

Biographical-Narrative Methodologies for Adult Education and Lifelong Learning between Personal Development and Critical Reflection

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I address the use of biographical-narrative methodologies in adult education and lifelong learning, from an interdisciplinary perspective. These methods are set in a critical and emancipatory model of lifelong learning and in an epistemological model based on the co-construction of knowledge from the analysis of personal and social experience oriented by a complex and systemic perspective. Critical and experiential learning is a powerful heuristic concept for confronting adult learning. Within this broad context, the paper explores the description and use of life histories, auto/biographies and narrative tools in both formal and informal adult educational contexts, pointing out its sociological, anthropological and pedagogical implications. Concepts such as collective memory, social change, cultural transmission, cohort generation, family communication, self and identity are explored in relation to personal growth and lifelong learning. Also, I outline some features of a pedagogical model based on an experiential and emotional framework. A central issue of the paper is to deal with transformations lived by adult learners in relation to social, cultural, economic and generational changes, as well as personal itineraries and educational transitions through the life-span course.

Key words : biographical-narrative approaches, adult learning, learning autobiography, life history, historical memory

1 Start Point : On Experiential Learning, Emotional Education and Critical Reflection in Adult Education

Experiential learning and communicative interaction is the base for learning and change. Experiential learning is a notion grounded in John Dewey, David Kolb and Malcolm Knowles, and it supposes, as Fraser explains (1995: 4-23), a challenge to post-school structures and curricula, combining individual development and social change. I think of learner as a subject that knows, without reifying or acritically legitimizing that knowledge. Learning means

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integration of processes. As points out D. Kolb (cit. in Fraser, 1995: 6), “learning and change result from the integration of concrete emotional experiences with cognitive processes: conceptual analysis and understanding”. Through learning, the adult symbolically travels from dependence to autonomy, from passivity to activity, from selfishness to altruism, from self-rejection to self-acceptance, from imitation to originality, from narrow interests to broad interests (Fraser, 1995: 9). In this perspective, sharing autobiographical writings and oral accounts in small groups often promotes support and understanding as participants reflect on their lives, in an informal atmosphere of free exchange.

Traditionally education has been conceived as mere instruction and transmission of objective knowledge. In more recent times, accelerated changes in social context, popular education, transformative learning, educational policies and innovative pedagogical methods have contributed to change that traditional perspective. Nevertheless, education, including some sectors of adult education, has continued to be above all a rationalistic and cognitive process. The affective, emotional and interpersonal dimensions have largely been underestimated. This panorama is congruent with the patriarchal system, based on authority, hierarchy and rationalism (Naranjo, 1993).

According to Steiner (2003: 34), “emotional education consists of three skills: the skill to understand emotions, the skill to express them in a fruitful way, and the skill to listen to everybody and to feel empathy in relation to their emotions”. Self-understanding implies, among other things, “an activity of reminiscence, which involves a contact, through remembering, with the past experience; this retrospective clarification is stimulated by the written and oral expression” (Naranjo, 2004: 185). Emotional education should be pervaded by a critical and emancipatory approach. In the last few years, under the influence of market and efficiency, emotional intelligence –and all what has been derived from this field in relation to education– runs the risk of turning “... in another lubricant of corporate human engineering used to help companies to identify optimistic dreamers and to avoid sad lunatics” (Steiner, 2003: 13).

Besides experiential learning and emotional education, perspectives on critical reflection and emancipation in adult education have been crucial over the last few decades. Paulo Freire speaks in his last book about the critical reflection of practice, a theme that preoccupies him a great deal during his management as Secretary of State for Education of São Paulo, between 1989 and 1991. At that time he developed an ambitious programme of continuing training of educators around the idea of reflection on practice. Before practice, we are first beings of curiosity. “Ingenuous curiosity, which is associated with the knowledge of common sense, is the same as criticising and approximating the cognizable object in an ever more methodically and rigorously way, around epistemological curiosity. The objective of the progressive educational practice consists, precisely, in “the development of critical curiosity, unsatisfied, headstrong” (Freire, 1996: 35-36). For that, we have “to provoke the question (and) critical reflection about the question” (Freire, 1996: 95).

The critical posture, as well, is not verbalism nor activism, but rather a dialectic activity that equally implies theory and practice. The progressive educational practice is not only a question of science and technique; it needs, as well a certain number of “...qualities or virtues, such as amorousness, respect toward others, tolerance, humility, lust for life, openness to novelty, availability to change, persistence in struggle, refusal of fatalism, identification with hope and openness to justice” (Freire, 1996: 136). But together with this almost spiritual vision, we find Freire politicised as always, implacably critical of our time: “Capitalism reaches the maximum

efficiency of its intrinsic evil in globalizing neo-liberalism” (Freire, 1996: 144).

Against this situation, it is precise to strengthen democratic society, social movements and citizens’ participation, against the “...invisible power of alienating domestication that reaches an extraordinary efficiency in what is usually called the bureaucratization of the mind” (Freire, 1996: 128). Democratic society is an ideal that constructs, conquers and recreates day by day.

In this way, critical literacy become a necessary condition to form citizens able to unfold themselves autonomously in democratic society. We must understand this literacy in the widest sense, including the formal educational system within it (from child education to university studies) such as the non-formal and informal educational processes. Literacy is not only related to written language, but also to the multiple codes, signs and messages that such a changing, plural and complex society produces, like the present one.

2 Origin and Development of Life Histories and Biological - Narrative Approaches

Life histories, when conceived from a broad and holistic perspective – that is, the narratives of human beings around lived-out experience, with its various forms, procedures, aims and contexts - are consubstantial to human beings. They thus make up a universal anthropological fact that is present in all the cultures and stages of life in historical evolution (Vansina, 1967). As Pineau and Le Grand indicate (1996: 5-13), life stories are part of the daily experience of intergenerational and intragenerational transmission and of cultural life experiences such as commemorations, collective life histories, personal biographical and autobiographical literature and audiovisual, cinematographic and digital productions.

