



6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Intercultural Education “Education and Health: From a transcultural perspective”

Learn collectively, democratic experience

C. Tapia<sup>a\*</sup>, M. Sánchez<sup>a</sup>, M. Rodríguez<sup>a</sup>, X. Carreño<sup>a</sup>, E. Prados<sup>a</sup>, D. Padua<sup>a</sup>, C. Martín<sup>a</sup>,  
M. Mercado<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *Universidad de Almería, Facultad de Humanidades y Psicología Almería, 04120, Spain*

---

**Abstract**

The use of life stories as a methodological tool for the process of teaching has been the starting point of this research experience conducted in a graduate course at the University of Almería. The experience was carried out with students enrolled in one of the subjects taught Gender master at this University. All are women. This narrative approach has shown the difficulty, aggression, abuse and the violence on the bodies of these women, as well as relations of power and inequality experienced by these students in personal contexts and gender-related professionals. Also this experience of educational research has uncovered the foundations of dialogic learning and the principles for developing a shared understanding and built from the students.

© 2014 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license

(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>).

Selection and peer-review under responsibility of HUM-665 Research Group “Research and Evaluation in Intercultural Education”.

*Keywords:* body; gender; power relations; education; dialogic learning; biographical accounts.

---

**1. Introduction**

The present paper is contextualized within of the subject ‘Body, Gender and Power Relations in Educative Contexts’, in the Master’s Degree in Gender Studies: Women, Culture and Society of the University of Almería, during the academic year 2012-2013. The experience that we present is defined as a process of educational research based on the application of dialogic learning principles (Freire, 1997; Aubert, A., Flecha, A., García, C., Flecha, R., Racionero, S., 2008) and the meanings the awareness of our own bodies (Esteban, 2004) from a gender perspective (Puigvert and Santacruz, 2006). This new glance has involved a reflexive process about how methodology is at the

---

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +34-677-364-732

E-mail address: [tapia.trinidad@gmail.com](mailto:tapia.trinidad@gmail.com)

service of a new way of learning, based on equalitarian relations and on the self-managed learning capacity (Miranda and Mainegra, 2006). In this process involved the members of the subject, 11 women from different nationalities (one French, one Puerto Rican and nine Spanish), ages between from 23 to 65 years.

The use of biographical accounts as a tool for qualitative research, serves to show the importance, relevance and linkage in the process of teaching and learning. Point out three fundamental issues: awareness of the dialogic principles and the autonomy of the students, the experience and the emotions recorded in the body, and the reflection process from reading different texts and dialog.

Finally we present the elements of analysis that lead to the understanding of the application of the principles of dialogic learning in the context of university postgraduate training and in the context of this research experience, as well as the most relevant and meaningful conclusions from what we have called an "inclusive student-centered" in the student

## **2. Body**

### *2.1. Problem definition*

From the experience and knowledge we have as students, we have confirmed that an academic structure of rigid, purely rational nature that is oriented towards efficiency purposes within the traditional teaching-learning process exists. This fact has influence in the empowerment of the own generating capacities of new knowledge, in the reflexive skills and in the solidarity in the classroom, which are notoriously reduced in favour of the competitiveness and the consumption of information between the students without the generation of new knowledge from the programmed ones.

Historically, the educational institution has not taken into account the specific characteristics of each individual. The knowledge taught is static, boring, cold and objective. Its relation with the emotional intelligence and with life outside the classroom is void, since he was interested more to set the patterns, managing and organizing the students from power and hierarchical relations with inferior treatment. From our experience learning academic in this subject, we can say that, and as expressed Balbás et al. 'university perverts the young people's soul, makes them confuse knowledge with data, love to wideness for the professional future, status and life. It is superficial, it confuses and frustrates. It is neither temple, nor knowledge' (Balbás et al., 2007:142). Hence our interest to show and demonstrate the importance of a conscious and dialogic education.

