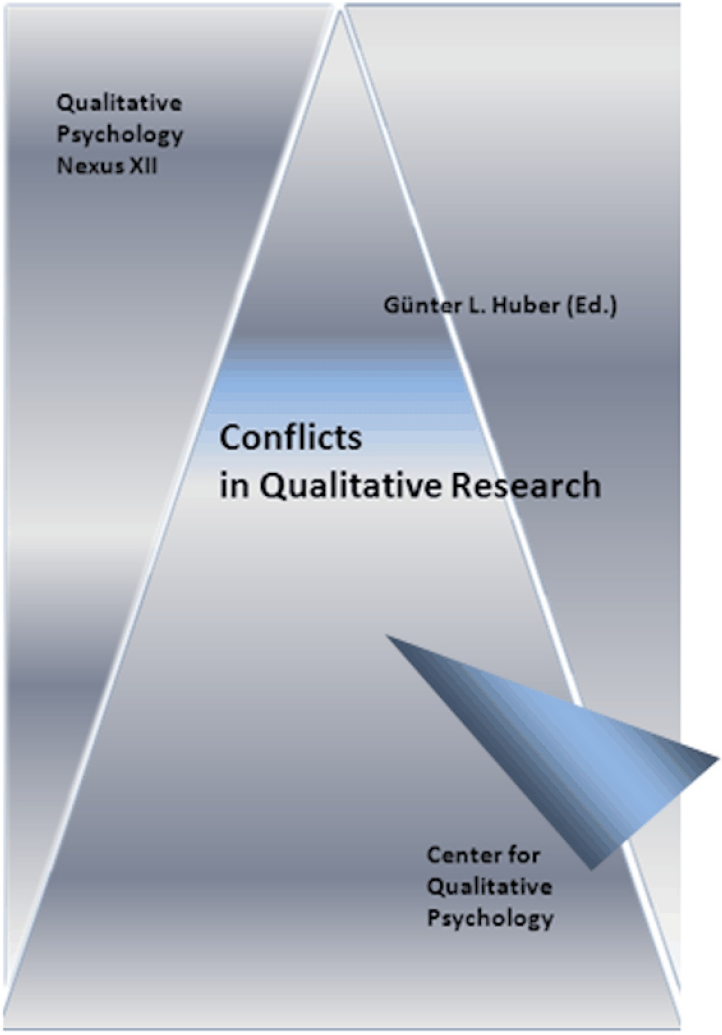
Qualitative
Psychology
Nexus XII
Günter L. Huber (Ed.)
Conflicts
in Qualitative Research
Center for
Qualitative
Psychology

Qualitative Psychology Nexus: Vol. 12

Günter L. Huber (Ed.)

# Conflicts in Qualitative Research

Proceedings of the XIV. Workshop
on Qualitative Research in Psychology,
University of Jaén, Spain, May 17-19, 2013

Center for
Qualitative
Psychology

**Bibliographic information published by**
**Die Deutsche Bibliothek**

Die Deutsche Bibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available in the Internet at http://dnb.ddb.de

1. Edition 2014

c/o Prof. i.R. Dr. Günter L. Huber
Viktor-Renner-Str. 39
72074 Tübingen
Germany
Tel. +49 7071 885147
e-mail: huber.paedpsy@uni-tuebingen.de
Web-Page: http://qualitativepsychology.com
ISBN 978-3-9812701-5-0

## Content

## Introduction

Volume 12 of the Qualitative Psychology Nexus series presents most of the contributions to the XIV. Workshop on Qualitative Research in Psychology on the general topic of "Conflicts in Qualitative Research." It was organized by the Center for Qualitative Psychology and the Department of Pedagogy of the University of Jaén, Spain, during May 17-19, 2013.

Günter L. Huber talked about "*The Research Question – A General Source of Conflicts for Researchers*" and its importance both in the qualitative and the quantitative domain, elaborating on the particular challenge of determining and formulating research questions for studies that are *not* built around known variables. Although a clear research question is the critical part of preparing any scientific study, it does not begin with a well-tailored research question, but with a long, tedious process of generating a promising question. Stepwise, more and more aspects of the general topic are put aside, until a concise question remains. This paper describes important steps in this process, discusses various strategies, and advices to check the suitability of the resulting research question.

Shahjehan Khan and Jana Sládková present in their article on "*Reflections on Participatory Action Research with Undocumented Migrants*" the experiences and considerations of the research author combined with reflections of her graduate student in a research setting that involves "potentially vulnerable participants in an unequal power context." The authors describe the expectations of their research participants and the effects of the study on their life, but also the effects of the interactions on the researchers themselves. Thus, this contribution gives not only an emotionally moving and methodologically challenging impression of conflicts researchers usually are not prepared for, but as a general result "an empathetic and substantive 'whole' view of the entire human being that comprises 'the migrant' and the entire migration process."

Conchita Medina Domínguez, María Concepción Domínguez Garrido and María Medina Domínguez describe in their paper on "*Conflict and Models for Training Workers in Enterprises*" a study on how to improve the training of employees in companies. The authors approach the problem of achieving

sound data on training needs and success by applying the method of focus groups and have them discuss the relevance of different training modalities for various training objectives. The possible conflict between the modes of presence learning and distance learning by e-learning is resolved by differentiating between learning objectives like on the one hand empathy, leadership, communication, collaborative work, efficient use of time, etc. and on the other hand mastery of technology, flexibility, use of resources, etc. The results "are crucial to implement new learning models in organizations or improve existing ones."

Amador Jiménez-Garrido and Eufrasio Pérez Navío concentrate in their paper on "*Children's Inconsistent Answers to the Language Learning Strategy Inventory: Are Introspective Questionnaires useful in Research with Children?*" on methodological challenges of scientific studies with children. The authors observe that children's answers lack stability, when the same instrument is applied a second time even after a short period. In addition, they assume that the factors "age" (because of cognitive development) and "language proficiency (because of differing strategies) influence the in/consistency of answers.

María Jesús Colmenero Ruiz, María del Carmen Pegalajar Palomino and Eufrasio Pérez Navío describe in their contribution on "*Construction and Validation of a Questionnaire on Attitudes of University Students towards the European Higher Education*" how they constructed at the University of Jaén "an instrument to check the university students' perception of the contribution of the European Higher Education Space towards the educational improvement." In their paper "both the qualitative part of constructing the questionnaire items and the quantitative part of confirming satisfying test criteria" are taken into consideration.

Ernesto López Gómez shows in his paper on the "*Exploration of Tutoring in Universities Using the Delphi Method*" first findings of an ongoing research about tutoring in the university. His central research question was: "Is it possible to reach a valid consensus by a panel of experts on a integral university tutoring model (concept, dimensions, indicators)?" The paper describes in detail the phases of the research and development process. Finally, the advantages and limitations of the Delphi method for this and comparable research projects are summarized.

María Concepción Domínguez Garrido, Antonio Medina Rivilla and María Medina Domínguez elaborate in their paper on "*The Qualitative Methodology as a Basis for Teaching Innovation*" on the design of a study that demonstrates the close complimentarity of teaching innovation and research on teaching-learning processes. The methodological approach of case studies could be proven to be most promising to support and promote this relation. Challenges and advantages of this methodological decision and conditions as well as consequences to link research on the teaching practice and teaching innovation are discussed.

José María Santoro Moreno describes in his paper on "*The Importance of Exposure to a Foreign Language*" the factors that are relevant for successfully acquire a foreign language and to foster language competence. It is assumed that the exposure factor (among the factors age, attitude, aptitude, motivation, mother tongue, personality) "is crucial at the time of learning a foreign language." The participants in this study were 24 hours during their daily life confronted with English as a foreign language. The discussion analyzes "possible reasons why the participants ... derived few benefit from the activities they performed" during this day.

# The Research Question – a General Source of Conflicts for Researchers

Günter L. Huber

## Introduction

Many teachers use a well-known expression to stimulate their students, if they hesitate to ask questions in a new subject matter area: "There are no dumb questions, just dumb answers". This may be true in the context of teaching and learning, however, asking questions in the field of research seems to represent an area of severe conflicts of many kinds. In any case, if we allow frequency of an issue as a potential indicator of its significance, then it is interesting to know that an undifferentiated search with the keyword "research question" showed about 773.000.000 findings in Google and the first 20-30 articles I skimmed were all of the type "How to ...".

This surely confirms the drawbacks of the classic routine of traditional teaching, where teachers in the classroom formulate questions about problems for which they obviously know the solutions, but nevertheless have their students find the answers. Of course, it is really difficult to ask questions about something one does not know yet, but just guiding students by a series of stepwise questions to produce the answers prescribed in the curriculum does not promote exactly the abilities they would need later to approach autonomously a new field of knowledge, nothing to say about learning to formulate effective analytic questions themselves.

No wonder then that once these students have to find interesting, well structured and feasible research questions for their qualification papers they are at a loss and need assistance. The amount of guidance offered to this end in the Internet corresponds closely to our experiences with our students' needs in research seminars on BA, MA and sometimes even on doctoral level.

Novices frequently are confronted with a serious conflict, when they start their considerations about their own study from an interest in a particular topic, problem, situation etc. and notice that any clear, well-structured research question will limit their research activities to study just a specific aspect of the broad field of interest. Unlike a guest in a restaurant, who has trouble to decide among the offers in the menu, knowing that each decision will exclude the remaining delicacies because of repletion, the researcher is sure to be able to ingest more details about his topic, if there were only more resources, above all time and money.

Therefore, it is quite understandable that novices often concentrate on their topic and avoid cutting off too many of its facets by formulating sharp, rigorous research questions. At best they reformulate their research interest as a very broad, unspecific question, such as instead of stating "I'ld like to find ways to get students more interested in physics" they ask "How can I get students more interested in physics?".

## The Research Question as the Product of Careful Considerations

Refraining from too fast decisions about the research question is not a bad idea, even though all research manuals advice students that the first step in any research project must be a concise research question. This is stated clearly in Wikipedia in the first sentence under the keyword "research question":

> "A research question is the methodological point of departure of scholarly research in both the natural and social sciences."

The guidelines of the Institute of International Studies of the University of California at Berkeley, like most of the other manuals try to explain in great detail that a good research question rarely is generated by simply taking a decision, but is the result of a more or less extended process of careful deliberation:

> "Your research question is the most critical part of your research proposal – it defines the proposal, it guides your arguments and inquiry, and it provokes the interests of the reviewer. If your question does not work well, no matter how strong the rest of the proposal, the proposal is unlikely to be successful. Because of this, it is common to

spend more time on the researching, conceptualizing and forming of each individual word of the research question than on any other part of the proposal. To write a strong research question you will need time. Step away from your computer ..." (http://iis.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/research question.pdf)

That is, although the research question determines the process of research and is without any doubt the axis around which the complete study is organized, it is not in the literally sense the first step of getting involved with a research topic, rather it develops during tackling the problem on which the investigation is focused. Traditionally research is conceived of as a cyclic process with three main phases (see fig. 1): the phase of exploration (also called phase of discovery or comprehension of the problem), the phase of explication, and the phase of application (of the research findings to the central problem).

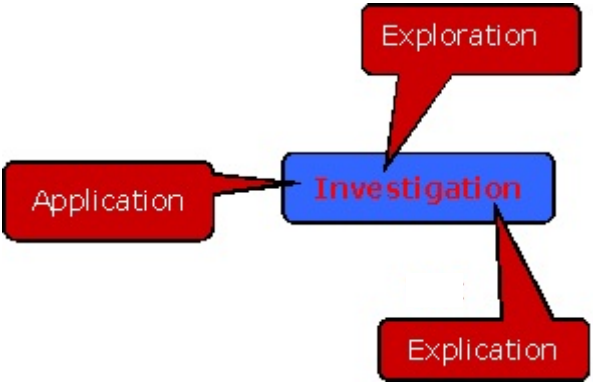


Fig. 1: *Three phases of an investigation*

Becoming aware of a problem, for instance, an educational problem like low motivation of students or mobbing in classrooms is one thing, exploring the problematic situation to such an extent that a clear research question can be formulated is another thing. Between the interest in or the decision for a general topic and the state of having explored its dimensions lies a space full of conflicts of all sorts. They refer not only to the issue at hand, but also to the own person of the researcher and his/her preferences and resources. A series of "W"-questions (What? Why? When? Where?)

determines this phase and the answers have to be focused finally in a research question (see fig. 2). The remaining phases of explication and application need answers for maybe not less difficult "How" (to do it) questions, however those do usually not involve so much the researcher as a person.


Fig.2: *The research cycle determined by series of questions*

For the development of a research question able to take a load in the forthcoming investigation, the manuals specify usually helpful questions of the "W"-type, for instance:

What do I already know about the problem field?
What says the scientific literature about the problem?
What research questions were already asked?
Why at all am I interested in this topic?
Why would a funding agency be interested in my study?
When is the deadline for my report, thesis, etc.?
When was this problem noticed – is my question out-dated or does it meet rising interest?
Where can I get access to the field?

One question most helpful for decision-making about one's research question is mentioned almost without exception in the manuals - the "So what?" question. Reformulated, we must ask: "Why at all should anyone try to find answers for this question?" Is it meaningful at all?

As an example of studies, for which the "So what?" question does not lead to promising answers, I will outline one of several studies which I had to review recently. They were methodologically well designed, but the research questions were close to meaningless. One of these investigations dealt with the topic of learning styles of the students enrolled in a particular university course. There are various concepts of learning styles and instruments to assess them. The author had made a reasonable selection and then formulated not exactly a research question, but the goal of the endeavor: "It is interesting not only to know about the predominant learning styles, but also whether there are any relations to socio-demographic variables, among them a relation to the students' age." Now, if we imagine the usual age of students in a regular university seminar, there is no wide-spread distribution to be expected, and low variation of one variable determines low correlation coefficients. Therefore, we cannot expect that even statistically significant, but nevertheless low correlations of learning styles and age will be meaningful for changes of university didactic. So what?

By the way: Asking questions that lead to statistically significant differences without any practical value is not a tendency found only in social sciences. Even in so-called hard and nowadays prestigious disciplines like neuro-science many studies are only of limited meaningfulness. The Süddeutsche Zeitung (April 11, 2013, p. 16) quoted recently an analysis by Katherine Button et al. of all the 49 meta-analyses, covering together 730 studies, published 2011 in the neuro-sciences. The authors came to the deeply distressing conclusion that only 21% of the studies were statistically and pragmatically meaningful, that is nearly four of five studies "cannot give clear answers to their questions; and some of the asserted discoveries are probably wrong or misleading."

As a rule of thumb for generating an interesting question, however not necessarily meaningful from a pragmatic point of view, we can resume: A study should (1) examine a new field of research, (2) analyze a well-known field from a new perspective, with new methods, etc., or (3) generalize available findings or ideas.

## The Research Question in Qualitative Research

The task of determining the main question to be answered by a study is less complex in quantitative approaches than in qualitative ones, because in quantitative approaches questions are built around known variables and form the starting point of a process of deductive reasoning. That is, the researchers ground their questions in something they already know and ask for something they want to know additionally.

Let us take for example researchers that want to study students' motivation in the classroom. The theory of self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1991) "distinguishes between the motivational dynamics underlying activities that people do freely and those that they feel coerced or pressured to do. To be self-determining means to engage in an activity with a full sense of wanting, choosing, and personal endorsement" (Deci, 1992, p. 44). A test battery for the assessment of self-determination is available (Hoffman, Field & Sawilowsky, 2004). Depending on the researchers' interests they will have no problems deducing questions falling usually in one of the following categories (see Cresswell, 2009): Descriptive questions like "How is self-determination distributed among students on the secondary level?", correlation questions like "How is self-determination related to academic achievement?", and comparative questions like "How are the achievements of high self-determined students vs. low self-determined students in mathematics?". These questions can be expressed alternatively as predictions or hypotheses of various types, for instance, the last question in form of a "null-hypothesis" would state "The difference of math achievement scores of high vs. low self-determined students is 0."

We see, the gist of preparing a quantitative study is deducing a problem from a knowledge base, for instance a particular theory like in the example of self-determination and then "identifying specific, narrow questions or hypotheses based on a few variables" (Cresswell, 2009, p. 129).

Although in qualitative research, too, a deductive process leading from a general conceptual framework to specific research questions is recommended (see Maxwell, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994), fundamentally "the intent is to explore the complex set of factors surrounding the central phenomenon and present the varied perspectives or meanings that participants hold" (Cresswell, 2009, p. 129).

In a joint endeavor participants of the third workshop of the Center of Qualitative Psychology 2002 in Perlora tried to illustrate the path from research questions to matching methods and had chosen the same

phenomenon for this end, namely the first chapter of Cervantes' Don Quixote. Now in this case, there is no way to deduce questions from the given text, unlike the situation when we could suggest research questions following from a given theory. Here we do not intend to falsify some hypotheses, but we are in a situation where we have to generate these hypotheses or propositions (or the underlying questions) first of all.

According to their perspectives the participants came up with questions like "Why did the narrator not name the village of La Mancha?" (Kleining, 2003, p. 12), "What does a basic work like The Quixote contribute to the process of teaching and learning?" (Medina & Domínguez, 2003, p. 28), "How did Don Quixote deal with a difference in views on knighthood between himself and his social context? (Kiegelmann, 2003, p. 51), how are "qualification and quantification ... interwoven even as we analyze the manifest context of texts"? (Huber, 2003, p. 62), and "Which person in or outside the text (author/reader) knows what at which level of the story?" (Schweizer, 2003, p. 71). Of course, these questions did not appear out of thin air, but were surely related to the researchers' personal scientific interests.

In the 2002 workshop we were interested in how to find appropriate methods to answer these questions, not in the preceding process of generating these questions. But in any case, it is obvious from the multitude of perspectives under which the researchers were looking on their common object of analysis that generating research questions is a complex process difficult to explain.

So we must not wonder about the researchers' wish to reduce this complexity and to forgo the formulation of research questions, but to describe instead meticulously the questions they are going to ask their research partners, traditionally known as "subjects". This tendency can be observed frequently among novices in qualitative research, sometimes even in scientific publications. For instance, in an otherwise excellent analysis of adolescence and identity development, the author gives a fine survey of relevant theories and research methods – and then jumps to develop the interview questions, which are supposed to reveal the adolescents' personal experiences ( in their family, with peers, in school, with their own body, etc.). Or in other words: Since it is sometimes difficult to formulate precisely what a researcher wants to find out or to understand, s/he decides to express it indirectly by describing how s/he wants to accomplish it. Thus, we do not learn directly about the "careful considerations" mentioned earlier, but we have to guess them from the methodological consequences,

that is from the questions that are used in interviews, questionnaires, group discussions, etc.

I should point out that Maxwell (1996, p. 52) also used the "understanding /accomplishing" formulation, however to describe a confusion between research issues and pragmatic issues, whereas here this formulation is applied to warn against a shortcut within the field of research issues.

## The Process of Generating Qualitative Research Questions

So far we have seen that a scientific study does not begin with a well-tailored research question, but with a long, tedious, sometimes even emotionally straining process of generating a promising research question. Stepwise, more and more aspects of the general topic are put aside, until a concise question remains. Personal experiences, available knowledge, interest in the topic are only a few of the numerous factors that determine the complex context of generating a sound question guiding the further stages of an investigation. Maxwell (1996, p. 6) summarized these factors influencing this process in an intricate web of conditions (see fig. 3).

However, many novices seem to run into conflicts in differentiating topics, problems, purposes and finally questions. For them, Fischler's explanations, to be found in a pdf-File describing the path "From Problem Statement to Research Questions" are surely helpful. The author defines: "A research problem is an educational issue or problem in the study. A research topic is the broad subject matter being addressed in a study. A purpose is the major intent or objective of the study. Research questions are those that the researcher would like answered or addressed in the study."

We stated initially that it is difficult, if not impossible to ask good questions about something we do not yet know. Later we described a deductive process of deducing questions from our disposable knowledge about a topic. If we put now these ideas together, then we see that this web of influences is less a deterrent representation of interwoven determinants of the research process, rather it is a promising suggestion where and how to become aware and find out more details about what we and others know already in relation to our general theme.

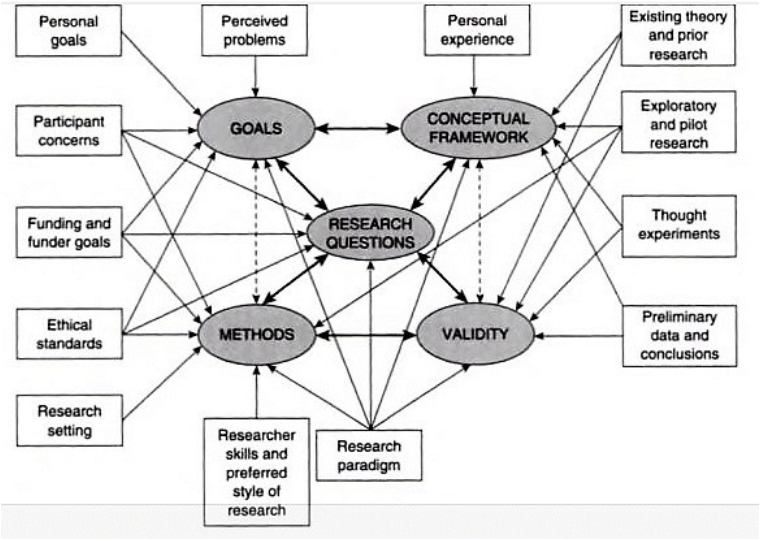


Fig. 3: *The research question within the web of influences (Maxwell, 1996, p. 6)*

Consequently, Maxwell (1996) elaborates on a path leading from scrutinizing one's personal goals as regards the research problem, constructing and analyzing a conceptual framework of the topic and finally distilling some strong questions. However, by nature of this process the destillate finally contains only some few of the initially rich ingredients of the concoction of ideas with which in mind the enthusiastic researcher approached his or her theme. At the Institute of Educational Science in Tübingen, in our joint seminars on research methods, Mechthild Kiegelmann therefore had every now and then to console distressed students by referring to the psychoanalytic concept of "grief work", because some students experienced the necessity of generating a research question as a remarkable loss and needed assistance in coping with it. In return, however, the students gained a sophisticated state of mind that spared them later to worry endlessly about how they would ever finish successfully their research projects.

In the literature and the internet novices can find numerous concrete guidelines assisting them in how to develop a usable research question. Common ground is to guide the beginner through the stepwise process of distilling a usable research question from a mixture of interests, background knowledge and academic necessities as well as to warn against conflicts and

pitfalls. Some of these guidelines are fairly general, others give very specific hints and provide tasks helping to state one's question more and more precisely.

As an example I want to outline the content of a paper available on the Harvard iSites "Moving from an interest to a research question". This movement is structured in four big steps:

(1) "From an Interest to a Topic" – the main task in the beginning is to use all sorts of sources from books, interested others, journals to finally the Internet to gain background knowledge in one's field of interest.

(2) "From a Broad topic to a Focused One" – here the advice is to narrow the perspective to a degree that firstly *original research* is possible at all, not just a report on what others have already written, and secondly that *original thinking* can be invested.

(3) "From a Focused Topic to Questions" – this third stage, on which we are concentrating here, is in the Harvard paper (p. 6f) further structured by a series of critical questions:

"1. Do I know the field and its literature well?
2. What are the important research questions in my field?
3. What areas need further exploration?
4. Could my research fill a gap? Lead to greater understanding?
5. Has a great deal of research already been conducted in this topic area?
6. Has this study been done before? If so, is there room for improvement?
7. Is the timing right for this question to be answered? Is it a hot topic or is it becoming obsolete?
8. Would I need funding or more time ... to complete the work?
9. Most importantly, will my research attract the interest of a potential thesis director?"

(4) "From a Merely Interesting Question to a 'WOW' Question" – the product of this final stage has to pass the test of what we earlier called the "So what?" question.

A rarely discussed source of conflict is waiting for the novice on the way from being interested to formulating a usable research question. Cresswell (2009) warns against the traps of the quantitative research tradition most students are familiar with. The customs of this tradition may creep almost unnoticed into the wording of a research proposal.

## Recipes for Formulating Research Questions

Many faculties provide their up-and-coming young scientists with more than advice or recommendations, but introduce them to follow more or less detailed recipes for the formulation of their research questions. At least, this guidance will resolve the novices' conflicts that their questions are either too concrete and detailed or too abstract, but comply with the standards of their institution.

Widespread recipes concern the wording of research questions, the components of the problem field, and the general suitability of the question. Guidance of this kind is common in faculties, where investigation does not pursue theoretical purposes only, but aims at solving a practical problem, too. Therefore, the majority of these recipes is published by faculties of medicine and schools of nursing. However, just because this approach of guidance is anchored in a field of problems that finally demands evidence based interventions of any kind, this approach could easily be adapted to the essentials of educational and psychological problems.

### Checking the wording of qualitative research questions

Cresswell (2009) elaborated rules for the wording of qualitative research questions, which are widely accepted and repeated in numerous guidelines for novice investigators. He starts with a general rule for using particular interrogative particles in qualitative research questions:

> "Begin the research questions with the words *what* or *how* [italics by Huber] to convey an open and emerging design. The word why often implies that the researcher is trying to explain why something occurs, and this suggests to me a cause-and-effect type of thinking that I associate with quantitative research instead of the more open and emerging stance of qualitative research" (Cresswell 2009, p. 130).

In further parts of his guideline, Cresswell (2009, p. 130f) goes into more details of the formulation of questions and suggests that more exploratory verbs should be used on the way from stating a problem to its exploration (see fig. 2 above). These verbs "convey the language of emerging design" and

"tell the reader that the study will
• Discover (e.g., grounded theory)
• Seek to understand (e.g., ethnography)
• Explore a process (e.g., case study)
• Describe the experiences (e.g., phenomenology)
• Report the stories (e.g., narrative research)."

Cresswell (2009, p.131) explains that "these more exploratory verbs ... are nondirectional rather than directional words that suggest quantitative research...". As core examples of verbs that should not appear in qualitative research questions, Cresswell lists the verbs

to affect,
to influence,
to impact,
to determine,
to cause, and
to relate.

We can take it for granted that Cresswell would also object against the use of the corresponding nouns in the wording of qualitative research questions, i.e., formulations like "What is the impact of ..." or "What is the cause of ..." should not appear in questions for a qualitative investigation, because they might be associated with quantitative approaches.

Finally, Cresswell (2009, p. 131) offers a script for constructing central questions for qualitative research, that is, he suggests a standard formulation with blanks that must be filled in depending on research topic and methodological orientation:

> _____ (How or what) is the _____ ("story for" for narrative research; "meaning of " the phenomenon for phenomenology; "theory that explains the process of " for grounded theory; "culture-sharing pattern" for ethnography; "issue" in the "case" for case study) of _____ (central phenomenon) for _____ (participants) at _____ (research site).

For instance, one of the research question in Drews' (2010) doctoral thesis on humor in early education could be arranged following this pattern like "What are the functions of humor for children and educators at a kindergarten?".

### Checking whether the essential components of the problem field are included

Under the acronyms of "PICO", "PICOT", and "PESICO" lists with different numbers of items are published that are supposed to guide the process of checking whether the essential components of the problem field are included. As an example we will have a look at the widely recommended "PICOT" checklist. Of course, it is also meant to serve as a recipe for formulating research questions. At least, it is used by medical researchers as a tool to develop a clinical research question, but it can be adopted easily for educational research purposes.

For instance, Riva, Keshena, Burnie, Endicott and Busse (2012) describe it item by item, Rios, Ye and Thabane (2010) have controlled the quality of reports that used research questions framed using the PICOT format. The letters of the acronym PICOT stand each for the first letter of an essential item that should be named in a research question:

> (**P**) – Population refers to the sample of subjects you wish to recruit for your study. ...
> (**I**) – Intervention refers to the treatment that will be provided to subjects enrolled in your study.
> (**C**) – Comparison identifies what you plan on using as a reference group to compare with your treatment intervention. Many study designs refer to this as the control group. If an existing treatment is considered the 'gold standard', then this should be the comparison group.
> (**O**) – Outcome represents what result you plan on measuring to examine the effectiveness of your intervention. ...
> (**T**) – Time describes the duration for your data

The last item, Time, is not necessarily in every study a component of the research question, therefore many guidelines for developing research questions recommend instead a shorter recipe "PICO".

### Checking the suitability of a research question

At the latest, once a researcher has generated for his/her study a question that seems to represent his/her interest in the topic as well as satisfies the demands of a clear formulation, it must be checked whether it meets critical criteria of suitability. Cummings, Browner and Hulley (2007) have summarized widely accepted criteria in a checklist known by the acronym "FINER", which means that a suitable research question should be feasible, interesting, novel, ethical, and relevant.

