

OBJECTS IN CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL FIELDS A BIOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN SPAIN

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to present and discuss a research on objects as educational and cultural analysers, undertaken with a sample of 154 university students in Spain. The participants were asked both to choose five key objects representing their lives and to write short stories about the objects selected and its meaning regarding learning, identity and culture. Firstly, I will discuss the importance of objects from a social and cultural point of view. Then, I will mention the general framework of biographical work that oriented this research. I will describe the concrete activity of object selection and the different oral and written working methods related to them. To illustrate the activity, I will present some cases, including the written comments of the selected objects. Finally, I will comment on the perspectives arising from this activity with the aim of understanding the generational, social, cultural and formative contexts of young people as well as the contributions of this research to biographical work in training, formal education, adult education and cultural fields.

Keywords: Objects, Biographical approach, Higher Education, Learning, Cultural analysis.

RESUMO

OBJETOS EM CONTEXTOS CULTURAIS E EDUCATIVOS. UMA PERSPECTIVA BIOGRÁFICA NO ENSINO SUPERIOR EM ESPANHA

O objetivo deste trabalho é apresentar e discutir uma pesquisa sobre objetos como analisadores educacionais e culturais, realizada com uma mostra de 154 estudantes universitários na Espanha. Pediu-se aos participantes que escolhessem cinco objetos-chave que representassem suas vidas e que escrevessem pequenas histórias sobre os objetos selecionados e seu significado em relação à aprendizagem, identidade e cultura. Em primeiro lugar, discutirei a impor-

tância dos objetos do ponto de vista social e cultural. Depois, mencionarei a estrutura geral do trabalho biográfico que orientou essa pesquisa. Descreverei a atividade concreta da seleção de objetos e os diferentes métodos de trabalho orais e escritos relacionados a eles. Para ilustrar a atividade, apresentarei alguns casos, incluindo os comentários escritos dos objetos selecionados. Por fim, comentarei as perspectivas decorrentes dessa atividade com o objetivo de compreender os contextos geracionais, sociais, culturais e formativos dos jovens, bem como as contribuições desta pesquisa para o trabalho biográfico em formação, educação formal, educação de adultos e estudos culturais.

Palavras chave: Objetos, abordagem biográfica, Ensino superior, aprendizagem, análise cultural.

RESUMEN

LOS OBJETOS EN CONTEXTOS CULTURALES Y EDUCATIVOS. UNA PERSPECTIVA BIOGRÁFICA EN LA UNIVERSIDAD EN ESPAÑA

El objetivo de este trabajo es presentar y discutir una investigación sobre objetos como analizadores educativos y culturales, realizada con una muestra de 154 estudiantes universitarios en España. A los participantes se les pidió elegir los cinco objetos clave que representaban sus vidas y escribir historias cortas sobre los objetos seleccionados y su significado con respecto al aprendizaje, la identidad y la cultura. En primer lugar, discutiré la importancia de los objetos desde un punto de vista social y cultural. Luego, mencionaré el marco general del trabajo biográfico que orientó esta investigación. Describiré la actividad concreta de la selección de objetos y los diferentes métodos de trabajo escritos y orales relacionados con ellos. Para ilustrar la actividad, presentaré algunos casos, incluidos los comentarios escritos sobre los objetos seleccionados. Finalmente, comentaré las perspectivas que surgen de esta actividad con el objetivo de comprender los contextos generacionales, sociales, culturales y formativos de los jóvenes, así como las contribuciones de esta investigación al campo de la antropología cultural y al trabajo biográfico en formación, educación formal y educación de adultos.

Palabras clave: Objetos, enfoques biográficos, Universidad, aprendizaje, análisis cultural.

Learning and research context: objects as research tools on material culture, learning, and identity

Anthropologists may have been the first to draw attention to the importance of material culture. The anthropology of material culture studies the relationship among things (objects, which anthropologists often call artefacts), the social relations in which they are produced and used, the meanings and symbols associated with things, and their purposes and roles in human groups from a sociocultural point of view. In the 1980s, anthropologists insisted on the fact that things are of central importance and that focusing on the material worlds does not make them fetishized, since they are not a kind of superstructure separated from the social worlds (MILLER, 1994). Additionally, “as academics, we can strive for achieving understanding and empathy by studying what people do with objects, because that is how people create a world of practice. As Simmel emphasized, human values do not exist other than through their objectification in cultural forms” (MILLER, 1998, p. 19).

