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**GENEALOGICAL FAMILY TREE, INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION AND AUTO/BIOGRAPHY. CULTURE, EDUCATION, AND IDENTITY.**

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**INTRODUCTION**

This paper arises from some educational activities biographically oriented that I have been developing with undergraduate students, master students and intercultural educators during the last few years (for an overview, see González Monteagudo, 2006a; previously as a paper, presented at the conference of Life History and Biography Network, Anghiari, Italy, 2005).

In the last few years, more attention has been paid to the family stories by anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, oral historians and educators (for an overview, see: Miller, 2000; Formenti, 2002; Thompson, 2000). Generations and generational differences, genealogical charts, social and occupational mobility, diachronic analysis of divergent types of family, family narratives, and aging, are some of the subjects dealt with by these scholars. According to Miller (2000, 10-18), there are three approaches in biographical research on family: realist, neo-positivist, and narrative. This paper is situated within the narrative approach, with a specific focus on educational uses of family narratives.

In this paper I address the use of auto/biographical methodology in adult education and higher education for working from an educational viewpoint on family roots and family. From my perspective, this use of family life stories is set in a critical and emancipatory model of lifelong learning and a epistemological model based on the co-construction of knowledge from the analysis of personal and social experience oriented by a complex and systemic perspective (see Freire, 1970; Gelpi, 2005; Fraser, 1995). For me, critical and experiential learning is a powerful heuristic concept for confronting adult learning. The paper explores some topics relevant to genealogical and generational questions, 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.

## **FAMILY, STORY, INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION AND IDENTITY**

It is difficult to think about self or identity independently of family story and setting. “Family stories seem to persist in importance even when people think of themselves individually, without regard to their familial roles. The particular human chain we’re part of is central to our individual identity” (E. Stone, cit. in Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, 420). But it is true that individual and family stories are enmeshed in a complex network of larger stories we live within, such as stories related to community, creed, culture, class, nation, politics, and ethnicity (Kenyon & Randall, 1997, 85-89). Family story is a point of intersection between personal and social story. “The personal experience of autobiographical memory is organized through socially shared resources. We draw on cultural meanings and language to shape our memories and to provide a framework for remembering” (Coffey, 1999, 127).

From a relational and systemic perspective, Laura Formenti writes that “family memory may be understood as a specific way of knowledge, almost imprinted in our bodies and consciences, used for giving shape and meaning as well as for explaining and sometimes legitimize our self and social identity... Family stories co-create reality and identity of family system and of its members” (Formenti, 2002, 38-39). Collective memories are the expression of a common family identity. Family is a network of social support and a setting of intergenerational encounter where the adults broaden their vital horizons making a bridge toward past (the grandparents’ generation) and future (the children’s generation) (Palacios y Rodrigo, 1998, 35). Traditionally, family stories have belonged to the women sphere (Kenyon & Randall, 1997, 7), even though social change in the last few decades is changing this traditional role of women within family structure.

Family memory has three main functions, according to A. Muxel (cit. in: Gaulejac, 1999; 151-153; Formenti, 2002, 56-59; Castaignos-Leblond, 2001, 170): (1) a function of transmission, mobilising the memory for setting the person’s story within the genealogical and symbolic bonds of family lineage as a whole, within which self-recognition is feasible. This is the genealogical register related with filiation; (2) a function of reviviscence, through the affective, emotional elaboration of past experiences. This is the affective register, shaped by the network of intimate relationships; and (3) a function of reflection through the critical assessment of personal development, linking past, present and possibilities for the future. This is the narrative register, enabling to distance from social and affective influences.

The concept of generation is crucial for understanding the work with family stories within a complex frame characterised by a strong emphasis on structural dimensions related to society, culture and history. Miller (2000, 29-30) distinguishes two meanings of generation. Generation is made up of an individual and his / her siblings; in this sense, generation is concerned with socialization, the transmission of values within the family and the inheritance of wealth. A second meaning of generation refers to a block of people born during a specific span of years who are considered distinct from those who precede or come after them (aggregate, cohort, cohort generation), living similar historical events or experiences that affect the individuals born during the same time. Working with family

history charts and constructing tables from these family history charts, Miller (2000, 44-60) offers a path for researching in sociology close to Bertaux's approach.