As characteristics that make a research question and the following study *feasible*, Cummings, Browner and Hulley (2007, p. 19f) refer to an optimal size of the sample, adequate technical expertise of the researcher, a not too expensive or time-consuming design, and a manageable scope. Particularly miscalculating the last factor determines the other impediments

of a planned study's feasibility. In our research seminars at the University of Tübingen, we always jokingly advised our master or doctoral students to focus the scope on the most important issues and to save the remaining aspects for their habilitation thesis (qualification for the position of a university professor in Germany).

The authors of the FINER list support strongly the idea that a research question should be *interesting* for the researcher him-/herself and thus help him/her to cope with frustrations on the long way to the final results, but they also warn against insisting on a question, that reviewers may find dull.

The research question should be *novel*, that is it should determine a study that provides the scientific community with new information. Cummings, Browner and Hulley (2007, p. 20) limit this characteristic by confirming that a study must not be original, because replications of former studies, applications of a design to different samples or methodological improvements may provide valuable new findings.

That a research question must not pose *ethical* problems should be out of question, particularly in educational studies.

The final and most important criterion demands that a research question must be *relevant*
– a necessity that we already twice addressed when talking about the importance of asking "So what?"

## Final Remark

The research question is the most critical part of preparing a scientific study. If the question has flaws, it endangers the success of the forthcoming work, even if much more time and efforts are invested than would have been necessary had the researcher only put more time and consideration in the process of developing a concise research question. Generating the research question surely is not a single step, but the first phase of the long journey from more or less clear research interests to scientific findings. Those researchers that try to avoid or circumvent conflicts and uncertainties during this phase or just cut this phase short by jumping to considerations about the design of their study, will for sure be confronted by major conflicts in later phases of their work.

As to the recipes just described, we should conceive of them as flexible guidelines, but *not* as instructions we have to follow strictly step by step. Particularly in qualitative research we need space to revise our approach

again and again according to what we learn about our theme during collecting and analyzing data. In any case, if we are looking for some solid orientation, the criteria for qualitative studies (cf. Charmaz, 2012), can guide already the formulation of research questions:
Will answers to your question lead to a credible, original paper that will meet with a certain response and be useful for your readers?

## References

Button, K.S., Ioannidis, J.P.A., Mokrysz, C., Nosek, B.A., Flint, J., Robinson, E.S.J., & Munafò, M.R. (2013). Power failure: why small sample size undermines the reliability of neuroscience. *nature Review Neuroscience*, published online: 10 April 2013, doi:10.1038/nrn3475

Charmaz, K. (2012). *Constructing grounded theory. A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: Sage.

Cresswell, J.W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cummings, S.R., Browner, W.S., & Hulley, S.B. (2007). Conceiving the research question. In S.B. Hulley, S.R. Cummings & W.S. Browner, D.B. Grady & T.B. Newman (Eds.), *Designing clinical research* (3rd ed.) (pp.18-27). Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

Deci, E.L. (1992). The relation of interest to the motivation of behavior: A self-determination theory perspective. In A. Renninger, S. Hidi, & A. Krapp (Eds.), *The role of interest in learning and development* (pp. 43-70). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Deci, E., & Ryan, R. (1991). A motivational approach to self: Integration in personality. In R. Dienstbier (Ed.), *Nebraska symposium on motivation: Vol. 38. Perspectives on motivation* (pp. 237–288). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Drews, J. (2010). *Kategorien und Funktionen des frühkindlichen Humors, seine Wirkungen und die Möglichkeiten einer bewussten Induzierung in Bildungs- und Erziehungsprozessen von Kindern* [Categories and functions of humor in early childhood, its effects, and possibilities to induce it deliberately in processes of education of children]. Doctoral thesis, University of Tübingen, Institute of Educational Science.

Fischler, A.S. (no year). *From problem statement to research questions*. Fort Lauerdale, FL: Nova Southeastern University, School of Education. Download (April 3, 2013): http://www.fischlerschool.nova.edu/Resources/uploads/app/35/files/ARC_Doc/from_problem_statement_to_research_questions.pdf

Harvard iSites (no year). *Moving from an interest to a research question.* Download (April 2, 2013): http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic815867.files/From%20Interest%20to%20Question.pdf

Hoffman, A., Field, S., & Sawilowsky. (2004). *Self-determination assessment battery and users guide.* Austin, TX: ProEd.

Huber, G.L. (2003). A quantitative approach to the analysis of Cervantes' Don Quixote. In M. Kiegelmann & L. Gürtler (Eds.), *Research questions and matching methods of analysis* (pp. 61-69). Tübingen: Verlag Ingeborg Huber.

Kiegelmann, M. (2003). Illustrating the voice method using the example of Cervantes' Don Quixote. In M. Kiegelmann & L. Gürtler (Eds.), *Research questions and matching methods of analysis* (pp. 49-59). Tübingen: Verlag Ingeborg Huber.

Kleining, G. (2003). The qualitative-heuristic method of text analysis: Chapter I of Cervantes' Don Quixote as Example. In M. Kiegelmann & L. Gürtler (Eds.), *Research questions and matching methods of analysis* (pp. 9-21). Tübingen: Verlag Ingeborg Huber.

Maxwell, J.A. (1996). *Qualitative research design. An interactive approach.* (Applied Social Research Methods Series, Vol. 41) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Medina, A., & Domínguez, C. (2003). Methods of qualitative research for the interpretation of Chapter I of Don Quixote. In M. Kiegelmann & L. Gürtler (Eds.), *Research questions and matching methods of analysis* (pp. 23-47). Tübingen: Verlag Ingeborg Huber.

Miles, M.B., & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis. An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rios, L.P., Ye, C., & Thabane, L. (2010). Association between framing of the research question using the PICOT format and reporting quality of randomized controlled trials. *BMC Medical Research Methodology, 10*, 11. Download (April 4, 2013): http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2288/10/11

Riva, J.J., Keshena, M.P., Burnie, S.J., Endicott, A.R., & Busse, J.W. (2012). What is your research question? An introduction to the PICOT format for clinicians. *The Journal of the Canadien Chiropractic Association, 56*(3), 167–171.

Schweizer, H. (2003). Preparations for the redemption of the world: Distribution of words and modalities in chapter I of Don Quixote. In M. Kiegelmann & L. Gürtler (Eds.), *Research questions and matching methods of analysis* (pp. 71-108). Tübingen: Verlag Ingeborg Huber.

# Reflections on Participatory Action Research with Undocumented Migrants

Shahjehan Khan & Jana Sládková
University of Massachusetts

## Abstract

In this article we reflect on research with undocumented migrants in Honduras. We present what we consider a unique approach to reflexive writing as it combines reflections of the research author combined with reflections of her graduate student. The article discusses the research process employed by one of the authors as it is reflected in participant expectations, her own preparedness, expectations, involvement in the community and particular research methods. We found that looking back at research that involves potentially vulnerable participants in an unequal power context is a powerful learning process for researchers, whether they were involved with the original research or not. Our reflections have lead us to build on the methods employed and to suggest that participatory action research may be the most empowering technique for both the community and researchers.

## Introduction

This paper is an attempt to take a reflexive look at the doctoral work of Dr. Sládková, who performed an intensive, narrative-based exploration into the journeys undertaken by Honduran migrants as they traveled to the United States in search of a better and more promising future. I was taken on as a research assistant by Dr. Sládková approximately one and a half years ago, and spent a great deal of time familiarizing myself with her research. Towards the end of our first semester working together, she asked me if I would be interested in co-authoring a paper with her as a means of re-

visiting her already published work from a fresh perspective, perhaps utilizing a different approach.

When I began researching other studies similar to Dr. Sládková's, I came upon a few articles based in reflexivity. It was interesting to me for a number of reasons, but mostly because I felt that it brought a mindfulness and vulnerability to the researcher, and really challenged the power dynamics inherent in much research.

So what follows is a rather unusual but stimulating collaboration between the two of us where I am attempting to incorporate some of my own reflections into hers. In order to effectively navigate between both of our "voices", we will use italics to delineate when she is actually doing the speaking directly, otherwise I will refer to her in the third person.

## Context

Having compassion for other people requires the ability to relate to their experience, whatever it may be. Wealth gaps in America are at an all time high (Isacson, 2012), and the very real experience of poverty here is unfortunately becoming a harsh reality for more and more Americans. Yet there is something especially dehumanizing about so-called third world poverty, and it is important to keep that in mind when examining why people are so desperate to leave those parts of the world in order to come to the United States. This point is especially salient in Dr. Sládková's research, which took place in the small rural community of Copán Ruinas in Honduras, one of the poorest countries in the world. There is not much of a local economy in Copán other than tourism to Mayan ruins where people presumably marvel at what once was the site of a great ancient civilization.

Unfortunately, time has not been kind to Honduras, and many are forced to leave the country in order to improve their financial realities. For most, work is extremely difficult to come by, and the income disparities leave the society open to political corruption (McKenzie and Menjivar, 2011). Ironically most of the country's employable people end up leaving; this is why 25 per cent of Honduran GDP (McKenzie and Menjivar, 2011) comes from remittances, the money that migrants send home to their families. It is not difficult to see how there is little hope for real long-term prosperity in Copán Ruinas when the able-bodied and most productive

members of the labor force find it necessary to find employment elsewhere.

The element of real danger also cannot be under-emphasized. Honduras is also now officially the "murder capital of the world" (Thayer, 2012). The widespread jurisdictions of the Mexican drug cartels keep the people of the region under a constant state of subservience and fear. One need only look at a news article from two days preceding the writing of this paper (Reuters, 2013) to get an idea of how much power and influence they exert. Dr. Sládková's research participants were people from the local community of Copán Ruinas that had attempted to migrate to the United States. She refers to a "successful" migrant as someone who made it all the way across to their destination; "unsuccessful" meant that the migrant was sent back, caught, or deported at some point in the journey, whether in Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, or the United States, if they were lucky enough to make it that far. The participants had a variety of reasons for going on the journey, but they all had aspirations of a better life and earning capability in America. She spoke with both men and women, some that journeyed on their own, and some that traveled with the assistance of a smuggler (a "coyote", as they are known). All migrants experienced difficulties on their journeys, some more harrowing than others.

We have all heard about immigration and perhaps seen statistics from time to time, usually in the context of the American media discussing the "problem" or the "challenge" of immigration. Some say we are fighting a "War on Immigration" and immigration reform seems to be just one of the many looming tasks of the current administration. There are several proposals on the table, such as the DREAM Act, which would provide a path to citizenship to the children of the undocumented, the so-called "1.5 generation" (Timmerman, 2011) who find themselves in America as a result of decisions they did not make but the consequences of which (lack of citizenship and documented status) they must deal with. There is also a widespread effort to "secure our borders" and a strong sense of nationalism and fear, especially post-9/11. Both Dr. Sládková and myself are products of immigration; she came to the US from the Czech Republic in 1991, and my parents are part of the South Asian wave of immigration of the 1960s and 1970s. However, neither she nor my parents had anything close to the experience of the migrants that participated in the study. With each new story I read in Dr. Sládková's book, I couldn't help but compare it to the experience of my parents, both of whom were welcomed into America I believe due to their status as potential high earners (my father attended a prestigious technical college and my mother already had a masters degree

from Pakistan). Ironically, it is the "menial" jobs that the U.S. needs but which people do not appreciate or respect.

A final component of context has to do with how such stories are told. The way we use language is very significant especially in public discourse about immigration. When it comes to undocumented migration, there is a tendency to engage in the process of so-called "othering" by using terms like "illegal immigrant", or worse, "illegal alien". I feel that this is due to the lack of real understanding in the general American public of why people migrate in the first place. Seeing people as multidimensional, real human beings is perhaps the most important part of good research, and this is primarily what I see that Dr. Sládková was hoping to achieve through her work with the migrants of Honduras.

## Journey

It is from such dire circumstances that many families hope to escape, and thus send off their mothers, fathers, daughters, and sons on the perilous journey to the U.S. in the hopes that they might make a decent wage and try to raise their standards of living. Reading Dr. Sládková's book (Sládková, 2010) was my first exposure to any real narrative about the experience of undocumented migration. Although I consider myself a fairly educated, well-traveled and certainly compassionate human being, I cannot claim to have had any real exposure to or interaction with this "hidden class" of people. I alluded previously to my own parents' immigration to the United States, however, theirs is a largely middle class experience, and while they certainly had to work hard to establish themselves, I would point out a key difference in that at no point were either of them discouraged from migrating.

The journey of the undocumented migrant is an unpredictable, often horrifying experience that leaves a permanent scar on their psyche. Most don't make it to the their destinations. Many are imprisoned, detained and deported, and scores die along the way. Undocumented journeys are taking place all over the world, including from Africa to Europe, through Europe, from Asia to Australia and the United States. These journeys have become a subject of documentaries (*Which Way Home*), movies (*Sin Nombre*), and news (Mogelson, 2013) recently. Hopefully these portrayals will lead to increased awareness and maybe even a change in the conditions. Even the

"successful" migrants usually have a life of hard, unforgiving labor ahead of them once they arrive at their destination. Perhaps the greatest injustice of all is that the vast majority of their stories remain untold, hidden behind barriers of guilt, shame, and fear.

## Reflexivity

Dr. Sládková has a very strong foundation in qualitative theory and practice, and she used this knowledge as a starting point for her research design and very thorough and detailed analyses of the stories that people narrated to her. Any good and comprehensive research study, regardless of the format, takes time, effort, and resources. Field research in particular also requires almost total immersion in the process. In this case, Dr. Sládková needed to be absorbed in Copán Ruinas as best she could. She spent several summers there teaching English to adults for free, learning Spanish, and just living there. When doing her research, she went directly to speak with people, in their own homes and at their convenience. She could have remained in the United States and only conversed with the people that had already made it across and while this would still probably have been fruitful, she may not have fully appreciated the complexities of the journeys.

As her work unfolded, she, as a researcher, was also constantly in the process of change, and I believe that it is particularly salient in such work to keep track of the bigger picture. She reflected on her own role as a researcher and what it meant for the participants as well as how she was changed or affected by what she was experiencing, namely the stories she was listening to. This is where I began to really see the possibilities for looking at the work in another way, and I began to pick out some of these instances and note her language and especially the feelings she mentioned having. It has been several years since her last trip to Honduras, but anytime she looks back at her notes or begins to put herself mentally back into the homes and lives of the people that she spoke with, I would say that she is in a state of reflection and self-awareness. As Dowling (2006) puts it:

> "[Reflexivity] acknowledges that the researcher is intimately involved in both the process and product of the research endeavor. It involves being aware in the moment of what is influencing the researcher's internal and external responses while simultaneously being aware of the researcher's relationship to the research topic and the participants." (p. 8)

We had a couple of conversations about some of these feelings, and talked openly about how reflexivity would be a great way to frame a collaborative effort between the two of us. I tried my best to synthesize all the different instances where she spoke of her own feelings about what was going on, and decided that the best way to proceed would be to look carefully at what she thought was expected of her by the people she was working with, the ramifications of her work on them, and perhaps most striking, their effects on her.

## Expectations of Migrant Participants

Participation in Dr. Sládková's research was naturally a matter of choice, and we needed to think carefully not only about what people said, but why they said it, whether only to help themselves "make sense of their stories" (Sládková, 2010) or if there were other underlying motivating factors. Migrants had certain expectations about the purpose of their participation in this work and any favorable outcomes that would result from participating. While Dr. Sládková made it clear that she was not a law enforcement official or involved with US Border authorities in any capacity, some people may have hoped that by talking to her they would be helping their cause or themselves in some way. Dr. Sládková mentioned at one point in her book that migrants chose certain narratives over others; the worst parts of certain migrants' journeys may have been highlighted in order to gain sympathy from an "influential outsider". While such studies are an important step in understanding the plight of the undocumented migrant, both Dr. Sládková and myself talked about the importance of being aware that there was a definite urgency for these stories to be told, and people may have been motivated by a personal desire to be part of social change, which at the time was her goal.

We also tried to examine other perhaps less obvious motivations of the interviewees. As she alluded to at one point in her book (Sládková, 2010), it became clear that some of the men interviewed may have had personal, sexual motives for agreeing to participate. From their perspective, she was asking them to sit with her alone in a room of their choosing, so although this was quite uncomfortable for her when she realized what may have been happening, Dr. Sládková certainly now concedes that cultural sensitivity is

crucial to her work and good preparedness for it, and she notes two instances where this became apparent:

*As I walked into Kevin's house and started looking for a place to sit down, Kevin came very close to me. Surprised I backed up and from his look realized what he was expecting to happen. Though I did not feel in physical danger, it was very awkward. I remember looking down and quickly explaining the purpose of the study and my role again. After a while, Kevin realized I really only wanted to talk to him, prepared chairs for us and we started the interview.*

*I am not sure how or if I could have prevented such a situation but it seems to me that I could have been better prepared. In retrospect I wish I thought more about the female and male dynamics in Honduras. Since many of the participants got recruited by a local female (who worked as my research assistant), I could have talked to her about the best ways to approach interviews with male participants. I could have also asked her to be very explicit (perhaps even more with males) about my role and my expectations of talking with them.*

*Another situation that I did not anticipate was that some people would think I was there to help them get to the U.S. in some way. At one point, an old lady came to speak with me from a nearby village and it quickly became clear that she wanted me to help her join her sons in the U.S. Her situation was heartbreaking and I felt stymied by my inability to help. She (as well as another female migrant) insisted that I write her a letter of invitation to come visit me in the United States, which they could present to the U.S. embassy. I tried to explain that such a letter would not help them get a visa, but she continued to ask. Even though this was likely unprofessional, I did promise the letter and sent it once I was back in the U.S. I have no idea whether it even reached her.*

## Effects on Participants/Migrants

I couldn't help but get the impression that there was an exchange of feelings happening between Dr. Sládková and the people she spoke to, and as such, she was transcending typical researcher-participant roles. I think that this is perhaps the greatest strength of these types of studies; indeed this is the way that we (the researchers) are shown to be complete human beings. Watts argues for the need for a "shared emotional space" (Watts, 2008) when examining empathy in social science research. While Dr. Sládková isn't entirely sure to what degree real empathy could have occurred in an interview atmosphere, as an outsider I would venture to say that she did the best she could with the tools that were available. Throughout her research, she was asking people to recount harrowing experiences and while she feels

that she was able to empathize to a degree with many of her participants, she was faced with conflicting feelings throughout her study regarding the ethical nature of her work.

To fully understand her effects on the people she spoke with it was important for Dr. Sládková to be aware of herself and how she appeared to the participants. Honduran gender roles tend to be fairly traditional; women are caretakers and homemakers and men are breadwinners. She learned rather quickly that men, women, and children are all equally likely to participate in migration, despite the risks, because of the financial prospects. It was clear that people tended to see her as a fairly successful, independent, woman who "made it" in America. I believe that her gender also had an effect on what migrants chose to share, as is illustrated by two interviews in particular.

Conchetta was one of the successful migrants who did eventually reach her destination. She traveled from Honduras with a friend and eventually made it to the United States with the help of a coyote. Her journey was like many others who make the trip hidden in cars, trucks, and gas cisterns. She found employment, learned English, and eventually returned home to be with her children. She emphasized the importance of family relationships in much of her narrative, and her story was one of pride in self-reliance and inner resilience, certainly influenced by her womanhood. Dr. Sládková noted that this provided an opportunity for empathy and respect between the two of them, evident in her transcription and analysis of their conversation. She believed that Conchetta may have been comforted by her presence and even seen her as a peer. Conchetta stressed that she did not suffer during the journey, and may have felt a desire to prove that she was strong and capable, particularly because she said it was her intention to repeat the journey again with her two sons to join her husband and reunite their family. In Dr. Sládková's words:

> *I tend to be referred to and consider myself a resilient and strong woman. I remember relating to Conchetta quite naturally, which may have impacted the way I carried myself and even how I asked questions.*

Nelson, an ultimately unsuccessful migrant, described a difficult train encounter involving a gang assault on fellow migrants. There were two high points (see Sládková, 2010 for a description, explanation, and analysis of high points) in his story, one regarding his powerlessness over the rape of

a woman and the other a rather heroic and dramatic battle once the bandits got onto his car. Though he described the first half and even implied that women that put themselves through such a journey should know better, and that they will be treated like "dogs", he quickly shifted gears to the second part of the story, and I believe that Dr. Sládková's presence as both a researcher and as a woman was an influence on his storytelling. He even offered to be her guide in the event that she should decide to undertake the journey herself. As Dr. Sládková puts it:

> *In hindsight, I would venture to say that he wanted to impress me and hoped that if I traveled with him, he would have a safer and ultimately successful journey. Though he was offering to be the guide (coyote), he wanted me to be the safeguard.*

Much of Nelson's story focused on his failures and the negativity that followed his deportation back to Honduras, namely his separation from his family and the meaninglessness of his life. He had made it all the way to the US-Mexico border when a policeman appeared and a physical altercation took place, after which Nelson was apprehended and eventually deported. Even more humiliating for him was the fact that his companion, when faced with the decision to help Nelson or cross the border alone, chose the latter. I wonder myself what this sort of betrayal (if that is how he saw it) would do to someone. It is rather poignant that Nelson selflessly put himself in danger earlier on during the train assault, only to fall prey to his good friends' own ultimately selfish and self-preserving choice. Travelers usually develop strong, lasting bonds, and I imagine that these relationships between migrants on the journey are very important and a source of emotional sustenance for them.

It is perhaps safe to say that a bond is also created between the storyteller and the listener. In this case, I tried my best to "read between the lines" of the experience of Dr. Sládková as she wrote about it in previous publications. It was apparent almost right away that she hoped that her research would be a collaborative process between herself and the participants, that they would in fact be creating a "co-constituted account" (Finlay, 2002). In order for this to happen and for her work to be meaningful, she had to make her intentions clear. While she certainly did not force people to speak about anything and kept the interviews semi-structured, her presence as a researcher studying a particular story had some bearing on the direction of the story. It would not be the same if she simply engaged in casual conversation.

At the same time, she also needed to be aware of the nature of her relationship with the people she spoke to. As much as she wanted to put them at ease, she was careful not to cross certain boundaries in order to preserve the integrity of her research while it was happening. According to Watts (2008), "Empathy is not synonymous with friendship and avoiding false or insincere friendship contributes to ethical research conduct (p. 9)". She has maintained ties with some of the migrants she spoke to. I hope that maintaining such contact will not only enrich the possibility of future work (in terms of any follow-up studies) but also perhaps ensure that those who participated feel they are still appreciated, not just as research participants but as human beings who trusted somebody else with their experiences.

## Effects on the Researcher

"Narrating is a process in which individuals make sense of the events, identify those that are worth telling about, reflect on the significance, and in the process create a particular self (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2003, p. ix)."

Involved work of this nature brings with it not only responsibility, but real intensity and pressure. Dr. Sládková is quite open even today when asked about what it all actually felt like for her, specifically how she dealt with the very real guilt and anxiety of not being able to "do anything about it". She found it very difficult not to bring her work home with her, and will attest to suffering depression to the point of wanting to stop the work several times throughout the process. All of the interviews she conducted in Honduras were emotionally charged, and she was not able to distance herself from the conversations after they ended. In reading some of the stories myself, I would find it hard to believe that anyone could have a completely cold and reserved "scientist-like" demeanor in such situations.

A few of the people she spoke with confided in her that they had never spoken about these events previously with anyone, and although in theory she hoped for maximum benefit for both parties involved, this proved to be a major responsibility that she was not necessarily expecting to be given. I think that it would be very interesting for there to be some follow-up to find out if Dr. Sládková was helping migrants make sense and meaning out of their experiences or simply re-opening old wounds without offering any sort of closure. She certainly struggled with guilt over her inability to

provide professional psychological support, which some participants needed but was totally inaccessible to them in Honduras:

> *Marcela was a migrant who was abandoned in the desert on the U.S. border by her coyote and saved by the U.S. border patrol only to be deported back to Honduras. She said she was still having nightmares half a year after her deportation and told me that sharing her story with me, with someone who cares and does not judge, was very helpful and therapeutic for her. I remember crying with Marcela as she was narrating her experiences and feeling close to her at the moment.*

Selena was a migrant that underwent what she referred to as extreme psychological torture while being held in an American prison. One of the most painful moments that Dr. Sládková recalls about her interview was when she said she would actually have preferred to be beaten physically than spend time in confinement and experience psychological harm. Dr. Sládková wondered if she was actually telling the whole story, or if there were other parts that were too painful or humiliating to mention. During an earlier phase of the research, she had held focus groups with migrants to allow for them to tell their stories together (Sládková, 2010). At one such meeting, a group of women directly asked her "How is it that you can come here [to Honduras] whenever you want and when we try to go to the United States we are shot at and imprisoned like criminals?". Although such questions were why she had held the group in the first place, Dr. Sládková was not adequately prepared for her privilege to be thrown in her face in this way, and it was cause for some humiliation.

Another unsuccessful migrant, Paulo, had a more positive attitude towards what happened to him. He was beaten up, robbed by thieves, and actually reached the U.S. only to be detained by immigration, jailed, and ultimately deported back to Honduras. Even though Paulo's attitude was positive, Dr. Sládková still felt guilty about her presence in his home:

> *When I arrived in Paulo's home, he was not there. His wife welcomed me in and then we just sat there waiting for his return, seated on two plastic chairs placed arbitrarily on the dirt floor, in the company of his naked children, all the while breathing in smoke from the fire under the pots in the kitchen. This was my first real encounter with such stark poverty, and I was extremely self-conscious of my position and privilege. Even though I paid each participant $6 for their time (often times equivalent of day's work for them), I felt awkward for my inability to do anything else.*

I can recall a similar experience when I was traveling abroad in Pakistan with a journalist friend of mine who had to report on land-grabbing practices in a slum outside Lahore. While I had seen such poverty before, I remember in that instance feeling like I was some sort of museum patron. I was aware of every single privilege, from the car I got out of, the shoes on my feet and the eyeglasses on my face to the reality that I would be eating a safe, hot meal later that day and that my friend would be paid more for this one story than any of the people in the slum would see perhaps all year. There was an entire psychological and physical sense of shame, that I was simultaneously humiliated but also humiliating the inhabitants of their world, which I was invading.

During the actual interview, Paulo at one point brought up his religious values and how he lost a job in Mexico after calling his gay employer a sinner. Dr. Sládková suddenly became aware of her own discomfort with the topic, and was placed in a bit of a strange situation when it seemed that Paulo assumed that she understood how valuable God-reliance was for him and that she agreed with his homophobic attitude. She chose not to pursue these issues in the rest of the interview to avoid potential conflict. I imagine that the interview may have taken a different shape had she pressed on. Often times in such extreme living conditions, the hope of a better afterlife or a loving God helps people accept the cards they have been dealt. Although Paulo stressed that he did not want pity and she certainly was trying her best to view migrants from a strengths-based perspective, she could not help but feel sadness at the end of many of her days in Copán Ruinas. Her work would end, her life would continue, but she would be leaving these people behind.

## Different Methodologies

A question that I certainly had after I was through reading all that I could about Dr. Sládková's work was in regards to what the future would hold and also whether anything might be improved upon in research like hers. After the fieldwork is done, the researcher (Dr. Sládková) goes home, the data is analyzed, and the papers are submitted and published, what then becomes of the research participants? While both of us hope that she played

a meaningful role in the migrants' lives, she certainly cannot change the laws herself to make it easier for migrants to come to America or stimulate the economy in Honduras simply by making more people "aware" of the situation. What Dr. Sládková can do is inspire others to follow in her footsteps, and try to convince other researchers that the plight of undocumented migrants deserves their attention.

As has been mentioned previously, what is lacking in current immigration research is an empathetic and substantive "whole" view of the entire human being that comprises "the migrant" and the entire migration process including the migrants' situation at home, the actual journey, and their attempt at assimilation into a new culture. How is it that words like "alien" and "illegal" find their way so easily into the American lexicon? There is no agency given to "those people in that country over there", whatever country of origin it might be. As a student in the first year of my graduate program, I see Honduras as a place that would benefit from a community-based psychological approach and concentrated implementation of action research, thanks in large part to Dr. Sládková's research. It is fairly easy to see this by simply taking a look at the "guiding principles" (Rudkin, 2003) of the discipline, which are centered around values, context, diversity, social change, and perhaps most relevant, a "strengths-based" perspective when it comes to working with research participants in any capacity (p. 41). Part of community development involves asset building, or looking specifically for the positives or "strengths" within the communal environment rather than simply focusing on the deficits; it is easy to see the challenges faced by migrants (and potential migrants) as inevitable and insurmountable obstacles.

As I reflected on earlier, it was often a challenge for Dr. Sládková to feel like what she was doing mattered. Even for a trained researcher like herself, sitting on a plastic chair on the dirt floor in Paulo's barren home was something she was not prepared for. But what if it wasn't her who was in that chair? What if it was a friend of Paulo's, or better yet, a fellow migrant conducting the research for him or herself, on behalf of a local community organization or task force whose job was solely to provide assistance to people directly affected by undocumented migration. While she may have given Paulo an hour or so of comfort on that day, even if she made him feel like somebody was there to listen, what he may have really needed was empowerment and emancipation from his condition. This does not come overnight or through one interview, but through a systematic change in his circumstances.

