

CONSTRUCTION OF TEACHER PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE THROUGH WRITING STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

Laura Pañagua, Diego Martín-Alonso, Nieves Blanco

INTRODUCTION

The knowledge needed in teaching is linked to practice, what implies having to decide what is appropriate in every situation (Biesta, 2017; Contreras, 2010). Van Manen (2004) calls it “pathic knowledge” (Van Manen, 2004), and it requires teachers to understand and reflect about their daily life in relation with students and other teachers. Thus, this knowledge puts into play teachers’ subjectivity when they interact with institutions and students.

In this sense, teaching does not require learning something new (what we could call theory), but embodying this knowledge, giving our own meaning to it and connecting it with our own story. For this reason, as Connelly and Clandinin (1988) say, the framework experience-knowledge seems more suited than the traditional theory-practice.

Therefore, teacher education must be focused on promoting reflection on oneself in relation with their own stories and the characteristics of teaching profession. This implies a “mental discipline” as well as a specific way of thinking oriented towards their own lived experience (Mortari, 2012, p.526). Given that disposition to reflection is not “natural”, it is needed that teacher students live teaching experiences that stimulate and encourage them to think about the meaning of what they do and live at school. It also requires that university teachers lead students in a way that let them analyse their own school contexts and, in this manner, understand its pedagogical meaning (Sierra, Caparrós, Molina & Blanco, 2017).

How can we orientate teacher students’ experience to promote the construction of experiential knowledge? How can we make this knowledge the starting point when deciding what is appropriate in any scholar situation? Given the narrative character of experience and experiential knowledge (Clandinin, 2013; Contreras & Pérez de Lara, 2010), several authors (Conle, 2000; Cifali, 2010; Contreras, 2017) point out that working with stories of experience could be an enriching teaching experience.

This paper is part of a larger research project (“Educational relationships and curriculum making: between school experience and initial teacher education. Narrative inquiries”. Ref.: EDU2016-77576-P) in which we try to delve into these issues by developing several teaching proposals (Contreras, 2016, 2017) and analysing them. One of these proposals is an inquiry into writing stories of experience as a teaching resource.

In the results of this part of the research we identified three moments in the writing process that could help to promote the construction of experiential knowledge (Pañagua, Martín-Alonso, Blanco, 2018): 1) narration of the experience, what demands to pay attention to their daily life and details that could be important in the narration; 2) by narrating an experience we have the chance to rethink about it, so in this second phase students start to think deeply about the experience and look for a pedagogical sense of it; 3) when students try to think for a long

time about an experience they end thinking about the pedagogical theme that it evokes and their personal relation with it.

In this paper we try to expose and analyse a teaching experience in the degree of Pedagogy. In this experience we used several narrative resources (written and oral stories) and asked students to write stories of experience. At the same that we developed the course, we have documented the process. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to show the results of this part of the research, in which we have tried to focus in the three mentioned moments when writing stories of experience (specially the first one: "narration of the experience").

METHODOLOGY

Given that we try to analyse our own teaching experiences and evaluate their impact on teacher students, the research is outlined from a self-study point of view (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015). Our purpose is to explore how writing stories of experience help and favour the construction of concepts of the course by linking them with their own lived experience.

To address this goal we have developed a teaching activity about gender roles. The task had a duration of 4 weeks (1 session per week and 4 hours per session). In total 55 students have participated. They were in the second year in the degree In Pedagogy at the University of Málaga (Spain). Since the activity was large and we asked students to do several tasks, we are going to focus on one of them: writing a story about an experience lived recently, in which they understood that gender roles plaid a significant part. Subsequently in the classroom, we shared these stories, reflected on them and tried to think which themes they recalled us.

We focus the paper on these stories (64 in total) and the process in which students had to select the experiences and narrate them in writing. Data collection procedures have been (Bárcena, Larrosa, & Mèlich, 2006; Sierra & Blanco, 2017; Van Manen, 2003):

- Observation: the course was given by two teachers. One of them was in charge of teaching while, at the same time, the other was collecting data through observation.
- Documentary analysis: we have analysed both the stories written by students and the oral narration they did in the classroom.
- Questionnaire. At the end of the activity, students answered a questionnaire anonymously. It had four open questions and tried to collect their feelings when writing and reflecting on their experiences. Specifically, the questions were: 1) What sense has this activity in your education? What value could it have in your future as pedagogue?; 2) Why do you think we have asked you to write stories of experiences?; 3) Was it useful for you writing stories of experience? And sharing them with your colleagues?

