

GENERATIONAL AND GENDER CHANGES IN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS.

6.3; 1.4

Key words: generational change, gender roles, biographical methodology, collective and individual identities, young people.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

- To explore generational and gender identities of university students through auto/biographical narratives.
- To identify some trends in relation to generational change in Spanish and Andalusian contexts.
- To compare socio-cultural settings and lived experiences through three generations (young people, parents and grandparents)

ESPISTEMOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.

The recent use of auto/biographical approaches in history, research and teaching has done possible the development of qualitative methodologies that offer new insights on social actors discourses and perspectives from subjective, experiential and engaged dimensions. In the educational field the biographical methodologies have promoted bigger integration between research and training, better knowledge on the complex dynamics of formal and informal learning, and better understanding of the relationships between individual and system, agency and structure, micro and macro levels in relation to groups, institutions and socio-cultural systems (Thompson, 2000; Formenti, 2002; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; González Monteagudo, 2008).

The generational change lived in Spain and Andalusia since the sixties of the past century has been very intense. Modernization, urbanization, and secularization have had strong influences on this generational transformation. Changes on traditional family roles, the progressive equality between women and men, and the higher participation of women in education, work and social life have accompanied and deepened these changes, within the historical context of Franco's dictatorship (1939) and the democratic period started with the democratic constitution in 1978, after a peaceful transition (Rodrigo & Palacios, 1998).

Biographical research on generations and families is relatively recent. In his research review about this topic Miller (2000) points out three main approaches in the biographical field: realist, neo-positivist and narrative. The book edited by Bertaux & Thompson (2005; original ed. In 1993), pioneer in this field, presented different papers related to generational, family and gender contexts in different countries, using biographical methods. In the Italian context, Formenti (2002) researched the construction of gender identities through biographical interviews with members of five families, using hermeneutic and constructivist approaches. In France, Lany-Baile (1997) studied the intergenerational transmission from a symbolic and subjective perspective. All these contributions have influenced our approach.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.

Our research is located within the narrative perspective (Miller, 2000) because we are interested in open methods for collecting narratives and in stressing the subjective perspective of the narrators. So the traits of the design are: interpretative, phenomenological, constructivist, symbolic, dialogical, open, inductive and interactionist (González Monteagudo, 2008; Thompson, 2000; Ricoeur, 2000).

The main techniques of this approach are the life history or biographical interview (Atkinson, 1998) and auto/biographical narratives, including individual, family and educational auto/biographies. In this approach the participants have an active role in the research process. This central role of participants has important implications both in epistemology and ethics. The research (or educational) process is more democratic and participative in relation to conventional trends, it breaks the distance between researcher (or educator) and individuals, it promotes a co-interpretation of the results and it recognises to the social actors the property of their own narratives.

The participants in the research have been university students from Andalusia (southern Spain). The technique used to collect biographical data has been the family, genealogical and education autobiography, written by the students, within a broader context of research and teaching activities in order to promote self-learning, reflexivity and collective awareness about identity

and historical memory. In the academic year 2008-2009 around 150 students of the first year in the degree of Pedagogy of a public Andalusian university wrote their autobiography, according to guidelines provided by the lecturer. Of these narratives, were selected 20 cases, in relation to depth, thematic diversity and reflexive ability. These 20 cases have been analyzed according to these topics:

- Descriptions about grandparents' and parents' generations.
- Comments on socio-cultural, family, gender and educational changes through the generations of parents, grandparents as well as the own students' generation.
- Lived students' experiences as well as experiences collected by students from their relatives, about conflicts and generational differences (values, life styles, rules of socialization, affective and family relationships, peer groups, authority and leadership).
- Students' experiences and appraisals on changes regarding gender roles.

The students' narratives include information about family genealogical trees, places of birth and residence of the relatives, workplaces, values, religious beliefs, political ideologies, economic situations, education and training, family development, transitions and significant turning points. The data provided by the students stem from photographs, videos, written documents, personal journals, letters, family archives, and short interviews done to siblings, parents, grandparents and other relatives. The students' generation is focused on present, with important and permanent processes of transition and crisis; it is centred on new technologies and on interpersonal relationships; and has had good educational opportunities and a relatively good standard of living. The generation of grandparents has been more stable and conservative, with strong differences regarding gender, scarcity and economic difficulties, and low educational opportunities. Taking into account the deep social change in the Spanish recent contemporary history, it is not surprising that these two generations have important differences. The generational gap is very impressive, and partially it is explained by the specific and contrasting historical moments lived by grandparents when they were young (the Spanish Civil War and the dictatorship) and the new students' generation, which has been living the democratic period of the last two decades, with better standard of living and educational opportunities.

IMPLICACIONES, INNOVATIVE VALUE AND CONCLUSIONS.

The auto/biographical narratives have implications in relation to research and teaching. These narratives make possible new ways of rapprochement to historical, social and cultural themes from a subjective and experiential perspective, stressing the agentivity of social actors. Also these narratives help the production and appropriation of knowledge, promote learning regarding techniques of qualitative research, and allow the use of disciplinary knowledge in relation to social and personal issues linked to the everyday life of the participants.

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