In the strict sense of a social research technique, life histories and biographical approaches appear in the 20th. century with the Chicago School sociology and the anthropological studies of P. Radin and others. The biographical focus was much used in Anthropology to study aboriginal culture and that of the native tribes of North America (Pujadas, 1992; Langness 1965: 3-18). Some anthropologists began gathering life histories from some chiefs of Indian tribes, facing the imminent perspective of the gradual disappearance of these groups. The major initially dealt with from the biographical perspective in Anthropology were cultural change, relationships between culture and personality, processes of deviation and social marginalization, analysis of roles, values, processes of socialization and cultural description.

After World War II there was a falling off of the interest of anthropologists in biographical studies, within a scientist environment dominated by positivist methods. However, in the 70s, the pioneering work of Oscar Lewis meant the reappearance of interest in biographical focuses. Lewis, rejecting the quantitative method, opted for participative observation and in-depth interviews to gather life histories of poor rural and urban families in Mexico and Puerto Rico. It was a matter of stories of crossed lives and with a polyphonic structure, given that the different family members narrated their life in common, placing their vital, unexpected events in a social and historical context. *The Children of Sanchez*, the most popular book of Lewis (1961), contributes to the legitimizing of a manner of carrying out more holistic, subjective and open Anthropology focused on the intensive study of a family group.

In the field of sociology (Ferrarotti, 1983; Peneff, 1990: 35-68; Plummer, 2001: 103-117), life histories began their life linked to the Chicago School and, specifically, to *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, by Thomas and Znaniecki, published in 5 volumes between 1918 and 1921. These authors considered personal documents as the most suitable sociological

material for research. Using autobiographies, letters and other personal documents, they offered a canonic example of how to carry out sociological research. Thomas and Znaniecki (2004) set out the relationship between what they call the social values (that is, the objective cultural elements of social life) and the attitudes (the subjective characteristics of the social actors). A process of bidirectional influence was produced between the social values and the attitudes. The sociologists of Chicago studied, between 1920 and 1945, urban life, social change, interculturality, gangs, poverty, prostitution, delinquency, violence and other topics from biographical focuses, particularly via the use of autobiography, written by the subject upon the request of the investigator. As took place with Anthropology, Sociology recuperated the methods of life histories from the 70s. The publication in 1959 of *The Sociological Imagination*, by C. W. Mills, was an important element in revitalizing life stories. In this innovative methodological testament, Mills settled scores with the North American academic sociology of the time – abstract empiricism- and denounced its jargon and fascination with figures. Mills claimed the need to place social research at the intersection point between history, social structures and biography.

From the 1970s and 1980s, life histories transcended the realistic and interactionist focuses typical of the first half of the 20th. century and began to become more important, adopting a great variety of forms. In this resurgence of what is biographical, the work of the sociologist D. Bertaux (1981, 1997) was very important. He introduced research into European sociology via life histories. Along with realist and interactionist focuses, more novel approaches started to appear. The crisis of functionalism, structuralism, behaviorism, and, in general, of experimental focuses, favoured the development of various qualitative paradigms: action-research, ethnography, discourse analysis, interactionism, phenomenology and life histories. A new, more subjective, narrative, dialoguing and implicative sensitivity began to permeate social research. At the base of these alternative paradigms we have to place the so-called interpretative, linguistic and narrative shift. In cultural psychology, Bruner (1991) has shown a lively interest in the narrative construction of reality. On the other hand, the influential work of P. Ricoeur (2000) culminated in a profound reflection about human temporality, memory and narrative identity from the perspective of hermeneutic philosophy. With the contributions of C. Geertz, anthropology began to become more postmodern, understanding culture from the perspective of meaning and the interpreting of anthropological theories about their authors. One of his works, dedicated to the anthropologist as author (Geertz, 1989), has brought about an interpretive shift towards the problem related to the authorship of ethnographic texts.

3 Debates on The Interpretive Turn, Memory and Theory

The interpretive turn, according to Bruner, started in the first quarter of the 20th century, first surfacing in literature, then moving on successively to history, sociology, anthropology and epistemology, and eventually reaching the domain of education between the 80s and 90s. Towards the mid-70s meaning became a central element in social sciences. The moment of transition specifically related to the narrative turn (understood as the growing interest in narrative in both research and practice) occurred over the course of the 80s, which, according to Bruner, is when the idea of self as a narrator or a storyteller became more evident (González-Monteagudo, 2011b). This new momentum was reflected in a short space of time in various influential books from different disciplines: oral history (P. Thompson, F. Ferrarotti),

anthropology (C. Geertz), sociology (D. Bertaux, K. Plummer, N. Denzin), philosophy (P. Ricoeur), education (I. Goodson, G. Pineau), and the humanities (D. Polkinghorne). It is interesting to note that all these books were published within a seven-year period, which shows that the ecology of ideas shapes emerging paradigms based on a set of new, shared assumptions across different fields.

These epistemological transformations form part of a broader intellectual movement – the qualitative, narrative and biographical approach. This approach has been characterized by its critical stance vis-à-vis positivism, the broader redefinition of the concept of human sciences, a focus on interpretation and on the construction of meaning, as well as the use of qualitative research methods and techniques, such as the in depth and biographical interviews, participative observation, action research, and life stories. Constructivism, postmodernism and literary studies on their part have influenced the development of these tendencies, and the said approaches have had a major impact on formal education, adult education and lifelong learning.