Participatory action research (PAR) has roots in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and Martín Barro's work (1994), and has been steadily gaining acclaim for its promotion of a more communal nature of engagement. It is applied, collaborative, and committed research that works in a cyclical rather than necessarily "conclusive" method (Walter, 2009). There is an initial sort of need recognition phase where a weak point in a given system is identified by not just a single group or team of field workers, but a "community of local researchers". Next comes a resource-pooling step with the goal of "tackling the problem", leading to the "action" phase where strategies are implemented to reach the "desired objective". The last stage of the cycle is a reflective one, where flaws in design are ironed out and methodology is streamlined, eventually leading to a new "reflection-informed planning" period. The emphasis here is on the rotational nature of the process; there is no real "end" until the problem is solved. While Dr. Sládková's work was done at the individual level, I believe that if replicated on a larger scale, it can be utilized within a mosaic of system-wide change when it comes to not only immigration reform but the migration process itself. As discussed earlier, in addition to teaching introductory English courses, she led several focus groups with migrant women. Unlike the more formal interview sessions, these groups provided a forum for migrant women to experience a sense of community and gave them the courage to ask questions, to challenge her research and motives, and to hopefully "challenge the metanarrative of immigration, acknowledging [themselves] as transformative subjects, not passive victims or the collateral damage of the sweeping forces of globalization" (Cahill, 2010, p. 160).

The traditional control structure of field research as it stands lacks necessary space for the input of the participant on the design and direction of the work. Dr. Sládková did her best to become immersed in her surroundings, but limitations were imposed by time, logistics and the unmistakable reality that she would always be an outsider. A better way to empower both the researcher and participant in a study like this would be to train and employ researchers native to this community (perhaps non-migrants) to speak with the very people who know exactly what it is like to go through this horrific journey. This could be the ultimate source of healing, to be of service to one's own community. Common struggle can truly empower human beings and their communities, and even allow people to palliate each other's suffering, as is evident from a New Year's Party by

Dr. Sládková attended some time after her research was completed, which she describes in a previous publication:

> The morning of New Year's Eve, a few migrants and I congregated in the kitchen in Baltimore and one of them spontaneously started talking about the journey (at the time he did not know I was interested in conducting research specific to the journey). As he talked, he acted out parts of the journey in a performance, not for me but the other migrants, who quickly started chiming in with their own experiences. As I was captivated by his description of crossing Rio Grande and seeing crocodiles next to the small raft he was sitting on, his sister jumped in and said she was scared to death of crossing the river because she couldn't swim and was told about all these dangerous animals in the water. Another migrant witnessed coyotes fighting amongst themselves to get more migrants so that they can claim more money from their relatives upon their arrival. And another migrant got in on the conversation with her story of being locked in a truck where she could not breathe properly and was afraid she would suffocate. This intense conversation went on for over an hour. I thought this was the first time they shared these experiences with each other, but my friend told me they often talked about the journey, and every time more details come up. … The group discussion about the journey described above showed me that the group narration was quite different from the individual interviews I conducted with migrants in Copán Ruinas. This is consistent with narrative theory (i.e.; Bakhtin, 1986; Bamberg, 2004; Daiute, in press; Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004) and research on focus groups (i.e. Wilkinson, 2006), in which narrating depends much on the audience and context of the event and where participants try to find consensus and shared experiences. Conducting group interviews would thus provide interesting data on how migrants narrate the journey to and with others who have undergone a version of it. (Sladkova, 2010, p. 157)

*Having experienced this group process showed me that the journey serves as social glue that contributes to the closeness of the group and provides something they keep sharing and empathizing with each other.*

This is also evident in several fairly recent studies. McNae and Strachan (2010) collaborated with two women native to the South Pacific island community where their study took place, with "the focus of the action research [being] the design and delivery of a culturally appropriate educational leadership development programme for women" (p. 41). They force us in the academic community to think carefully about the nature,

focus, and implementation of our research by asking a series of direct questions:

- What are your reasons for doing the research?
- What is the purpose of the research?
- Who will benefit [from the research]?
- And perhaps the most important question of all: In your research context how might you show that you value people's input?

As Cahill (2010) points out, "PAR involves...foregrounding the concerns of those who have been excluded or whose contributions to knowledge production have been marginalized, distorted, or otherwise silenced" (p. 154). There are plenty of organizations already in place that do work with migrants both at the US border as well as along the way, a few of which Dr. Sládková highlighted in her book (Groupo Beta, migrant shelters, religious organizations, etc.). I believe that they would benefit from more focused PAR and other similar guided research. Although Dr. Sládková's work was done without much financial support, researchers in the United States certainly have more power to provide migrants with an opportunity to tell their stories. Ultimately, it is the people that must become empowered in order for real progress to happen in places like Copán Ruinas. We (Dr. Sládková and I) hope that readers of this paper will see it that way too.

## References

Barrera, G. (Executive Producer), Cruz, P. (Executive Producer), Bernal, G. G. (Executive Producer), Kaufman, A. (Producer), Luna, D. (Executive Producer) & Fukunaga, Cary (Director). (2009). *Sin Nombre* [Motion picture]. Mexico: Scion Films.

Cahill, C. (2010). 'Why do they hate us?' Reframing immigration through participatory action research. *Area*, *42*(2), 152-161.

Cammisa, R. (Producer)& Cammisa, R. (Director). (2009). *Which Way Home* [Motion picture]. USA: White Buffalo Entertainment.

Daiute, C., & Lightfoot, C. (Eds.). (2004). *Narrative analysis: Studying the development of individuals in society*. Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage.

Dowling, M. (2006). Approaches to reflexivity in qualitative research. *Nurse Researcher*, *13*(3), 7.

Finlay, L. (2002). Negotiating the swamp: the opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice. *Qualitative research*, *2*(2), 209-230.

Freire, P. (1993). Pedagogy of the Oppressed. 1970. *New York: Continuum*.
Isacson, A. (2012). *Annual Statistical Yearbook*. U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

McKenzie, S., & Menjívar, C. (2011). The meanings of migration, remittances and gifts: views of Honduran women who stay. *Global Networks*, *11*(1), 63-81.

McNae, R. E., & Strachan, J. (2010). Researching in cross cultural contexts: a socially just process. The University of Waikato.

Mogelson, L. (2013, November 15). The Impossible Refugee Boat Lift to Christmas Island. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/17/magazine/the-impossible-refugee-boat-lift-to-christmas-island.html

Palencia, G. (2013, October 22). Honduras' Zelaya could bounce back as wife runs for election. *Thomson Reuters*. Retrieved from http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/22/us-honduras-election-idUSBRE99L0GL20131022

Rudkin, J. K. (2003). *Community psychology: Guiding principles and orienting concepts*. New Jersey, NJ. Pearson College Div.

Sládková, J. (2007). Expectations and motivations of Hondurans migrating to the United States. *Journal of community & applied social psychology*, *17*(3), 187-202.

Sládková, J. (2010). *Journeys of undocumented Honduran migrants to the United States*. El Paso, TX. LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC.

Thayer, A. (2012 September 25). Mr. President, You Are Abetting Murder in Honduras. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/andy-thayer/mr-president-you-are-abet_b_1902469.html

Timmerman, H. (2011). Dare to DREAM: Generation 1.5 Access to affordable Postsecondary Education. *W. St. UL Rev.*, *39*, 67.

Walter, M. (2009). Participatory action research. *Social Research Methods, 2nd ed., M. Walter, ed., Oxford University Press, Australia*, *21*.

Watts, J. H. (2008). Emotion, empathy and exit: reflections on doing ethnographic qualitative research on sensitive topics. *Medical Sociology Online*, *3*(2), 3-14.

# Conflict and Models for Training Workers in Enterprises

Conchita Medina Domínguez,
María Concepción Domínguez Garrido &
María Medina Domínguez

## Abstract

Training is essential for innovation and continuous transformation of organizations, with special emphasis on companies wishing to adapt to the enormous society changes and the complex global scenarios.

The research for improving training in enterprises is achieved through the use of qualitative methodology, particularly the use of focus groups, which have shown the relevance of the training modalities depending on the type of competencies to develop. The article highlights the modality of presence learning to form competencies like empathy, leadership, communication, collaborative work, efficient use of time, etc.., while underlining the value of e-learning to promote technology mastery, flexibility, use of resources, etc.

It is emphasized that the line for innovation of teaching and improvement of training practices will require the blended-learning modality, meaning, the complementarity between the two modalities, being the visions, expectations and needs of people and enterprises, who guide the priority in the use of each it and integration-combination of both, in those situations of full exchange of experiences among the participants in the training program.

## Introduction

We highlight that training has an impact on the improvement of enterprises and the responsibility that leaders take on it, if they want that they become true communities of learning and service generation.

We start from an understanding of training as an essential activity for which people feel dedicated and accept the challenges that socio-labor environments require from them.

The models and development prospects of training are different, from those focused on the job and its requirements, to the training in the essential competencies demanded by each socio-labor reality.

The training linked to job demands, is characterized by a focus on conceptual requirements, skills and attitudes that such key positions demand of the various departments of companies.

Thus, we took two references in a generalized view of key positions within the framework of the company:

- The leaders with directive functions.
- The people who form the base or positions of entry into training in companies, which are completed by the middle managers and depending on the type of companies:
  - Services
  - Technological (knowledge)
  - Industrial
  - Country
  - Transformation, etc. The requirements and expectations of each job position vary.

The second great typology of training is located in the competencies development, understood as the combination and synthesis of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, oriented to transform reality and to offer solutions to various problems.

The training is concreted in basic skills development, and social-labor that each person has to develop to achieve a favorable climate and continuous improvement generator in thinking, emotions, relationship styles and work environment.

The problem lies in identifying the competencies they have to develop to generate the most valuable human aspects to achieve a culture of overcoming in the job, satisfaction and continued involvement with the quality of the institution and the assets of production, linked to the optimum development of each person in every respect.

Le Boterf (2005) identifies the competencies that people must to maximize to adequately perform the job in the most diverse situations and

realities adapting them to the changes and continuous challenges of the knowledge society.

Formation is a process that promotes the necessary training of people in the various dimensions of their lives, with a special projection in the mastery of techniques and resources that the performance of the profession requires. The preparation of members of an organization must be Integral, with special emphasis on mastering of changes methods and forms they have to apply in the enterprise to propitiate the culture and achieve the optimal response to the continuing transformation that society and the other organizations demanding them. The training of company members includes:

- Prepare into a new and adapted axiology that selects the representative values to promote innovative enterprises.
- Promote global visions of sense and meaning the enterprise, as an organization and place of development of all its members.
- Build a thinking style that drives the commitment with the company as creative institution of goods.
- Mastering the techniques and intellectual means and technological to solve the most important problems that enterprises have posed.
- Advancing in the competencies needed to adapt to the needs of the institution, of people and the global environment.
- Assume the most representative elements of a climate of collaboration and to prepare in interaction with colleagues and experts to consolidate the foundation of a quality company.

The continuous training must tend to prepare each person and to institutions as a whole to generate cultures of ongoing improvement and achieve that the organizations' members become the most harmonica and prepared persons to undertake the permanent transformation of their organization and to generate their project of integral improvement.

We advocate a model that integrates the visions: long life learning, professional development, narrative of experiences, reflective practice and competencies development, to achieve a comprehensive training updated and permanently improved of all company members. (Medina, 2012; Medina & Dominguez, 2013).

The training of the company members has to achieve complementarity between each person's self-training in the organization framework own of the institution and preparation to produce goods, values and new ways of implication all members of the company in the project and culture common.

Training models have to be supported in values of solidarity, cooperation and encouragement of individual and collective effort, getting to create in the institution a climate of innovation and deep reflection on the processes and outcomes of good practices applied in the enterprise, achieving a continuous overcoming environment, entrenchment of all people, and of motivation to consolidate an innovation style.

The training actions are supported in the development of several key competencies that must to achieve the institution members. Such competencies should be worked in complementarity: innovation, research, institutional relevance and shared culture; it open to meeting between all human beings.

## A Consolidation Model of Innovation Culture

Personnel training of companies must be oriented to promote the innovation competence, which involves providing a model of transformation and continuous improvement of thought and action in production processes. This competence orients the practices, providing scenarios of adaptation to new demands and decision-making to provide solutions to most prominent problems of the institutional framework, while it generates attitudes and values more consistent with culture for development and permanent updating.

The advancement in innovation competence is linked the mastery of investigation competence, understood as knowledge generator activity, open to reflection and consolidation of rigorous processes, which support the increase of knowledge, the performances and decisions more pertinent to achieve new construction lines of innovative practices.

Among other research (Medina et al., 2013), evidence that training of innovation competencies and investigation, is linked to the consolidation of institutional pertinence, achieving that each person feel fully integrated into the mission and objectives that the enterprise has to reach; given that the person assumes the impact of transformation and adaptation of organizations to enormous change of the society to the challenges of glocalization,

feeling the trajectory of institutions as the direction to follow, working for its suitability to the various challenges.

The training has to adapt to the variety of cultural approaches and to the difficulties emerged from the continuing problems that come before all human beings, aware of the main contribution of training: to train each company member to discover the true sense of the organization to the enormous pressure of all states and the global associations which are the new scenario in which coexist the productive organizations.

To train members of a productive organization is propitiate to them the knowledge of exponential change, in which they have to act and place them face the deep reflection and open rhythm, that prepare them in the opening and in the search, together to a style of making decisions, which complements the interest in finding the most suitable path to innovation with a proceeding style in which, the inquiry and use of the methods and techniques is essential to generate models that establish new practices.

We must achieve that, together with the long life learning to resolving new problems of organizations, is consolidate the processes and performances supported by the rigor and verification of findings, well-founded, and serve of debate to undertaken innovations and it open lines for the elaboration of well-constructed knowledge, in which support future improvements of the company culture.

Among the models, that improve the learning processes, it highlights: blended learning, applied to enterprise development and progress in ecological learning models and the leadership training (Medina, 2013), Dennis and Cols (2006) and Hanson and Clem (2006) emphasize the value of networks and community development / social networks that drive the initiative of its members, which are necessary to stimulate to all company members, on the challenges of the knowledge society, multicultural and interdependent.

The great discussion is, innovation has to be placed before a creative approach to generate new knowledge, rather than relying on the trivial and known?

Training must prepare for permanent question, the questioning and finding solutions?

The authentic formation has not starting from the identification and consolidation of most valuable and consolidated of the multiple cultures and the obtained and solved it? Does the training has to find the bridge

between the identification of the most consolidated and valuable acquired for humanity and the opening and search of most relevant by achieve?

The research that we present has pretended to find some essential competencies, methods and forms of performance, along to the most valuable tasks to show that training is the basis for innovation and adaptation of enterprises to the permanent challenges of the knowledge society and an interdependent world.

## Conflicts on the Qualitative Investigation Related to the Enterprise Training and Formation of Leaders

Training is the central activity to continuity and innovation of enterprises, marking a process of constant improvement of all its members.

Training models are specified in the design of courses of action, which intending to develop in those involved the knowledge and a new style of understanding the enterprise culture. One of the most important discussions is to develop courses of action which seek complementarity between employment experience, as the basis of practical learning and development of cognitive processes as support the interpretation and improvement of own experience.

This complementarity between experience and knowledge has been highlighted by Hernes and Irgens (2002, p. 254) "another view sees learning as an organization as an ongoing cumulative acquisition of knowledge, where actors gradually increase their knowledge through experience". "Similarly, organizational learning become not a transition between stabilized states, as in the first view, but the ongoing work of expanding organizational competence and exploring new opportunities" (March, 1991).

"Huber's definition, mindfulness comes from the building up of potentially useful knowledge while purposely keeping things on course" (Huber, G. P., 1991).

Hernes and Irgens (2012: 463) "Their propose data strengthened forms on learning under continuity will help managers caught between conflicting institutional expectations to justify their decisions openly by associating continuity, not with inertia, but with capacity for strategic patient. Mismatch and surprise are utterly important in organizational learning, as they represent an opportunity for learning and willful change, but also because they represent an opportunity for choosing not change".

"Continuity, after all, is the very essence of organizational survival, and should, as in the case of change, a result of learning".

Improving institutional learning (organizational learning), requires the collaboration of all involved in the enterprise, singularly managers-leaders, which constitute the keys to promoting the integral improvement of the institution and of each of the people who integrate.

According to Hernes and Irgens (2012), the major challenge is to generate genuine learning processes that promote knowledge, stimulate the continuity of organization culture, but not as an inertia, but as a way of become aware of the integral improvement of the institution by persistence in the lines that best define the integral project the organization and the commitment of all people to adapt and understand the rules, routines and values of the enterprise.

The aspects of training to promote continuity innovative the companies, it should to specify at:

- Identification of innovation competencies, research and institutional pertinence and cultural dialogue.
- Classification of enterprise culture style: values, norms, rules, routines, decision making process, system communication, leadership, etc.
- Harmony between continuity theory and innovation processes, which represent the debate (Hermes and Irgens, 2012) between: (Continuity and non-learning) (Discontinuity and non-learning) (Discontinuity and learning) (Continuity and learning), (Continuity and non-learning) (Discontinuity and non-learning) (Discontinuity and learning) (Continuity and learning), which are completed with a vision of innovation, linked to the transformation horizon and training for continuous improvement of all people in the company with special incidence in the leaders, (Medina, 2011; Medina, C., 2012; Medina, M., 2013).

Greig et al (2012), in much of the practice based research, practices are discussed from the outside, where the discourse and actions involved in observable, reportable practices are studied and the insights this produces helps us to understand them better, (Nicolini, 2009).

Training programs have to find the keys to train all the institution's persons to they discover the most valuable of the standards and essential culture of companies that have to continue, performed as an authentic

learning, completing this vision of perseverance and consolidation of the organization with the continuity and learning, based on the optimal belonging with the institution and the commitment with an innovation line reflective, argued and creative.

This line emerges and is justified from the most valuable experiences as a basis for building quality cognitive processes, but open to deep change models (Senge, 2000) and of cultural understanding (Dominguez, 2006), openness to complex learning, uncertain and integral (Huber, 2012) and the scenario of search and adaptation of blended learning (Dennis et al, 2006; Hanson and Clem, 2006).

Thus, the enterprise is consolidated as a learning community (Gairín, 2011) and the organizations as the scenario in which the leaders share many visions, openness to ambitious objectives and an emotional harmony style and active coaching (Medina Domínguez, 2013).

Productive organizations are consolidated by applying models (ROI Medina, C. 2012), that generate new ways of understanding the formation as the substantial investment, creator of expectations and committed to the continuity of the company in a horizon of permanent improvement.

Models that support and orient training programs from and beyond the organizations have to focus the training of all people in the mastery of skills, updating and learning from experience and complementarity between continuity and innovation of business culture.

All with a focus transcendental, training of managers of organizations, to carry out a leadership style, essential competence to them, based on the advancement in management competencies, human and technical (Medina and Gomez, 2012) as well as in the transformation and continuous improvement of the foundations of leadership, determined by, emotional intelligence, coaching, talent development and eagerness to continuous overcoming, (Medina, M. 2013), laying the foundation of a decision-making style supported on flexibility, open communication, the horizon of continuous transformation, the integrated learning and situated, complex, movable which placed the managers, facing open and growing responsibilities, with all parts of the organization.

The integral training program must to harmonize the demands of updating methods and techniques to advance in the job, improve the labor reality like technical and expert in it, next to the update of knowledge and way of thinking, reflecting and assume the demands of the organization as a whole; at the same time, employees have to feel the direct protagonist of

the holistic enterprise culture, from a vision ecotraining, global- local and with global impact.

The program for the training of leaders aims to train them to develop the human competencies (empathy, trust, recognition of the role of people, close discourse, collaboration, etc.); management competencies (organization and resource optimization, decision-making, use of time, achieving goals, etc.), technical competencies (organizational models, knowledges and models of management, mastery of techniques and production methods, etc.).

Nowadays improvement of institution and their training' leaders have been linked to the employment of qualitative and quantitative methods to measure its performance. There are some conflicts in the methods due to:

- Differentiated interpretations.
- Comments on the analysis of qualitative data.
- Complementarity and contrast on the results of qualitative data.

## Research Guidelines

When performing training model research and analysis we should be able to answer:

- Are training experts' focus groups suitable for evaluating the integral learning plan for the company?
- Are leading discussion groups a methodological advance to understand and compose appropriate training models?
- Do the training models incorporate the essential points to improve the training of professionals and, especially, the leaders of the organizations?

## Research Objectives

- Show the most valuable competencies for the performance of labor practices and leadership action.
- Seek the relevant data for the training models.
- Establish dialogue-discussion groups on the training of leaders.

- Highlight the influence of the methodology of discussion groups on the design of formative models and the professional development of leaders.
- Demonstrate the impact of discussion groups and data gathered to improve formation models to develop the employees' competencies.

## Research methodology

This methodology has a mixed nature, although in this task we focus on substantiate and exposing the meaning and results of the numerous group discussions.

This method is based on the analysis and assessment of the group discussion to generate formation models that enables experts' contribution and helps us to define new scenarios for integral formation and improvement of employees' capabilities and leaders.

The expansion of emotional intelligence and coaching within the organization are crucial to reinforce and develop the competencies needed in leaders and other staff of the organization.

Focus groups are a qualitative methodological approach essential to deepen the central problem of this research:

Detect the value of training in organizations to create a climate of innovation and continuity of institutional quality, using the Return on Investment (ROI) as evidence of the effectiveness of this investment.

The focus groups, in this research, are constitute as the overcoming of the collegial interview, because they are formed by people who know the problem, generators of an involvement environment and committed in the solution the problem we want to solve. The most valuable contribution to this research process lies in that participants have responded to a questionnaire "ad hoc" which aimed to assess the importance of training and competencies that constitute the same.

The nature of discussions generated between those involved is of shared search of solutions to the problem, contrast between the participants and a desire of meeting, given that those who collaborated in the five focus groups were characterized by their high specialization and academic training in the field, abundant experience as business leaders and generators of small and medium enterprises.

The participants assess, reflect and contribute their theoretical and practical knowledge to the estimation of the issues raised, abounding in the

debate between them and seeking to provide the visions, perceptions and solutions considered more relevant to show the most suitable path to improvement of training provided in enterprises.

Group members are constituted on a team and they have to provide, after thorough preparation, knowledge of the discussion questions and a sense of collaboration, understanding that involvement is voluntary and seeking to improve the set of actions and judgments that they have to issue around the central problem.

What is the contribution this method to achieving the objectives? This method presents a new perspective to this research line because they are responsible for programs, generation of enterprises and researchers in which strategically placed and harmonized in the dialogue groups and analysis of training activities, who share an intense time; some of the discussion processes exceeded three hours and were videotaped. Discussion groups are valued by the members as a possible scenario, enriching and promoter of value of training to boost performance optimization processes and the competence of enterprises people in critical moments of crisis.

The ethnographic vision of this method is explicited in that its members have to act and provide the richest visions to solve the problem and implies that when sessions are videotaped the rigor is intensified, collaboration and pertinence of reflections about the discussion object. (Gürtler, Kiegelman & Huber, 2005).

The emphasis is on the value of complementary methodological and the design richness of processes of qualitative research where have special importance the "focus groups" for the breadth and relevance of discourse put into action and interaction among team members involved.

Gürtler, Kiegelman and Huber (2005, p. 25) "We may conclude that quantitative studies follow the road-map of a standardized design procedure, whereas qualitative studies demand openness to adapt or specify a most general design to the uncertainties of research interactions with active partners."

Bridges (2003) emphasizes the uniqueness of the methodological approaches used in education, since this modality of inquiry requires:

- Intellectual rigor and knowledge of plural situations, characteristics of multicultural and complex scenarios.
- Consolidation of arguments and proposals of new ideas deeply substantiated.

- Observation persistent, evidencing the most relevant aspects and distinctions.
- Find a harmony between the empirical experience and philosophical arguments.

The modalities of discussions groups depend on the nature of the research problem, access of its members and the real possibilities of the research team to involve the most leading experts and practical in such training program.

## Data Analysis

Research synthesized in this presentation are based on five and four focus groups, respectively, with special emphasis on the final conclusion of the experts and the formation of programs that enable the Organization to develop the skills of its professionals, five centered on ROI model and four in the leadership training program.

Hermeneutics perspectives have been applied to implement the analysis of the data, supplemented with information provided by the following agents from:

- Innovative organizations.
- Relevant leaders of organizations of 30 to 20,000 employees.
- University specialists in the design, implementation and evaluation of training programs, we select the analysis focused on the quality of the training program in the company: ROI.

### Focus of the analysis

- Central aspects and attributes that help us to recognize the core competencies for the development of professional.
- To value the main elements to improve or develop training programs depending on the role to be performed within the organization.
- Use of the ROI (Return on Investment) as a tool that allows us to evaluate the profitability of the learning program.

We present most relevant aspects of the five focus groups, which have carried out meticulous competence's descriptions, scenarios, methods, means and tasks making up a training program for the integral improvement of life and quality of productive actions of the enterprises applying the ROI.

The analysis of the focus groups, we present them in those characterized by complexity and diversity of the experts involved.

1st focus group

- Consisting of five professionals with experience in this field between 2 and 6 years, with direct management in the training and management costs.
- The dialogue process has been carried out for over an hour and a half, using the protocol of 15 questions to debate, trying to achieve the following objectives:

  - Increase employee motivation.
  - Promote teamwork.
  - Improving communication.
  - Increase productivity of people in training.

The discussion group had a high impact on improving designs enterprise training, in choosing a consultant to collaborate in the generation of the requested course and to adaptation and cost reduction, since the company itself is not specialized in staff training.

Through a process of triangulation between researchers, two participants and a leader of the organization is proceeded to analyze text recording retaken in audio-recorder with abundant iconographic material.

The development of discussion revealed the competencies to training, including

- Emotional Intelligence.
- Management.
- Leadership.
- Optimization time.
- Work in team.
- Location in the results.
- Creativity / innovation.

- Inter-departmentalization.
- Flexibility

These competencies would be those that have to chairing the expected achievements in training courses, especially when it comes to that the people involved improve the culture of the organization, participate in the adaptation of methods and resources to the needs of the company and singularly is chosen the creativity / innovation, inter-departmentalization and flexibility.

Thus, when requesting the relevance and adequacy of training programs and its training modality for the company people, in this focus group is evident:

- Emotional intelligence.
- Managing customer relationships.
- Leadership.
- Focusing on results.
- Teamwork
- Creativity and innovation.
- Inter-departmentalization.
- The e-learning training is more chosen to develop:
    - Sell more competitively.
    - Consultation techniques
    - Technical knowledge.

No outstanding preference was noted by some modality, understanding that blended learning would be appropriate for forming at:

- Economic and financial knowledge.
- Knowledge of market-industry.
- Effective management of meetings.
- Flexibility.
- Optimization time.

The preference graphical representation of the training modalities between presence and distance learning is synthesized in the following graphic:

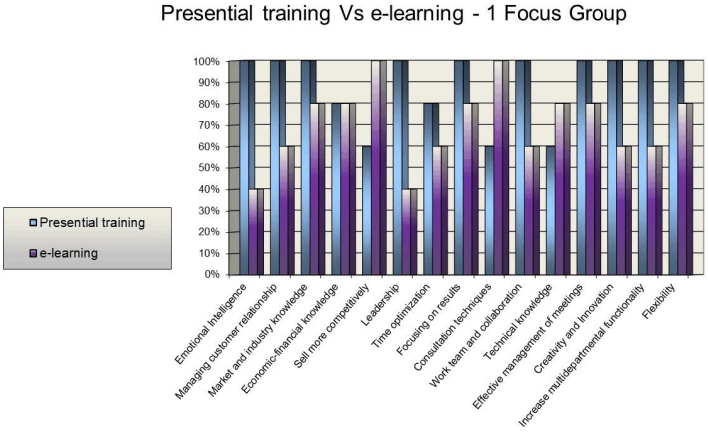


Fig. 1: *Presence vs. e-learning: Focus group 1*

Evidence that competencies closest to human relationship aspects, communication, innovation and teamwork are highlighted by the experts in training of this micro-group emphasizing the nearest interaction of presence modality, assuming that the competencies most linked to technical knowledge, sales, consulting and implementation of procedures characteristic of the job can be mastered better with e-learning modality.

The group no. 2 is composed of six participants:

Directors of different departments of enterprises of training and sales, two directors general of small and medium enterprises, and university professor and enterprise director and a doctor and university professor specialized in training.

The session, very extensive, close to three hours, was recorded on video and constituted a research scenario, innovation and meeting between all involved. The modality of SMEs in Spain is majority (CCD, 2010. 3,283,495), over 99% of all businesses (between 1 and 249 employees).

Applied the research team and completed a new process of dialogue between researchers, participants and an expert group, we proceeded to the viewing, analysis, interpretation and creation of the semantic network of competencies, the training modality and the program update proposal most relevant for the micro-enterprises of the Andalusian business set, the

jienense context specially. The skills most valued for programming object are:

- Emotional intelligence.
- Creativity and innovation.
- Teamwork and collaboration.
- Economic and financial knowledge.
- Leadership (role model).