To learn, according to the conception of dialogic learning, people need not only interaction and situations are different, but also the dialogue that is established must be based on a relationship of equality and power, as traditionally lives in the classroom. This means that we all have knowledge to contribute, thus recognizing the cultural intelligence of all the people. Through dialogue transform relationships, our environment and our own knowledge. In our case, starting the dialogue about our bodies, the experiences recorded in the same linked to gender relations and power, we highlight how the way we relate to ourselves and the environment. If we put in evidence our own educational reality we can help build knowledge based on the principles of dialogic learning: egalitarian dialogue, cultural intelligence, transformation, instrumental dimension, creating meaning, solidarity and equality of differences. So dialogic learning occurs in interactions that increase the instrumental learning, encourage the creation of personal and social sense, are guided by the principles of solidarity and equality and difference values are compatible and mutually reinforcing (op. cit., 2008).

### *2.2. Objectives*

- Apply the principles of dialogic learning the process of teaching and learning in the field of training of an official master graduate.
- To demonstrate the importance of biographical accounts as a learning tool that facilitates self-managed knowledge

- Encourage the expression of emotions, feelings and thoughts on training processes as a means for the development of emancipation and creativity of students and teachers, thus replacing the structure and rigidity of the traditional teaching model

### 2.3. *The material we used*

The importance of the biographical accounts as analysis elements has its origin in the 60's, when the social sciences (Márquez, 2011), place the subject of study as central element of the research. Subject's contributions are significant in terms of direct experience, therefore the subject is the true connoisseur of his/her environment and thinking builder. 'His/her life stories achieve special importance within the narrative research, as they contextualize an epoch socially and culturally, and they become embodied stories, expressed in his/her ways, positions and experiences' (Prados et.al., 2012:148). According to this perspective 'social sciences intend to create a new ontology, whose main condition is starting from subjectivity to reach the true social knowledge' (Bruner, 1988, 1997 and Gadamer, 1992 quoted in Márquez, 2011:118). According Rivas (2009), in the qualitative paradigm, the narrative approach used in education has created a fitting space, mainly for its credibility and legitimacy in the generation of shared knowledge. The narrative goes beyond the mere interpretation of the subjective experience, as the voices of all the people are allowed, and it avoids exclusion. Because of all these reasons, biographical accounts are a new way to understand a person, his/her personal experience, and give voice to the subjectivity that is permanently linked to the context where it moves; as the identity construction processes must be understood in relation to the social environment where it is build.

Therefore, the use of life stories as a methodological tool for the development of the subject, have been determinant in the process of knowledge transformation and knowledge generation group. Throughout the course have developed two individual stories and one group, the result of collective work. The stories were shared in class as a tool for building knowledge within the subject. From these accounts, we have discovered difficulty, abuses and violence situations in questions related to gender, power relations and inequality in personal and professional contexts.

Finally, taking the evaluation process of the self-rating school as the culmination of learning, we suggest as an alternative to the proposals of the principles of dialogic learning. In evaluating them is considered as a continuous process, where knowledge is generated during the process of dialogue shared in classes, both personal and group level, and as a result of reading and writing expressed in the stories. However, given the academic requirement of issuing a rating we look for and inquire into alternative forms of evaluation and assessment, resulting in the use of audiovisual media for the creation and formalises the process lived. This allowed to investigate other modes of study based on the dialogue and active listening of the students. The result has allowed the creation and recording of a short film (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97Xv0xGj12A>) showing the methodology of lived teaching master classes, experienced significant elements in classroom learning, discovering another look for educational processes and the awakening of the consciousness of this group of women in situations of violence and abuses of power.

### 2.4. *Methodology*

In the framework of the subject, 'Body, Gender and Power Relations in Educative Contexts' in the Master's Degree in Gender Studies: Women, Culture and Society, professors propose a methodology based on the principles Dialogic Learning. This enabled the sharing of individual knowledge, emotions, feelings and thoughts raised through dialogue and writing the story. The methodology starts with writing a biographical account. The story has to narrate and describe any individual or collective experience reminisce or remember events experienced having special relationship with three aspects: the school or any other educational context, body and power relations. After writing shared in class, leaving freedom for each student to decide what, how and when to share. Along with writing the story the students read readings proposed by teachers or proposals for themselves based on previous knowledge. Readings must be related approaches to critical pedagogy, educational narrative, dialogic learning and body awareness.

