of doctorate (1998-2000) in which we have elaborated our narrative autobiographical researches from different perspectives and with different purposes, although with a common nexus, that it has been made with the same professor with whom we began in the educative and investigating model previously mentioned.

We began to write our autobiography because we needed to find a referring one, a guide before a rupture of psycho-social-mental schemes, was a necessity of self-education, clarification through the search of one more defined figures, characteristics that gave more clarity us, from where we could aim to the change of ourselves, of our attitudes, behaviours and actions.

a) Course of third university degree (1998 – 1999): the life story as a method of action research existential

We worked this methodology from the concept of Action Research Existential that raise López Górriz (1997: 480) taking Barbier: “the action research existential is conceived like an art of clinical rigor developed collectively, in views of the collective adjustment of itself to the world”. The objectives of this first stage were: to approach the Life Story from the collective, like instrument and methodology of action research existential; and to apply the life story to formation situations, research and intervention in social and educative. The methodology that was considered was participative, and it was constructed in collective form from the knowledge. The followed procedure was inductive-deductive, centring us in the research to understand and to interpret; sharing the closing report with other investigating students who also were boarded this methodology, although with other objectives and/or procedures. Also

we contrasted it with the expert person who had oriented us throughout the process. The objective of this putting in common was to share and submit this methodology in a critical analysis, to glimpse new perspectives. As conclusion of this first stage we emphasized that it was clarifying, allowing the initiation in this type of processes, although not enough to appropriate us in depth of the complexity that this type of methods entails, reason cause the product that we obtained from it was left in something "rudimentary", but essential to open other horizons.

b) Course of third university degree (1999 – 2000): qualitative analysis in the introspective research of the story life.

At this second moment, the objectives were centred in going deep in the analysis of qualitative data to approach the story life. That is to say, to know and to apply techniques of analysis in depth, essentially, the introspective research, that through the understanding, locates us in the reality that surrounds us by interrelated form. The methodology was continuity of the previous work, to deepen in the life story elaborated in the phase one, approaching this time from individual form. It was fundamental the accompaniment of the expert investigator. Guiding it us to break preconceptions and to question us, to formulate new questions and reflections from the raised thematic. To be into the process did difficult to understand that it was an emergency and immersion process at the same time. When we retook the story life, we extended this with more data differentiating the previous parts, made in before course, from the later ones. We made an analysis essentially qualitative (descriptive, comparative, relational, argumentative), taking not only the life story, but also other instruments like the rough daily, "that one in which they are putting the ideas and thoughts that are arising from the action, the readings, the experiences, etc." (López Górriz 1997: 480, taking to Barbier 1992). In this phase the process also varied, it was to insist on the analysis and to give answers to a new exposition: to go deep in our life story to discover, to analyze and to understand what individual characteristic had had our formative and labour process.

Phase 3: New knowledge. University cultural interchanges and like an immigrant in Argentina (2000-2002).

The objectives varied considerably with respect to the previous phases, were emerging without being specified nor delimited beforehand: to collect information of a different cultural context from the origin through the autobiography of the investigator and the contrast with other people of different countries in Latin America and different Spanish regions that

were then in the place with a formative and investigating purpose in some of the cases. Other objective was to know and to deepen, through the experience, about the changes and transformations that are unchained in the people when they change of cultural context. The methodology was emerging according to the created necessities and the limitations originated by scheme rupture – reconstruction that entails to be inserted in the context of research and personal development. We were during a time without being able to collect information, and without advancing in the study due the implication that we lived. It was a phase of personal transformation that caused a paralysis of the research work and a great anguish by the remodel that we experienced.

Phase 4: The autobiography like a way of research and self-education for the personal and investigating readjustment in the origin context.

Of this phase we emphasize the union of the investigator to the study object and the difficulty of taking distance from it, necessary to advance. In this sense has been very important the accompaniment of the person with whom we have come forming us in narrative autobiographical research and moreover because there is more of twenty years ago that this professor comes working in these lines of research. She helped us in the constant reformulation, to understand the changes happened, as well as she confronted us to the putting in common with other professional investigators from different contexts that know these thematic and who have a great investigating route.