The participants in this discussion group advocate for a training that specializes the professionals in the specific needs of their work "to pursue what you know to do well", because mobility is lower, consistent with these limitations they estimate, also to limit departments, that multi or inter departmentalization competence is not relevant for training in such companies.

It is underlined the need training programs to excite workers in their labor task and they feel involved to and enthusiastic about the competence of institutional belonging, it will foster cooperation and will influence on improving production.

The crisis has influenced to intensify links with the enterprise and the most value to the continuity in the job, is necessary to find and promote incentives linked to the performance and identity with work, rather than small economic increments, complicated at this time.

It is advocated the design of programs to improve the specialization of workers and promote the adaptation of training to specific needs expressed by each person, in the position he performs.

It is highlighted the value of an updated training, which involve the professional with the enterprise mission and it generates scenarios of full advance personal, human and technical.

It is proposed some complementary competencies which are essential in SMEs, including:

- Responsibility, give freedom in the performance of work and demand greater assumption of the rightful role.
- Continuous improvement.
- Human values.
- Show initiative.
- Communication and leadership model.
- Innovation (increase it is essential).

It is dialogued about training modalities and it highlights the blended learning model, which brings together the most valuable of the methodology presence and distance, pointing that according to the required training be chosen the predominance of one of them.

It is noted that the development of more human character competencies

- Empathy.
- Communication
- Leadership
- Innovation / creativity.
- Teamwork, etc., requires presence modality.

while the domain of competencies linked to technical processes:

- Technology.
- Time management.
- Technical Update.
- Flexibility.
- Organization of parts storage, etc.

can be addressed by e-learning. Figure 2 below shows the option given to the competencies and training tasks presented:

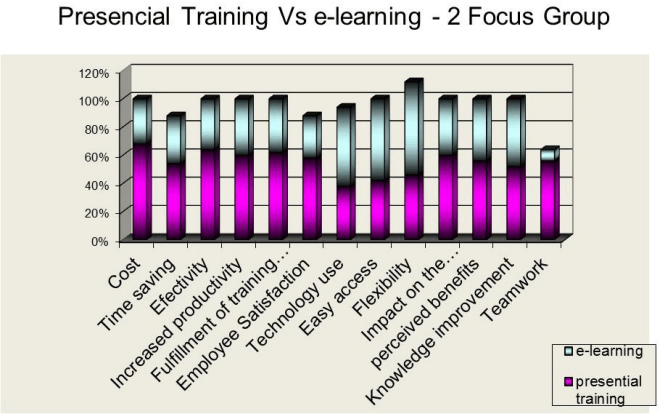


Fig. 2: *Presence training vs. e-learning: Focus group 2*

E-learning training in small businesses can raise the costs, if there is not a network platform and suitable materials; but if it improves productivity, satisfaction, achievement of objectives and the impact on enterprise culture as well as the flexibility and technology, it is noted a preference based on the type of competencies to train and the related costs. It is evidenced that the trend is the blended learning by its value of complementarity.

The dialogue conducted in the other groups, notably number 5 coincides, in general terms, but abound on a greater nuancing of the issues discussed, their contribution, by the own nature of its components, doctors and academics (6), and their experience in the field (3 to 22 years) enrich the training model in expanding competencies, didactic methods, tasks and involvement, as the most direct and holistic training model.

## Training objectives

The following is pointed out:

- Improve communication.
- Know the culture of the company.
- Achieve updated technical training.
- Develop people in their capabilities and potential.
- Generate more individualized and singular plans, according to the people.
- Train to understanding and succeed in the job.
- Training for collaborative activities.

There have been many comments about the meaning and projection of training, understood as an investment that produces benefits, increase productivity, enthusiasm in the performance of assigned tasks, which leading to enterprise to achieve the expected benefits.

Design programs that harmonize training and time dedication to the enterprise, that optimize the implication of each person with the goals of the enterprise and the need to obtain new resources and better outcomes social, labor and economic.

Adapt the program to the profile of expectations, finding identities and adapting the training process to cycles of life, trying to harmonize youth, drive and initiative with maturity and wise experience, and simultaneously involve autonomy in complementarity with collaborative work.

The competencies most valued by this group are in line with above ones:

- Leadership.
- Teamwork.
- Emotional Intelligence.
- Flexibility.
- Decision-making capacity.
- Communication skills are highly valued and are expanded with the following:
    - Resistance to adversity.
    - Fellowship
    - Time optimization.

To the request about the preference to an optimal training, they state:

- Presential training has a higher cost than that of e-learning, but the temporalization is more rigid.

It is noted that the content of training and the goals pursued will determine the most appropriate modality. Again, this group coincides with the previous groups in:

- The presential modality is more relevant to develop social skills, learn with colleagues and of their experiences, expand interaction and stimulate communication and feedback.
- The e-learning modality is essential to advance technical knowledge, improve flexibility, respect the time commitment to training and to coincide in scenarios, geographically distant, on social networks, chat and web conferences.

Again, in agreement with the comments and suggestions of the groups one and two, is incised in promoting the blended learning model and meet the singularities of workers, the expectations of enterprises and the content / objectives and specificity of training program, which will be the aspects most valuable to designing the more pertinent modality and methodology, in periods, scenarios and availability of economic and material resources / personal.

The content analysis of recording evidence that proposals free and open of the team members agree that a training program, will tend to improve the following aspects / competencies of participants:

- Communication.
- Collaborative work.
- Understanding of tasks work of enterprise.
- Reflection and development of diverse intelligences, especially the theoretical, practical and emotional.
- Leadership (located / removed)
- Innovation / flexibility.
- Empathy.
- Technology, etc.

Participants note some obstacles that the training program must provide for:

- Individualism. Distrust, negative effect of extreme competitiveness.
- Prioritizing of individual goals versus goals of the institution.
- To think that training is a cost rather than an investment.
- Searching immediate efficiency.

Enterprises have to discover their priorities and involve people in achieving a culture and climate that engage all its members, creating an environment of trust, collaboration, commitment and continuous progress, promoting the best talent, good practices and the permanency at organization.

The groups were unanimous in stressing training as an investment activity, improvement and opportunity of great value for that each enterprise person feel involved, prepared and committed to the optimal development of the enterprise culture, providing knowledge, techniques and the most appropriate collaboration.

It agree on the value of human and techniques competencies that people of enterprise have to improve and updating constantly; specially there is a high coincidence in the competencies training linked to each person, to mastering the techniques and of updating facing the great challenges of globalization of enterprises; agree that these competencies should be completed with the knowledge and reflections, which allow train

people ever more balanced, hopeful and efficient through mastery and progress in:

- Empathy.
- Creativity / innovation.
- Leadership.
- Communication
- Teamwork, together to the flexibility, technology, time management, etc.., which must be improved by presential teaching-learning modality the first ones, and e-learning, the second ones.

It was shown that the advance of networked communications and of computing resources getting closer to teachers and trainees, enable that the most appropriate model it is blended learning or combination of both modalities, that both companies and the protagonists of training have to adapting and accommodate to the initiative of each professional who demands and wants be update (life-long learning), as basis of motivation and integral commitment.

## Discussion

Training models presented here, Huber (2012), Le Boterf (2001), Medina et al. (2013), Hernes and Irgens (2012) are coincident in emphasizing that at the base of formation of all person, highlights the training to progress in mastering competencies (synthesis of knowledge, practices, attitudes and values), that all persons have to constantly update, if desired that perform with enthusiasm, commitment and efficiency, the set of tasks that are required by their profession and that, as active members of an enterprise have to contribute to reach and carry out the optimal realization of their professional action, performed in a climate of harmony, collaboration and intense innovation.

The findings of the state of knowledge and the most relevant research of the field confirm that training is an essential activity that enterprises have to use if wish continue as productive institutions (Hernes & Irgens, 2012), the continuity of the enterprise depends on the level of improving of all people in it, who have to achieve optimal training actions to update the

knowledge, actions and achieve a greater personal capacity, intellectual and socio-labor.

The findings of the various focus group presented above, coincide in highlight that training is a valuable investment that contributes to update the knowledge of workers, to improve essential competencies, supported in the programs and authors cited, (Medina et al., 2013), which identify the social and human competencies of greater significance, such as:

- Empathy.
- Communication
- Teamwork
- Leadership
- Mastery of technology
- Motivation
- Mastery of techniques
- Innovation.

These competencies must be improved permanently if desired that businesses have continuity in times of complexity and uncertainty as at present, advancing in making decisions for optimal preparation and personal and technical improvement of all members of the organization, with singular implication and transformation of institution leaders.

It confirms the great challenge of blended learning (Dennis et al., 2006) (Hanson & Clem, 2006). This research confirms such training modality, but states that for the development of social and human competencies, is most appropriate the presence modality and to develop technical competencies, the blended-learning.

## Conclusions

Discussion groups on the fulfilled investigations have provided data about:

- Identification of the essential competencies for the professional development.
- Essential skills on leaders and employees.
- Main elements of the enterprise culture.
- ROI to evaluate and demonstrate Learning Program profitability.

Dialogue groups have highlighted aspects that should be included on the formation model as development of

- Empathy.
- Communication skills.
- Leadership.
- Work team.
- Efficiency.
- Commitment.
- Time efficiency.
- Flexibility.
- Innovation / creativity.
- Technology.

Experts' discussion groups are relevant in the design and improvement of formation models for employees and leaders. These learning models enable the increase of professionals' talent and this improves the organization.

The data gathered in the analysis and experts conclusions are crucial to implement new learning models in the organizations or improve existing ones.

The proposed objectives have been achieved, singularly those linked to the relevance and impact of the discussion groups to emerge relevant data, which identify the objects, methods and training modalities more relevant to train members of enterprises on the achievement of continuity, innovation and key of institutional culture.

The defined teaching modalities more consistent with the typology of competencies close to social skills, human, and empathy, considering presence modality the most appropriate; on the other hand, it is considered that for the best of the knowledge mastery, mastery of the techniques and technology, as you need to apply on-line modality.

It is evidenced that is complementarity of both modalities in the perspective of blended learning, which will be consolidated in the future and will depend on the economic possibilities of the enterprise and the updating and development of ICT which will encourage a more intense and combined use of both training modalities.

The contribution to qualitative research in psychology and education/pedagogy has been the use of focus group method, which is notable for the breadth of voices and its potentiality, the abundance of texts and the intense collaboration of practitioners and experts, who have presented visions, increasing the level of reflection and considering the great value of qualitative research to strengthen conceptions and innovative practices in the field of training in enterprises.

The major limitation of some group, has been the time available to carry out a wider debate, but it has been rigorous and enough to achieve the research objectives.

Discussion groups have prepared in advance the answers, the participants have felt active collaborators and have constituted the field of training in an area of exceptional value for the professional development of people and advance of enterprises.

Discussion groups have meant a consolidation peculiar of the method itself, by its pertinence to obtain the most suitable data and for its impact to serve the participants themselves to improve their conceptions, practices and training modalities, fulfilling with the essential the qualitative design: to incorporate quality of subjectivities and conceptions of those involved to transfer the knowledge emerged in the real improvement of the people and institutions in line with the principle of "life-long learning".

## References

Bridges, David. (2003). *Fiction written under Oath? Essays in philosophy and educational research.* Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Dennis, Alan; Bichelmeyer, Barbara; Henry, Dan; Cakir, Hasan; Korkmaz, Ali; Watson, Carol & Bunnage, Joanne. (2006). The cisco networking academy: A model for the study of student success in a blended-learning environment. In C.J. Bonk and C.R. Graham (Eds.), *The handbook of blended-learning, (*pp. 120-135). San Francisco: Pfeiffer.

Gairín, Joaquín (2011). Innovación y mejora de las instituciones: cultura y cambio. In A. Medina (Ed.). *Innovación de la educación y de la docencia.* (pp. 211-262). Madrid: Ramón Areces.

Greig, Gail; Gilmore, Charlotte; Patrick, Holly & Beech, Nic. (2012). Arresting moments in engaged management research. *Management learning, 44* (3), 267-285.

Hanson, Kirsten & Clem, Frances. (2006). To blend or not to blend: A look at community development via blended-learning strategies. In C.J. Bonk & C.R. Graham (Eds.). *The handbook of blended-learning, (*pp. 136-154). San Francisco: Pfeiffer.

Hernes, Tor & Irgens, Eirik. (2012). Keeping things mindfully on track: Organizational learning under continuity. *Management learning, 44* (3), 253-266.

Huber, George P. (1991). Organizational learning: The contributing process and the literatures. *Organization Science, 2* (1), 88-115.

Huber, Günter (2012). Aprendizaje transversal, integrado e intercultural. In A. Medina & María C. Domínguez (Eds.). *Didáctica.* (pp. 123-146). Madrid: Universitas.

Gürtler, Leo; Kiegelmann, Mechthild & Huber, Günter. (2005). *Areas of qualitative-psychology - Special focus on design.* Qualitative Psychology Nexus IV. Tübingen: Ingeborg Huber Verlag.

Le Boterf, Guy. (2001). *Ingeniería de las competencias.* Barcelona: Ediciones Gestión.

March, James. (1991). Exploration and exploitation in organizational learning. *Organization Science, 2*(1), 71-87.

Medina, Antonio et al. (2013). *Formación del profesorado.* Madrid: Ramón Areces.

Medina, Antonio & Gómez. Rosa. (2012). *Formación de líderes pedagógicos.* Paper presented at the Congreso de organización escolar. Granada, 16-18 de diciembre.

Medina D., María C. (2013). *Formación de líderes e inteligencia emocional.* Madrid: Universitas.

Medina D., Conchita. (2012). *La empresa y la inversión en formación: El ROI.* Madrid: Universitas.

Nicolini, Davide. (2009). Zooming in and out: studying practices by switching theoretical lenses and trailing connections. *Organization Studies, 30*(12), 1391-1348.

Senge, Peter. (2002). *La danza del cambio.* Barcelona. Ediciones Gestión.

# Children's Inconsistent Answers to the Language Learning Strategy Inventory: Are Introspective Questionnaires Useful in Research with Children?

Amador Jiménez-Garrido & Eufrasio Pérez-Navío
University of Jaén, Spain

**Abstract**

There are many difficulties that researchers acknowledge when studies focus on children. For instance, there are open questions as regards the ethic appropriateness of investigating children's actions or opinions, as their naivety can make children vulnerable to external influences. This study is centered on a particular aspect of research with children: the lack of consistent answers to the items of introspective questionnaires. This issue is especially harmful for the internal validity, because it alters the results in a similar way as other independent variables would do. 115 children of second and fourth grade from two bilingual schools took part in a study completing an adapted version of the language learning strategies inventory for children (henceforth Children's SILL or CSILL) twice over the period of one month. Furthermore, a quick placement test was used to sort participants into three different proficiency groups in order to observe whether steadiness is affected in different ability ranges. The maturation effect was controlled by distributing the tests before and after the Christmas break. Results revealed that second graders were inconsistent. In terms of the CSILL overall score separation (Mdif=1.06) is bigger than that of the fourth graders (Mdif=0.73). Relatedly, advanced students showed fewer differences than their intermediate and beginner counterparts. Reflections on the findings and considerations about the use of introspective questionnaires are included.

## Introduction

As in other fields of science, studies on children should be permanently improved to obtain a better approach to education and psychology. In the words of Borgers et al. (2000), "society is becoming more and more concerned with children's issues and there is an increasing interest in children's rights" (p. 60), but not having an own voice may cause that this group is forgotten in debates about society's development.

Research on children causes methodological challenges that rarely seem to appear in studies on adults. From achieving permission by authorities till the validation of results, investigations in the field of early education have to overcome many obstacles. Compared to adults, children have different cognitive capacities and specific interests. Therefore, the approach to the study of children must be tackled bearing in mind these differences. There is only a limited number of empirical studies about the usability and validation of research methods used with children (Druin 1999).

The second language (henceforth L2) acquisition style is something that requires a deep observation of the participants, not just within the school environment. Considering the variety of the items to be observed the only way of knowing about the L2 learning tactics is asking the participants themselves. No distinction is to be made in the case of children; it must be them who tell the researches about their routines and activities. Small and controlled experiments can be made but they can hardly be generalized.

The following paragraph of this study is a review of the literature based on previous investigations on the limits of certain research methods and data gathering tools like the Strategy Inventory for language learning in its version for children (henceforth CSILL). The paragraph "Purpose of the Study " introduces the research questions. The procedure and participants are described in the paragraph "Method", followed by a paragraph on the "Results." Finally, the pargraph "Conclusions" discusses findings, draws conclusions and outlines future lines of research.

## Review of the Literature

Donker and Markopoulos (2002) summarize the most repeated concerns among scholars interested in the methodological problems when testing children. The authors mention the observation equipment used, the behavior of the experimenter, the age groups of children, the presence of

teachers or parents during the experiment and the construction of meaning from the young participants responses. Borgers et al. (2002) affirm that there is not a magical formula, safe from issues, to survey children.

Hanna et al. (1997) refer to the shorter attention span of children as the main methodological difference to look into when conduction research. In order to cope with this problem she recommends smaller sizes along with more control or intervention from the part of the researcher. It is necessary to make sure the impact of the evaluator is not strong enough to contaminate the results.

Think-aloud, interviews and retrospective questionnaires are the most repeated methodology to gather information from children when the dimension of the study requires extracting the information as viewed by the children themselves (Donker & Markopoulos, 2002). The main factors affecting the answer of respondents are in first place the cognitive ability to answer, secondly the difficulty of the task and finally, the motivation of the participants (Krosnick, 1991).

Following, the specific issues of the methods above mentioned are going to be detailed. Starting with the first technique, think-aloud, Donker and Markopoules (2002, p. 3) state that "the extroversion of children may significantly affect whether they are likely to voice their thoughts." Furthermore, they acknowledge that the verbalization factor is more influential that the age of the kids. This issue is common to all three methods.

Information gathered from infants and by means of questionnaire can be deceiving. In first place, we mention the conclusions of Borgers and Hox (2001) that warn about the impact of questionnaire quality in item nonresponse by part of the children. A no response by their part must not necessarily mean a lack of knowledge on the aspect asked, it can be associated with the complexity of the question itself, not being adapted to the cognitive development of the young participants. Borgers (2002, p. 90) considers that giving responses options (i.e. multiple choice questionnaires) free of ambiguities and vague words help researchers obtain a more accurate representation of their reality. Likewise, this study postulates that "the use of computer assisted questionnaires in general produces a better response quality in survey research with children."

Perhaps the biggest concern of all, independently of the method used to gather data, is the lack of stability of the responses over time. Borgers (2002) ascertains that steadiness increases as the children get older, but in early stages the difference can be substantial to the point of questioning the

understanding of the items by the part of the children. The "satisficing theory" by Tourangeau and Rasinki (1988, p. 83) ponders the following four steps: "(1) Understanding and interpreting the question; (2) retrieving information from memory; (3) making a summarized judgment; (4) reporting this judgment."

Following Piaget (1929) theory about children cognitive development and considering the challenges of answering questionnaires it is pertinent analyzing the struggle of younger children coping with the demanding tasks of filling a surveys. Paying a closer look at the four points by Tourangeau and Rasinki (1988), language development in the form of limitations with comprehension and verbal memory undoubtedly have repercussions on the ability to go through these kinds of data gathering tools.

## Purpose of the Study / Hypothesis

This study intends to obtain data about the way children answer a self-reported survey. Our theory is that without an evident reason the answers will be different when the same questionnaire is administered twice within the period of a month. Secondly, we assume that age due to cognitive development and second language proficiency due to having a more analytical approach to learning will affect steadiness.

## Method

### Participants

A total of 115 children of second and fourth grade took part in this study by filling the CILLs. All these kids belonged to the same school and shared the same language instructor. The participants have been taking three hours of English Second Language since kindergarten age. After analysis some specific cases it was decide that the responses of a few subjects would not be computed as they either belong to a special need program or they are immigrant kids that are in the process of becoming efficient in Spanish, the language in which CILLs was delivered.

## Materials

### Children SILL

Nowadays, the main instrument that accompanies research on learning strategies is the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The SILL was originally created by Rebecca Oxford in 1989. This tool is a self-reported questionnaire with 50 items. It uses Likert-type responses scale. Second language acquisition happens differently in adults and children, therefore it is accepted that the underlying processes differ. Pamela Gunning identified the necessity of a new tool to conduct the same kind of studies carried out for adults but with children. In 1997, she created an adapted version of Oxford's SILL. This new questionnaire had 30 items. The ratio for each category of strategy was maintained and the participles of the original SILL were respected. Oxford, the original creator of the 80 item SILL, actively advised Gunning in the adaptation of the questionnaire. Comprehensibility, simplicity and elimination of items that might be considered redundant were the key instructions throughout the process. The following example will show how Gunning rewrote one item to improve students' understanding: Item 12 "I practice the sounds of English" became "I often practice the sounds of the letters of the alphabet in English". Some items simplified the information and in other cases clarifications were added. Children's SILL was translated to Spanish, the vehicle language of the research without any modification of the content. Two students from a different school tested the final translation to observe the appropriateness of the language used.

### English Second Language Proficiency Placement Test

In order to assess the subjects' levels of proficiency in English, a multiple choice placement test was specially designed for this study. The contents of the 10 questions were obtained from the objectives of 2$^{nd}$ and 4$^{th}$ grade – English subject, distributed by the board of Education in Spain, which every English instructor working in the public system is mandated to follow. Standardized tests like the Oxford Quick Placement test would normally be used for something of this sort but nonetheless, there exist a dearth of those created for early ages. The final draft of the 2$^{nd}$ and 4$^{th}$ grade placement tests (henceforth PTs) were pilot tested without finding any need for

modification. Unfortunately, as often occurs in linguistic research, placement tests of this type focus on the use of the language and grammar of the subjects and not on speaking or listening. The students were given fifteen minutes to complete the test on a regular class day different to the one used for the children's SILL collection. None of the students needed extra time to complete it.

Data Collection and Procedure

The CILLs was administered twice over the period of approximately one month, using the Christmas school vacation and one week as the time gap. The excuse given to the students for why they were doing the same survey again was related to the loss of the previous set of surveys. The research team considered that excuses like "the previous survey gave incorrect results" would make them voluntary change answers radically. In first place, the researcher and the classroom teachers did not explain the triviality of the results for their final grade in the course since this could create a lack of motivation in the sample. Participants were strongly encouraged to answer the questions sincerely in the form of sentences like "el responder lo mas sinceramente possible os hara obtener mejores resultados / Answering in a sincere way will improve your score", "necesito total sinceridad de vuestra parte para realizer un buen trabajo / I need total sincerity from you for me to produce coherent results", "necesito vuestra ayuda, responded de la major manera possible / I need your help, answer in the best way possible". The questionnaire was completed in 30 minutes approximately in both occasions. Each item was introduced with a brief example that in turn would be used verbatim for the second collection.

- Item 18
  "Cuando no conozco una palabra en Ingles, pido ayuda / When I do not know a word in English, I ask for help." (Item as seen in CILL)
  "Por ejemplo, le pregunto a mi compañero de clase o al profesor / For example, I ask my classmates or the teacher."

## Results

Looking at the first graphic (figure 1) and table (table 1) we observe how both groups scored higher on their use of learning language strategies the second time the filled the same questionnaire. In the case of the second

graders it went from 2.8 to 3.8 (1.06) in both cases (maximal score 5). This variation represents a 21%. For the fourth graders, the difference is not that big, but still substantial; a 0.7 in average score with translates in a 15% separation. This first set of results supports the idea of a *mismatch* that can hardly be explained by methodological reasons. Furthermore, pay attention to our previous comments on *age* and cognitive development, the results shed light on this issue as the older kids' answers in fourth grade stay more stable between the two test administrations.

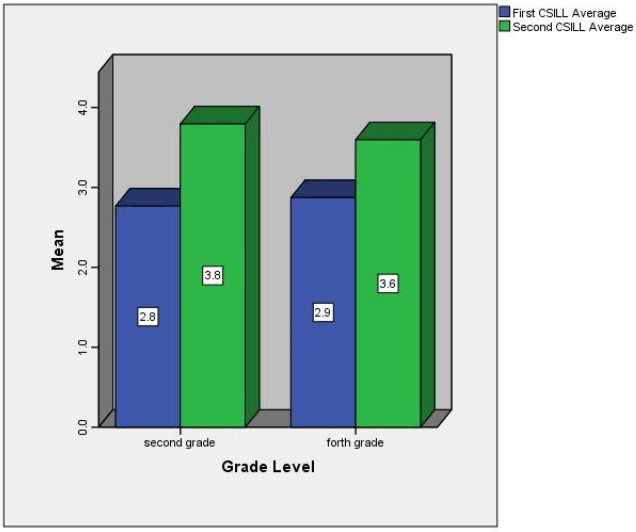


Fig. 1: *First and second application of the CSILL*

*Tab. 1:* Differences: Grade Level

**Mean differences between first and second CILL in terms of grade level**

| Grade Level | | First CSILL Average | Second CSILL Average | Absolute Differences |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| second grade | Mean | 2.767 | 3.795 | **1.0600** |
| | N | 55 | 55 | 55 |
| | Std. Deviation | .9096 | .6773 | .94978 |
| forth grade | Mean | 2.873 | 3.597 | **.7300** |
| | N | 60 | 60 | 60 |
| | Std. Deviation | .8061 | .7270 | .68527 |
| Total | Mean | 2.823 | 3.691 | .8878 |
| | N | 115 | 115 | 115 |
| | Std. Deviation | .8550 | .7075 | .83531 |

The next set of results will provide information on the way *proficiency* level affects the consistency in the answers. As a reminder we categorized the participants in beginners, intermediates or advanced by the mean of a proficiency test based on the contents of the curriculum of their level grade. Outcomes shown in figure 2 and table 2 back up the idea of differences in the way tests are answered when grouping by proficiency. Advanced students with 11% are steadier than intermediates with 16% that in turn do the same as beginners with 29%. These results do not try to directly affirm that their proficiency in ESL is what makes them stick to the same results. Further research will attempt to explain the bond between both facts.

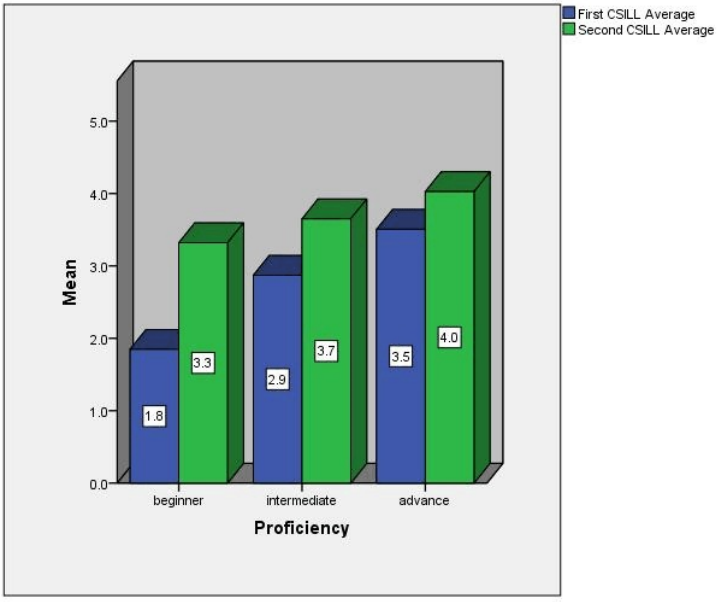


Fig. 2: *First and second application of the CSILL*

*Tab. 2:* Differences - Proficiency Level

**Mean differences between first and second CILL in terms of proficiency level**

| Proficiency | | First CSILL Average | Second CSILL Average | Absolute Differences |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| beginner | Mean | 1.848 | 3.321 | **1.4724** |
| | N | 29 | 29 | 29 |
| | Std. Deviation | .7472 | .9983 | 1.15043 |
| intermediate | Mean | 2.871 | 3.650 | **.8104** |
| | N | 48 | 48 | 48 |
| | Std. Deviation | .5842 | .5702 | .65986 |
| advance | Mean | 3.505 | 4.026 | **.5395** |
| | N | 38 | 38 | 38 |
| | Std. Deviation | .4133 | .3874 | .44146 |
| Total | Mean | 2.823 | 3.691 | .8878 |
| | N | 115 | 115 | 115 |
| | Std. Deviation | .8550 | .7075 | .83531 |

## Conclusions

We observe a mismatch that is not easily attached to any factor like the maturation effect, motivation, confusion or etc. The results, again, advocate for those who are skeptical when reading results of children's studies that are bases on data collected by questionnaires, think-aloud protocol or interviews as there are many internal processes that occur in the mind of the young participant and that are hard, not to say impossible, to control.