According to Castaignos-Leblond (2001 169-186), the concept of generation is related to (1) age of people, (2) filiation, and (3) epoch. Being member of a generation enables to the subject to establish a position between predecessors and successors. To belong to a generation is to become an actor of history. According to Rindfleisch (cit. in Miller, 2000, 30), "a cohort generation is a group of persons born during a limited span of years who share a common and distinct social character shaped by their shared experiences through time".

### **"FAMILY ROMANCE AND SOCIAL TRAJECTORY": AN APPROACH OF GENEALOGICAL WORK**

Now I need to present some ideas and concepts developed by Vincent de Gualejac, a French psychosociologist, working with a genealogical approach. His work has had important relevance both in the theory and in the practice. At the crossroads of sociology, psychoanalysis and phenomenology, the Gaulejac's psychosocial approach, named "Family romance and social trajectory" (Gaulejac, 1987, 1999), explores, from different verbal and non verbal tools, participants' family history and personal trajectory, always characterised by the split between the power of wishes and the need for socialization. Family is a place of transmission at different levels: transmission of life (biological register); of a name, a culture, an education, a heritage (anthropological register); of narcissists wishes (psychic register).

Gaulejac applied this approach in seminars. There is a permanent interplay between personal implication and theoretical analysis. The participants in the seminars are usually professionals engaged in interpersonal work: sociologists, psychotherapists, social workers, teachers, psychiatrists, architects, health professionals, and counselors). Vincent de Gaulejac proposes four techniques to work social trajectory and family romance (a freudian concept, *Familienroman* in German): genealogical tree, picture of the parental project, analysis of social trajectories and sociodramatic performances (Gaulejac, 1987, 266-267, 277-283; Lainé, 1998, 275-276).

The seminars animated by Gualejac and collaborators explore theoretically and practically these topics: family genealogy, from which depend on cultural, economic, ideologic and affective "heritage"; the formation of parental project; family romance and its relation with family stories and social context; life choices and turning points (professional, political, ideological, emotional experiences); events making the social trajectory and its relations to social changes. There are two different levels in the genealogical work: (1) a descriptive level, expression of lived, subjective experience; (2) an analytic level, "choral" reflection on lived experience (analysis developed in group, through the implication of researchers, teachers and participants). Genealogical tree is a technique by which the subject reunites with his or her own history, a reality that is previous to him or her. Family makes possible the construction of self and identity.

## **EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING**

Now I consider some ideas on learning with the aim of relating experiential subjectivity and critical, social engagement. Later I will return to family genealogical work and its implications for teaching with an auto/biographical perspective. My purpose is similar to that of Wilma Fraser when she speaks of facilitating “individual empowerment whilst not losing sight of broader social issues” (Fraser, 1995, 5). Experiential learning and communicative interaction is the base for learning and change. For me, experiential learning, a notion grounded in John Dewey, David Kolb and Malcolm Knowles, is very interesting because 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 uncritically legitimizing that knowledge. Learning means 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). It is necessary to locate subjective experience within a wider social context, developing a more critical approach to topics such as identity, difference and student voice (Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997, 42-44; Freire, 1970; Gelpi, 2005). 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 (Aminoff, 1995).

## **FAMILY AUTO/BIOGRAPHY, GENEALOGICAL TREE AND EDUCATION**

In my opinion, to apply auto/biographical methods in lifelong learning is an innovative solution in view of the increasing impasse of conservative adult educational programs and politics as well as the confusion of many teachers. So, adult educators have found in life histories a methodology for learning (and also for researching) with a strong potential in order 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, accrediting prior learning, workers, adult learners, educators, social workers, and so on. Mixing cooperation, work from experience, and self-directed learning, auto/biographical methods can help 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. This approach is qualitative, transdisciplinary and collaborative. It is rejected the gap among disciplines. The partnership among educators, researchers and learners in all phases of the process is promoted (Pineau & Marie-Michèle, 1983; Dominicé, 2000; González Monteagudo, 2006b).

Auto/biographical work on family starts with the exploration of family roots. The analysis of family genealogy makes possible to situate the personal story in a larger context. This analysis has two main dimensions. One aspect is related with social and cultural context of the different generations (the 'target' individual, his/her parents, his/her grandparents, and, if it is the case, his/her children). Diachronic and synchronic comparison is a basic element of this biographical activity. Also it is important research on differences of all kinds: generational, social, economic, political, cultural, ethnic, educational, axiologic and religious. The second aspect is linked to the adult's subjective narrative frame. Here the oral and written stories of adults become important by evocating the lived experiences from a subjective, existential, controversial stance. The union of both sides in the same educational methodology explain, in my opinion, the potential of auto/biographical approach for encouraging the construction of a historic, cultural, social knowledge, that it is at the same time personal, subjective and even healing (see Formenti, 2002; Demetrio, 2002).