The word object comes from the Latin *objectum*, “which is placed in front”, and it has two meanings: concrete and abstract. From a concrete point of view it is: “everything (including animate beings) that affects all senses, especially our sense of sight”; and also a “solid thing having unity and independence and responding to a certain destination” (DICTIONNAIRE PETIT ROBERT, ed. 1987, p. 1292). The importance of these material objects was pointed out by the historians of the Annals school: “material life is men and things, things and men” (F. BRAUDEL, in CORONA, 2007).

As written by an anthropologist, “material culture can be considered the totality of artefacts in a culture, the vast universe of objects

used by humankind to cope with the physical world, to facilitate social communication, to delight our fancy, and to create symbols of meaning” (T. SCLERETH, cited in CORONA, 2007). In cultural anthropology, the term artefact refers to a product that has undergone a transformation, however minimal, from men, and it is distinguished, therefore, from objects transformed by natural phenomena. The notion of culture connects directly with the human world of objects and with the use of things through the material practices of the production and consumption cycle.

However, culture has both material and symbolic dimensions. Culture consists of material practices, but also in symbols, values and beliefs. We live in a world of objects, which structure and organize our daily life. Even if they possess a merely instrumental function, objects are always symbolically and affectively invested by human beings. Human beings cannot avoid producing and creating meanings in the process of interaction with objects. It should be noted that this creation of meaning is not an exclusively individual activity. The attribution of meanings is developed in complex and changing cultural and societal frameworks, mediated by socially and linguistically shared activities.

Through objects, we can understand our own identity as well as the sociocultural dynamics related to generations, social change, class, ethnicity and gender (MOLINIÉ, 2009). Objects remind us of times, spaces, values and symbols that allow us to better describe and understand the human world (SANZ, 2008). Objects are a good way of studying the process of socialization and the construction of a specific cultural identity:

This sense of material culture as a form of being-in-the-world becomes clearer when we consider the process of socialization. From quite early on, the infant born in one cultural context becomes recognizably distinct in man-

ners and outlook from an infant socialized in another setting. Much of these results from the micro-routines of daily life, in which we become oriented to and by the spaces, the objects and the small but significant distinctions in the object forms through which we form our classifications and habits. In turn these create our expectation, which allow much of the world to become quickly absorbed as a taken-for-granted context for our lives. In this sense our cultural identity is not merely embodied but literally 'objectified' (MILLER, 1994, p. 399).

I am interested in exploring the relationship that objects have with temporality, because here is one of the main axes of auto/biographical work. In this sense, the artefact, or what it represents, survives people, transcending the temporal limits of human life and leaving a material trace of individuals and groups' ways of life. It is interesting to note that a review of the most influential European literature reveals that little attention has been paid to objects within research and training fields based on life history approaches (GONZÁLEZ-MONTEAGUDO, 2008).

The intervention and research with university students using objects as key focus are located within a broader approach based on life histories, particularly through educational autobiography. Therefore, here I will comment about this broader context. The autobiography is a tool of training and research whose use in learning and teaching contexts has proved to be of interest in terms of self-knowledge, reflection and personal growth, through the integration of the cognitive, operational and affective dimensions of learning (Educational autobiography is a tool that promotes the development of experiential sensitivity and critical reflexivity. In this field, it is important to highlight the contributions from French-speaking authors (COULON and LE GRAND, 2000; DELORY-MOMBERGER, 2003; DOMINICÉ, 2000; GALVANI, 1997; LAINÉ, 1998; PINEAU, 2000).

The objectives proposed by the educational autobiography are: to develop personal self-knowledge; to promote the analytical and critical capacity of the various daily settings (family, school, media, religious group, group of peers and friends, leisure and free time, work); to link personal biography, family and local context, and the overall social and cultural environment; and, finally, to encourage the personal involvement of the student in the learning process (GONZÁLEZ-MONTEAGUDO, 2008).

The educational autobiography approach consists in writing a text guided by a thematic guide, resulting from both from literature review and contributions from students. The preparation of the autobiographical document is accompanied by different biographical activities, developed during the courses and focused on oral and written activities promoting the involvement and sharing of experiences and knowledge produced.