Nevertheless, research on children must be carried out in order to know more and improve the upbringing of future generations. Studies of this sort, which identify specific problems, just pinpoint potential contamination problems and ultimately try to make investigators aware of these problems.

Possible solutions for this issue have not been tested in this research, future lines of investigation could consider checking the suitability of measures such as using triangulation to gather data and eliminate discordant results from the sample. This model would require a massive amount of time and work but could definitely free results from the type of methodological doubts here mentioned.

## References

Borgers, N., & Hox, J. (2001). Item nonresponse in questionnaire research with children. *Journal of Official Statistics, 17*, 321-335.

Borgers, N., & Hox, J. (2002). *Reliability of responses in questionnaire research with children.* Retrieved from: joophox.net/papers/p021704.pdf

Borgers, N., Hox, J., & Sikkel, D. (2003). Response quality in survey research with children and adolescents: The effect of labeled response options and vague quantifiers. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research, 15*(1).

Borgers, N., Leeuw, E., & Hox, J. (2000). Children as respondents in survey research: cognitive development and response quality. *Bulletin de Methodologie Sociologique, 66*, 60-75.

Donker, A., & Markopoules, P. (2002). A comparison of think-aloud, questionnaires and interviews for testing usability with children. In X. Faulkner, J. Finlay, & F. Detienne (Eds.), *People and Computers XVI – Memorable Yet Invisible. Proceedings HCI.* (Pp. 305-316). London: Springer.

Druin, A. (1999). The role of children in the design of new technology. *HCIL Technical Report, 1*, 99-23; http://www.cs.umd.edu/hcil.

Hanna, L., Risden, K., & Alexander, K. (1997). Guidelines for usability testing with children. *Interactions*, *4* (5), 9-14.

Krosnic, J. (1991). Response strategies for coping with the cognitive demands of attitude measures in surveys. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 5*, 213-236.

## Appendix

### THE CHILDREN'S SILL: Versión en Español.

Instrucciones: Lee las siguientes preguntas, después responde a cada una con alguna de estas respuestas:

1. Nunca o casi nunca.
2. Normalmente no.
3. Algunas veces.
4. A menudo.
5. Siempre o casi siempre.

Ejemplo: Pregunta: Intento encontrar oportunidades fuera del colegio (deportes, actividades, etc.) para practicar el Inglés.

Respuesta: 4 (A menudo)

Recuerda! No hay respuestas incorrectas. Solo queremos conocer la manera en la que aprendéis Inglés u otro idioma.

Parte A

1. Asocio las palabras Inglesas nuevas con las palabras que conozco en mi idioma.

2. Hago un dibujo, en mi cabeza o en papel, para que me ayude a recordar Ia palabra nueva.

3. Relaciono el sonido de la palabra en Inglés con el sonido de una palabra que ya conozco en mi idioma.

4. Imito y represento una palabra.

5. Repaso lo aprendido a menudo.

Parte B

6. Repito muchas veces las nuevas expresiones y palabras que ha aprendido.

7. Cuando hablo Inglés, intento imitar a la gente Inglesa para pronunciar igual de bien que ellos.

8. A menudo, practico con las letras del alfabeto Inglés.

9. Escucho y veo la radio en Inglés.

10. Leo libros en Inglés y uso programas de ordenador que están en Inglés.

11. Intento encontrar oportunidades fuera del colegio (deportes, actividades, etc) para practicar el Inglés.

12. Practico lo que he aprendido con mis padres.

13. Encuentro parecidos entre mi primer idioma y el Inglés (Ejemplo: Teléfono / Telephone)

14. Hago un esfuerzo para comprender el sentido de las cosas que leo o escucho pero sin traducir palabra por palabra.

15. Yo mismo intento descubrir las reglas gramaticales del Inglés

Parte C

16. Cuando escucho una nueva palabra, intento adivinar el significado mirando el resto de la frase.

17. Cuando tengo problemas para que me comprendan cuando hablo Inglés, uso gestos para expresar lo que quiero decir.

18. Cuando no conozco una palabra en Inglés, pido ayuda.

19. Cuando no puedo encontrar una expresión en Inglés, intento encontrar otra manera de decirlo (Sinónimos, descripción, ejemplos, etc.)

Parte D

20. Organizo mi tiempo para estudiar Inglés (No solo cuando hay un examen de Inglés)

21. Busco ocasiones para hablar Inglés.

22. Cuando alguien me habla en Inglés, escucho muy atentamente.

23. Yo mismo pienso en mi progreso aprendiendo IngIés.

24. Analizo mis propios errores e intento no repetirlos.

Parte E

25. Cuando me pongo nervioso porque tengo que hablar en Inglés, intento relajarme de alguna manera.

26. Tomo riesgos: pruebo a adivinar el significado de la una palabra, intento hablar Inglés aunque cometa errores.

27. Cuando lo hago bien, me siento bien y contento conmigo mismo.

Parte F

28. Si no comprendo lo que me están diciendo en Inglés, le pido a esa persona que hable más despacio, que repita o que me explique lo que ha dicho de nuevo.

29. Trabajo con mis compañeros de clase para practicar Inglés.

30. Intento saber más cosas sobre la cultura Inglesa.

Hoja de Respuestas

Nombre:_____
Fecha:_____
Lengua Materna (Primera Lengua)_____
Edad_____

Escribe tu respuesta para cada pregunta (1 2, 3, 4 o 5) al lado del número de la pregunta.

Calcula el total para cada columna y escribe el resultado abajo de cada columna.

| Parte A | Parte B | Parte C | Parte D | Parte E | Parte F |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| l.___ | 6.___ | l6.__ | 20.___ | 25.__ | 28.__ |
| 2.___ | 7.___ | 17.__ | 21.___ | 26.__ | 29.__ |
| 3.___ | 8.___ | 18.__ | 22.___ | 27.__ | 30.__ |
| 4.___ | 9.___ | 19.__ | 23.___ | | |
| 5.___ | 10.__ | | 24.___ | | |
| | 11.__ | | | | |
| | 12__ | | | | |
| | 13.__ | | | | |
| | 14.__ | | | | |
| | 15.__ | | | | |
| Total_ | Total_ | Total_ | Total_ | Total_ | Total_ |
| + 5 = | + 10 = | + 4 = | + 5 = | + 3 = | + 3 = |

Adaptation of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) developed in 1989 by Rebecca Oxford; adapted for Francophone children in 1997 by Pamela Gunning.
Source: Thesis retrieved from
http://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/517/1/MQ40159.pdf

# Construction and Validation of a Questionnaire on Attitudes of University Students towards the European Higher Education

Mª Jesús Colmenero Ruiz,
Mª del Carmen Pegalajar Palomino &
Eufrasio Pérez Navío

**Abstract**

This article describes the process of design and validation of a *"Questionnaire on Attitudes of University Students towards the European Higher Education"* which tries to gather university students' appraisal of the European merging process in Higher Education. This process includes both the qualitative part of constructing the questionnaire items and the quantitative part of confirming satisfying test criteria. The resulting instrument, which is based on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (where 1 = "I strongly agree" and 5 = "I strongly disagree"), was addressed to undergraduate students at the university of Jaén (Spain). It has been analyzed taking into account the content validity, construct validity and reliability. Expert judgement has been used to determine the content validity. To validate the construct a factor analysis of the data was carried out by means of the matrix of main components and rotation Varimax. Finally, reliability was determined by calculating Cronbach's alpha and applying the split-half method. The results prove both content and construct validity as well as high reliability. Thus, the instrument allows to assess the university students' perceptions of the European Higher Education Space and its effect on undergraduate studies at the University of Jaén (Spain).

## Introduction

The European merging process is a reality in the Spanish university life. This reform has meant a deep structural change focused on the adaptation of certain formal features, which are common to all higher education institutions (Jacobs & Van der Ploeg, 2006), and a different teaching approach (Escorcia, Gutiérrez & Henríquez, 2007; Herrera & Enrique, 2008; Tomusk, 2006). In this sense, the report *"Student Centred Learning: Time for a New Paradigm in Education" (*ESU, 2010) shows how this reform not only demands that the current syllabuses are updated, but it presents the necessity that the institution develops its own educational model.

In this new context, the professor's role consists in facilitating and guiding the learner so that s/he can have access to the contents and professional practices in a given discipline (Herrera, 2007; Moreno, Bajo, Moya, Maldonado & Tudela, 2007; Sander, 2005). An autonomous learning system is required, which should be tutored. This will lead the learner to build and interpret the environment in a meaningful way (Gairín, Feixas, Guillamón & Quinquer, 2004; Herrera & Cabo, 2008) by means of life long learning (Herrera, Lorenzo & Rodríguez, 2008; Méndez, 2005).

Besides, a deep change of educational paradigms is suggested, which is focused on the development of students' competencies and on the processes of acquisition and construction of that knowledge (Michavila & Esteve, 2011). This educational model demands the development of a professional profile, roles and activities different from the traditional tasks which used to identify the learner as an *"apprentice who is active, autonomous, strategic, reflexive, and responsible"* (translated from Fernández, 2006, p. 41), someone who is capable of manipulating the knowledge, updating it, selecting what is appropriate in each occasion, learning on a permanent basis, understanding what is learnt and extrapolating it to new contexts (Esteve, 2003), which implies the need to redefine the organizational structures (González, 2008).

For its part, Rue (2007) establishes how the planning proposed by the European Higher Education Space is focused on the competencies that the learner must acquire. In this way, the traditional teaching concept gets broken: contents, teaching methods and evaluation systems. So this has given rise to a more varied methodology thanks to the introduction of new ways of co-learning (Font-Mayolas, 2005; Menéndez, de Paco and Parrón, 2009; Pascual, 2004) as well as ICTs in the students' teaching-learning process. Thus, *"the success or failure of the educational innovations depends on the way*

*the different educative actors interpret, redefine, filter and shape the given changes"* (adapted into English from Rodríguez 2009, 159).

In this context the above mentioned process has been established at the University of Jaén (Spain). The intention was to design an instrument to check the university students' perception of the contribution of the European Higher Education Space towards the educational improvement.

## The Study

### Objectives

This research describes the process of construction and validation of a quantitative instrument, developed *ad hoc,* in order to analyze the attitudes and perceptions of the students at the University of Jaén (Spain) towards the European Higher Education Space. The study tries to analyze the content validity and construct validity as well as to examine the reliability of this instrument.

### Method

The methodology followed in this research is descriptive. It means that it tries systematically to analyze the facts and features of a given population or area of interest in a way which is objective and verifiable. Based on the technique of the survey, an *ad hoc* questionnaire has been used as an instrument to gather information, because it is the tool par excellence in the educational field and it is easy to apply (Thomas & Nelson, 2007). The statistical programme SPSS (version 20) has been used to analyze the data, since it is regarded as a perfect resource to fulfill the demands of this study. The statistical analysis was carried out with a significance level of $p<.05$.

## Results

After defining the objectives of the research and the literture review (Fernández, Suárez & Álvarez, 2006; Font-Mayolas & Masferrer, 2010;

García & Salmerón, 2010; Coterón, Franco & Gil, 2012), a number of possible questions were established. Having being formulated into items and located into the appropriate dimensions for this study, they became a pre-questionnaire, which was able to give access to the university students' perceptions of the European Higher Education Space.

At the time of the writing of the questions, it was kept in mind that these were clear and understandable to the addressees, referred to a single aspect or logic relation, did not lead to the answer, and were brief so as to avoid difficult interpretations. In addition, it was considered that the items were formulated in a neutral or positive form, taking into account to whom it was addressed. An aspect, which we have worked on, has to do with the extension of the questionnaire, as it was intended that it was not overly long, including questions used all along the process.

This questionnaire includes a section devoted to collect sociodemographic data about the university students such as gender, age, address, degree, academic course, way of access to the university and involvement in Erasmus programmes. Besides, the instrument contains 45 items, which allow to analyze on an organizational and didactic level the university students' appraisal of the changes in the current syllabuses due to the European merging process. It is a Likert scale, whose answers range from 1 to 5 (1 = "I strongly agree" and 5 = "I strongly disagree").

## Validity

Once the scale was built, the questionnaire was validated by means of an expert judgement. It was given to thirteen professors from the area of Didactics and School Organization (DSO) in different Andalusian universities, who had more than three years of professional experience. They were asked to assess the questionnaire globally by indicating the appropriateness of the initial information by means of a scale from 0 to 10. As far as the items are concerned, these should indicate the level of relevance towards the object studied (content) and the level of accuracy and adequacy (form). In the first case (level of relevance of the object that is studied), it was registered to what extent each of the items should be included in the questionnaire; the expert judges pointed out by following a scale from 0 to 10 the level of relevance of the item with respect to the questionnaire (0 = non-relevant, 10 = strongly relevant). In the second case

(level of accuracy and adequacy), the level of accuracy in the definition and wording in every item were registered; likewise, the expert judges stated the level of accuracy and adequacy of the item within the questionnaire (0 = non-suitable, 10 = very suitable).

Next, the answers given by every expert were interpreted, giving rise to the deletion or modification of some of the items in the questionnaire. More specifically, those items, which were modified, were those at which more than three experts pointed out some inconvenient in the qualitative validity; specially, those containing the term "European Higher Education Space" or "European Merging process" were paraphrased and substituted for "new curricula" so that it could lead the experts to a better understanding. Likewise, an item was eliminated due to the fact that it was a neutral question as for the content that is studied; to be precise; this was the item which had to do with the student's knowledge about the specific competencies established in the grade that s/he belongs to. Anyway, the evaluations realized by the experts revealed how most of the items were right and appropriate with respect to comprehension and writing.

Once the experts judgement was conducted so as to know the level of understanding as for the different items on the part of the students and analyze the construct validity, it was time to perform a pilot test with 90 students belonging to the third course of Primary Education at the university of Jaén (Spain), from whom a 60% were women, while a 40% were men, whose age usually ranged between 20 and 25 years (93.3%). With reference to their place of residence, a 63.3% lived in Jaén city, and they had accessed the university by means of a Baccalaureate in Humanities and Social Sciences (76.8%) or a Baccalaureate in Sciences and Technology (18.9%). Moreover, a 90% of the participants stated that they had never taken part in an Erasmus programme in the previous years.

The construct validity was calculated thanks to a factorial analysis by means of the extraction of the main components and the combination of the Varimax and Kaiser rotation, so that each variable was included in a factor beaing in mind its factorial charge. Thereby, the measure of the KMO's sampling adequacy reaches a value of .721 and the Bartlett's sphericity test reaches 2149.940 ($p=.000$) (table 1). These data make us refuse the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix inter-items is identical and that the answers are substantially related.

*Tab. 1:* KMO's and Bartlett's Test

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Measure of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's sampling adequacy | | ,721 |
| Bartlett's sphericity test | Chi-cuadrado aproximado | 2149,940 |
| | gl | 946 |
| | Sig. | ,000 |

Both the method of main components and the combination of the Varimax and Kaiser rotation allowed us to obtain the merging of six factors which explain the 52.44% of the variance (table 2).

*Tab. 2:* Total variance explained

| Components | Initial eigenvalues | | | Saturation aggregate by the square of the extraction | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | % variance | % accumulated variance | Total | % variance | % accumulated variance |
| 1 | 11,213 | 25,485 | 25,485 | 11,213 | 25,485 | 25,485 |
| 2 | 3,244 | 7,373 | 32,858 | 3,244 | 7,373 | 32,858 |
| 3 | 2,756 | 6,264 | 39,122 | 2,756 | 6,264 | 39,122 |
| 4 | 2,231 | 5,070 | 44,192 | 2,231 | 5,070 | 44,192 |
| 5 | 1,923 | 4,369 | 48,562 | 1,923 | 4,369 | 48,562 |
| 6 | 1,707 | 3,880 | 52,441 | 1,707 | 3,880 | 52,441 |

Finally, the data analysis started with the initial matrix of components which determined the factorial charges for the selection of the items for each factor, as table 3 shows.

*Tab. 3:* Matrix of components. Variables for each factor

| | F1 | F2 | F3 | F4 | F5 | F6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4. The new restructuring of Grades and Masters improves the university educational quality. | .553 | | | | | |
| 12. My appraisal as for the new curriculum of my degree is positive. | .496 | | | | | |
| 15. The organization of the curriculum in my degree permits to develop a teaching process with quality. | .510 | | | | | |
| 19. The teaching guides let me know the subjects. | .404 | | | | | |
| 29. Generally speaking, my appraisal of | .570 | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| the university of Jaén is positive. | | | | | | |
| 30. As for the curriculum, the faculty develops an important role. | .680 | | | | | |
| 31. The teaching quality fulfils my expectations. | .735 | | | | | |
| 32. Roughly speaking, professors satisfy my educational expectations. | .629 | | | | | |
| 44. I notice that the professors in my degree are able to cope with the educational necessities of the students. | .401 | | | | | |
| 20. Those subjects that are given by several professors facilitate the teaching-learning process. | | .234 | | | | |
| 35. The teaching techniques that the professor uses in class are appropriate to the students. | | .665 | | | | |
| 36. In the classroom context, professors suggest different types of activities so that the competencies can be acquired better. | | .809 | | | | |
| 37. The resources that professors make use of all along their sessions are appropriate and sufficient. | | .370 | | | | |
| 38. Generally, professors use references that are updated and easy to access. | | .668 | | | | |
| 39. Professors make use of virtual spaces to spread materials and foster the virtual teaching. | | .495 | | | | |
| 40. The evaluation system has helped me to develop my learning. | | .360 | | | | |
| 41. The relationship profesor-student allows to create an empathetic atmosphere so as to facilitate the teaching-learning process. | | .685 | | | | |
| 42. Tutorships made the contents easier to understand and assimilate. | | .404 | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.I consider that the adaptation of the curriculum to the European context facilitate the homogenization of the university studies. | | | .687 | | | |
| 2.The new curriculum improves the university students' training in competencies. | | | .717 | | | |
| 3. The new curricula contribute to the students' professional training with a view to their labour insertion. | | | .559 | | | |
| 5. The new curricula facilitate the university student's autonomous work. | | | .533 | | | |
| 6. The new European regulation with respect to university education has contributed to the learning of a foreign language on the part of university students. | | | .532 | | | |
| 7. The new European regulation has made possible students' mobility within universities. | | | 472 | | | |
| 8. The new European regulation promotes the students' active participation in the classroom. | | | .590 | | | |
| 18. The facilities (classrooms, laboratories, seminars, computer rooms...) to give lessons in the university of Jaén are appropriate and adapted to my needs. | | | .220 | | | |
| 24. My academic training is complemented thanks to the external practical sessions (Prácticum). | | | .235 | | | |
| 34. I think that the number of students should be reduced. | | | -.112 | | | |
| 11. I entirely know the system of credits (European Credit Transfer System, ECTS). | | | | .569 | | |
| 14. The timetable facilitates the university | | | | .649 | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| students' learning. | | | | | | |
| 16. The examination timetable adjusts itself to my interests, academic needs and usefulness in daily life activities. | | | | .661 | | |
| 17. With reference to the subjects of my degree, the number of examination sessions (ordinary and extraordinary). | | | | .689 | | |
| 23. The tutorial action plan of my degree is appropriate to my needs. | | | | .570 | | |
| 25. I consider that the figure of the tutor it is crucial at the time of performing the practical study (practicum) so that there is a connection between the educative centre and the university. | | | | -.122 | | |
| 33. Both assisting lessons and participation contribute to the betterment of the learning process. | | | | .102 | | |
| 43. Roughly, there is coherence between theoretical contents and practices carried out in classrooms. | | | | .102 | | |
| 9. I have received information concerning the new curricula thanks to any other means which have nothing to do with the university such as the radio, newspaper, Internet, etc. | | | | | .301 | |
| 10. I was informed about the new curricula and their implications in my studies by the university of Jaén (professors, clerks,…). | | | | | .292 | |
| 13. I have information enough about the academic aspects of my degree. | | | | | .407 | |
| 21. I am aware of the competencies of the degree I am studying. | | | | | .767 | |
| 22. As for the degree I am studying, I know the results of its learning. | | | | | .846 | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 26. I am aware of the different mentions established by the university of Jaén in the degree I am studying. | | | | | | .231 |
| 27. I think that the mentions established in the degree I study are appropriate and sufficient. | | | | | | .806 |
| 28. I consider that the new curricula allow students to be more specialized. | | | | | | 644 |

Keeping in mind the aforesaid procedure, the name of the factors, which were found, was determined from the elements that constitute them:

- Factor 1:*"Academic restructuring in the European Higher Education Space",* states the 25.48% of the variance, which is focused on matters related to the degree, curricula, teaching guides and university teaching quality (9 items).

- Factor 2:*"Teaching planning",* which explains the 7.37% of the variance, tends to analyze how professors take into account their planning so that the teaching-learning process is as effective as possible (9 items).

- Factor 3:*"European Merging in the Curricula*", explains the 6.26% of the variance and intends to know how the process of European change has affected the new academic degrees (10 items).

- Factor 4: *"Teaching Organization",* explains the 5.07% of the variance and deals with planning and development matters in order to improve the teaching-learning process in Higher Education (8 items).

- Factor 5: *"Academic Information",* which explains the 4.36% of the variance and gathers the students' knowledge about the degree they are studying (5 items).

- Factor 6: *"Degree Specialization",* explains the 3.88% of the variance and shows information regarding the students' knowledge about their possibilities of specialization in the process of academic development (3 items).

## Reliability

Having checked the questionnaire validity, the instrument reliability was studied by means of the Cronbach's Alfa coefficient. Thus, the results obtained state the high inner consistency of the questionnaire due to the fact of reaching the value .922, at the Cronbach's Alfa coefficient, which indicates that the scale designed is quite reliable. Moreover, Cronbach's Alfa coefficient oscillates between .629 y .869 for each of the dimensions in the questionnaire, as the chart no 4 displays:

*Tab. 4:* Reliability for each factor in the questionnaire.

| Factors | Cronbach's Alfa |
|---|---|
| Factor 1. Academic Restructuring in Higher Education | 869 |
| Factor 2. Teaching Planning | 824 |
| Factor 3. European Merging in the Curricula | 793 |
| Factor 4. Teaching Organization | 630 |
| Factor 5. Academic Information | 718 |
| Factor 6. Specialization | 629 |

In order to verify even more the instrument reliability, the two halves method was conducted. In the first part, a value of .876 was obtained while a value of .863 was obtained in the second part. This confirms the results obtained all along the aforementioned process once again. What is more, Spearman-Brown's coefficient produces a value of .830, which leads us to consider the high reliability of the instrument we made use of to collect data.

## Discussion

The design and validation of a questionnaire has been fulfilled in this article so as to know the students' appraisal as far as the European Higher Education Space is concerned. It was aimed at improving the teaching-learning process so that universities can offer a Higher Education with

quality. This challenge has been achieved once the appropriate methodological processes were developed and put into practice, which is not very common, as authors such as Burgos (2006) or Wiersma (2001) affirm.

With reference to the first objective of this study, *analyze the content and construct validity in the "Questionnaire on attitudes of university student towards the European Higher Education"*, has been satisfactorily fulfilled due to the creation of a questionnaire where we have sought to ensure the content and construct validity. At the time of validating the content, a suitable number of expert judges has taken part in order to obtain a correct analysis (Ortega, Jiménez, Palao & Sainz, 2008; Wiersma, 2001; Zhu, Ennis & Chen, 1998) who have realized qualitative contributions to the development of the instrument (Carretero-Dios & Pérez, 2007; Ortega, Jiménez, Palao & Sainz, 2008; Wiersma, 2001). However, we have to highlight the fact that most of the expert judges have pointed out that most of the questions are right and that their degree of understanding and writing is high. For its part, the construct validity has been obtained thanks to the realization of the item factorial analysis. The value of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's sampling adequacy, which has been obtained (.721) allows to consider this analysis as a suitable procedure because its value is nearby the unit. In addition, the procedure of rotating components has permitted to extract six main factors, which explain the 52.44% of the total variance: Factor 1. Academic Restructuring in Higher Education; Factor 2. Teaching Planning; Factor 3. European Merging in the Curricula; Factor 4. Teaching Organization; Factor 5. Academic Information; and finally, Factor 6. Specialization.

The second objective was focused on examining the reliability of the *"Questionnaire on attitudes of university student towards the European Higher Education"*, and the result obtained by all the items is .922 with a reliability level of 95%. Furthermore, and keeping in mind the all the dimensions in the questionnaire, Cronbach's Alfa coefficient oscillates between .629 y .869, which leads us to think that the reliability obtained by means of the analysis of inner consistency turns out to be high. The aforesaid coefficient reflects the degree in which the items of the questionnaire vary. This is an sign of inner consistency (Esnaola, 2005).

To sum up, the results of the analysis allow determining that it is a useful tool, valid and reliable to assess the students' perceptions regarding European Higher education Space and their effect on the studies at the University of Jaén.

## References

Burgos, R. (2006). *Metodología de investigación y escritura científica en clínica.* Granada: Escuela Andaluza de Salud Pública.

Carretero-Dios, H., & Pérez, C. (2007). Normas para el desarrollo y revisión de estudios instrumentales. *International Journal of Clinical and Health Psychology, 5(3),* 521-551.

Coterón, J., Franco, E., & Gil, J. (2012). Opinión del alumnado sobre la implantación del Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior en estudios de Ciencias de la Actividad Física y del Deporte. *RevistaComplutense de Educación*, *23(1),* 191-206.

Escorcia, R.E., Gutiérrez, A.V., & Henríquez, H.J. (2007). La educación superior frente a las tendencias sociales del contexto. *Educación y Educadores, 10(1)*, 63-77.

Esnaola, I. (2005). *Elaboración y validación del cuestionario Autokontzeptu Fisikoaren Itaunketa(AFI) de autoconcepto físico.* Servicio Editorial de la Universidad del País Vasco.

Esteve, J.M. (2003). *La Tercera Revolución Educativa. La Educación en la sociedad del conocimiento.* Barcelona: Paidós.

ESU (2010). Student Centred Learning: Time for a new paradigm in education. *European Students`Union.*

Fernández, A. (2006). Metodologías activas para la formación de competencias. *Educatio Siglo XXI*, 24, 35-56.

Fernández, B., Suárez, L., & Álvarez, E. (2006). El camino hacia el Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior: deficiencias metodológicas y propuestas de mejora desde la perspectiva del alumno. *Aula Abierta, 88,* 85-106.

Font-Mayolas, S. (2005). Análisis del uso de la técnica de aprendizaje cooperativo del puzle en alumnos de la Licenciatura de Psicología. *Revista de Enseñanza de la Psicología: Teoría y Experiencia (REPTE), 1*(1), 9-17.

Font-Mayolas, S., & Masferrer, L. (2010). Conocimientos y actitudes de estudiantes universitarios respecto al Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior, *Revista de Formación e Innovación Educativa Universitaria, 3(2*), 88-96.

Gairín, J., Feixas, M., Guillamón, C., & Quinquer, D. (2004). La tutoría académica en el escenario europeo de Educación Superior. *Revista Interuniversitaria de Formación del Profesorado,* 18, 66-77.

García, C., & Salmerón, R. (2010). Adaptación de la metodología al Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior. Análisis de la opinión de los alumnos. *Estudios sobre educación, 19,* 237-260.

González, M.T. (2008). Educación para la ciudadanía: implicaciones para el centro escolar como organización. En AA.VV. (coord.). *Educación ciudadanía y convivencia. Diversidad y sentido social de la educación. Actas del XIV Congreso nacional y III Iberoamericano de Pedagogía.*(pp.277-298).Zaragoza: Sociedad Española de Pedagogía.

Herrera, L, Lorenzo, O., & Rodríguez, C. (2008).Las tutorías en el Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior: valoración de su implementación en la titulación de Maestro. *Revista de Investigación Psicoeducativa, 6*(1), *65-85*.

Herrera, L. (2007). Experiencia Piloto de Implantación del Sistema de Transferencia de Créditos Europeos (ECTS) en la Titulación de Maestro. Valoración del profesorado y el alumnado participante. En R. Roig (Dir.). *Investigar el cambio curricular en el Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior* (pp. 159-178). Alicante: Editorial Marfil.

Herrera, L., & Cabo, J.M. (2008). *Experiencias piloto de implantación del sistema europeo de transferencia y acumulación de créditos (ECTS). Reflexiones derivadas de su aplicación práctica en diferentes universidades españolas.* Granada: Editorial Comares.

Herrera, L., & Enrique, D. (2008). Proyectos de innovación en tutorías en la Universidad de Granada: Análisis de los instrumentos empleados. *Profesorado. Revista de Currículum y Formación del Profesorado, 12*(2), 1-18.

Jacobs, B y Van Der Ploeg, F. (2006). Guide to reform of higher education: a European perspectiva. *EconomicPolicy, 21*(47), 535-592.

Méndez, C. (2005). La implantación del sistema de créditos europeo como una oportunidad para la innovación y mejora de los procedimientos de enseñanza aprendizaje en la universidad. *Revista Española de Pedagogía, 63*(230), 43-62.