The interview is a good instrument for collecting data about the members of family. Interviewing is an easy way of introducing adult learners to research and fieldwork, connecting formal learning to lived experiences in personal, family and social sectors. In order to explore family experiences, it is useful to facilitate to adult learners some orientations on selected topics deserving attention. Thompson (2000, 309-323), from the perspective of an oral historian, proposes this general elements in his life story interview guide: general information; grandparents' generation; parents' generation; siblings/cousins/uncles/aunts; daily life in childhood; community and class; school; employment; leisure and courting; marriage and children; changing daily life; later life. Atkinson (1998, 39-53) suggests to search for information on these general aspects : birth and family of origin; cultural setting and traditions; social factors; education; love and work; historical events and periods; retirement; inner life and spiritual awareness; major life themes; vision of the future; and closure questions. Finally, from a sociological gaze, Miller (2000, 62-68) advises to work on significant social and historical processes affecting family life: socio-economic changes; the move to cities and other alteration in migration patterns; changes in state social policy; demographic changes; patterns of the transfer of material wealth between generations (inheritance); the effect of parents; broken marriages and 'postmodern' family structures; the interactions between siblings' trajectories; changes in social relationships over time; and collective memories.

Reflection on adult learner's family group is developed from these aspects (always as a open script: a) home considered as a physical space; b) attribution of meaning to the spaces and places of home; c) narratives on daily objects of home; d) structure of family communication, characterized by specific interpersonal relationships, framed in an ecological and systemic perspective; e) family emotional world and attitudes toward feelings; f) analysis of use of time by the different members of family, as well its evolution during the life span; g) symbolic and spiritual universe prevalent in the family; h) leadership, power and management of conflicts; i) family transformations and changes in function of social and cultural evolution; j) perspectives on future and open questions for working.

Family life stories use orality and writing, individual and social activity. They combine subjectivity and objectivity, story and interpretation, production of sociocultural knowledge and development of self-knowledge, research on existing “reality” and search for change in personal and collective dimensions. From my view auto/biographical learning is a good instrument for integrating in lifelong learning subjective experience and openness to a complex and uncertain sociocultural world. Finally, life histories combine research and education, helping educators can become engaged actors (and researchers) in favor of a democratic and dialogic educational practice.

The family tree consists of the graphic representation of the individual’s family roots, showing as accurately as possible the branches of their maternal and paternal ancestors. In educational settings, each student hunts for the information needed to discover more about their predecessors. It is convenient to represent at least three generations on the family tree: that of the ‘target individual’, that of their parents and of both sets of grandparents. In some cases, in function of the age of the target individual, it is possible to add a fourth generation for their children.

The aim in producing a family tree is to view our predecessors in their social, economic, cultural and ideological context. This allows us to reflect in depth over the significance and the extent of the influences and mutual interdependences of our grandparents, parents (and aunts and uncles), siblings (and cousins) and, if that is the case, children. For this, the target individual presents information about some of the following aspects: places of birth and residence, important dates, main occupations, moral and religious beliefs, political ideologies, economic situations, family development, significant crises and transitions. One of the objectives of the tree lies in identifying and evaluating the symbolic and material universe of the target individual’s maternal and paternal branches. Later the individual may reflect over the influence exerted by both branches of ancestors upon his or her own life’s journey and conception of the world. For exploring the family roots it is suited the help of the spoken accounts of parents, grandparents, children and other relatives, written documents, photographs and video recordings. It is also possible to consult public archives, church records and web sites related to genealogy. Ways of collecting such information are many and various.

Genealogical work is an appropriate way in order to know more about culture, education and identity understood as a process and a product of intergenerational dialogue and transmission. The intergenerational and intragenerational perspectives enable to analyze vertically and horizontally the resemblances and differences on subjects such as gender, occupational category, social class, culture, ethnicity, geographical location, cohort generation, and so forth. Telling and writing family stories is both an existential, critical, experiential learning process and a cultural research grounded on subjectivity and history.

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