The targeted questions, always with flexibility and freedom of approach and content, concern genealogy and the family tree, the family group and its socio-psycho-pedagogical dynamics, the local and community context, the personal coat, and the stories of formal and non-formal learning (GONZÁLEZ-MONTEAGUDO, 2017). This research has been developed within the framework of a Cultural Anthropology of Education course; because of this context, we are interested in working on the concept of culture as well as on social and cultural changes, particularly in relation to generational transformations (GAULEJAC, 1999).

Objectives, methodology, data collection and analysis

The objectives of this research were to: a) explore the role of material culture regarding learning and identity in a sample of university students in Spain; b) identify and describe objects preferred

by the participants; c) analyse written narratives about selected objects; d) propose some implications and guidelines to work on artefacts both in education and cultural fields.

The participants in this research were students of Andalusia, Spain, registered in university degrees of Pedagogy or of Primary School Teacher, in a big Faculty of Education. Regarding the profile of the sample, it is worth mentioning the great cultural homogeneity of these students, most of whom were born in Andalusia, Spain, were educated according to passage rites of Catholic tradition (baptism, first communion) and had lived similar itineraries in terms of socially determined biographical experiences and generational contexts. The total number of students who participated in the activity was 154. 29 were men and 125 were women. These numbers clearly show the high degree of feminization of the informants.

The participants were asked to select five key objects, as a way of working on biographical itineraries. The instructions given were as follows: a) to choose freely five important or significant objects from your past or current life, according to personal criteria; b) to write some short stories referring to each of the selected objects, emphasizing the reasons for choosing them, the importance and significance of the object, and the relation of the object with specific temporal stages and with significant or influential people. When giving the instructions to students, it was important to specify what we meant by objects. It is something physical, material, that has an empirical existence, although it may have disappeared from our life a long time ago. On the other hand, it should be clarified that the object refers to elements which are not too big or complex. For example, if the participant mentions his or her home, it will be requested to choose something smaller or a more specific item. It is also necessary to clarify that

pets are not objects, since some students tended to choose pets as objects.

This activity was undertaken in the university classroom. In order to favour a good work ambiance, the participants were requested to bring some preferred objects to the classroom, as an opportunity to tell, write and share about their preferences, guided by two key points: who we are and how we have lived.

Considering that each student had to choose 5 objects, the total number of choices were approximately 770. The quantitative distribution of the objects selected by four or more will be presented in the next section, devoted to data collection and results, besides some comments about the contents and profiles of these data.

On the other hand, all the students were demanded to write short stories about their five selected objects. There will be presented three cases to show several examples of these narrative materials.

The analysis of the data collected has focused on learning, identity, generation and culture as key categories that make possible to understand biographical itineraries of young university students (ROBERTS, 2002; PLUMMER, 2001).

Discussion: between culture, social change and identity

As commented previously in the section on methodology, the results offer both quantitative and qualitative data. Firstly, I will be presenting quantitative data about choices done by 154 university students, according to the most frequent choices. These data will be followed by some comments about the main objects targeted by the participants and its cultural or learning relevance. Then, I will offer three selected narrative cases, showing how these three participants constructed written stories about the objects selected.

Students' favourite objects: between symbolism, functionality and technology

In this section, the favourite objects by grouping the students' choices are presented. I remind here that 154 students participated in

this research. Considering that each student had chosen five objects, the total number of choices were 770. Here are the most repeated objects, for those that received four or more choices, ordered according to their frequency. In some cases, the objects are presented grouped into categories or types.

Table 1 - Number of choices for each object.

Objects	Choices
1. Mobile phone	51
2. Child's toy (20 dolls and 28 plush toys).	48
3. Photographs, photo albums and CD with photos	39
4. Bed (23), pillow (6), blanket and duvet (8)	37
5. Personal computer	30
6. Necklace or bracelet	30
7. Ring (17) and wedding ring (10)	27
8. Book	21
9. Watch	20
10. Car	17
11. Television	15
12. Contact lenses and glasses	14
13. Radio	14
14. Musical instrument	14
15. Brotherhood or religious brotherhood medal, or religious image	14
16. Diary	13
17. CD, cassette or song	12
18. MP3 and MP4	11
19. Sport symbols linked to football	9
20. Perfume	9
21. Pen or pencil	8
22. Makeup tools	7
23. Ball	7
24. Shoes	7
25. Earrings	7
26. Table or chair	7
27. Bicycle	6
28. Film	6
29. Keys or keyring	6
30. Letter or email	5
31. Notebook	5
32. Scarf	5
33. Trip memories	5
34. Food or drinks	5
35. School Uniform	4
36. Shower or bath	4
37. Camera	4

Source: Data collection. Own elaboration.