Menéndez, O., de Paco, P., & Parrón, J. (2009). Aplicación de metodologías de enseñanza cooperativa en la titulación de Ingeniería técnica de Telecomunicación. *Revista de Formación e Innovación Educativa Universitaria,2(1),* 31-37.

Michavila, F. y Esteve, F. (2011). La llegada a la universidad: ¿oportunidad o amenaza? *Participación educativa*, *17*,69-85.

Moreno, S., Bajo, M.T., Moya, M., Maldonado, A., Tudela, P. (2007). *Las competencias en el nuevo paradigma educativo para Europa.* Granada: Vicerrectorado de Planificación, Calidad y Evaluación Docente de la Universidad de Granada.

Ortega, E., Jiménez, J.M., Palao, J.M. y Sainz, P. (2008). Diseño y validación de un cuestionario para valorar las preferencias y satisfacciones en jóvenes jugadoras de baloncesto. *Cuadernos de Psicología del Deporte*, *8(2),* 39-58.

Pascual, M.A. (2004). Reverse tiempo para un aprendizaje cooperativo entre estudiantes. En L.M. Villar (coord.). *Programa para la mejora de la docencia universitaria* (pp.231-244). Madrid: Pearson.

Rodríguez, R. (2009). El reto de la convergencia europea: necesidades y cambios. *Revista de Formación e Innovación Educativa Universitaria,2(1),* 20-30.

Rue, J. (2007). *Enseñar en la universidad. El EEES como reto para la Educación Superior*. Madrid: Narcea.

Sander, P. (2005). La investigación sobre nuestros alumnos en pro de una mayor eficacia en la enseñanza universitaria. *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology,* 3(1), 113-130.

Thomas, J.R., & Nelson, J.K. (2007). *Métodos de investigación en actividad física*. Barcelona: Paidotribo.

*Tomusk, V. (2006).*Creating the European Area of Higuer Education: Voices from the periphery.*Dordrecht: Springer.*

Wiersma, L.D. (2001). Conceptualization and development of the sources of enjoyment in youth sport questionnaire. *Measurement in Physical Education and Exercise Science,5(3),* 153-177.

Zhu, W., Ennis, C.D., & Chen, A. (1998). Many-faceted rasch modeling expert judgment in test development. *Measurement in Physical Education and Exercise Science, 2(1),* 21-39.

# Exploring Tutoring in Universities Using the Delphi Method

Ernesto López Gómez[1]


## Abstract

This paper shows the first findings of an ongoing research about tutoring in the university applying the Delphi method. The objective of this research is to validate an integral model for tutoring in the university (concept, dimensions, indicators), from the following research question: Is it possible to reach a valuable consensus by a panel of experts on a integral university tutoring model (concept, dimensions, indicators)?

The starting point is the conceptual aproximation of "integral tutoring" in university and also the theoretical foundation of Delphi method. Following is a summary of the research design, showing the integration of the Delphi method into the research design in an effort to combine a qualitative and quantitative research approach.

Finally, the paper highlights strengths and weaknesses of the Delphi method that can offer new horizons for research.


## Introduction

In the European context, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has brought a new horizon in university education from more or less profound changes of the university model so far used in Europe (Sorbonne Declaration, 1998; Bologna Declaration, 1999).

Competency-based training, training of highly qualified professionals, accountability, social commitment, training of an active citizenship, research challenges in the knowledge and technology society, Massive Open Course,

[1] This work is part of an ongoing doctoral work under the supervision of Dr. Medina Rivilla.

governance processes, accreditation and quality assurance are, some of the challenges that the university is facing.

In addition, the EHEA has been a profound movement offering university professors a new conception of their teaching. As regards teaching, the work of university professors was traditionally focused on the transmission of depth knowledge dominated by research. Now, it seems that teachers have to think more about student learning than their own teaching. This is what it has been called *from teaching to learning* (Barr & Tagg, 1995) *or learner centered teaching*, well identified in the rigorous work of Professor Maryellen Weimer of *Pennsylvania State University*, for whom students construct knowledge through the compilation and synthesis of information in a collaborative and shared culture. Thus, they generate the best questions to investigate and seek to learn from mistakes. According to this model, it is the teacher, who facilitates students to get started and learn. Assessment can stimulate learning: teacher and students learn together (Weimer, 2002).

Therefore, it is found that one of the great challenges affecting the dynamics of the university is the methodological change, allowing update teaching methods to a new university of the third millennium, in which it is necessary to create the conditions for building learning and teaching learning (Huber, 2008, 78). This is a new vision of university and its mission, as well as a rethinking of the role of university professor. Highlight as great possibilities to change the Problem Based Learning (PBL), the case study (Medina, 2013a), cooperative learning (Camilli, López Gómez and Barceló, 2012) and university tutoring (López Gómez, 2012, 2013) that allows a new model and horizon to innovate in university teaching. In this paper, we delve into university tutoring, understood as a helping relationship between university teacher and students, which stimulates the integral development of students and professional development of university teacher.

## A Brief Conceptual Aproximation of Integral Tutoring in Universities

University teaching has to provide a scope for the student to learn based on a solid academic training, and optimum professional preparation and also a personal development with the actual time. As indicated by Zabalza (2013,

11), "being a professor is to be more than being teacher[2]" in line with other international studies that have also emphasized the importance of quality teaching (Bain, 2004; Escámez, 2013). The university professor is responsible for advising, guiding and orienting the student in the various formative stages of his trajectory. The university teacher, as a tutor, is an authentic guide for learning processes, as it wants to provide meaningful help to the whole student body. Therefore, we can introduce tutoring as a "help-support relationship" (López Gómez, 2012, 67).

The integral tutoring claims university professor to be a guide in the learning processes, which are not limited only to the teaching of a discipline (García Nieto y cols., 2005; Michavila y García Delgado, 2004).

Although a number of concepts and nuances, several proposals (Gairín, Muñoz, Feixas y Guillamón, 2009; García Nieto, 2008; Álvarez y González, 2008) matching to identify three dimensions to achieve an integral development for university students: academic, professional and personal-social.

The *academic* and *professional* dimensions are related with two key aspects in university: the "cultivation" of intelligence and the preparation as a future professional in a particular area of knowledge. So, the professor conducts its tutorial action, mainly, from their teaching tasks, closely linked to the subject taught. From this tutorial function in teaching, the professor tries to advice on academic aspects of their subject. It is a curricular tutoring, to accompany learning (López Gómez, 2013). The goal is to stimulate the intellectual-cognitive student. Tutoring is also very representative in researching, in which the teacher is the supervisor of the student in their research training (Hall & Burns, 2009) and, in this, there is a great influence on the doctoral student´s professional identity in training (Baker & Lattuca, 2010).

Moreover, the professional dimension is closely tied to strengthening the student's identity, as a future professional, helping them to choose and design their professional project, to each student, within the different options. It is very relevant, in this regard, the itinerary of training, the initiation in practice for the student, its connection with the workplace, developing practices in university departments. In summary, it is to guide the student toward a personalized professional style.

[2] Original in spanish: "ser docente es más que ser enseñante."

The *personal-social* dimension relates to larger purposes, it is intended to educate students beyond the purely academic and professional aspect. Indeed, one may ask: is it possible to train a professional, forgetting that the professional is a person? Is clear that the university, in the actual context, is orientated to instructional approaches rather than a formative global prospect?. Thus, university education is projected, first, to the theoretical training (academic) and secondly, to technical and practical training (professionalizing). But, it cannot be forgotten education, broadly, of university students (Buchanan, Baldwin & Rudisill, 2002).

An integral tutoring in university context, demands from teachers a broad and deep view of university education. Tutoring consolidates and strengthens, as a help-support of university student aid since joining the university, during their studies and in their professional transition, for the development of an integral training (personal-social, academic and professional). From this perspective, it achieves a teaching style that manages to align teaching to learning, educational expectations of students with university style of each institution and can meet the challenges of society and the new professional stage from a holistic development of socio-professional competencies (Arthur & Bohlin, 2005). The university tutoring is a scenario of formative innovation in which achieves professional development space for university professor, from which guides students in a complex and changing context for university education. It comes to offer each student the personalized integral orientation to the best prospects as possible, by the broad framework of educational opportunities and life expectations of human beings, especially in a university context and in the society of lifelong learning (Medina, 2013b; López, 2013).

## Design of Research: the Delphi Method for Tutoring in Universities

This paper presents a synthesis of innovative research around the university tutoring through the Delphi method. The scheme is as follows. First, theoretical Delphi method and a summary of the research design and then Delphi methodology followed by an effort to integrate quantitative and qualitative vision.

## The Delphi Method: a Theoretical framework

Initially the Delphi method was invented to predict the impact of technology on warfare. A group of experts responded to questionnaires anonymously and then received feedback in statistical group response, after which the process was repeated, with the aim of reaching the maximum consensus of the experts involved. Therefore, the key elements are: the anonymity of participants, the repeatability-iteration, controlled feedback and statistical measure of the group's response (Helmer, 1966; Dalkey, 1969; Yousuf, 2007, Rowe & Wright, 1999).

Several authors have conceptualized the Delphi method. Listone and Turoff (1975, 3) define it as "method of structuring a group communication process that is effective in allowing a group of individuals, as a whole, to address a complex problem" or Jon Landeta, from *University of the Basque Country* –recognized expert in the Spanish environment–, for who is a "systematic and interactive process directed towards obtaining the views, and if possible the consensus of a panel of experts" (Landeta, 1999, 32). Along the same lines are the proposal from Luna, Infante and Martinez (2005, 95) for those Delphi "Intends to obtain an expert insight on a topic from repeated rounds of questions, being a method to obtain and refine group judgments" and Averch (2004, 300), for whom is "a structured, indirect interaction between experts with centralized control, which provides a feedback of information and judgment." Especially interesting is the conceptualization found in the *Dictionary of Cybernetics and Systems*, where Delphi is defined as "a technique to arrive at a group position regarding an issue under investigation, the Delphi method consists of aseries of repeated interrogations, usually by means of questionnaires, of a group of individuals whose opinions or judgments are of interest. After the initial interrogation of each individual, each subsequent interrogation is accompanied by information regarding the preceding round of replies, usually presented anonymously. The individual is thus encouraged to reconsider and, if appropriate, to change his previous reply in light of the replies of other members of the group. After two or three rounds, the group position is determined by averaging" (Heylighen, 1998).

This method is based on the premise that "many heads" are better than one to make subjective guesses about the future, assuming the principle of collective intelligence, since the experts are based on conjecture rather than rational judgment simply guess (Weaver, 2001). Thus, the Delphi is based

on the judgment of an individual is less reliable than that of a homogeneous and relevant on equal terms.

The Delphi method is based on subjective information that seeks to achieve a consensus through convergence the views of a group of carefully selected individuals as experts around the object of investigation. As forecasting method, the Delphi method attempts to identify "what could / should be" while other surveys or methods try to identify "what is" (Sutherland, 1975). Ultimately, the purpose is to get some kind of consensus among various experts-who assume a common profile, which can reduce the degree of uncertainty (error) associated with any objective way of predicting or consensus.

The Delphi method has been applied successfully and good results have been achieved in different disciplines. Highlight the work of Miller (2001) on sustainable tourism, the contribution of Lobera (2008) who used the Delphi method to investigate and explore the views on the role of higher education in relation to human and social development from a panel consisting of 214 experts and studying Bravo & Arrieta (2005), who applied the Delphi method to elicit the views of an expert group on the characteristics of a teaching strategy for teaching geometric proofs.

Also, serve as an example the work of Luna, Infante & Martinez (2005), which is used as a methodological foundation Delphi research predictive information systems and information technology, and more recently, the work of García-Aracil & Palomares-Montero (2012), from *Polytechnic University of Valencia*, which are validated through the Delphi method most valuable indicators that provide a rigorous assessment of universities, achieving some consensus among the participating experts. These works, among others reviewed in the Spanish context and science disciplines of education (Blasco, López & Mengual, 2010; Moreno, Padilla-Carmona & Velez, 2002; Pozo, Gutierrez & Rodriguez, 2007) show the possibility and relevance of conducting investigations guided by this method.

## Objetives and Research Question

This study is part of a broader investigation, "*Proposal, validation and evaluation of a model for integral tutoring in university (EHEA)*". In the whole process, we present in this paper the Delphi method to *validate* the model for integral tutoring in university (Figure 1). Therefore, the objective of this research is

to validate an integral model for tutoring in university (concept, dimensions, indicators), from the following research question: Is it possible to reach a valid consensus by a panel of experts on a integral university tutoring model (concept, dimensions, indicators)?:

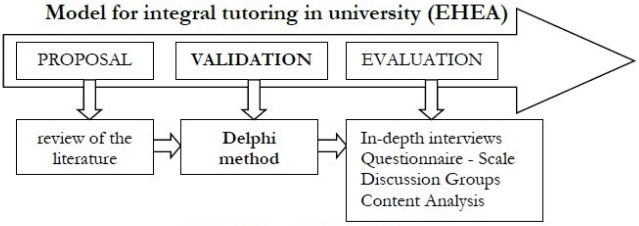


*Figure 1:* General Research Design

## Methodology

Although there is some plurality of approaches when establishing the basic steps of this methodology, below is the scheme which includes the Delphi method integrated into the overall research design for validation the model for integral tutoring (Figure 2):

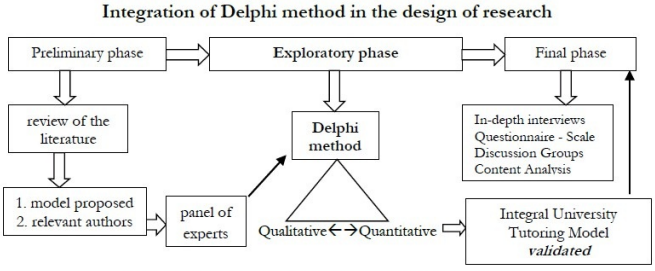


*Figure 2:* Integration of Delphi method in the design of research

### Preliminary Phase

In the *preliminary phase* we developed a theoretical review of the literature, which allowed to propose a theoretical model and also identify the most relevant authors around the subject of research (potential members of the expert panel).

Thus, the first element to which it has to give special attention is the selection of the panel of experts. Therefore, the main question that comes it is: Who are potential experts for the study is intended here? Obviously, the random selection of participants is not acceptable (Ludwig, 1997) and for this, it must be identified and define the characteristics of those who by their knowledge, experience, or training may be potential experts. In this line, Pill (1971) notes that individuals can be experts if they have related background and experience with the research question, and whether if they are able to contribute to the process and are willing to revise their initial judgment, in coherence with the develop of the process, in order to search a consensus. In this regard, Miller (2001) and Averch (2004) justify the importance of selecting the panel of experts from a review of the most successful and impact authors in the scientific literature on the subject matter. This is the position that we have assumed in this research from the Literature Review. In this line, Steurer (2011, 960) proposes to nominate as experts who have more than "five publications on the theme in two journals for the past three years." To carry out the assignment of experts, therefore, has to be carried out a nominative process (Jones, 1975) leading up to a formal proposal recognized with a panel of relevant expert around the subject of research. Hung, Altschuld & Lee (2008, 197) suggest that it is essential "to contact with the experts who show more interest in the subject and establish a relationship with them". It is important that the experts are self-motivated and also integrate the interest of experts with the topic of the study, so that, their participation was significant (Ludwig, 1997).
For this study the inclusion criteria in the expert panel were:

- Verifiable experience in the subject under study, supported by several publications in the field of tutoring in university.
- Management and/or participation in R & D + i on the subject.
- Institutional support and/or head position in advisory university tutoring-guidance services.
- Significant trajectory as university supervisors.

Having identified the potential panel of experts it is time to invite their commitment for this research and get a representative number of experts. The key is to understand that the Delphi method itself does not depend on a sample that is representative of a given population, i.e. there are no specific rules regarding the selection of participants, – although we have

seen that there are desirable criteria – or in relation with the number of participants (Steurer, 2011, 960).

Yet the scientific discussion on the number of experts is diverse. In this research, we made the compromise of 23 experts belonging to 13 different universities from 8 different Autonomous Communities. Experts are ascribed mainly to the following areas: Diagnostic and Research Methods in Education and Psychology and Education. To a lesser extent that of Didactics and School Organization. All experts have a doctorate degree and at a rate of over 80% are Full Professors (*Catedrático de Universidad*) and Professor (*Titular de Universidad*). Although one might think that the more experts, the higher the reliability, authors like Skulmoski, Hartman and Krahn (2007), Delbecq, Van de Ven, and Gustafson (1975), Witkin and Altschuld (1995), Gordon (1994), Landeta (1999) and Novakowski and Wellar (2008) notes that the number of 23 experts achieved in this research is very representative and relevant to the Delphi method.

## Exploratory Phase

After obtaining a reasonable number of experts, Delphi method requires designing the initial questionnaire and how will the representation of the theoretical model is to validate. To prepare the main questionnaire items was taken as reference, in this case, a r*eview of the literature*, which allowed us to find the essential elements about the model of integral tutoring in university that facilitate the construction of the questionnaire. Once developed the questionnaire, starts the interactive process from rounds between experts and the administrator-in this case the doctoral-in which Delphi process progresses. On the number of appropriate rounds, Worthen & Sanders (1987, 312) state that "the interactive process may continue for several more rounds, but the results start to decrease and stabilize quickly after the third round." In the same vein, Steurer (2011) indicating that the study was performed in two or three rounds, depending on the degree of consensus. We assume with Hung, Altschuld & Lee (2008, 197) that "the open questions in the first round offer a rich and valuable information" from which to develop a rigorous content analysis of the responses of the expert panel (Piñuel, 2002), although it may involve more time for analysis and delivery of the next round. In this regard, Best (1974) indicates that Delphi studies in which elements were argumentative-reasons and besides

the median and range-were significantly more accurate than Delphi studies provided only the latter.

The decision made is to include a first exploratory questionnaire, providing information from general and open questions about the research object. For this, the exploratory phase begins with sending the first submission to the expert panel. The Questionnaire 1 (Q1) requests general data about each expert, as well as broad issues in qualitative research perspective on the problem to be addressed in relation to the proposed model after theoretical review. In this Q1 asks the experts:

- *Classification variables*: university, professional category, area and teaching experience.
- *Facts competence as an expert.* The experts are asked about the "degree of knowledge on the subject on a 1-10 scale" and "level of influence (high-medium-low)" they had had several "sources of argument" for the criteria as expert (Table 1). Finally, they were asked about dedication throughout it is trajectory in relation to university tutoring.

| Sources of arguments | level of influence as an expert in tutoring in university | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | High | Medium | Low |
| 1. *Theoretical analysis* on the subject made by you | | | |
| 2. Their *professional experience* | | | |
| 3. Participation in R *&* D + *i* on the subject | | | |
| 4. Knowledge on the topic generated in *discussions and academic exchanges* | | | |
| 5. *Research* work on the subject by *spanish authors* | | | |
| 6. Their *knowledge* about the state of the problem in *international perspective* | | | |

*Table 1:* Sources of argument and Level of influence on knowledge sources and expert criteria

- There were some general and open questions, evaluative and diagnostic, around three axes: university tutoring, relation between tutoring and EHEA and finally, tutoring and university teacher.
- These questions help researcher to identify:
    a) Concept and purposes of university tutoring.
    b) Definition of the model for integral tutoring.
    c) The relationship of tutoring with the purposes of the EHEA, competencies training and active methodologies in teaching.

d) The difficulties and problems of tutoring in the EHEA and the challenges, needs and proposals to undertake in the future.
e) The benefits of tutoring for university professor
f) The impact of tutoring for change and transform the professional practice of university professor (teaching and research).
g) Know the knowledge, attitudes and competencies needed to practice tutoring in the actual context of EHEA.

The expert answer individually, private and anonymous the questionnaire. The experts answer each round and the administrator has to ensure the condition of anonymity and personal response. While it is true that anonymity can be a disadvantage if it translates into a lack of responsibility in encouraging responses and quick answers (Sackman, 1975). After analyzing the responses, expert comments are integrated with theoretical findings of the literature review, conducted and sent to experts in the form of Questionnaire 2 (Q2).

Throughout the process, apart from statistical indicators to calculate mean and range, will be asked to provide explanatory notes on the judgments they make, to assess their confidence levels for each dimension or component thereof and could be used to weight their contributions, as explanatory factors. Novakowski and Wellar (2008, 1492) have suggested that "the explanation of judgments by experts can produce more accurate results." The main criteria for quality in Delphi process are related to:

- The rigorous thematic development of the various questionnaires given the purpose of the research.
- The intelligibility of sentences that make up the questionnaires and neutrality as to the eventual induction of responses.
- The fulfillment of the criteria for selection of panel members of experts.

The Delphi process has to culminate if there is a high percentage of agreement (unanimity / consensus) concludes the exploratory process, in case of dispersion and discrepancy would a new round with the Questionnaire 3 (Q3), in which the process is repeated.

Final Phase

The final phase analyzes the comments of the panel of experts to validate the model for integral tutoring in university adapted to the EHEA. From this perspective, the development of the Delphi method has attempted to integrate a qualitative vision (content analysis of the open responses-Q1) with a quantitative perspective (averages, ranges and standard deviation), achieving a mixed methods research.

This phase enables to continue the research process, as part of wider research *"Proposal, validation and evaluation of an integral model for tutoring in university (EHEA)"* through depth interviews, questionnaire - scale, discussion groups and content analysis to agents tutoring process: teachers and university students.

## Discussion: Advantages and Limitations of the Delphi Method

The scientific discussion weights the advantages and limitations of the Delphi method. We have to prepare a brief summary, as a conclusion, to show the benefits and the difficulties of this methodology.

We begin with the advantages. The Delphi method has been widely spread and recognized as a tool that facilitates decision making, supported by the participation of various experts and recognized authoritative voices. In addition, the main benefits of Delphi are offering their own group response methods, contributing to overcome the difficulties arising from the site support and the absence of conditioning for experts to express an informed opinion as it does not feel social pressure or the influence of the other experts (Geist, 2010; Landeta, 1999; Landeta, 2006). Indeed, one of the big advantages is precisely that it is a method to avoid situations that lead to groupthink. Due to the anonymity of the panel, the ideas are considered without the identity of the person presenting the idea, hence the importance of the formation of a panel of the most valuable criteria, as we indicated above.

Jon Landeta notes that the Delphi method provides data of "equal or greater quality than those obtained through traditional surveys and also at a lower financial cost" (Landeta, 2006, 476). In this sense, the possibility of dissemination and sharing via email and the use of electronic platforms (www.surveymonkey.com) for surveys provide access to geographically dispersed experts and the work of data collection (Steurer, 2011). Thus,

electronic technology provides an opportunity for the best use of Delphi helping "the storage, processing, and an optimal dissemination speed, maintaining anonymity claimed and the possibility of rapid feedback" (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995, 204).

The main advantages, in short, are: building consensus, expert geographically dispersed are linked, maintaining anonymity and confidentiality of responses, limited time and flexible allows surveyed to complete the reporting and consideration reflexivity quiet, avoids experts direct confrontation with each other (honest opinion, free from peer pressure), the communication process appears structured, reduces the tendency to follow experts, focused process (avoiding the diversion of discourse of the experts), integrates knowledge collective, is one method motivating and formative for participants, not very expensive and takes relevant validity criteria.

Moreover, the scientific literature (Gustafson, Shukla, Delbecq & Walster, 1973) notes that one of the fundamental limitations refers to the high level of commitment to be assumed by the expert. The time involved in the Delphi process is superior to any other method group, hence the high dropout rates that occur in your application, which involves the researcher a high degree of uncertainty and try to wonder how to maintain the commitment of the experts involved (Landeta, 2006). Indeed, one difficulty is to keep the motivation and loyalty of the expert panel.

The Delphi method requires mastery of certain skills in written communication, since the process is based on this type of communication (Gustafson, Shukla, Delbecq & Walster, 1973). As indicated Ludwig, the Delphi method should not be used with groups who have difficulty reading or expressed in written communication (Ludwig, 1997). The absence of guidelines make the consensus among experts a complex process and the results are the perceptions of the experts who have to be treated rigorously, since paradigm of qualitative research aims to limit subjectivity.

On the other hand, the fact of having limited resources and time may influence the need to preset a maximum number of rounds, which can limit a higher degree of consensus on some questions that have not achieved stability among expert response. In short, some limitations included: there are not clear guidelines to determine the techniques of consensus, sample size and sampling are not defined, it requires time and commitment of the expert (usually have busy schedule), the initial questionnaire may offer some problems; can lead to hasty and thoughtless answers; potential for bias in studies because it is possible manipulation by researchers; requires skills in

written communication; selection criteria for the composition of the panel are complex and controversial; response rates; budget constraint because experts did not perceive any remuneration for their contribution (Hung, Altschuld & Lee, 2008, 192).

The Delphi method has a long tradition in the field of health sciences and economics (Gayoso, Blanco, Aira & García, 2001; De Vet, 2005) and, to a lesser extent, although exponentially emerging, in the social sciences (Landeta, 2006; Brummer, 2005). Undoubtedly, as researchers we may profit from the benefits of a booming method in the social sciences, we must also be aware of the potential drawbacks. The future of the Delphi method is strong and if we intend to use it in the social sciences, we need significant commitments from qualitative methodology.

## References

Álvarez, P. & González, M. C. (2008). Análisis y valoración conceptual sobre las modalidades de tutoría universitaria en el Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior. *Revista Interuniversitaria de Formación del Profesorado, 22* (1), 49-70.

Arthur, J. & Bohlin, K. (eds.). (2005). *Citizenship and Higher Education. The role of universities in communities and society*. London and New York: Routledge Falmer,

Averch, H. (2004). Using expert judgment, pp. 392-309. In J. Wholey, H. Hatry & K. Newcomenet (eds. ). *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bain, K. (2004). *What the best college teachers do.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Baker, V. & Lattuca, L. (2010). Developmental networks and learning: toward an interdisciplinary perspective on identity development during doctoral study. *Studies in Higher Education, 35* (7), 807-827.

Barr, R. & Tagg, J. (1995). From teaching to learning: a new paradigm for undergraduate education. *Change,* Nov-Dec, 3-14.

Best, R. J. (1974). An experiment in Delphi estimation in marketing decision making. *Journal of Marketing Research, 11* (4), 448–452.

Blasco, J. E., López, A., & Mengual, S. (2010). Validación mediante método Delphi de un cuestionario para conocer las experiencias e interés hacia las actividades acuáticas con especial atención al windsurf. *Ágora para la Educación Física y el Deporte, 12* (1), 75-96. Available in:

http://www5.uva.es/agora/revista/12_1/agora_12_1d_blasco_et_al.pdf

Bologna Declaration (1999). *The European Higher Education Area. Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education.* Bologna, 19/06/1999.

Bravo, Mª. L. & Arrieta, J.J. (2005). El método Delphi. Su implementación en una estrategia didáctica para la enseñanza de las demostraciones geométricas. *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación, 35*(3). Available in: http://www.rieoei.org/inv_edu38.htm

Brummer, J. (2005). A Delphi Method of Teaching Applied Philosophy. *Teaching Philosophy, 8,* (3), 207-220.

Buchanan, A., Baldwin, S. & Rudisill, M. (2002). Service Learning as Scholarship in Teacher Education. *Educational Research, 31* (8), 30-36.

Camilli, C., López Gómez, E. & Barceló, Mª. L. (2012). Eficacia del aprendizaje cooperativo en comparación con situaciones competitivas o individuales. Su aplicación en la tecnología: una revisión sistemática. *Enseñanza & Teaching. Revista Interuniversitaria de Didáctica,* 30 (2), 81-103.

Dalkey, N. (1969). *The Delphi Method, An Experimental Study of Group Opinion".* Rand Corporation. Available in: http://192.5.14.43/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_memoranda/2005/RM5888.pdf

De Vet, E. (2005). Determinants of forward stage transitions: a Delphi study. *Health Education Research, 20,* (2), 195-205.

Delbecq, A. L., Van de Ven, A. H., & Gustafson, D. H. (1975). *Group techniques for program planning.* Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, and Co.

Escámez, J. (2013). La excelencia en el profesor universitario. Revista Española de Pedagogía, 254, 11-28.

Gairín, J., Muñoz, J.L., Feixas, M. & Guillamón, C. (2009). La transición secundaria-universidad y la incorporación a la universidad. La acogida de los estudiantes de primer curso", *Revista Española de Pedagogía*, 242, 27-44.

García Nieto, N. (2008). La función tutorial de la universidad en el actual contexto de la educación superior. *Revista Interuniversitaria de Formación del Profesorado, 61,* 21-48.

García Nieto, N. & cols. (2005). La tutoría universitaria ante el proceso de armonización europea. *Revista de Educación, 337,* 189-210.

García-Aracil, A. & Palomares-Montero, D. (2012). Indicadores para la evaluación de las instituciones universitarias: validación a través del método Delphi. *Revista Española de Documentación Científica, 35* (1), 119-144.