The recuperating of the past and work around lived-out, individual and collective experiences make up topics that are permanently current, that are reflected daily in the mass media and in the major social debates. Discussions about memory and its historical, political, symbolic and personal function are countless (Ricoeur, 2000; Todorov, 1995; Roberts, 2002: 134-150). Archives and centres to rescue, organize and document the oral and written patrimony that is not the concern of traditional archives abound. The places of memory are an important feature of our period. The recuperating of the historical memory is bringing about the creating of research and documentation centres. In South Africa and in different Latin American countries, truth committees have published horrifying reports that include the detailed enumeration of crimes, torture, raping and other repugnant acts committed or, at least, inspired by the governments and, at times, by groups in the opposition. These reports mean to recuperate the truth of what happened, and at the same time establish the bases for reconciliation, for the difficult forgiveness or forgetting. This social climate saturated with personal and collective memory- so often impeded, manipulated, and abusively carried out – is one of the definitive features of our historical moment (Ricoeur, 2000: 67-163; Todorov, 1995).

The recuperating of the historical memory starts out normally from an associative, restless and rebellious weave that promotes collective work and the building of knowledge from situations, problems and life experiences of great social and personal meaning. These initiatives, linked to social movements and to popular education, tend to be structured in the form of collective life histories (Coulon & Le Grand, 2000; Brun, 2001; Gaulejac & Legrand, 2008). Among the productions carried out, we find collective books, leaflets, artistic exhibitions, debates, plays, videos, audiovisual installations and web pages. Among the topics worked on one must mention the recuperating of the past, the situation of women, traditions, festivities, the world of work, and traumatic situations linked with wars, prisons and conflicts. The importance of the life histories of political militants, trade unionists, immigrants, the social marginalized, workers and women stand out for their powerful evocative strength. In this area of social testimony, we find the best examples of democratic and horizontal collaboration between academics and social actors (Beverley, 2000). Here we also find the best samples of the democratizing potential of the biographic-narrative genre and its inescapable ethical and political character.

The pedagogies that can already be labelled biographical and narrative can help us in this task (González-Montegudo, 2008, 2011b). Biographical research and narrative approaches are providing interesting contributions to the construction of a renewed educational and cultural

theory, which is shaping up to be more culturalist, contextual and dialogical than traditional education theory has been. I will point out some of the debates that I consider most relevant and on which we need to work over the coming years:

- The criteria for interpreting and analyzing narratives, particularly problematic in the case of autobiographical stories.
- The role of social actors and participants who function as collaborators in forming interpretations and analyses. This topic is highly relevant in the educational domain. The way in which this challenge is taken on denotes a dividing line between research and practice in education undertaken from narrative approaches. The francophone approach in *Histoires de vie en formation*, for example, defends a co-interpretation model, or in other words, an active collaboration between professionals and social actors, both in research and education (González-Monteagudo, 2008).
- The danger of reifying and essentializing narratives, considering them as objective data, and upholding traditional conceptions of self.
- The need to work across different disciplines using different approaches should not cause us to lose sight of the relationships that exist between the micro and the macro level, agentivity and structure, and the individual and the group. To me the search for relationships between levels and perspectives or different outlooks seems urgent.
- In this context, the approaches of narrative psychology can benefit from sociological contributions. To give an example of what I want to say here, I am thinking of M. Weber and his reflections on power, legitimacy and coercion. This can help us limit the voluntarism and the idealism of some viewpoints on social actors as the exclusive constructors of their own worlds.
- This in turn takes us to the issue of axiological and ideological neutrality of research in social sciences. I think there is a need to develop a more socially and politically situated outlook with regards to our narrative and biographical projects. The critical discussion on the political and economic uses of storytelling in which Salmon (2010) engaged in represents a good starting point for future reflection.
- The diversity of our linguistic, national and disciplinary contexts creates an objective difficulty for collaboration. We should be more sensitive to and conscious of these issues to find the best way to handle them in this increasingly interrelated and globalized world.
- Finally, we come across two dilemmas. The first one is between description and theorization. The second one is between what we can call basic research and intervention or practice in domains such as education, communication, conflict, social work, health and others. We will need to reflect more on the collaboration between the different approaches and subfields related to narratives and biographical studies.

4 Life History in Adult Education Fields - Contributions from French Context

Autobiographical methods have been used in education from the beginning of the eighties of the past century. From a biographical viewpoint, subjects such as students, teachers, curriculum, adult learning, educational innovation, leadership, school time and space and so have been studied. Research on educators and teachers is an important area, focused on everyday life, learning of profession, cycles of teaching career, teacher thinking, attitudes on educational

change, curriculum development, in-service training and professional development (Bolívar, Domingo & Fernández 2001; González-Monteaudo, 1996; Goodson & Sikes, 2001). In the Anglo-Saxon educational setting, the first applications of biographical methods are related to pre-service and in-service teacher education and teacher development.

The starting point of the use of life histories in education in the French-speaking context is related to Gaston Pineau, author strongly interested in life histories as an instrument of experiential learning of adults. With other educators interested in this approach (such as P. Dominicé, G. de Villers, G. Bonvalot, B. Courtois, C. Josso, J.-L. Le Grand), Pineau has animated the network ASIHVIF (Association Internationale des Histoires de Vie en Formation) for more than 20 years. This group, based in Paris (France), is very interested in adult education, self-directed learning and lifelong learning focused on auto/biographical work from an existential, qualitative and radical viewpoint (Coulon & Le Grand, 2000; Dominicé, 2000; Lainé, 1998; Pineau & Le Grand, 1996). In the last few years, attention to auto/biographical methods in education has also been devoted in Italy, with contributions by D. Demetrio (2003) and L. Formenti (1998, 2002), among others.