This list could be completed by more than a hundred different objects (chosen one, two or three times), reflecting a truly rich biographical and experiential idiosyncrasy. I will not present this list here to concentrate on the most recurrent choices.

About one in three students chose the mobile phone and a child's toy; it could be said that, symbolically, the former represents the new information and communication technologies, while the latter recalls the paradise of childhood, both so close and so distant. These two objects might reveal the paradox of Spanish university youth, experiencing an artificially prolonged childhood, while they live in a world very different from that of childhood; a world where technical, automatic and digital objects play a crucial role in the daily lives of all generations, especially young people.

The first five items on the list were selected 205 times (representing 27% of the choices). By adding the choices of the first 10 objects, we find 319 choices (43% of the possible choices). The first 20 objects total 444 choices (59% of the possible choices). Finally, the complete list of the 37 objects listed represents 542 choices (72% of the possible choices). The repetition of the objects is to be highlighted, as seven objects were selected by more than 25 students.

We can group these choices according to the categories of objects. Thus, we can gather technological objects, such as the mobile phone (51 choices), the computer (30), the television (15), the radio (14), the MP3 or MP4 (11) and the camera (4). We have a total of 125 choices (17% of the possible choices). In post-modern society, techno-biographies illustrate the central place given to technical, electronic and digital artifacts, and they highlight the technological cleavages between men and women (MILLER, HENWOOD and KENNEDY, 2001). These technological choices confirm in a decisive way the advent of the information

society from the hands of the younger generation. This social and cultural change poses a major challenge to traditional socialization institutions, particularly schools, universities and all kind of formal learning settings (ALHEIT, 1995; BERTAUX, 1981).

Another category, more imprecise in its contours, refers to objects worn, such as bracelet or pendant (29), ring or wedding ring (27), watch (20), glasses or lenses (14), and earrings (7). In this case, we have a total of 97 choices (13% of the possible choices). Other categories of objects concern utility (for example, glasses, watches, diaries and cars), even if this instrumental use can always take on other symbolic readings, in terms of personal identity, attribution of emotional value, or attachment to important persons or mentors.

It is interesting to indicate which objects are selected in relation to learning and training, what one could call, according to Charlot (1997, p. 77), "knowledge objects". In addition to the computer (versatile instrument used for different purposes: leisure, learning, communication, and so on), the book was chosen by 21 students, followed by musical instruments (14 choices), ballpoint pen or pencil (8), notebook (5), desk (4), shoes used for sports or leisure activities (dance) (4) and uniform school (4). Except for the personal computer, the choices mentioned above reach a number of 60 (8% of the possible choices), a low score showing the difficulty of schools, and other formal learning contexts, to become a central element in the lives of children and young people. This situation confirms that young people value informal sociability and an individualized relationship with objects, whether they are technological or not.

Finally, it is curious to consider the presence of the car, named 17 times, against the 6 of the bicycle. Here we have a good starting point for auto-eco-biographies. Perhaps here we are faced with potentialities not fully ex-

plored from life stories in the era of climate change and global threats to the environment.

Some examples of stories about objects

I transcribe below written contributions by three students about the objects they selected and the comments they wrote about each one. The narrative data offered in this section complements, from a qualitative perspective, previous quantitative data collection. To ensure the confidentiality of the subjects, the names of the informants have been changed.