The analysis process was made from a phenomenological point of view. We looked for structural themes in students' experiences when writing and sharing their stories. For this reason, the results are organized following what Van Manen (2003) calls "thematic analysis".

RESULTS

Through the analysis of the whole experience and the collected data, we came to four main ideas:

1. Stories of experience helped students to become aware about gender issues of their daily life, and it allowed them to understand that everyday experiences are more complex than they seem. In this way, they started to comprehend that the ground of theories and models about gender is in our everyday life. For this reason, some students said that it could be interesting to change the way in which they try to understand academic knowledge. It means: it is not about making a theory or understanding an idea to look for it in the "reality", but to reflect on their own experiences and, then, create the idea or theory.
2. After writing, they shared their stories in the classroom. From those stories they could re-think about their own experiences and continue the reflection process they had started before. We can observe this in the repeated sentence "I have realized that I am not the only one". After this statement, they used to link the story they have just heard with their own one. In other words, it is not about thinking with *my* story, but thinking *with stories*.
3. The activity has helped some students to release their emotions, troubles, and think in a personal solution. Several students (most of them women) wanted to share unpleasant experiences (such as sexual harassment, violence, etc.) and think with them.
4. This last point has promoted a climate of confidence in the classroom. When we share a personal experience we are presenting ourselves, and this exercise requires confidence, acceptance and listening. In consequence, after the activity students knew better each other, what promoted team work.

REFERENCES:

- Bárcena, F., Larrosa, J., & Mèlich, J. C. (2006). Pensar la educación desde la experiencia. *Revista Portuguesa de Pedagogia*, (40-1), 233-259.
- Biesta, G. (2017). *El bello riesgo de educar*. Madrid: SM.
- Cifali, M. (2010). Enfoque clínico, formación y escritura. En L. Paquay, L. (Coord.), *La formación profesional del maestro. Estrategias y competencias* (pp. 170-196). México: FCE.
- Clandinin, D. J. (2013). *Engaging in narrative inquiry*. Walnut Creek, CA.: Left Coast Press.
- Conle, C. (2000). Narrative inquiry: Research tool and medium for professional development. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 23 (1), 49-63. Doi:10.1080/713667262
- Connelly, F., & Clandinin, D.J. (1988). *Teachers as curriculum planners: Narratives of experience*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Contreras, J. (2010). Ser y saber en la formación didáctica del profesorado: una visión personal. *RIFOP*, 68 (2),61-81.

- Contreras, J. (Coord.). (2016). *Tensiones fructíferas: explorando el saber pedagógico en la formación del profesorado: una mirada desde la experiencia*. Barcelona: Octaedro.
- Contreras, J. (Ed.). (2017). *Enseñar tejiendo relaciones. Una aproximación narrativa a docentes y sus clases de educación infantil y primaria*. Madrid: Morata.
- Contreras, J. y Pérez de Lara, N. (2010). *Investigar la experiencia educativa*. Madrid: Morata.
- Mortari, L. (2012). Learning thoughtful reflection in teacher education. *Teachers and Teaching*, 18 (5), 1-21. Doi: 10.1080/13540602.2012.709729
- Pañagua, L., Martín-Alonso, D. & Blanco, N. (2018). *Construction of experiential knowledge through writing stories of experience in teacher education*. Presented at ECER 2018 Bolzano – The European Conference on Educational Research, Bolzano.
- Sierra, J. E., & Blanco, N. (2017). El aprendizaje de la escucha en la investigación educativa. *Qualitative Research in Education*, 6(3), 303-326.
- Sierra, J.E., Caparrós, E., Molina, M.D., & Blanco, N. (2017). Aprender a través de la escritura. Los diarios de prácticas y el desarrollo de saberes experienciales. *Revista Complutense de Educación*, 28 (3), 673-688. Doi: 10.5209/rev_RCED.2017.v28.n3.49708
- Van Manen, M. (2003). *Investigación educativa y experiencia vivida: ciencia humana para una pedagogía de la acción y la sensibilidad*. Barcelona: Idea Books.
- Van Manen, M. (2004). *El tono en la enseñanza: el lenguaje en la pedagogía*. Barcelona: Paidós Ibérica.
- Vanassche & Keltermans, (2015). The state of the art in self-study of teacher education practices: a systematic literature review. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 47, 508-528. Doi: 10.1080/00220272.2014.995712