Adult educators have found in life histories a methodology for both learning and researching, with a strong potential to foster a situated and democratic learning. In the last 25 years, this approach has been used in very different contexts: writing workshops, higher education, associations, youth groups, women groups, immigrants and ethnic minorities, recognition and accrediting prior learning, workers, adult learners, educators, social workers, and so on. In 1983 G. Pineau published, in collaboration with Marie-Michèle, *Produire sa vie. Autoformation et autobiographie* (Pineau & Marie-Michèle, 1983), a stimulating and innovative book, authentic starting point of life histories in adult education. Pineau works the concepts of self-directed learning and life history, so far conceived as not related fields, and explains the need for developing the education of adults from the use of life histories as an instrument of research and teaching. This approach has important implications for the change of roles of researcher, educator, and adult learner, aimed to the criticism of hierarchical models. Criticising subjectivism, individualism and liberalism, Pineau points out self-directed learning as appropriation of the own education by the adult, within a democratic, experiential, critical and liberatory perspective. It is necessary to talk and write on the own life. The autobiography, until now a privilege of the learned elites, should become democratic and accessible to people. Life history is not only a method of knowledge but also of social action, within a militant and engaged approach.

Life histories, according to ASIHVIF, try to enhance the power of action of the person on himself/herself and on the environment, associating him/her to the construction of produced knowledge. The models of research and intervention are qualitative, transdisciplinary and collaborative. It is unequivocally rejected the gap among disciplines and the collaboration among educators, researchers and learners is promoted in all phases of the process.

To exemplify how life histories are worked within this group –and without forgetting the variety of theoretical and methodological approaches employed by the members of ASIHVIF– we are presenting the works by P. Dominicé (2000, 2002), undertaken in Geneva, with students in the Faculty of Sciences of Education and with adult educators in a non-university context. The activity consists of a voluntary seminar focused on educational biography carried out in a weekly session during two university semesters. The aim is to work the own educational biography, from orality and writing, mixing together individual and group work. Students prepare a first oral narrative, presented before their group and subsequently discussed.

Then, students write their educational biography, based on the oral narrative, group discussions and written notes taken during the teaching sessions. To foster participation, implication and construction of meaning by the group, each student is asked to read, interpret and orally comment the biography of one of his/her classmates. Finally, the process is evaluated through a writing report by each student in which it is specified the knowledge produced through the process from the personal, procedural and cognitive dimensions.

Dominicé (2000) comments that firstly he tried to use life histories as a strategy for researching adult learning, but he was soon shocked by the educational possibilities of biographical work, starting its use with students. Dominicé also points out the adult learners get fascinated with this methodology that deals with the history of personal life from a holistic outlook. Educational biography provides a very intense sense of immediacy, dynamism, cooperation, subjectivity and implication. It is also a very motivating activity for promoting writing and discussing on production, communication and applicability of knowledge. During the learning process storytellers keep the control on the process and the product of the activity. Theory and practice are related reciprocally. Researchers, educators and adult learners establish, from lived experience, a democratic, horizontal and existential relationship. People play a leading role in their education. As he writes, “we are not educated until we can give meaning to our education –in some ways we are not educated until we can educate ourselves” (Dominicé, 2000: 80).

4.1 New Roles for Educators with Biographical Focus

The gradual development of the autobiographical didactics and the pedagogy of memory brought Demetrio (2003: 96-98) to an attempt to systematize the autobiographical skills of educators, beginning with the distinction of the different specialists who operate in this field: (a) the autobiographical trainer, that promotes the writing of life history with introspective or creative intentions, with highly motivated subjects with an average or high level of education; (b) the autobiographical counsellor, collaborator of a trainer and who offers tutorial and technical support; (c) the non-formal autobiographical educator, which intervenes in extracurricular, intercultural and intergenerational contexts, as a facilitator of experiences aimed at a wider audience, generally with low educational level; (d) the autobiographical teacher, usually working in infant, primary or secondary schools, who practices the autobiography to create conducive narrative climates in the classroom. In addition, other specialists, in guidance or the expert in skills validation and recognition of prior learning, are used to utilising biographical methods in their social and educational work.

5 Biographical Tools for Adult Education, Lifelong Learning and Social Pedagogy

The following table, adapted and shortened from Formenti (1998: 159-160), is reproduced to show the variety of techniques used in autobiographical learning.

Table 1. Instruments of autobiographical work

Instruments of individual work (spontaneous or with precise instructions)
personal journal (daily, nocturnal, of fixed periodicity, occasional) production of a thematic text production of a creative/expressive text search for material testimonies (family photographs, letters, songs, poems, objects) creation of “complex objects”, with simultaneous use of several languages (living sculptures...) instruments of pencil and paper (questionnaires, chronological profiles)
Instruments of work face to face (with and without observers)
open interview (for example, “Tell me your life”) in depth interview projective methods (use of images, sounds, symbols) critic-clinic method (psycho cognitive inquiry on the ideational process) back-talking method (restitution by the interviewer)
Instruments of collective work
oral discussion based on documents (produced with the instruments mentioned above) discussion on biographical subjects auto presentation before the group (oral, written, mixed) work of group with observers collective use of projective materials and evocative methods (with discussion) mixed and crossed techniques (from couple to group, from individual to group, and vice versa).

(Adapted and shortened from: Formenti, 1998: 159-160)

The training with the approaches of life histories unfold different dimensions: orality, writing, theatrical and bodily expression, artistic creation with specific materials or instruments. I list and describe briefly a few biographical tools. These techniques have been mainly used in adult education and only recently have been adapted and used in social pedagogy, social inclusion and intercultural contexts. I stress the potential benefits of autobiography as an experiential training approach, supported by writing, group oral exchanges and the links between evocation of the past and the collective domains of family socialization, peer groups and learning milieus (Formenti, 2016).