Phase 5: Accompaniment of two student groups (both male and female) of psycho-pedagogy during the construction of its own project of narrative autobiographical research (2005/2006).

Here we emphasized the change of roll in the research process: from accompanied to the companion. It has been necessary to leave out of “I” and watching ourselves from the “us” and watching towards outside us, the most difficult part in the process. This collection and analysis of data at the same time that we took part helped us to deepen in aspects that are unchained from this type of works: contributes and difficulties occurred, aligid moments that have ready us to the learning, etc. As well as they have helped to contrast and to see us in the distance, because it is not the same understanding at the beginning in these processes that when we come deepening and experiencing them in a long time period.

Phase 6: Contrast of our personal daily writing of life with key informants (2006).

In this phase we have considered ethical questions in this type of research, because it is not easy to find people who could help to portray us autobiographically and who can understand from limited information the evolution produced throughout the time. Also it is important to respect this information, because through it we undressed and we were vulnerable at the same time that other people allows them to deepen in singular but also universal what are in us. For that reason it was very important to extend study with people who also work or have worked at other moments their autobiography and that showed great respect by this type of information, helping to objective us.

Phase X: Accompaniment for the Co-construction in the narrative autobiographical research processes and action research existential.

This research is continuously fed by different accompaniments, although essentially it is a mutual childbirth between us and the person who directs, Co-constructs and accompanies this self-education and research process. She has been the one that have helped us to enter a logic, reflection and meditation that goes deep in most particular of ourselves, but also in the most universal. This has taken us understand something plus the world and our place in it, from a logic that is drawn from the most invisible thing that there is in the people and the relations, forming a whole, a constellation. This understanding requires an accompaniment that lets leave deepest of our being, our necessities not only formatives but also essential and existentialist. This is an accompaniment towards the growth like person, woman, professional, companion, daughter, friend, etc. It is a commitment with the life from freedom of being oneself. This accompaniment hardly can do somebody who has not happened through this process previously. This companion sends us from her experience the challenge of conform ourselves. It supposes pain and use of energy and time. It has been the constant food of a live word, in its maximum expression, re-made from the vital experimentation, from the same life, understood this like a knowledge possibility and constant learning. The same life is an experiment.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

We only specified some conclusions of this research, because although it is in phase very outpost, we still needed to deepen more on them:

- Narrative autobiographical research take us conscience from certain situations, attitudes or behaviours that we want to change, reason cause we entered in an action research existential process.

- Looking for us, poking in our interior, writing on us or find an own writing is not nor has been easy, mainly considering the experiential formative trajectory that have been modelling us and the culture in which we have grown, since this could not be considered a culture with strong root in the existential, on the contrary, it reinforces a refuge in the groups, being created relations very depend, from very vertical positioning. At the same time that the historical, social and economic conditions at the present time not always offer possibilities in this direction.
- This is an educative model significant transforming, that generates a change towards the autonomy and homing of the own project of life.
- This work allows to reconstruct us and to aim towards an internal coherence in our actions.
- Deepen in our autobiography, and understand better the potential that develop this work, has taken us at certain moments to disfigure the meaning of our existence, since to deepen and question the meaning we give our life, has taken to disturb part or great part of the system of norms, values and principles that gave sense our life before beginning this work.
- The accompaniment has been an accompaniment to construct knowledge and not for reproduction it, which implies: “a work on the endogenous processes that constitute the itinerary of the thesis like independent activity, self-creation and making reference to a self-definition process of himself (...)” (Melyani, 2004: 17).
- The accompaniment in the construction of narrative autobiographical research is very expensive and complex, because it requires a delivery, implication and dedication that goes beyond the accompaniment in an academic work, reason because this type of works are gotten to turn isolated processes.
- In order to accompany these processes, it is necessary to unchain a knowledge to make not only cognitive, but formative, clinical, experiential and also investigating, in intimate connection with the internal processes that cross the narrative autobiographical research

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