Case n°1: Laura (woman, born in 1985, university degree in Primary Education):

- Laptop computer (with Internet connection): Since I have had my laptop, I have had nothing to complain about. I saved up and when I had the money, the need and the desire to have my personal laptop, I didn't hesitate for long. I needed it at that time because I had to study the program for the children's education competition.
- During these two years, I could store thousands of memories, experiences and situations that will be present throughout my life. I have a lot of pictures of every moment I lived. Connecting to the Internet...I use it a lot every day because in addition to allowing me to have more contact with some distant family members, with friends I don't often see, it also serves me to do homework for the university, to look for information and to share group work.
- Camera and photos: the first camera I had was a Kodak. I didn't like it very much because it was bulky and it was battery-powered and the batteries didn't last long. The one I have now is a Canon, that I share with my sister.
- I like to take it with me wherever I go; I love to immortalize all the good moments to remember them later... Even if I have these photos on CD or on my laptop, I like to print them on paper, so I can see them whenever I want.
- The cushion: this is one of my childhood memories. It is an object that has special meaning for me. It was my mother who did it for my first year at school, when every child had to bring their own cushion for ground activities. My mother always loved sewing and she decided to make me an embroidered drawing. The cushion is still in my parents' house, in my room and in perfect condition.
- The bicycle: It was the object that gave me the greatest pleasure among all those brought to me by the "Reyes Magos". I was only four. When the parade passed the door of my house, my mother put the bike and all the presents in the entrance and sent me there. When I saw the bike, I couldn't believe my eyes. I kept asking my mother if it was for me, how the bike got there, how the Kings knew it was the bike I wanted. It was pink, with a basket in front, a bell and two little wheels on the sides. I fell several times but the first fall is the one I remember the most. My father had decided to remove the two wheels so that I could learn to use them without them, and as soon as I was installed and he let me go, I fell. All my uncles and cousins were there and at that moment they couldn't stop laughing.
- The bed: Both the bed in my childhood home and the bed in which I currently sleep are objects that I distinguish especially in my life because sleep is very important to me. I remember I was always afraid to sleep besides the window in the summer.

Case nº2: Damián (man, born in 1987, university degree in Primary Education):

- Laptop computer: this is one of my main tools at university. If it were to get damaged, I would have to make every effort to buy myself another one because currently ICTs have a considerable importance. The computer is a key element in the success of university studies.
- The paddle racket: why the paddle racket? Indeed, it could have been a basketball or volleyball, or sports shoes, or tennis ball. What I want to represent with this racket is that one of my favorite hobbies is sports.
- Flamenco guitar: I can't play guitar. I would love to learn to accompany the flamenco songs that I like to sing from time to time, which I really like. Actually, I don't have a beautiful voice and I don't know how to sing but I wish I had a beautiful voice.
- A bottle of sea water: I like the beach. What I wanted to say with this sea water bottle is that what I really like about the beach is swimming: swimming in the water, diving, playing dead... it amuses and relaxes me.
- A flag of Malta: this is flag I have on the wall of my room in my apartment. It reminds me of all the friends I met on my scholarship trip to Malta. Since we were staying in the same hotel, we all became friends. We were together all the time.

Case nº 3: Pilar (woman, born in 1986, university degree in Primary Education):

- The violin: I consider it as a transversal object in my life. I attribute personal qualities to it, because with it I have experienced situations of all kinds. I have matured both intellectually and personally. During certain stages of my

life, I even hated it and wanted to stop playing it, but the habit (of the previous years) and the taste for this instrument (these last years) as an object of evasion make that with it I have a love-hate relationship.

- The ball: As a symbolic object, it represents in my life the game and the dynamics of my personality. Now this object has a stronger representation because before I didn't have much time for sport.
- The bed: it is the most comforting object of my life. It helps me to reconcile sleep and rest. It's my favourite place to watch movies, talk and spend rainy days. It is also a transversal object in my life. I find it very hard to feel serene if I don't sleep in my bed.
- The diary: I started it when I was nine. I wrote a notebook and a half. I am very attached to it because it contains all the memorable experiences of my life as well as photographs, letters, messages received on my mobile phone, etc. I read it from time to time, especially when I have sentimental problems. That way, I remember past experiences and try not to repeat the same mistakes. It's funny how we make the same mistakes over the years at different stages of our lives.

Discussion and implications: learning, identity and cultural perspectives about objects

The symbolic, cognitive and mental dimensions of culture is well reflected in the students' comments about their choices and in the complex motivations handled to select a few objects among hundreds and even thousands of possibilities.

Objects play an evocative role, which allows to explore the past and to work biographically. "We call 'evocative' – as written by an Italian scholar - to those document-remains (images, objects, sensorial stimuli) that produce a cognitive, and obviously, emotional effect on long-term or short-term memory" (DEMETRIO, 2003, p. 51).