5.1 Autobiography focused on learning, education, culture, transitions or turning points

The educational autobiography is an instrument of training and research whose use in the context of adult education and higher education has proven to be an interesting contribution in terms of self-knowledge, reflexivity and personal development, through an integration of the cognitive and affective dimensions of learning. The objectives proposed for the educational autobiography are to: (a) develop personal self-knowledge; (b) promote the ability to analyse and criticise the various daily frameworks (family, school, media, religious and spiritual groups, cultural diversity, peer group and friends, leisure and free time, work); (c) relate the personal biography, the family and local context, and the global social and cultural environment; (d) promote the learner personal involvement in the learning process; (e) assist in the reflective review of personal difficulties, by creating resources to better manage conflicts and problems in daily life.

The approach of the educational autobiography consists in writing a text based on a thematic guide. The elaboration of the autobiographical document is accompanied by the different biographical activities, developed during the group sessions, focused on oral and written exercises, promoting the involvement and sharing of experiences and knowledge produced. The targeted issues, always with flexibility and freedom of approach and content, concern: genealogy and family tree; the family group and its socio-psycho-pedagogical dynamics; the local, community and cultural context; the biographical chart of the personal, educational and social pathways; the personal escutcheon; the narratives of formal and non-formal learning. One of the transversal dimensions worked concerns culture, cultural diversity and social change, especially in relation to generational transformations.

The autobiography has a final part of an interpretative reflection that allows a comprehensive look at the approach developed as well as the establishment of relationships between the different content worked, to favour a personal and narrative articulation (for example, temporally, in relation to the past, present and future; or in terms of the learning frameworks, such as the family, the school, the media, the peer group and others). It is a matter of building meaning from the experience lived and told. This implies the reflection on personal identity and its relationship with individual, interpersonal and sociocultural history.

The educational autobiography carried out by international students (Erasmus, language learners, educational exchanges) is a very rewarding process. We underline the difficulty of developing the autobiography while we are abroad, without having access to the sources of personal documentation, to everyday objects, to relatives. It is a demanding, difficult and even confrontational exercise. The reflection on the own course, made in a place far from the usual references, sometimes written in a language which is not that of the autobiographer, implies an additional effort from the participants. The experience of a different context and culture requires a stronger lucidity.

5.2 Language biography and biographical support for the learning of a foreign language

The strangeness of mobility and the reconstruction of identity linked to the learning of foreign languages promotes the application of biographical approaches in this field, navigating between intercultural dimensions and development of multilingualism (Molinié 2003, 2006, 2009). The European Language Portfolio (ELP) proposes a working approach focused on a language passport, a dossier and a language biography, describing in detail "the knowledge acquired in

specific languages, but also during experiences such as visits, exchanges or other professional experiences abroad" (Dobson, cit. in Molinié, 2009: 116).

"A biographical accompaniment to the acquisition of French [and other languages] thus introduces a significant change in the relationship usually built around the languages-cultures ... the biographical facts are also reflexive practices that both question and clarify the stakes of these learning ... This is aimed at that everyone can develop an imaginary making possible the various components of his or her displacement and mobility are freely organized: a new relationship to time, space, languages, education and existence (Molinié, 2009: 124).

5.3 Genealogy and Family

The biographical work on the family begins with the exploration of family roots. The analysis of family genealogy makes it possible to situate personal history in a broader context. Two dimensions of analysis are proposed. A dimension refers to the social and cultural evolution of the last generations. The diachronic and synchronic comparison is an important feature of this approach, focusing on the search for differences in several dimensions: generational, social, economic, cultural, axiological and educational. Secondly, the analytical dimension refers to the context of the autobiographer through evocation based on the oral and written narratives of the lived experience (Formenti, 2002). Genealogical work is a good way of knowing more about culture, education and identity, understood both as a process and as a product of intergenerational transmission and dialogue (Jeong & Yi 2017).

The family tree consists of a graphical representation of familial roots, with information from the paternal and maternal background, placed in their economic and sociocultural context (places of birth and residence, important dates, economy and occupations, beliefs and ideologies, learning and training, culture, personal and family evolution, crises and pivotal moments). The analysis of the family group begins with the material elements of the housing and it also includes the symbolic and axiological levels that configure the family system and the complex relationships between the different members of the system, with special attention to generational and gender differences, family re-composition and family change.

5.4 Lifeline

The life line is a chronological representation of the main events of a person's life, throughout a temporal axis that develops between the birth and the present moment (Bolívar, Domingo & Fernández, 2001). The Life Line offers a first map of the personal itinerary, organized around the family, school, local community and other broader sociocultural frameworks (Pineau, 2000).

5.5 Escutcheon

The escutcheon or blazon is a symbolic representation of personal identity, centered around four elements: (a) An important memory of childhood; (b) A desire for the future; (c) Recreational activity and (d) a quality of oneself. The escutcheon promotes the work on the personal imaginary by the graphic expression and the freedom with which one works on the identity. It is easy to adapt the personal escutcheon to reflect on the cultural dimensions, proposing the realization, individually or in groups, of a escutcheon that reflects the cultures of

the participants in the activity (Galvani, 1997; Mitchell, Weber & O'Reilly-Scandon, 2005).

5.6 The Narratives of Formal and Informal Learning Experiences

The stories take place between the birth (with the help of the relatives) and the present moment. We do a chronological and thematic work, with a view to offering a narrative about the most significant agents and content of informal e-learning. The comparative look allows to highlight different frames, time periods and educational actors (Dominicé, 2002; Demetrio, 2003).