After pooling the first story, we proceed to highlight the different topics that appear on those sites to link these topics with the conceptual profile of the subject. From this, emerging thematizations are made. We make them by consensus and dialogue. Once defined the theming, we proceed to develop a single second story deepening of reflective, critical and argumentative matters that build our idea of body, gender and power relations in educational contexts. All of this analysis argues concepts appeared on the different readings. The development and sharing of both accounts generates a process of continuous dialogue and new searches for readings, experiences, etc. This process allows teachers and students to participate actively and simultaneously both the methodology class and how to build knowledge. Precisely this methodological will create and set up dynamic temporal patterns, dialogic and interactive to follow in the process, continuously leading to new ways of doing, new arguments about the contents of the course and new perspectives on the design of the it is to educate and learn. This means that progress in the course is on request and depending on the group's own development and progress thereof. Thus we highlight some methodological issues that have highlighted the importance of dialogic learning:

- The group dialogue is reflexive, critical and creative, generator of common knowledge and based on collective argumentation. Through open and reflexive dialogue, based on personal readings, corporal group experiences and individual writing, the group aims to create sense, validate the information received and confirm opinions, ideas and knowledge that are useful for every member. As the group dialogue causes reflection, the group is enriched with individual contribution. Besides, motivation and participation are also raising factors. As stated by Bruner (1997, quoted in Mattos, 2011:138), 'through narrative though we make sense of our lives and to the events we are involved in, integrating them in accounts'.
- The creation of personal accounts with several purposes: reflecting all the process lived through the narrative, giving voice to every experience recognizing the lived suffering and its meaning, and how it is reflected in our body. The pooling of these enabled the leap to create a methodological instrument that enables the whole process to evaluate and verify the lived and move towards a more plural and collective consciousness.
- Experience of reflective silence in the teaching process. Faced with the usual form of communication in class and rushed without a break, using this resource allowed individual reflexion of the taught contents, the elaboration of new arguments that led to concerns or doubts. Pauses and silences to assimilate the information before answering are as important in communication as argumentation and exposition are.
- Another important element in the dynamic methodology was the break. At the university, professors and students usually use these moments to separate. In this course the break became a human resource that has enhanced mutual understanding and recognition of diversity.
- The dialogic dynamics has given opportunity to make proposals expression and body awareness in class, based on Fedora Aberastury (2005) conscious work. The proposals allow us to relate the fact of being a woman and the experience in the body. Such experiences evidenced the bad treatment that is practiced over female body and in particular the footprints on our own bodies and talking about abuse of power, violence towards women, sexual abuses, invisibility, self-esteem and labour exploitation. When we listened to each other and we realised we were a bad treated group, we noticed there are a lot of different, subtle and atrocious mechanisms of manipulation towards women and the way in which the hegemonic system achieves to appropriate our bodies.
- Know and recognize our fellow personal experiences, favored a learning environment based on confidence, generosity, respect, open and active listening arose, as well as an engagement, sharing, honesty and sincerity climate. As the course progressed, we discovered that sharing the factors that had marked and conditioned our lives had created a space to grow, learn and progress in the way of learning, as we were building a shared knowledge based on our own experience.
- Finally, creating two learning tools based on the use of the tics, becoming the methodological tools for assessing and learning process. One, the creation of a forum within the virtual-space classroom college intended for the development of the subject through webct. This forum allows students participate both as teachers in other spaces and times varying academic format. It has been the main instrument to share other knowledge, as well as academic. Another, creating a short film as a visual tool to assess, evaluate and show the learning process, elements of innovation implemented and bodily experience as a means to raise awareness of gender and power relations.

## 2.5. Participating subjects

The group has formed the students enrolled in the course the master said. Eleven women of different nationalities (one from France, one from Puerto Rico and nine different Spanish provinces of (Santander, Granada, Murcia and Almeria), from 23 to 65 years old. Even being aware of the need and importance of the presence of the male gender in this process, the absence of men in the experience was because no kid is enrolled in this course master.