It should be reminded here that the data collection discussed in this paper was integrated in an experiential learning pathway, which consisted of different oral and written activities, developed both individually and in groups. They aimed, as stated before, at developing self-knowledge linking their past experiences, current moments and future prospects, from both affective and intellectual viewpoints.

With this research and teaching intervention, I wanted to explore the meaning of objects, within a perspective of what we might call artefact-bio-graphies. Things can be a real way to access the complexity of the biographical in learning, both in formal and informal settings. I have explored the possibilities offered by biographical work focused on material life, and not only in the world of ideas and feelings. I am aware that when talking about objects, I am approaching biographical work from dimensions usually ignored and under researched. However, objects bring us to the actions and human activities linked to these objects, being many of them shared in social terms. For example, choosing a book as a favourite object opens the world of reading, with the inherent complexity of human actions. This perspective could be considered simple, but it intends to offer an innovative contribution within the broad biographical-narrative universe.

A way of facilitating the memory of objects consists in trying to select an object which refers to each of the main stages of life. This brings us back to the temporal dimension of objects, and to their evolution over time, to

which we have mentioned above. Demetrio (1996, p. 148-152) suggests, within his autobiographical work proposals, the selection of important objects related to early childhood, middle childhood and adolescence stages. This diachronic perspective can also work with landscapes, feelings and friends. This is the core of the biographical perspective in education: experience the evolution and change along life experiences, as a starting point for a better self-knowledge and learning linked to personal and affective growth (BOLÍVAR, DOMINGO and FERNÁNDEZ, 2001; DEMETRIO, 1996; DOMINICÉ, 2002; FRASER, 1995).

There are objects that have a transversal dimension, since individuals give them a great significant throughout their biographical itinerary. On the contrary, other objects are limited to specific periods of time and are linked to specific activities or processes (for example, the dummy during early childhood or the uniform during the school years). In many cases, objects are selected because they represent a strong link between a stage or past event and its subsequent evolution or even the present moment. It happens sometimes through the mediation of a family adult ancestor, a particularly influential mentor, or through an affective, loving or friendly relationship. This is the case of objects that evoke coexistence with the deceased grandfather, the rings that evoke important relationships, and photographs that symbolizes the memories of key situations, like a group of friends or a school trip.

The different objects usually remind us of spaces, places and different institutional and interpersonal contexts, which reflect the variety and plurality of environments in which we live. Family, group of friends, school, technological tools and work spaces are decisive contexts for communication, learning, production, fun and interaction. These are characterized by specific objects and activities linked to them.

Leisure and holidays, holiday destinations (beach, mountain, the grandparents' house, etc.), the street and the neighbourhood are some of the special environments in which we use, enjoy and share our favourite objects.

Among the chosen objects it is important to consider the role that collective or group dimension plays (COULON and LE GRAND, 2000; BRUN, 2001). Some objects have a predominantly individual dimension. They are at the service of individuals and their personal life. Thus, some people usually choose objects related to rest and comfort, such as the bed, mattress, pillow or armchair. We also find objects of individual use, such as the bicycle, but they can be used in group and interactive contexts. Other times they are objects linked to a collective context. The choice of a soccer ball, for example, refers to the practice of team sports. Without falling into the artificiality of separating individual and group dimensions rigidly, it is evident that some objects refer mainly to the first ones and other objects to the second ones.

Objects reflect important values, linked to a moral vision that derives from the received education, the family, the concept of the personal world, the religious beliefs and even the political ideologies (DEMETRIO, 2003). The symbolic dimension of objects is decisive (BRUNER, 1991). Symbolism refers to representation and identity. Many objects are chosen for their ability to evoke and legitimize the personal, family, sport, religious, local, regional and national identity. The favourite sports club scarf, the flag from the country that has been visited on the first trip abroad or the religious image of the First Communion are good examples of this capacity for symbolization that favourite objects have (GONZÁLEZ-MONTEAGUDO, 2011).

A wide range of variation is noted in the selection of objects by students. However, when working with people who have some obvious

common features (belonging to the same generation or even cohort, being born in the same region, belonging, for a certain time, to the same institution), the similarity in the choice of objects is important. The common profile of the participants in this research, already stated previously, explain, at least partially, the coincidence of the most represented objects. Globalization and digital technologies certainly lead to an aggressive cultural homogenization, very present in leisure, consumption, fashion, values and social life (GONZÁLEZ-MONTEAGUDO, 2008).