5.7 Biographical Work with Objects

It is possible to work on biographical objects by asking the adults or young in training to choose five important or significant objects of their life, past or present, according to the personal criteria, with total freedom. After having chosen the objects and exchanged orally in groups, the learners are asked to write a few lines in relation to each selected object, emphasizing the reasons of the choice, the importance of the object, the meaning of the object and the potential relation of the object with times, values, symbols and persons concerned. Things can be a pertinent way to access the biographical complexity. It is a biographical work anchored in material life, not only in the world of ideas and feelings. It is the culture and cultural identities that can be explored with objects, since to evoke the objects is also to evoke the actions and the human activities in their unlimited variety and meaning (for example, the book, as a chosen object, invokes the reading and the complexity of this activity).

The concept of culture connects directly with the human world of objects and with the use of things through material practices of the production cycle and consumption. But culture consists of material practices as well as symbols, values and beliefs. This symbolic, cognitive and mental dimension of culture is well reflected in the learners' comments on their choices and the complex motivations to select a few objects among hundreds of possibilities. We inhabit a world of objects characterizing our daily lives. Even if they possess an instrumental function, they are always symbolically and emotionally invested by human beings. We cannot avoid producing meaning by interacting with things. It must be stressed that this sense is not only an individual production but that meaning-making is developed within a cultural framework, mediated by socially and linguistically shared activities.

5.8 Songs and Music

Participants make a personal selection (also there may be a more cultural or local choice) of songs and favourite music throughout their lives. The commentary on the lyrics of the songs, and the symbols, experiences or moments lived offers an authentic openness to the personal and cultural domains (Lani-Bayle, 2006).

5.9 Photobiographies and Photolanguages

The photographs are decisive documents in the autobiographies. Digital technology facilitates the task of revising, ordering and reproducing images. The comments of the photographs written by the autobiographers develop the observation and description abilities while

connecting in a natural way the different moments of the life course.

5.10 Narrative-Theatre

The narrative-theatre, designed and adapted in Germany by D. Feldhendler (2003, 2005) from the playback theatre founded by Jonathan Fox, it is an approach of creative expression and pedagogical innovation used in community development, adult education, language teaching, international exchanges, research-action-training projects, initial training of students and the continuing training of teachers, trainers and animators. The narrative-theatre integrates listening, understanding, expression, action, interaction, feedback and sharing. With the narrative-theatre one makes the scenic representation of the fragments of life (experiences as a learner, community problems, cultural and intercultural experiences).

From a more general point of view, this author proposes the exploration, written and theatrical, of the following questions related to the experience of modern human mobility: leaving the homeland, travelling and arriving alone, living abroad, being well or poorly received, apprehending cultural identity, oral tradition in the culture of origin, the role and position of man and woman in the culture of origin, to live the recognition and respect of the other, to tell his or her intercultural history from his own name. "The theatrical representation... promotes the expression and perception of underlying feelings, of the unspoken, of implicit cultural issue. It also raises awareness of the different management of space-time, related to proxemics and polychronie. The expression of the ambiguity and affective polarities as well as conflicting moments opens intercultural work to other perspectives (Feldhendler, 2005: 109).

5.11 Masques

Making masks and wearing them has to do with cultural knowledge and craft techniques. The masks help to develop the autobiographical and cross-cultural consciousness and thus constitute a true intercultural learning (O. Lüdeman, in Formenti, 2004: 1-28).

6 Educational Autobiography : A Tool for Experiential Learning and Reflexivity

To write one's own autobiography is something surprising and pleasant. It also tends to be, paradoxically, a difficult task that is experienced with fear, anxiety and a worrying uncertainty. The narrator is faced with the writing of his own life, which is a task that is undertaken almost always for the first time, without previous experiences or attempts. Personal writing is not easy and sparks off an unavoidable existential questioning that breaks with the sureness and conventions of one's own existence. The initial attitudes connected with autobiographical writing vary a great deal from one person to another. The framework within which the task is carried also has an influence. The autobiographer imposes on himself some limitations connected with, for example, the potential readers of the personal narrative, especially in institutional contexts (training, work reintegration, validation of skills, etc.). In the end, the result is positively valued, as the narrator perceives that he has un-covered himself, that he has explored forgotten or unknown territories, that he has achieved a new and more complete understanding of himself, that he has comprehended the powerful influences of families,

communities and cultures on his history and his person better. Narrators usually conclude their task valuing the written narrative as a legacy, worthy of being transmitted to those close to them, even to their future children. In other cases, they mention the unfinished nature of the autobiography and make resolutions to continue writing in the future. They speak of the need to study it in depth, of not having enough time to produce a more complete story, one with a greater dedication and without urgency and the tasks of university studies. In my experience in recent years, my attention has been strongly drawn to the power of writing as a tool of self-knowledge, exploration, training, awareness, empathy and conflict-solving. Moreover, one must consider that it is a question of a low-cost tool -indeed free-, that is easy to use, adaptable to very different contexts and that can be carried out under supervision or autonomously, in a face-to-face way, but also at distance or using new technologies. It is a tool that makes a person matures and favours a better understanding of others.

Autobiography makes it possible to explore the past and the present of the autobiographer in the framework of the family, of the local community and the widest institutional and sociocultural contexts. As a training instrument, autobiography favours: self-knowledge, the ability to analyze the past; the setting up of connections between the experience lived, the present and future projects; and the identification of the most important factors that condition the personal and educational evolution of the autobiographers.