Age differences and the different cultural backgrounds have meant to take the place of the other understanding those cultural differences and therefore to include other educational knowledge and experiences.

## 2.6. Discussion

The presentation of the different elements of analysis is generated by all accounts, categories and themes drawn from the use of 18 individual stories, a group narrative and audiovisual narrative short film. The analysis from this information and data have highlighted the different categories of analysis that we explicit and analysis generated in the same group and contained within the short story and the visual:

- The use of physical space in the university classroom,  
*“In our transformation process the first element that changes is the physical space, as the chosen one by the professors was totally different from the one we were used to. They proposed a spacious, well-lit space, with an only table where students and professors could choose our place without distinctions, that is, on equal terms and with glances to the group; the physical closeness between us caused confidence and comfort” (Extract from the group narrative March, 2013).*
- Relationship and interaction in the classroom,  
*“has led the sharing of individual knowledge, emotions, feelings and thoughts possible. They emerged from the fluid dialogue between us. The way of understanding learning is the last component of this process, realizing the group reflections were more determinant that the theoretical expositions of the professor, noticing the invalidity of the current educative system. We become aware that we need to produce knowledge interaction. This means, we have to create links in multiple directions because we understand making a change is our responsibility” (Extract from the group narrative March, 2013).*
- Towards a new social and cultural construction of gender and power relations in educational contexts,  
*“This new glance gave us the opportunity to question the social construction in relation to gender and perpetuated patriarchal society, inside and outside the educative. We have transformed our hegemonic conception of gender and its invisibility through the concepts and images of body abuse. Through reflection and dialogue we have incorporated new elements in our identity, being some of them the social and affective links between us, the incorporations of emotions and thoughts that helped us to recognize ourselves in the other and the questioning of patriarchal society” (Extract from the group narrative March, 2013).*
- Stereotyped and violated body,  
*“We recognized values, beliefs and stereotypes internalized in our bodies, highlighting the beauty, corporal care and erotic feminine pleasure epitome, as well as their reproductive and caring to others capacities; however, the most identified features were that of the male gender, such as virility and strength. The rigid structure of the traditional school has been the precursor of the cancellation of creativity and individual expression; with the aim of using our minds to manage our bodies. ‘The truth reveals itself. We limit to recognize it’ (Balbás et al., 2007:145). The body represents a personal dimension we hardly ever access in order to wonder what happens in our body, how it is in our classroom, how the hegemonic system controls the physical body to dominate minds. We discover in the first that the body is a tool used by the political and economic systems as another piece of the productive gear. Power attacks and since the moment we enter the educative system we experiment an indoctrination to it: expressivity is reduced and individual creativity is cancelled. The body is educated according to rational objectives whose importance lies in the head, in numeric*

*intelligence. Sensitive body is discarded, as well as spiritual and physical body. They have a reduced vision of embodiment” (Extract from the group narrative March, 2013).*

- Homogenization of the academic system,  
*“Academic field does not consider equality as a combination of diversities. It expects homogenization increasing differences and exclusion in the classroom. Our experience through short stories and reveals hitherto felt like we were a number, and we were dealing anywhere cataloged to successful academic or non-numeric. As stated by Balbás et al. (2007:147) ‘I think the most important fact that happened to us in this travel, is realizing we don’t realize’’. We have broken with a truth regime and we have created in order to, understanding it as the capacity to do, or to admit any change or to resist it to the academic system” (Extract from the group narrative March, 2013).*

### 3. Conclusions

From the ontological and methodological experience in which we located, we can propose as a conclusion and synthesis mode some relevant issues arising from the analysis of this process of educational research. Since our view and the data from which are reflected in the different instruments used in the process we can share the following:

- The current educative system is obsolete. The methodology, spaces and instruments used by the traditional model are anchored in contexts and realities of the past. Students need to confront their knowledge with the progress of modern society we live in, based more on the multiplicity of information and exchange of experiences.
- The technical and educational methods continue to perpetuate a learning model based on rivalry, individualism and marks as main objective, dehumanizing the individual and making him/her a mere subject of analysis in knowledge away from the current social needs.

