

Exploring the dilemmas triggered by the practice of life history seminar: The expression of struggles as engine of the narrative practices

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Symposium

Text

This symposium articulates the contributions of three seasoned practitioners (from three different countries) using life history and auto/biographical approaches as a method to reflect on significant life experiences (including transformational ones), and eventually trigger shifts in meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 1991) among learners in the context of adult and higher education (e.g., Dominicé, 2000; West, Alheit, Andersen & Merrill, 2007). Assuming the potential value inherent to the experience of dilemmas, as a catalyst for learning, growth and development (Mezirow, 1991), the aim of this symposium is to discuss the conditions in which there is real educational value, and those that eventually prevent meaningful learning from occurring.

The reflection will be conducted from two points of view. From the learner's perspective, questions will be formulated regarding the choices and tensions involved in the process of generating material for and writing an auto/biographical narrative. Dilemmas regarding the selection of experiences to be included, people to be interviewed, the format of the narrative, the problematic boundary between doing educational biography and explicitly therapeutic processes, or what levels of description to adopt, will be discussed considering their educational value and their influence on perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1991). From the practitioner's point of view, questions will be formulated regarding the dilemmas involved in the implementation and the facilitation of life history seminars. The reception of participants' tales, the necessity to choose between competing interpretive frameworks, the options available to facilitate an inclusive dialogue between learners with heterogeneous backgrounds, or the tensions inherent in the different temporalities involved in the organization and the experience of the process, will be analyzed.

Based on the professional experiences shared by the three of us, we will finally question the potential benefits of discussing in the classroom the connections between the learners' dilemmas – emerging from the task of generating, writing and sharing their autobiographical narrative – and the practitioners' ones, related to the implementation of a containing environment for them to proceed openly as well as critically. Doing so, we will discuss the

transformational value inherent in the experience of dilemmas, as they may simultaneously be encountered and reflected on by learners and practitioners.

Question: How do we learn from the experience of expressing and receiving stories in first person in life story seminars?

Keywords: adult education, emancipation, life history, narrative.

References

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