My proposal of educational autobiography has a guided approach. Having to develop my courses with a great number of students and not having assistants, I have created this version of autobiography to make the development of the activity during a semester possible (15 weeks of classes). Working during the semester in parallel with four groups of students (of about 60 students per group), and having to encourage experience by themselves, I have given great importance to written orientations. I have aimed to combine group sessions, centred on oral work, with the students' autonomous work which consists of developing the educational, family and social life story. At the end of the process, each student will have produced two written documents: an autobiographical story and an analysis of this story (Delory-Momberger , 2003; Demetrio, 2003; Dominicé, 2000 & 2002; Formenti, 1998 & 2002; Lainé, 1998; Pineau 2000; Pineau & Le Grand 1996; West, 1996).

It seems important to me to point out that when we work with autobiographical approaches in training activities that are obligatory for the students, it is necessary to offer other work alternatives, so that the student or the adult in training always has the option to decide if he wishes or not to involve himself in the writing of his own autobiography. This seems to me to be a reasonable solution, halfway between these two extreme stances: on the one hand, to limit autobiographical experiences to seminars and freely-chosen courses; on the other hand, to prevent students from feeling obligated to involve themselves in a training experience with a deep personal and affective dimension. This is part of the ethical problem of life stories in training. It is also important to guarantee privacy, anonymity and the right of authorship, which excludes using stories without the approval of the authors.

Educational autobiography is a suitable instrument to explore the deep roots of learning carried out throughout life. The genealogical tree, the analysis of the family group, the commentary on the local environment, the lifeline, the personal shield or coat of arms and the learning narratives in different contexts (family and couple, school, peer groups, associations, information and communication technologies, leisure, the world of work) are some of the questions proposed as storylines of the written autobiography. These themes are offered as

work possibilities and never as points that must be tackled.

Despite the university institutional framework, the experience of autobiography has, I believe, known how to preserve the spontaneity, creativity and freedom inherent to profound and experiential training activities, those that make progress in self-knowledge and the development of those taking part possible. In this sense, autobiography has a very open format and I believe that this is an important reason for the richness and strength of this training activity. Autobiography helps students to explicitly state their personal models and paradigms connected with culture, knowledge, representations, interpersonal relationships and educational values.

The trainer or educator takes on various roles: a) the facilitating of clear guidelines to carry out the activity, from its own voluntary nature, to guarantee that the activity be a joyful experience of creative work, intellectual autonomy and profound affective experience; b) the motivating of the desire to search and research, aimed at recuperating evidence, experience and feelings, in dialogue with the family, mentors, friends and educators; c) the accompanying of the process of writing and the facilitating of strategies to unblock difficulties and encourage progress; and d) the reduction and relief of anxiety and unease that some students experience, who refuse to abandon the activity in spite of the difficulty that they experience. The educator is the guarantor of what is secret and confidential. The students must also respect this when they carry out oral exchange sessions or when the students exchange their autobiographies to read them. By its aims, methodology, context and contents, educational autobiography is a training activity and cannot be conceived either as psychological aid or as psychotherapy. However, it can have, and in fact in many cases this does happen, a therapeutic effect, connected with the redefining of some events of the past and the achievement of a more integrated and mature perspective of personal evolution. We also aspire to favour the classic aims of psychoanalysis, such as P. Ricoeur describes them: "... to substitute fragments of histories that are at the same time unintelligible and unbearable with a coherent and acceptable history" (Ricoeur, 1985: 444).

7 From Subjective Narratives to Historical and Sociocultural Analysis

The analyses of biographical and narrative documents tend to be especially concerned with exploring the dialectic between personal dimensions and social structures. In this context, we find in different authors a common interest in explaining and understanding the dynamics that link subjectivity with society and culture. The differences between structure and agency (Giddens), system and actor (Touraine), and field and habitus (Bourdieu), formulated from different theoretical and methodological platforms all, however, go in the same explanatory direction. Bertaux (1997) has shown a special interest in the study of intersubjective relationships in the framework of groups, associations, institutions and intermediate level environments (family and interpersonal relationships, school and adult training experience, professional integration and employment). This is where the deep connections between individual subjectivity and global social structures can be grasped, such as the social class, gender relationships, generation and ethnicity. Bertaux (1997) also points out the importance of comparing the different stories gathered via a process of saturation which will indicate to us the moment at which the new information gathered or analysed does not add a significant value to the information already analysed.

In recent years, there has been a good deal of development in the field of the study of the

family and family member and generational relationships, from a sociological, cultural and historical perspective. The study of the common experiences of different cohorts and of demographical patterns is being carried out via the analysis of open interviews and other personal documents. This analysis is suitable for setting up typologies. These make it possible to work in a comparative manner with different cases and contexts. Analysis involves the transition from the subjective and experiential story to the socio-cultural commentary. This allows the narratives (individual, fragmentary, subjective, partial) to be placed in a broader socio-structural framework (nature, territory, culture, social class, gender, social change, general transmission, peer group, crisis of traditional life-styles).

The intense personal involvement favoured by group sessions centred on orality promotes an appropriation of experience. This appropriation is worked specifically in the final phases of the activity when requesting students to re-read the autobiographical text produced and to undertake the difficult work of submitting it to a critical analysis. The students gradually discover that they are not only able to write their life stories – a question that many doubted when beginning the experience – but also, furthermore, they can become hermeneutist of their own writing and, consequently, of their own lives. The transition between the autobiographical story and the written analysis marks the genuine formative moment of the autobiography.

The analysis of the autobiography has a basically socio-cultural approach, although the student can decide the content and the approaches of his analysis. The aim of the analysis is for the student to place his biographical path in the framework of its genealogical and family context, of its local community and of its broader socio-cultural structure. The students place their own story better, this being understood as their personal itinerary and as a development that can only be clearly understood in the context of broader family, educational, historical and socio-cultural contexts. I believe that this effort of understanding the relationships between the individual development and the contexts of development promotes the construction of a theory by the students.