On the other hand, the criteria handled by students to select the objects are very varied. At first, they seem to be implicit criteria, which are only revealed later, when we analyse, comment and compare the choices made. In some cases, a criterion of functionality and utility prevails (as it is the case of the car), although it is usual that, behind this façade, important identity and symbolic dimensions appear, not always well explained. Nonetheless, the car is an icon of modernity and it represents in many cases the owners' aspirations, status, social class and taste or even of those who aspire to buy it or just enjoy it.

Working with objects is an easy and attractive way to access to their own autobiography. It does not require much time. It does not require the mastery of writing. It does not frighten people who may experience difficulties in returning to their past, because the choice of objects does not directly refer to painful feelings or difficult experiences. Even with all this in mind, objects have the advantage of facilitating access to the affective, interpersonal and experiential dimensions of individuals. In short, they are a great point of departure for starting the autobiographical work, which can then be continued through deeper instruments and techniques. These approaches might play an important role regarding development of

professional skills and transitions to the labour market (SOUZA, 2011).

The biographical work with objects does not refer to a mere enumeration and description of the objects preferred by people, from an objective and distanced look. On the contrary, the selection of objects triggers deep affective experiences (sometimes associated with crying or intense emotion from which the person is often surprised) as well as reflection on the actions, activities, contexts and interpersonal relationships that are derived from the objects mentioned (STEINER, 2003).

The choice of objects is usually accompanied by a brief story or comment on each of them. Previously I offered three cases to show several examples of this written narratives. The writing styles and contents used for these short stories display a wide variety of perspectives regarding identity, temporality, and training. For students, objects are mediators that allow to evoke memories or experiences of great significance. This is especially evident in the case of photographs and rings, two of the objects with greater symbolic capacity. These memories and experiences show the importance of human bonds, whether family, generational, social, loving or friendly. In this context, mentors, grandparents, parents, friends and other influential figures play a key role.

By examining the choices and reading the students' written comments on the objects, I believe I discover the profile of a young university generation spoiled by parents who grew up in a quiet environment, without significant economic worries and whose basic needs were covered. The content of the choices and their comments generally describe a happy childhood and adolescence. This portrait has important implications for generations and generational transmission. In the historical context of Spain and Andalusia, this generation of students is the first one to arrive massively at the university.

The choice of objects reveals a pleasant temporality without important conflicts or imbalances in this area (on temporality and learning: ALHADEFF-JONES, 2017; PINEAU, 2000). Presentations and comments about the objects are more about using and consuming time than saving it. Young people dispose of free time: they listen to music, read, meet up with friends, either directly or through technological devices (mobile phone, contacts through the Internet and social networks) or rest quietly in their beds. In short, students prolong childhood and adolescence during the stage of university life, without too many worries about money, work or the exigence of combining the problems of everyday life with free time and social life.

I believe that the personal choice of certain significant objects can constitute, in terms of intergenerational comparison, an important analyser of daily life and socio-cultural change (FORMENTI, 2002; LANI-BAYLE, 1997). The choices of objects of people belonging to the two previous generations of parents and grandparents highlight the family, work, cultural and technical reality of each historical moment. Thus, grandparents use talking about radio, parents about television, and today's youth talk about smartphones and laptops.

Intergenerational comparisons of everyday objects can offer some important insights into the epistemologies of social actors and the relationship to knowledge (CHARLOT, 1997; DELORY-MOMBERGER, 2003), areas that have undergone accelerated transformation in recent decades. The content of information, knowledge and know-how has changed. The methods of intellectual work and appropriation of knowledge have also evolved. I believe that many disappointments of adult and older generations regarding young people find here a good explanation.

The new generation view information and knowledge from different perspectives than their predecessors. It is clear that the educational and cultural world should work on this social, cultural and historical gap in order to better understand formal and non-formal education and the changes that have occurred in recent decades. Education and learning should be considered as historical and evolving processes (NARANJO, 2004). In this context, objects constitute a powerful analyser of socio-cultural changes and a tool for training that is at once experiential, deep, and determined by specific historical and social contexts.

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