Gayoso, P. Blanco, M. A. Aira, M. & García, A. (2001). Estudio para la determinación de necesidades formativas en un área de salud: método Delphi. *Cuadernos de Atención Primaria, 8* (4), 253-258.
Geist, M. R. (2010). Using the Delphi method to engage stakeholders: A comparison of two studies. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 33* (2), 147-154.

Gordon, T.J. (1994). *The Delphi method.* Washington D.C: United Nations University.

Gustafson, D. H.; Shukla, R. K., Delbecq, A. & Walster, G.W. (1973). Comparative study of differences in subjective likelihood estimates made by individuals, interacting groups, Delphi groups and nominal groups. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, *9* (2), 280-291.

Hall, L. A. & Burns, L. D. (2009). Identity development and mentoring in doctoral education. *Harvard Educational Review, 70* (1), 49-70.

Helmer, O. (1967). *Systematic Use of Expert Opinions.* Santa Monica: The RAND Corporation. Available: http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=AD662320

Heylighen, F. (1998), "Web Dictionary of Cybernetics and Systems," Available in: http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/ASC/Delphi_METHO.html

Huber, G. L. (2008). Aprendizaje activo y metodologías educativas. *Revista de Educación,* núm. extraordinario, 59-81.

Hung, H.L., Altschuld, J. W. & Lee, Y. (2008). Methodological and conceptual issues confronting a cross-country Delphi study of educational program evaluation. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 31, 191–198.

Jones, C. G. (1975). A Delphi evaluation of agreement between organizations (pp. 160-167). In H. A. Linstone, & M. Turoff (Eds.). *The Delphi method: Techniques and applications*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Landeta, J. (1999). *El método Delphi: una técnica de previsión para la incertidumbre*. Barcelona: Ariel.

Landeta, J. (2006). Current validity of the Delphi method in social sciences. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change, 73* (5), 467-482.

Listone, H. & Turoff, M. (1975). *The Delphi method. Techniques and applications.* London: Addison-Wesley.

Lobera, J. (2008). Encuesta Delphi: la educación superior para el desarrollo humano y social, 307-327. En: Global University Network for Innovation (ed.) *La educación superior en el mundo: nuevos retos y roles emergentes para el desarrollo humano y social*. Madrid: Mundiprensa. Available in: http://upcommons.upc.edu/revistes/bitstream/2099/7937/1/19%20(307-327).pdf

López Gómez, E. (2012). Tutoring in European Higher Education Area: essential points for an integral model. *Journal of Educational Sciences and Psychology, 64* (2), pp. 63-71.

López Gómez, E. (2013). La tutoría en la universidad: una experiencia innovadora en el Grado de Educación Primaria. *Revista de Docencia Universitaria,* 11 (2), 243-261.

Ludwig, B. (1997). Predicting the future: Have you considered using the Delphi methodology? *Journal of Extension, 35* (5), 1-4. Available in: http://www.joe.org/joe/1997october/tt2.html

Luna, P., Infante, A. & Martínez, F. J. (2005). Los Delphi como fundamento metodológico predictivo para la investigación en sistemas de información y tecnologías de la información. *Pixel-Bit. Revista de Medios y Educación, 26,* 89-112.

Medina, A. (2013a). Conflicts in qualitative methodology. Paper. *XIV Workshop of Qualitative Research in Psychology with the topic: "Conflicts in qualitative research"*. Jaén University.

Medina, A. (Coord.). (2013b). *Formación del profesorado. Actividades innovadoras para el dominio de las competencias docentes*. Madrid: Ramón Areces.

Michavila, F., & García Delgado, J. (coords.). (2004). *La tutoría y los nuevos modos de aprendizaje en la universidad*. Madrid: CAM-UPM.

Miller, G. (2001). The development of indicators for sustainable tourism: Results of a Delphi survey of tourism researchers. *Tourism Management, 22,* 351-362.

Moreno, E., Padilla-Carmona, Mª. T. & Vélez, E. (2002). La técnica "Delphi" en la evaluación de necesidades: una aplicación al tratamiento del género en los centros escolares. *Bordón. Revista de Pedagogía, 54, (*1), 83-94.

Novakowski, N. & Wellar, B. (2008). Using the Delphi technique in normative planning research: methodological design considerations. *Environmental and Planning,* 40, 1485-1500.

Pill, J. (1971). The Delphi method: Substance, context, a critique and an annotated bibliography. *Socio-Economic Planning Science, 5*, 57-71.

Piñuel, J. L. (2002). Epistemología, metodología y técnicas del análisis de contenido. *Estudios de Sociolingüística, 3* (1), 1-42.

Pozo, Mª. T., Gutiérrez, J. & Rodríguez, C. (2007). El uso del método Delphi en la definición de los criterios para una formación de calidad en animación sociocultural y tiempo libre. *Revista de Investigación Educativa, 25,* (2), 351-366.

Rowe, G., & Wright, G. (1999). The Delphi technique as a forecasting tool: Issues and analysis. *International Journal of Forecasting, 15*(4), 353–375.

Skulmoski, G. J., Hartman, F. T., & Krahn, J. (2007). The Delphi method for graduate research. *Journal of Information Technology Education, 6,* 1–21.

Sorbonne Declaration (1998). *Joint Declaration on harmonization of the architecture of the European Higher Education systems by the four minister in charge from France, Germany, Italy and United Kingdom.* Paris, 25/5/1998.

Steurer, J. (2011). The Delphi method: an efficient procedure to generate knowledge. *Skeletal Radiol, 40,* 959–961.

Sutherland, J. W. (1975). Architecting the future: A Delphi-based paradigm for normative system-building. In H. A. Linstone & M. Turoff (Eds.). *The Delphi method: Techniques and applications.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Weaver, W. T. (1971). The Delphi forecasting method. *Phi Delta Kappan, 52* (5), 267-273.

Weimer, M. (2002). *Learner-centered teaching: five key changes to practice.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Witkin, B. R., & Altschuld, J. W. (1995). *Planning and conducting needs assessment: A practical guide.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Worthen, B. R., & Sanders, J. R. (1987). *Educational evaluation: Alternative approaches and practical guidelines.* New York: Longman.

Yousuf, M. I. (2007). Using Experts' Opinions through Delphi Technique. Practical Assessment *Research & Evaluation, 12* (4). Available in: http://pareonline.net/getvn.asp?v=12&n=4

Zabalza, M. A. (2013). Ser docente es ser más que enseñante. *Revista de Docencia Universitaria, 11* (2), 11-13.

# The Qualitative Methodology as a Basis for Teaching Innovation

María Concepción Domínguez Garrido,
Antonio Medina Rivilla &
María Medina Domínguez

## Abstract

This study demonstrates the close relationship between teaching innovation and research on teaching/learning processes.

It presents the close link between the case study methodology and transformation of educational processes, evidencing that reflective case studies and longitudinal case studies are complementary and provide the most valuable process to consolidate innovative teaching practices.

The most prominent finding is an agenda for innovation in teaching practice supported by the case study approach. By building creative learning environments the study shows an interaction between reflective practices and theories as well as research processes that improve teaching/learning permanently.

## Introduction

The object of this research is teaching innovation. It requires a process of permanent search of meaning based on a research approach that applies mixed methods, dominated by communication, didactic methodology and innovative tasks like text and context of this line of continuous improvement of the teaching/learning process.

Medina and Dominguez (2011), Medina (2011), Dominguez and Garcia (2012), Ruf and Gallin, (1998), Long (2011), Huber (2012, p. 170) identify four principles that have guided the development of the methods of mutual teaching-learning:

- "Support students with learning strategies tailored to its preconditions.
- Stimulate students to teach each other.
- Recognize and feedback the results achieved by the team: apprentices-teaching.
- Negotiate rules and initiate processes of reflection."

Innovation of teaching is a process of flexibility, empathy, communication and openness to student learning, promoting the basis for continuously overcoming didactic routines, enhancing learning and creating a climate of continuous improvement.

Decisions how to promote communiction play an essential part, advance the meaning of communication and involve teachers and students in most innovative practice.

Long (2011, p. 3) manifests the great value of knowledge and advancement of communication competence, both for teachers and for students: "Language teaching is likely to remain a critical matter for these groups for the foreseeable future, with the scale of forced mass migrations if anything likely to grow in the twenty-first century."

Margevica (2012) underlines the value of communication competence and the development of encounter and adequate dialogue between cultures.

Ruf and Gallin (1998) emphasize the value of genuine encounters between students and subject matter.

Huber (2012) deepens in the central ideas of learning, the discovery of mediation, and the reasons for learning and in the value of the learning log, highlighting the value and potentiality of the communicative act in educational processes.

Van den Branden (2011, pp. 163-167) notes: "Innovations that tail to tune into driver teacher actions will probably stand a smaller chance of success than programs that teachers make and the resulting actions they take."

The real innovations in this line are characterized by:

- The relative advantages of adopting the innovations.
- Innovation is compatible with the teachers' previous practice and contextual conditions.
- Observability of innovation.
- Complexity of innovation.
- Its problem-orientedness.

Educational innovation in general and teaching in particular in European Higher Education is characterized by openness to master new languages.

The teacher action is enriched by openness to other cultural visions, styles of solving educational processes and challenges of a society by complexity, permanent change and openness to the multiple ways of understanding the processes of teaching-learning.

Teaching innovation is linked to action research and practice development, rigorous and intense analysis of its sense, projection and real improvement of the teaching in its entirety.

Teaching Innovation must rely on theoretical models that encompass the didactic conceptions of:

- Situated-learning.
- Socratic.
- Socio-communicative, in a process of continuous improvement and integration (Medina, 2012).

The socio-communicative model facilitates understanding of the didactic act in line with the development of communication competence of teachers.

Teaching Innovation is specified in the performance of the teaching-learning process, integrating its theoretical process adequate, with a reflexive practice and searching. The continuous transformation of thought and the practice is the basis of innovation of teaching, which must be expanded and consolidated consistent with the challenges of the knowledge society, cultural dialogue and transdisciplinarity, laying the basis for developing a climate of continuous improvement and understanding of permanent challenges and changes in a complex world.

We select some practical and theoretical frames of orientation which direct the diversity of problems and situations by means of which the teaching-learning processes are characterized. The perspective visions that support the education research are profuse and come from several approaches consolidated in this discipline. They will be as follows:

## Behaviourist-neobehaviourist Perspective

The behaviorist vision considers teaching as a process of improving learning. It has to construct more favourable environments and select relevant stimuli to optimize and evaluate the relevance of each student's learning, observing, measuring and manipulating the appropriate stimuli to promote the most pertinent and rewarding behavior of each student. This vision as embodied in:

- Focused on the research for explanations between performances and processes in education and their repercussions in the practice.
- Learning developed by students, enhanced by virtual as well as traditional classroom styles so as to understand the wide variety of performances.
- Based on the explanation of the interaction among teachers' reflexion, their performance and the students implied.

The emphasis of behavioral conceptions is focused on learning considered as a process to transform the behavior of people. Its concern is to define the types of learning and observing the stimuli, determinants and most relevant environments to foster the desired learning. The action to organize, to sequence and determine the most relevant environments and stimuli for such learning is the activity of teaching.

The consequence of this behavioral vision of teaching innovation is:

- Select, adapt and transform the stimuli, constraints and the most suitable environments to promote and facilitate learning most suitable to achieve the training of students, consolidating the most fruitful behavior through motivation and effort more valuable.
- The value of the reinforcement, motivation and continuous encouragement of expected and valuable behaviors of students, carried out with the support of efficient instruction and teaching, promotes in each person the adequate line to optimize students learning.
- Innovation means to create the appropriate environment and adopt the decisions more fruitful to propitiate most valuable learning through shaping the behaviors and expected behaviors for each person.

Mallar (2012) places this perspective within the technical approach, characterized by instrumental knowledge, a positivistic basis, the curriculum considered as product and settled on a technical interest.

More established methods in this teaching perspective are the experimental, quantitative and objective, delving into measurement processes, correlation and statistical analysis, providing new ways to measure and estimate the relevance, coherence and intensity of innovations-improvements in the teaching-learning processes.

## Interpretative-symbolic Perspective

The perspective interpretive-symbolic perspective highlights that the task of teaching is linked to different cultures present in the classroom, to the value of the most representative symbols and the way to understand and share them the whole individuals of each human group. The perspective of symbolic interactionism delves into:

- The natural complexity of the teaching-learning process.
- Discourse analysis.
- The relations among every single teaching-learning process.
- It goes into teaching in order to discover its effects, its natural manner, as well as its initial and subsequent development.

The complexity of learning and mastering a new language, basis of the culture in interaction, has been identified by Collentine (2011:228): "Researchers approaching the S.A. Context from a socio-cultural perspective have focused on the individual histories of students and the tension that exits between maintaining individuality, issues of self-esteem, worldviews and the need to advance their own development through native-speaker interactions."

Symbolic interactionism emphasizes the role of agents in the teaching-learning process and the value of each action as well as the interpretation that thereof perform educators and students, applying the most appropriate methods such as hermeneutics, interactionist, content analysis etc. Hylland (2011, pp. 210-211) presents his vision (see fig. 1):

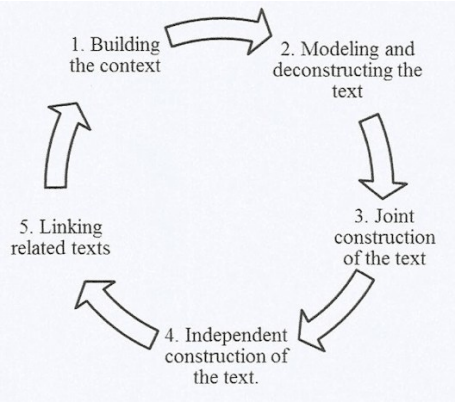


Fig. 1: *The teaching-learning cycle*

- "Setting the context, the select genre and the setting.
- Modeling, reveal its stages and key features.
- Joint construction, to provide guided, teacher-supported practice in the genre.
- Independent construction, students give opportunities for independent use of language.
- Linking-comparing texts, the students-learners speak and make decisions to other genres and contexts."

The knowledge of using new discourses and the mastery of new languages is the new approach to communication competence which is consolidated essential for teaching innovation in the world of interaction, emergent symbology and use/continued imposition of new modes of interaction-communication in powerful social networks.

Innovation of teaching will be marked by the design, use and adaptation of new texts and communicative frameworks which assess and adapt the use of ICT, from a communication model, which demands new communication styles and their preeminence front to a fleeting and oppressive use of ICT.

Medina (2013) following the vision of "Generative theory of communication" (Toshi, 2011), highlights the value of communicative action and its adaptation and reworking in the new spaces of communication, working from:

- The creative use of language.
- Collaboration between speakers (teacher-student).
- Adapting the digital language to education challenges.

Teaching has become aware of the breadth of languages and its transformation power, generating discourses of empathy and collaboration between speakers (Margevica, 2012).

## Critical Perspective

The critical vision has emphasized the role of adaptation and accommodation of teaching to the prevalence and higher recognition of some people, cultures and groups respect to other, demanding new ways to adapt the curriculum, research methods and teaching styles to recognize the leadership and compensation role that the teaching-learning process must mean for each person, culture and evolving social scenarios.

The critical vision of teaching highlights:

- It goes into conflicts and complexities by means of which human relationships are characterized; and set up the teaching-learning process, regarding the fact of teaching a liberating practice.

Mallar (2012: 39) highlights the characteristics that identify a critical perspective of the teaching-learning process:

- "Know emancipatory and reflective, socio-political.
- A means to innovate is the critical use of power.
- The curriculum as emancipatory action.
- Critical-transformer interest."

Crookes (2011, pp. 595-597): "Structures and systems for the teaching of languages have often worked to distribute resources under conditions of scarcity and to extend there each of set of ideas; people have sought to learn languages to gain access to power and to resists oppression, and people have tried to teach languages so as to gain control or extend influence over others"

- "The idea of a particular kind of language teaching being associated with values (anti-imperial, anti-racist, Marxist, etc.)."
- "The emphasis on egalitarian and supportive relationsbetween teacher and student, on a group orientation, in free schools and the modern school movement."
- "Learner initiative and choice are to be emphasized, and means developing and nurturing the free will that is crucial for individual freedom."
- "Seeking radical schools alternatives that can benefit from state support."

Innovation of teaching involves decision making based on emancipatory processes, of equality and anti-system, understanding criticism by critics as the most fruitful line to overcome the established order. This approach applies methods close to qualitative vision, with emphasis on management processes, in the search for evidences that characterize the domain of some social classes over others and openness to continuous overcoming of processes and accepted standards of conduct and consolidated.

The analysis of language and inclusion-domain in some groups over others leads to intensify the meaning of the socio-linguistic and the social value of some more elaborate codes over other barely intellectually developed.

It intensifies discourse analysis and the search for the most decisive character of texts and pragmatic models of language (textual spaces) versus others considered more in evolution.

The pragmatic approach reaches a high value and the hermeneutical processes again are assessed and applied to demonstrate the predominance and imposition of some texts and symbols over others, highlights the role of teachers and their commitment to adapt to the uniqueness of the speeches of the students and their differential use in contexts, models, construction of texts and reworking the context (Hylland, 2011).

Educational action assumes criticism and converts it in a necessary line of work, but exceeds socio-political constraints and focuses on the meaning and axiology of new processes and the justified decisions to promote and overcome the many problems of teaching action, applying methodological complementarity and advancing in the process of professionalization of teaching.

## Emerging – Integrative Ecotraining

The vision of this innovative option aims to overcome the limitations of previous approaches and to provide models, methods and practical actions that provide to teachers the keys to assume the innovation of teaching as more established and necessary culture in times of continuous crisis. The characteristics of the perspective of eco-formation are:

- Regards the fact of teaching as an action that harmonizes different perspectives.
- Gives a point of view that provokes deep changes with a universal impact.
- Gives rise to processes of continuous innovation.
- These interpretative-symbolic perspectives and Ecotraining add their own characteristics to the research:
    - Natural.
    - Committed to teaching innovation.
    - Provoke thinking.
    - Open to continuous improvement.
    - Responsible for changing thoughts, emotions, attitudes.

This approach resituates innovation of teaching in a line of integrated and sustainable stimulus that applies the principles of transdisciplinarity, cultures meet, digitization of communication, universal harmony, complexity, etc.

Mallar (2012: 39) ccharacterizes this emerging perspective with the following characteristics:

- "Learn and sustainable development training contents from transdisciplinarity.
- Medium, commitment to the country and its inhabitants (sustainability).
- Basic sciences, Ecology, Economics, Sociology, Geography, Ethnology.
- Curriculum communicative action.
- Ecotraining interest.
- Highlights value and breadth of complexity, professionalism, inquiry and continuous emergency of uncertainties, challenges and problems.

Emphasizes:

- Ecological vision, interactivity and inter dependence between contexts, cultures and new regional agreements, which show the recognition of genuine knowledges of people and communities, the encounter between cultures and permanent progress in the rapprochement between human beings, together with the recognition and wealth of diversity, acceptance of differences and the new sense of belonging to the world-global village of all human beings.

This vision of full and complementary dialogue between all people and communities demands a new sense of work style and collaboration, essential for innovation in teaching, ongoing search and consolidation of innovative deeply processes.

Innovation of teaching is a complex process that requires universal models linked to a new way of sharing thoughts, actions and innovative methods of teaching.

To carry out the process of innovation of teaching, methods to be applied are essentially combined (mixed methods), extended with the intensive use of case studies, data analysis and complementarity between techniques and methods (didactics and heuristics).

Jourdenais (2011, p. 648) states that "Teaching must be explored within the complexity of its social, intrapersonal, and interpersonal contexts."

Suggests:

- Reflective practice model of professional education/development (see fig. 2; Wallace, 1991).

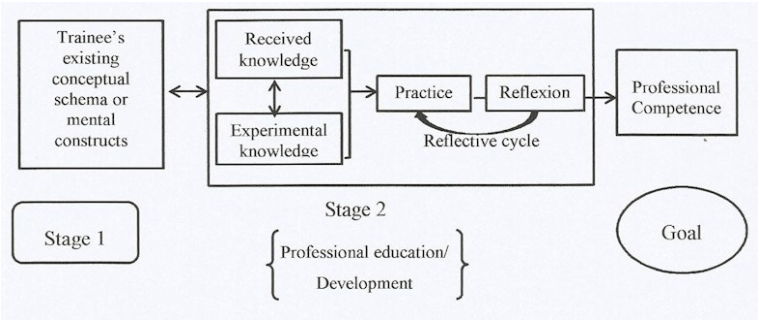


Fig. 2: *The model of reflective practice of professional development*

Teaching innovation requires a conceptual basis that integrates in the conception of teachers complexity, transdisciplinarity, eco-training and uncertainty, increasing the sense of performance by responsibility with the improving of sustainable development and a creative perception of interaction styles of complementarity of research methods, with singular emphasis on teachers' professional performing and the mastery of professional competencies, that they need to an adequate professional practice (Medina, 2013), (Medina, de la Herrán & Domínguez, 2013).

Teaching innovation requires converting teaching-learning situations, at least one semester, in a scenario of full investigation, which must be supported in improving professional practice, being aware of the transformative role and continuous improvement of performances of each teacher.

The teaching action is developed as a research process, starting from the initial diagnosis, generating a design which helps to transform the teaching-learning processes taking as basis some core themes – didactic units and turning them into a research problem in the design of: competencies, objectives, content, interaction, methods, tasks, integration of means and ICT, classroom organization and learning environment, evaluation, etc.

This innovative process in the design of such core themes is intensified improves and becomes a heuristic-transformative process in its execution, when evaluating and recording on video, scenes and significant processes of practice performed in its entirety, especially assessing the potentiality of teaching in:

- Discourse and communicative process, coherence and relevance of the codes: verbal, paraverbal, iconic, etc.
- Didactic interaction. Harmonization of methods, tasks, integration of means and ICT, classroom organization and learning environment.
- Global process followed, to advance the knowledge holistic, Ecotraining and transdisciplinar of selected knowledges and of the presentation style and sequencing of these.
- Interrelationship of all components of the didactic act, valuing the global scene becoming this general process into a problem of nature didactic and inquisitive developing by an artistic-creative practice.

Innovation of teaching from this approach that we propose is inquisitive, holistic and transdisciplinar, oriented at improving teacher professional competencies and that the students master the basics competencies in a culture of inclusion and real meeting between cultures.

## Research Objectives

- Discover more relevant prospects of teaching and innovation research.
- Demonstrate the complementarity between innovation of teaching and research of teaching.
- Verify the impact between the case study and improvement of teaching practices.
- Provide an agenda to convert practices in innovation and research processes of teaching.
- Generate a climate of inquiry and continuous improvement of teaching-learning process in educational centers.

## Teaching Innovation

Teaching innovation and its environment is the main objective of the training processes in continuous improvement and each teacher and students are to be the true protagonists.

These features require innovation of teaching, as well as other methods, being necessary a synthesis perspective of those discussed above, but with particular emphasis on Emerging-Integrative-Ecotraining.

Teaching innovation is concretized in:

- Enhancement process with respect to teaching.
- Continuous overcoming of the teaching practice.
- Creation of an environment which facilitates the teaching process.
- Finding ways to improve the teaching process.
- Updating the knowledge, improve the practice and the teaching utopia.

Teaching innovation requires a creative methodology, which applies case study to understand and find new explanations to the most valuable actions of teachers to improve their conceptions and teaching practices that transform learning in new possibilities for the integral education of all students in the most diverse contexts and singular situations.

## Case study

Teaching innovation has to apply, among other methods, the case study, completed with the solution of the problems experienced and shared by the protagonists of educational practices, guiding their work to advance in the continuous improvement of the teaching-learning process. This method involves:

- Research method that goes into the knowledge of concrete teaching realities.
- Analysis of the teaching reality.
- Set of actions led to understand the meaning of the teaching practice.
- Type of holistic and intensive research, which tries to comprehend and interpret the teaching process.
- Natural monitoring, continuous observation and study of the teaching practice oriented to its betterment.
- Characteristic procedure of the interpretative perspective, practice analysis and Ecotraining.

## Types of Case Studies

Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013), underline the following modalities of cases:

- Reflective cases study.
- Longitudinal case study.
- Cumulative case study.
- Collective case study.
- Collaborative case study.

The set of cases constitutes a rigorous way for investigate the relevance and quality of teaching-learning processes that we have applied in educational innovation networks during the past four years, especially the complementarity between the reflective case study and the longitudinal case study, harmonizing the singularized intensity of each period innovative, with longitudinal analysis of innovative activities developed during the quadrennium. (Medina, Dominguez & Sanchez, 2013).

## Reflective Case Study

Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013, p. 159): "the voice present in case study: whether we are discussing field notes or the final write-up, is usually more like narrative than traditional academic writing in that it tells a story of relationships, interactions and processes." The reflective case study is:

- A personal evaluative component.
- Commentaries or expanded field notes.
- Issues and reflections on experiences and interactions.
- The teacher reflects her own practice.
- Makes use of the research to enhance his or her own practice.

The reflective case study focuses the inquiry on rigorous knowledge of teaching practice, harmonizing the progress in the social and didactic knowledge with the performance of practices oriented to the continuous improvement, generating a climate of mastery of teaching competencies as well as consolidating the set of perceptions and options of continuous transformation of the teaching-learning.

Key Aspects of the Reflective Case Study

- Research practice becomes the central aspect.
- Building different kinds of evidences.
- Can be conducted all along the course.
- Challenges:
    - Personal resources.
    - Need for additional perspectives to balance the researcher's focus.
    - Drawing different forms of collecting data.
    - Ethical issues in relation to colleagues and pupils.

Innovative processes are based on case studies which select relevant problems and provide the most appropriate way to resolve them, find new lines for the continuous improvement and consolidate the bases of improving teaching practice and its theory.

## Longitudinal case study

Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013, p. 16) characterize this modality with the following aspects:

- A longitudinal case study is that one which is carried out an extended period of time.
- Involves the need to understand a process all along an academic year.
- Process of reciprocity, respect and trust.
- The priority is in relation to the fact of understanding beliefs, opinions and the teaching practice.
- Understanding of quality and nature of any quantitative change need a statistic base.

Consolidating the culture of innovation requires the application of longitudinal case study because it intensifies the improvement processes and provides new data to strengthening a search style and permanent transformation. The aspects of longitudinal case studies are:

- Investigating process and changes.
- Dynamic rather than static data.
- Linking present, past and future.

- Relationships built trust and respect.
- Explore groups and processes in social context.

### Challenges

The case study methodology represents new challenges and places the innovative culture on the field and in the future challenge for the adaptation of teaching to major societal changes. Among the challenges we noted:

- Need for continuous effort and persistence.
- Need for flexibility/adaptability towards the unexpected.
- Recognizing possible changes occurring in a natural way.
- Bringing the research to a conclusion and sharing the findings with the participants.

## Case Study: Implication for Teaching Innovation

The didactic process is carried out in its continuous transformation by:

- The teaching practice case chosen as relevant by teacher-researcher-collaborator.
- Representation of the teaching actions in order to carry out deep and intensive analysis.
- The classroom in the object of innovation in the teaching process.
- Informal/formal teaching settings.
- Groups of didactic interaction in the classrooms.

### Objectives of the case study in teaching innovation

Teaching practice is improved, when these conditions are fulfilled:

- Content appropriateness.
- Didactic implication.
- Methodology.
- Tasks.
- Resources.

- Evaluation systems.
- Working environment

The teacher has to work on the objectives relevant for research to consolidate the culture of continuous improvement and involve the team of colleagues in the choice and justification of the most relevant ones in each didactic action.

The research practice becomes a process to innovate the teaching, proceeding as follows:

- Identifying an annual period for the practice innovation (one semester, minimum one month).
- Choosing the subject.
- Selecting the contents more appropriate.
- Devise the innovative practice during the first month of the semester.
- Applying the didactic units that have been designed.
- Documenting the practice with camera/audio.
- Notebook.
- Monitoring the practice.

Displaying what has been shared and lived between teachers and students.

- Discussion.
- Sharing innovative processes among teachers.
- Involving both students and families in innovation.

The practice design is carried out as a process of inquiry, oriented towards teaching innovation and deepening the coherence between a rigorous design and its creative development and continuous improvement.

## Complementarity between Innovation and Teaching Research

The perspective that gives meaning and depth to this line is to understand the close complementarity between both activities: to innovate and to study teaching by:

- Identifying the most relevant and transforming aspects in the teaching process.
- Sharing among other teachers the teaching improvement.
- Reflecting on the most meaningful problems
    - Discourse and environment in the classroom.
    - Updating the resources.
    - Harmonization between the most representative performances that have been carried out. Take into account history and innovations.
    - Transferring what has been taught to the real life.
    - Impact on the continuous teaching improvement.

The case method guarantees the teaching innovation, by:

- Focusing on the problem regarding the teaching innovation.
- Give new ideas that have arisen from practice analysis.
- Applying appropriate techniques to gather data:
    - Selecting moments to data.
    - Collaborative learning.
    - Shooting a video.