This theorizing, which turns out to be very inconsistent, based on the capacities of the different students, aims to contribute to the most difficult problem that this activity displays. I am referring to the construction of a personal theory that sheds light on the relationships between the personal biography, the contexts of the development of the intermediate level (the family, the school and the community environment) and broader socio-cultural areas. In the intersection of these three vertices (biography as a micro-level; close contexts as an intermediate level; and global contexts as a macro-level) is to be found the most decisive formative and reflexive principle of educational autobiography. The theorizing that is attempted is backed by the group debates, the carrying out of biographical activities in small groups, the search for relationships between worked out readings and the autobiographical story, the autonomous search for documentation and the analytical and reflexive writing.

Autobiography trains skills of observation, research and documentation. Gathering biographical material and documents is an exciting task whose limits are those that the students themselves set out. The micro-interviews carried out with family members and close educators start off as brief, simple and motivating research. This is an important methodological dimension of the activity. The students become more mature gathering, organizing and analysing biographical material. The experiential initiation carried out with this field work in the family and local area increases interest and understanding about ethical questions (privacy, respect for the informers, the dynamic of secrets, trust in the testimonies), the work procedures (instrument design, data gathering problems, technique and data triangulation) and the hermeneutic

problems derived from the analysis of the experience lived out (the involvement of the student who researches and documents, the diversity of perspectives, the difficulties of writing life stories, the variety of audiences of the stories produced, the usefulness of analysis for constructing a personal educational theory). For these reasons, autobiography is an easy path to provoke the debate about culture, education, new technologies, personal and collective identity, values, and pedagogical contents and methods.

Autobiographical narratives have implications for both research and training. As a research instrument, written narrations offer first-hand biographical materials about recent history, society, culture, the family and education. These materials make it possible to approach historical and socio-cultural questions from the subjective and experiential perspective of the subjects.

As a training instrument, autobiographical narrations favour the production and appropriation of knowledge, make the learning of basic techniques of qualitative research easier, allow the applying of disciplinary knowledge in social and close personal contexts, and have a great motivating strength. Due to all this, life stories are useful for the creation of motivating learning contexts, centred on the lives of students and favouring an integrating education of cognitive, emotional and social dimensions. These methods have much to contribute to teaching in matters of social sciences such as cultural anthropology, cultural studies, sociology, pedagogy, psychology, social work and communication.

Life histories help the exploration of personal and family world from a free and subjective perspective, within an interpersonal framework, facing the subject to his/her conflicts and favouring a positive resolution to conflicts, in the perspective of what Ricoeur (2000) has called a happy remembering. Auto/biographical methods are a way to access to experiential, subjective, affective and reminiscent pedagogical work. Personal narratives help the expression of feelings, and at the same time they sensitize people to the feelings of each other's, increasing empathy and tolerance. Life histories contribute to the production of grounded, experiential and dialectic knowledge, derived from the ongoing interplay among theory, research, learning process, and personal and group experience (Pineau & Marie-Michèle, 1983; Pineau & Le Grand, 1996; Dominicé, 2000).

8 Final Reflections : Life Course and Adult Education in Current Societies

The sociologist Peter Alheit analyses the changing nature of work, knowledge and technology in the societies of late modernity, linking biographical work to adult learning. The life course is becoming progressively complicated. In the face of these changes educational institutions are dysfunctional. As a result, adults lose their motivation and take refuge in a purely instrumental vision of learning. The dialectic between structure and subjectivity, which Alheit (1995) theorizes from the concept of Bourdieu's habitus, implies accepting that our autonomy of action and planning is subordinate to structural processes. Alheit has highlighted the importance of crises and biographical transitions. Currently, knowledge has a transitional character, and can only be genuine knowledge if it involves a biographical work. Biografizität (Biograficity), i.e., learning and biographical knowledge, mean that we can redesign our lives within specific contexts, which are also designable and configurable. The real challenge of an emancipatory adult education is to provide autobiographical training, that is, to discover the biographical opportunities to be more autonomous. The organization of biographically oriented learning

processes must be communitarian, focused on the vital world of learners and based on genuine projects, interests and motivations.

Changes in recent decades have dramatically altered the field of adult education. The conceptions about adult life have been rethought from their foundation. The training has gained a greater role than in previous historical stages. The experience and the biography should be inescapable starting points of the education of the young and adults, including citizenship, personal and labour dimensions (Boutinet, 1998; Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 2001; Field, 2000). In the age of globalization and ICT, personal itineraries, group affiliations and learning processes are built in a different way from that of previous eras. Breaking the tradition, reflexivity, individualization, uncertainty, risk, discontinuity and accelerated socio-economic change include new personal, family, professional, cultural, educational, temporal, leisure and consumer settings. "This complex society corresponds to an infinitely more open and diversified biographical offer, but also less hierarchical and coherent than that which proposed more stable and more centralized societies" (Delory-Momberger, 2003: 129-130).

In the new globalized, postmodern and changing contexts, life histories and narratives -as multiform practices of research, training, social intervention, historical testimony and identity building- aspire to deepen an integrative and complex way of working to make more viable the development of personal autonomy, tolerant coexistence and social participation. Or said in other words, to make possible the moment of critique and conscience proposed by Gramsci, that implies "to elaborate the conception of the world consciously and critically ..., to participate actively in the production of the history of the world, to be guide of oneself and not to accept passively that our personality is formed from outside" (Gramsci, 1978: 12). Biographical-narrative approaches, whether in research, training or social intervention, are aimed at linking the past, the present and the future, in a projective perspective. In this way, autobiographical approaches and life history methodologies can bring new sap to better develop the utopia of cosmopolitan, tolerant and cohesive learning environments, combining humanism and democracy with training for actual life and work.

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