The final pretension of the rigid structure in which the educative system and academics and students currently living remains homogenize and categorize every man and woman passing through it, in order to be useful for the system. The university contributes to perpetuate this assembly line that begins at school. In this respect,

*‘The university system created us and it is still creating frustration and castration to people who went to the classroom (...), it creates expectations in these people who access to it thinking they are going to find wisdom there, a change of paradigm different from the usual one. However, it had never the intention of providing its students with the patterns and advices, method and development of abilities to become wise people, but only the aim of giving a diploma (...)’ (Balbás et al., 2007:141-142).*

- The training and socialization we are subjected to during our life is reflected in our embodiment and in everything being part of it, we have adapted to an established code that changes depending on the gender. The lived experience in our body has remained in it, has contributed to the identity we have now and that is always changing in a subtle way. Hearing in the lessons ‘who teaches marks the body’ has led us to reflect about the exigencies of the society we live in. The vision the collective imaginary has of the woman comes from the physical body and its difference with the man. In this regard the words of Esteban (2004) reflect our learning and how this extends to all kinds of contexts, and therefore the educational and academic setting different roles for both individuals

*‘the body of the women is under the constant glance of society, whereas the body of the man, since it does not need to be expression, but instrument, does not suffer in the same way the effect of beauty standards (...)’ (Esteban, 2004:73),*

- Today, we can say that sometimes we desire to know everything, to investigate, to question... the interest is transferred to our day to day, experiences, emotions, feelings. Paraphrasing Balbás et al. (2007) believe that this is the right way to generate knowledge. From own experience as a basis for further investigating. This has been a journey together. A journey of knowledge, which is the recognition of old power structures that inhabit

us. Because today we know that we have not only suffered the system, but have also helped to perpetuate it. But as we have gained in awareness win in transformation and evolution.

## References

- Aberastury, F. (2005). *Escritos. Sistema Consciente para la Técnica del Movimiento*. Madrid: Mandala.
- Aubert, A.; Flecha, A.; García, C.; Flecha, R.; Racionero, S. (2008). *Aprendizaje dialógico en la Sociedad de la Información*. Barcelona: Hipatia Editorial
- Balbás, M. J., Bautista, R., Cañada, M., Fuentes, M., González, M., Martínez, A., Ponte, M., Ruiz, C. and Pau, M. (2007). *Hilando Fino. Mujeres, un viaje en común*, Barcelona: Icaria editorial, S. A.
- Esteban, M. L. (2004). *Antropología del cuerpo. Género, itinerarios corporales, identidad y cambio*. Barcelona: Bellaterra.
- Freire, P. (1997). *A la sombra de este árbol*. Barcelona: El Roure.
- Márquez, M. J. (2011). *Mediadoras Interculturales en Centros Educativos. Un punto de vista narrativo*. Tesis Doctoral inédita. Servicio de publicaciones de la Universidad de Almería.
- Mattos, B. (2011). *La voz del alumnado. Una investigación narrativa acerca de lo que siente, piensa, dice y hace el alumnado de Magisterio de Educación Física en su formación inicial*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis. Publication Service of the University of Almería.
- Miranda, J. y Mainegra, D. (2006). “Aprender a aprender: El aprendizaje autogestionado”, *Revista “Mendive”*, no. 16, September.
- Prados, E., Márquez, M. J. and Padua, D. (2012). Historias que cuentan. Entrevistar como arte de dejarse contar. En Rivas, J. I., Hernández, F., Sancho, J.M., Núñez, C. (2012). *Historias de vida en educación: Sujeto, Diálogo, Experiencia*. Barcelona: Dipòsit Digital UB. Consulted on <http://hdl.handle.net/2445/32345>. 8th October, 2013.
- Puigvert, L. and Santacruz, I. (2006). “La transformación de centros educativos en comunidades de aprendizaje. Calidad para todas y todos”. *Revista de Educación*, 339, pages 169-176..
- Rivas, J. I. and Herrera, D. (2009), coord. *Voz y Educación*. Barcelona: Octaedro