The following is an example of ateaching innovation process based on innovative performances which reorient the meaning and the keys to carry out a high-quality teaching.

- Innovating the teaching in the class:
- Turning into a case study the class that has been chosen.
- Discovering the most meaningful difficulties in the classroom context.
- Applying the observation and self-observation to the processes in the classroom.
- Transforming the settings in difficult situations so as to analyze them.
- Involving both teacher and students in the project of collaboration and research on the teaching practice.

This process consolidates the essential decisions that teachers must make in case they wish to make culture a set of actions that lead to the continuous transformation of thought and practice, focused on search for meaning and advance collaborative and global of schools .

The research process is a necessary option to promote innovative actions in schools and turn every learning environment in the basis of reflection and ongoing adaptation, at carry out:

- Diagnosis of the teaching practice in the classroom.
- Analysis of the actions / decisions that were taken in the class.
- Selection of the difficulty.
- Teachers and students cooperation is in need in order to find a solution to difficulties, as well is consolidated a style of search and continuous improvement of teaching practices.

The preparation of the preparation / research processes in the class reinforces the action of research, and it ensures the innovative culture that improve classroom work, by:

- Describing the steps to follow so as to solve the difficulty.
- Sharing the results and completing the teachers' and students' points of view.
- Commenting, interpreting and taking decisions with respect to the solution of the difficulty observed in the class.
- Sharing ideas, solutions and critics to improve the teaching in the classroom.
- Bearing in mind the possible aspects that can be improve as far as the teaching process is concerned.
- Incorporating the decision regarding the better research.

Case study: research to improve the teaching that is projected in the following decisions that every teacher has to perform, consolidating this new line of innovation:

- Recognizing the classroom as a didactic laboratory.
- Choosing techniques to gather information.
- Analyzing the data.
- Reorganizing the data and extracting findings.
- Thinking about processes to improve the teaching with respect to: discourse, environment, decisions, etc.

## Conclusions

To ascertain the success of teaching innovation it is necessary to:

- Select case studies tailored to each reality educational and convert the practices in an investigation process.
- To update the teaching practice based on inquiries and to improve the practice by applying the criteria and the methodology of the case study to the continuous improvement.
- Complement:
  - Self-monitoring the teaching practice, among teachers and students.
  - Analyzing the discourse appropriateness, the relationships and teaching act.
- Sharing and expanding the results with respect to the teaching quality among teacher, students, education community.
- Incorporating the fact of making inquiries and the case study in the teaching practice.
- Assuming the parameters of the didactic innovation that support the quality and continuous adaptation of the case studies, quantitative complementary methodology to convert teaching activities in a continuous reflection and research

Teaching practice becomes innovative, to using the case studies more consistent with the problems and contradictions emerged between the theoretical models and the performance of teaching practices.

Teams of teachers have to intensify the most important achievements in their teaching practices and deepen on the performance thereof, consolidating creative lines and carrying out reflexions and longitudinal case studies, which evidence the true trajectories of teachers groups committed to the rigorous innovation and justified of teaching.

Innovation requires applying research methods evidencing the relevant cases and the real problems that have to be identified and lived from the complementarities between innovation practices and research; expanding sense, projection and impact of each one on the other and enriching the knowledge from the selection of conflicts most highlight in teaching practices; seeking to overcome them through actions characteristics of authentic knowledge, possession of the rigor and relevance of research, but

broadened and enriched with practices full of art and comprehensives of the complexity of each teaching task.

It has been tried to provide the need to establish the innovative culture in the performance of teaching practices, but the essential requirement is to link to continuous improvement, the way of research and select teaching cases relevant for teachers, students, families, institutions, etc. These problems and relevant cases must become the actual core of search and understanding, that different case study, as a method of understanding, inquiry and search for meaning that such qualitative research methods can provide to building the culture of teaching innovation.

## References

Crookes, G. (2011). Radical language teaching. In M.H. Long, & C. J. Doughty (Eds.), *The handbook of language teaching* (pp. 595-609). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Collentine, J. (2011). Study abroad research: Findings, implications and future directions. In M.H. Long and C. J. Doughty (Eds.), *The handbook of language teaching* (pp. 218-233). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Domínguez, M. C. , & García, P. (Eds.) (2012). *Tratamiento didáctico de las competencias básicas.* Madrid: Universitas.

Hamilton, L., & Corbett-Whittier, C. (2013). *Using case study in education research.* London: SAGE.

Hyland, K. (2011). Specific purpose programs. In M.H. Long, & C. J. Doughty (Eds.), *The handbook of language teaching* (pp. 201-217). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Huber, G. (2012). Métodos de enseñanza para el aprendizaje adaptado a la complejidad. In A. Medina, & M. C. Domínguez (Eds.), *Didáctica, formación básica para profesionales de la educación* (pp. 147-188*).* Madrid: Universitas.

Huber, A.A. (2012). Einführung. Introduction. In A. A. Huber (Ed.), *Kooperatives Lernen – kein Problem. Effektive Methoden der Partner- und Gruppenarbeit* (pp. 4-15). Leipzig: Ernst Klett Schulbuchverlag.

Jourdenais, R. (2011). Language teacher education. In M. H. Long, & C. J. Doughty (Eds.), *The handbook of language teaching* (pp. 647-658). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Long, M. H. (2011). Language teaching. In M. H. Long, & C. J. Doughty (Eds.), *The handbook of language teaching* (pp.2-5). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
McAteer, Mary (2013). *Action research in education.* London: Sage.

Mallar, J. (2012). Didáctica: perspectivas, teorías y modelos. In A. Medina, & M. C. Domínguez (Eds.). *Didáctica: formación básica para profesionales de la educación* (pp. 33-78). Madrid: Universitas.

Margevica, Ieva (2012). La competencia comunicativa plurilinguística e intercultural. In M. C. Domínguez & P. García (Eds.). *Tratamiento didáctico de las competencias básicas* (119-158). Madrid: Universitas.

Medina, Antonio, De la Herrán, Agustín, & Domínguez, Mª. Concepción. (Eds.) (2013). *Las fronteras de la investigación didáctica*. Madrid: UNED.

Medina, Antonio. (2013). *Innovación del profesorado*(Ed.). Madrid: Ramón Areces.

Medina, Antonio, Domínguez, Mª.Concepción, & Medina, Castañar. (2013). La formazione iniziale degli insegnanti di scuola secundaria in Spagna. In M. Baldacci (Ed.). *La formazione dei docenti in Europa*, (pp. 45-71). Milano:Pearson Italia, Bruno Mondadori.

Medina, Antonio. (2012). Interacción didáctica. In A. Medina, & M.C. Domínguez (Eds.), *Didáctica: Formación básica para profesionales de la educación* (pp. 530-580). Madrid: Universitas.

Medina, Antonio. (2011). *Innovación de la educación y de la docencia* (Ed.). Madrid: Ramón Areces.

Medina, Antonio, De la Herrán, Agustín, & Sánchez, Cristina (Eds.) (2011). *Formación pedagógica y práctica del profesorado*. Madrid: Ramón Areces.

Patton, Michael Quinn (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ruf, Urs, & Gallin, Peter. (1998). *Dialogisches Lernen in Sprache und Mathematik. Band 2: Spuren legen – Spuren lesen. Unterricht mit Kernideen und Reisetagebüchern*. Seelze-Velber: Kallmeyersche Verlagbuchhandlung.

Toschi, Luca. (2011). *La comunicazione generative.* Milano: APOGEO.

Van den Branden, Kris. (2011). Diffusion and implementation of innovations. In M. H. Long, & C. J. Doughty (Eds.), *The handbook of language teaching* (pp. 659-672). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Wallace, Michael (1991). *Training foreign language teachers: a reflective approach*. Cambridge: University Press.

# The Importance of the Exposure to a Foreign Language

José María Santoro Moreno


## Abstract

Many factors need to be taken into account when learning a foreign language since they influence the learning process. This article intends to put special emphasis on the importance of the exposure factor at the time to acquire and develop a foreign language. It also shows the procedure that has been followed in order to carry out a study as far as oral skills are concerned. Although the participants that took part in this research studied English at Primary, Secondary and Upper Secondary Education, they are not able to speak this language. That is why our study is going to be focused on the things (always oral activities, tasks, etc…) that the participants usually do all day long to maintain, develop and acquire the English language. Then the tasks that the participants conducted within a twenty-four-hour period are going to be compared with those of mine within the same period of time so that we can get meaningful findings.


## Introduction

Even though Spanish students are taught English from Primary to Upper Secondary Education, they often finish their studies with many shortcomings, since oral skills are left aside because of the lack of oral examinations and the strong need to get students ready for the upcoming examination to enter university. The point is: can our students develop and acquire the English language by just doing exercises and listening to lessons?

Our present educational system says so. That is why our students usually finish their Upper Secondary Education without being capable of having a conversation in the English language since the teaching of foreign languages in Spain is focused on learning how to write them instead of

learning how to speak them. Then, how can somebody learn a language without speaking it?

The fact of learning languages is not an easy task and there are some factors that make it even more difficult.

## Factors that affect learners when learning a foreign language

There are some factors that affect the acquisition and development of a foreign language. These are going to be named and explained below:

### The age factor.

According to the study by Oyama (1976, pp. 261-283), the younger a person is when learning the target language, the more accurate his or her pronunciation will be. This means that his or her pronunciation will be closer to that of natives. Nevertheless, other studies have just revealed the opposite, for instance that of Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle (1977, pp. 357-365). These authors showed that adults' pronunciation was better, but after being tested again one year later, children stood out. This leads us to think that there are more factors affecting the process.

### The attitude factor.

Gardner and Lambert (1972, p. 135) state that students acquire the target language better when their attitude towards English speaking people and their culture is positive.

### The aptitude factor[1].

This factor entails

- the ability to identify and memorize new sounds.
- the ability to understand the function of particular words in sentences.
- the ability to figure out grammatical rules from language samples.
- the ability to memorize new words.

### The exposure factor.

The more expose to the language in question we are, the more we are going to improve our skills on it.

[1]The aptitude factor. http://www.slideshare.net/cupidlucid/3-factors-affecting-l2-learning-presentation (18 Feb. 2013).

Exposure as one of the conditions for L1 acquisition holds equally true for second language (L2) learning. If children are exposed to the L2 in the same way as they are exposed to the L1, greater success will be achieved. This is because in the 'natural' L2 learning situation, the pressure to acquire the IL in order to control the environment is indeed tremendous[1].

### The mother tongue factor.

Traditionally, as Harmer (2001, p. 131) points out, learners have been studied the English language for many years from Primary to Upper Secondary Education. As a result, they do not know how to speak English yet due to the fact that their mother tongue has been used quite more than the target language in the classroom context.

### The personality factor.

Personality features such as empathy, anxiety, self-esteem and extroversion among others, also affect the learning of a foreign language[2].

### The motivation factor.

Motivation is crucial for everything we want to do in our life. If learners lack motivation, they will not learn the language properly. One the one hand, they can already be motivated to learn a given foreign language; and on the other hand, the teacher can be responsible for motivating them to learn it. "Motivation is a key part of learning a language. The more time that you spend during the day speaking your second language, the better at it you're going to be[3]."

The best way to summarize the above information is by means of the following chart, which collects all the factors that have been previously mentioned in order to have a general idea about the above mentioned factors that affect the language learning process:

[1] The exposure factor. http://www.melta.org.my/ET/1991/main3.html (18 Feb. 2013).

[2] The personality factor. http://www.slideshare.net/cupidlucid/3-factors-affecting-l2-learning-presentation (19 Feb. 2013).

[3] The motivation factor. http://www.forbes.com/2010/07/27/learn-second-language-lifestyle-travel-study.html (20 Feb. 2013).

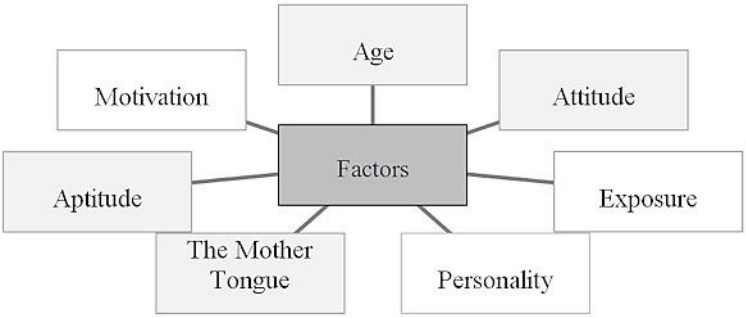


Fig. 1: *Factors that affect learners when learning a foreign language*

## What to do to acquire and develop a foreign language?

As has been already said, the best way to acquire and develop a foreign language is to be exposed to it, which is why the three participants who took part in this study (a 26-year-old boy, a 32-year-old girl and me), exposed themselves to the language in question during twenty-four hours, since one of the factors affecting pronunciation learning is the amount of exposure learner receives (cf. Kenworthy 1987, p. 6). The aim of this study is to state that the exposure factor is crucial at the time of learning a foreign language.

Having presented the aim of the study and having given the reader a general overview on the research, we describe now the different moments, in which the participants faced the English language in a 24-hour period within their daily life.

### Waking up.

Rather than starting the day due to the ringing of an alarm clock, some music or the English news can be heard on the radio so that we can get up by listening to the English language.

### Telephone call.

Two aspects should be highlighted in this section. On the one hand, the fact of holding a phone call is known as 'Language as Process', that means that you have to speak without having any chance to revise your own words once you have pronounced them. On the other hand, the sort of talk held

by both speakers is a non-standard English conversation so that it is more fluent (Nunan 1993). The next situation shows us the opposite example.

### Email.

If the example above is 'Language as Process', this is 'Language as Product'. However, the kind of writing is Standard English, since it is more formal and we have plenty of time to write a text, whose formality is always going to depend on the person we want to address to (Brown & Yule, 1983).

### Listening to music while driving, working, and cooking, etc.

Let us picture the next situation. Let us imagine that a thirty-minute trip awaits us, and what better way to spend that time but listening to music! To put it crudely, radio stations play so much advertising that we tend to get bored. Therefore, it is more advisable to play our own CDs. Do not forget our ears need a constant bombardment of English in order to get used to its phonetics. This is our premise: the more English you listen, the more you will improve.

### Attending lessons.

Maybe this is what we are used to doing most of the time: to attend lessons or a Master session at university in order to be given instruction.

Class attendance facilitates learning in a variety of ways. Lectures supplement reading assignments. Classroom presentations present information differently than the text. Discussion and elaboration of topics provides current information that may not be found in the textbook. Hearing the comments and questions of others can answer your questions. Instructors can use class discussion to enhance critical thinking skills. They can pose questions that require students to make connections between concepts and relate what they are learning to real life. The more students analyze and examine material, the better their retention will be. As you can see, attending class on a regular basis gives you much more than just credit for attendance[1].

[1] Attending lessons. http://www.stateuniversity.com/blog/permalink/The-Importance-of-Attending-Class.html (21 Feb. 2013)].

Video games[1].
Likewise DVDs and Blurays, video games can also be played in their original version (henceforth OV). On the contrary, this task might seem not to be appropriate; nevertheless, it is a different way to keep on doing the same. What we want to say is that we go on listening to somebody while speaking the target language.

Films in their OV. If we do not have the opportunity to be surrounded by native English speaking people in order to practise our English, we may take advantage of the seventh art. Needless to say that we may combine them with TV series, interviews, news, commercials among many others so as to be aware of the different accents that there are in the world and that words are not pronounced in the same way everywhere. Moreover, new technologies such as DVD and Bluray players can be useful too. "Learning from multiple people is another key to success, especially when attempting to cultivate a native accent. When you are exposed to a lot of people you get a much better sense of what the sound of a word is supposed to be[2]."

Interaction via videoconferencing[3].
Activity whereby a conversation is held thanks to the software programme Skype.

[1] This has been possible thanks to the development of new technologies and the combination of DVDs and Blurays with game consoles such as PlayStation, Xbox or Wii, among others, whose features allow us to play video games on line with people from all over the world. That is when your English comes to play once again.

[2] Exposure to different accents. http://www.forbes.com/2010/07/27/learn-second-language-lifestyle-travel-study.html (20 Feb. 2013)].

[3] This is part of the tapescript of the conversation held between a Hungarian woman and me:
*Me:* Hungarian winter must be horrible
*Hungarian woman:* Ah! very cold.
*M:* What's the temperature?
*H:* This morning minus 10.
*M:* Minus ten! That's nothing! When I was in Canada it was minus 25 and I survived!
*H:* Ha! Really?
*M:* I think I should go to Hungary to check that.
*H:* Yeah, you should come. Well, you can come anytime.

Thanks to this software[1] you may watch, listen to somebody or both things at the same time, which means that there is interaction between the participants who are bound to try to understand one another in English.

Studying or preparing a power point presentation

is a task that entails the use of English all along the process. Nonetheless, this is a fact of paramount importance that is skipped from time to time. At the same time it is a tool very easy to use and practical in the classroom context[2].

Coffee talk.

That can be done by having a coffee while holding an English conversation with a native English speaker as long as it is possible. If not, it can also be carried out by non-native English speakers; and of course the whole conversation will be kept in non-standard English.

"The tricks to maintaining foreign fluency are very similar to the methods used to achieve it–you have to practice. Maintaining a language is a matter of dedicating enough time to it, […] You need to interact with

[1] But what is exactly Skype?
With more than 350 million registered users, Skype is the most popular voice communication service in the world. Skype is one of the pioneers in voice communication over the Internet […] Skype has broken many barriers to communication. While in the past you needed to take particular care of the minutes and seconds you spend speaking on international calls, you no longer need to bother about that now […] From anywhere in the world, you can make unlimited and totally free calls to anyone in the world provided that person is using Skype too. So, you have to arrange to meet that person online at a time.
*Skype:* http://voip.about.com/od/voipsoftware/a/whatisskype.htm (21 Feb. 2013)].

[2] Why could it be so relevant for teaching?
PowerPoint uses a graphical approach to presentations in the form of slide shows that accompany the oral delivery of the topic. This program is widely used in business and classrooms and is an effective tool when used for training purposes. PowerPoint is one of the simplest computer programs to learn. It is the number 1 program used worldwide for presentations. Anybody can create stunning presentations that look like they were designed by a professional.
*Power point:*
http://presentationsoft.about.com/od/powerpointtipsandfaqs/f/ppt_overview.htm (21 Feb. 2013)].

native speakers. Make every possible effort to speak the learned language on a daily basis[1]".

Phonetics:

This section will teach us what to do when we do not know how to pronounce a word in the target language. Likewise children in their mother tongue, we often know how to pronounce words once we have already listened to someone at the time of saying them. In addition, we can check their phonetics in a dictionary or listen to different people from the word while they say them thanks to some dictionaries online or web pages created for that specific purpose[2].

Commercials.

Foreign commercials have always been dubbed to Spanish; nonetheless, lately these are broadcast in their original version while the Spanish subtitles are shown, which is why spectators are forced to listen to the language in question.

Signs.

While driving, we may notice that both sides of the road are filled with plenty of advertisement spaces, whose spelling is most of the time in the language in question. Thereby, our exposure to the English language goes on and on.

[1] How to learn a second language. http://www.forbes.com/2010/07/27/learn-second-language-lifestyle-travel-study.html (20 Feb. 2013)].

[2] Some of these links allow us to listen to isolated words or sentences so that we can appreciate how they are pronounced by people with different accents:

- http://hearnames.com/
- http://9to5mac.com/2013/06/23/siri-asks-for-help-pronouncing-names-in-ios-7/
- http://www.pronouncenames.com/
- http://www.howtosayin.com/

Phone application.

The fact of downloading an application for your telephone, tablet or personal computer may not be easy to do, as the guidelines to follow in order to install it and set it up afterwards are usually in English.

Table 1 provided below gathers all the situations at which the participants were exposed to the target language within a 24-hour period. We have to keep in mind that their exposure was not forced, but these are only the situations where they usually are confronted with the language in question in their daily life.

*Tab. 1:* Situations within a twenty-four-hour period

| My own exposure | Participants' exposure |
|---|---|
| Waking up | Commercial |
| Telephone call | Music |
| Email | Sign |
| Listening to music while driving | Mobile phone application |
| Attending lessons | |
| Video games | |
| Films in their OV | |
| Videoconferencing | |
| Studying or preparing a power point presentation | |
| Coffee talk | |
| Phonetics | |

Figure 2 below shows the next results. I, as a participant, was exposed to eleven different situations while the rest of the participants only faced the English language in four occasions within a twenty-four-hour period.

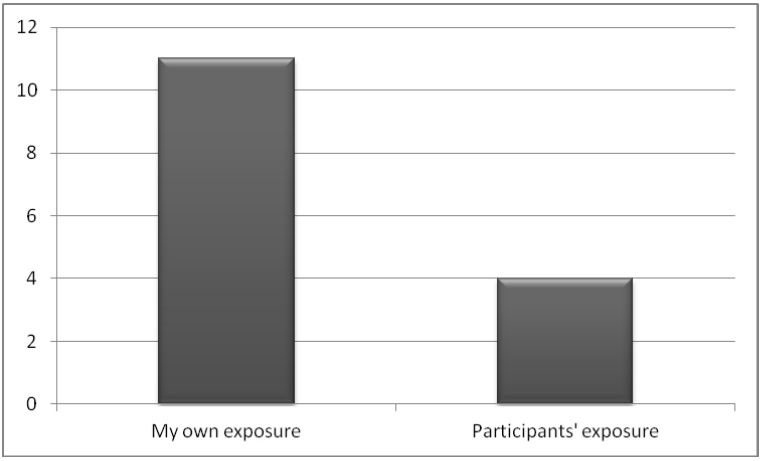


Fig. 2: *Exposure to English*

Obviously, my period of exposure was more profitable than that of the rest of the participants. As was already said before, we have to bear in mind that the more exposed to the language in question we are, the more we will improve our skills on it.

The paragraphs below are devoted to the situations in which the participants had to deal with the English language and how they solved the possible difficulties all along the process.

First of all, as far as the telephone application is concerned, the task was hard to carry out because they did not understand the instructions to download it and install it. Thus they way to solve the problem consisted in asking me for help.

Secondly, taking into account that music is everywhere, the activity was not so meaningful as we expected, since they only paid attention to the rhythm and sounds, but they did not focus on the words spoken by singers.

In the third place, even though they actually read the advertisement space while driving, they did not pay it too much attention, as they did not know the translation into their mother tongue (Spanish) of the words they were reading.

As a result, we may say that the participants did not take advantage of the chances they had to deal with the target language because they sometimes lack vocabulary, or because they did not pay attention to the

meaning, or simply because they were nor capable of adapting the words into Spanish.

The following chart collects the possible reasons why the participants, who took part in this research, derived few benefit from the activities they performed all along the process:

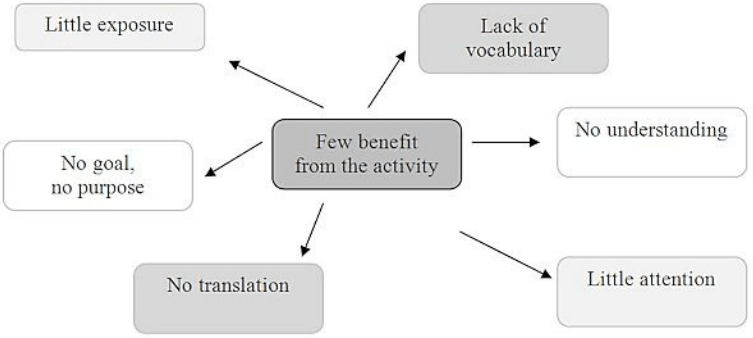


Fig. 3: *Reasons why the participants got few benefit from the situations*

## Conclusion

Having displayed many situations from which we may take advantage in our daily life in order to get our skills in English better, we would like to state that the exposure to a foreign language is probably one of the most relevant factors dealing with the acquisition and development of the target language.

We cannot focus our attention on doing exercises, since that is just a part of our learning, regarding instruction, due to the fact that there are a great number of activities that can be carried out as well as applied to our daily life, not to mention our social life. But most of all we need a purpose to do things, which is why the participants fulfilled the tasks, but they derived few benefit from them.

## References

Brown, Gillian & Yule, George (1983). Discourse Analysis. *Cambridge:* Cambridge University Press

Gardner, R.C. and W.E. Lambert (1972). *Attitudes and Motivation in Second Language Learning*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Harmer, Jeremy (2001). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. England: Pearson Education Limited.

Kenworthy, Joanne. (1987). *Teaching English Pronunciation*. Longman, London.

Nunan, David (1993). Introducing Discourse Analysis. Penguin Books Ltd.

Oyama, Susan (1976). "A sensitive period for the acquisition of a nonnative phonological system". *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, *5*(3), 261-283.

Snow, Catherine E. and Marian Hoefnagel-Höhle (1977). "Age differences in the pronunciation of foreign sounds". *Language and Speech, 20*(4), 357-365.

### Websites

*Exposure to different accents*. <http://www.forbes.com/2010/07/27/learn-second-language-lifestyle-travel-study.html> (20 Feb. 2013).

*How to learn a second language*. <http://www.forbes.com/2010/07/27/learn-second-language-lifestyle-travel-study.html> (20 Feb. 2013).

*Motivation*. <http://www.forbes.com/2010/07/27/learn-second-language-lifestyle-travel-study.html> (20 Feb. 2013).

*Power point*.
<http://presentationsoft.about.com/od/powerpointtipsandfaqs/f/ppt_overview.htm> (21 Feb. 2013).

*Skype*. < http://voip.about.com/od/voipsoftware/a/whatisskype.htm> (21 Feb. 2013).

*The aptitude factor*. <http://www.slideshare.net/cupidlucid/3-factors-affecting-l2-learning-presentation> (18 Feb. 2013).

*The exposure factor*.< http://www.melta.org.my/ET/1991/main3.html> (18 Feb. 2013).

*The personality factor*. <http://www.slideshare.net/cupidlucid/3-factors-affecting-l2-learning-presentation> (19 Feb. 2013).

## Authors' Notes

**Colmenero Ruiz**, Mª Jesús:
Universidad de Jaén
E-mail: mjruiz@ujaen.es

**Domínguez Garrido**, María Concepción
Department of Didactics, School Organization and Special Didactics, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED).
Concepción Domínguez is professor of Didactics of Social Science.
Address: Calle Juan del Rosal 14, Madrid, Spain
E-mail: cdominguez@edu.uned.es

**Huber**, Günter L.:
Prof. i.R., Dr. phil., retired Chair of Educational Psychology at the Dept. of Educational Psychology, Institut für Erziehungswissenschaft, University of Tübingen. Among his publications are books and training materials on cooperative learning and teaching/learning problems, on inter-individual differences, and software for the analysis of qualitative data.
Address: Institut für Erziehungswissenschaft, Münzgasse 22-30
72070 Tübingen, Germany
E-mail: huber.paedpsy@uni-tuebingen.de

**Jiménez Garrido**, Amador:
Universidad de Jaén
E-mail: amador_jimenez@dpsk12.org

**Khan**, Shahjehan:
MA Candidate, Community Social Psychology
University of Massachusetts, Lowell, MA, U.S.A.

**López Gómez**, Ernesto:
Doctoral student (UNED)
E-mail: elopezgeducacion@gmail.com

**Medina Domínguez**, Conchita
is PhD in Economics and PhD Extraordinary Award.
IBM-Spain Sales and Marketing Department.
Address: Calle Playa de Agua Dulce, 7, 28660 Boadilla-Madrid
E-mail: conchmedom@hotmail.com

**Medina Domínguez**, María:
Consultant and Head of the e-Logos Program. Enterprise Director Education.
Address: Calle Juan del Rosal 14, Madrid, Spain
E-mail: tatinamedina@edu.uned.es

**Medina Rivilla**, Antonio
Department of Didactics, School Organization and Special Didactics. Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED).
Antonio Medina is professor and director of the Department of Didactics, School Organization and Special Didactics.
Address: Calle Juan del Rosal 14, Madrid, Spain
E-mail: amedina@edu.uned.es

**Pegalajar Palomino**, Mª del Carmen:
Universidad de Jaén
E-mail: mcpegala@ujaen.es

**Pérez Navío**, Eufrasio:
Universidad de Jaén
E-mail: epnavio@ujaen.es

**Santoro Moreno**, José María:
Universidad de Jaén
E-mail: jason_vorhees2003@hotmail.com

**Sládková**, Jana
Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Psychology
Jana Sladkova received her Ph.D. in Social Psychology at the Graduate Center, CUNY in New York in 2007 and has been working as an Assistant Professor of Psychology at UML since 2008. She has focused on research related to various immigration issues, including journeys of undocumented migrants from Latin America to the United States and impact of deportations on immigrant communities.
Address: University of Massachusetts, Lowell, Mahoney Hall 2
870 Broadway Street, Lowell, MA 01854
E-mail: Jana_sladkova@uml.edu

## Subject Index