

## TEACHERS' RESEARCH USING THE BIOGRAPHICAL METHOD. CONTRIBUTIONS AND REFLECTIONS BASED ON TWO CASE STUDIES.

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### 1. THE BIOGRAPHICAL METHOD IN SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY.

In the strict sense of social research technique, the biographical method appeared around the 1920's, with sociology in the Chicago School and the anthropological studies of Radin and others.

As far as social sciences method is concerned, the biographical method was widely used for decades in the field of **anthropology** to study the aborigine cultures and North American Indian tribes. In Langness' historical balance (1965b, 3-18) he points out the importance of the anthropologist P. Radin's studies where he studied the Indian culture using biographical accounts of its members (cf. Langness, 1965, 3-18; Pujadas, 1992, 15-26). Although he published several works on the this subject, the most famous is still "**Crashing Thunder**", written in 1926, where Radin did a very thorough anthropological job from a methodological point of view. His works are considered to be the scientific starting point of the biographical method in anthropology. Along with Radin, we should mention the work of Sapir, another researcher, who was convinced of the usefulness of this approach and who directed numerous investigations using the biographical method. Sapir had a strong influence on **the culture and personality approach** and was very concerned about the roles that individual factors have on the explanation of culture. Radin, on the other hand, put more emphasis on the cultural dimensions of human existence. Between 1925 and 1945 Sapir and Radin based most of the anthropological method on life histories. According to Langness (1965b, 16-18), after this date there was a convergence of interests between the emphasis on structural, cultural aspects on the one hand, and cognitive and individual dimensions of the culture on the other hand. The main two subject matters that are addressed in life histories are the phenomena of cultural change and theoretical questions linked to the cultural and personality method (for this approach, cf. Harris, 1983, 499-515). During the renaissance of the biographical method, which took place after the nineteen sixties, the vigorous anthropological work of Lewis stands out, one of whose books, **The Sánchez children**, has been considered as one of the best of its kind, together with Thomas and Znaniecki's study on the Polish peasant (cf. Lewis, 1961; Lewis, 1964; Lewis, 1965; Pineau and Marie-Michèle, 1983, 149-150; Ferrarotti, 1983, 114-121; Langness, 1965b, 13-14; Pujadas, 25-26 and 84). Lewis comes from the University of Columbia, an academic centre with a quantitative approach. Lewis rejects quantitative methodology, preferring to adopt techniques such as participant observation and in depth interviews for collecting **life histories of poor families**, both urban and rural (from Mexico and Puerto Rico). These are **cross** stories of lives and have a **polyphonic structure**, as the different members of the family unit narrate their life together putting their life's incidents into social and historical contexts (cf. Pujadas, 1992, 25). Lewis limits himself to structuring and re-telling the stories, and presenting them with a theoretical introduction. Nevertheless, the real protagonists of his work are the subjects who recount the events of their existence in the first person. The tone of Lewis's work is almost totally **descriptive** and this characteristic is precisely one that has received the most criticism (cf. Langness, 1965, 13-14).

In the field of **sociology**, life histories were first used in connection with **Chicago Sociology** and more specifically to Thomas and Znaniecki's monumental work of five volumes on the Polish peasant in Europe and America. Chicago sociology, especially during the period between 1920 and 1935, had a preference towards using autobiographies of different subjects which were written based on their narrations to the researcher (cf. Peneff, 1990, 35-68; Ferrarotti, 1983, 131-137). In Thomas and Znaniecki's 1918 work, previously mentioned, one of the volumes includes an autobiography of one of the Polish immigrants (cf. Peneff, 1990, 62-64; Blumer, 1969, 91-95). Thomas and Znaniecki made extensive use of **letters** as personal documents through which the immigrants in America kept in contact with their relatives who continued living in Poland. The writers classified the letters into **five categories**; **ceremonial** (for name days or other special celebrations), **informative**, **sentimental** (to intensify or revive affectionate and romantic relationships), **literary** (with an esthetic function) and **business** (Plummer, 1983, 24-25). According to Szczepanski (1967, 593), Thomas and Znaniecki aimed to create a synthesis between the purely objective explanations of Durkheim and the purely subjective explanations of Tarde.

The research into the Polish peasant served as a reference for numerous subsequent works which were based primarily on the study of **marginal people** and the Chicago low life. These studies have a militant, sociological slant, in the sense that the Chicago sociologists believed that their work was fulfilling the function of **social reformism** and the rejection of the social situations stemming from industrialisation and wild capitalism (cf. Pineau and Marie-Michèle, 1983, 137-140). In these works, the criminal's point of view is contrasted with the counterpart's, the judges' and the police's different points of view. In this way, researchers reveal problems such as the abandoning of children, the harsh reality of youth bands, poverty or prostitution. The most famous monograph is that of **The Jack Roller**, (The attacker of drunks) which was written by C. Shaw and is about Stanley, a young, twenty year old thief who wrote his life story in prison upon the researcher's request. Shaw followed Stanley's path over seven years, studying his evolution as a criminal and putting together the youth's continuous observations of himself (cf. Becker, 1966; this text is the prologue in the re-edition of Shaw's work). Other authors, such as the criminologist Sutherland, carried out similar studies (Peneff, 1990, 58-61). The autobiographies also fulfilled a **pedagogical function** as they were used by the professors in the Chicago Department of Sociology (especially by Park) to enable the students to have a better understanding of social reality. At the beginning of the academic year Park proposed two activities to his students: to write an autobiography or a history of their own family, and to go on a guided tour of the Chicago neighbourhoods in order to observe the different social climates. Later on in the year, the students had to write up a balance of the observations that they had made, including some very brief autobiographies, obtained through their field work (Peneff, 1990, 47-49). As we can see, the Chicago sociologists renovated not only research methodology, but also university teaching. For them, the object of the research was **life** in terms of **concrete experience**, taken as **permanent social flow**, characterized by ambiguity and marginality. As Plummer says (1983, 45-70), they prefer the **fragile subjectivity** to the lineal and classical perspectives of the conservative approach.

From 1920, Znaniecki continued his sociological studies in Poznań, a Polish city where he held the position of Sociology Professor. Under his strong personal influence the biographical method continued to be present in **Poland**, unlike the United States where this method disappeared between the nineteen forties and nineteen sixties approximately. The numerous Polish works, which were able to be gathered thanks to competitions that were held on autobiographic stories, are relatively unknown as they were never translated. **Two schools of life histories** were created in Poland. One was of psychosociological approach, headed by Znaniecki himself; the other, based on Marxist tendencies, was led by Krzywicki (cf. Pineau and Marie-Michèle, 1983, 142-144; Szczepanski, 1967, 600-602).

The critical review on life stories by Angell (1945), which covers the period between 1920 and 1940, examines **three kinds of studies** on life histories. The first emphasizes the **historical and evolutionary**

**explanation** of the lives of individuals, groups or social units; the second is focused on the **development of theory** (for example, Trasher's study on 1,313 Chicago gangs); the third addresses the **methodological problem** (as in the case of Stoufer who studied the problem of attitudes using experimental methodology and case studies and who concluded that there was no difference between the two methods.) Together with Angell's study, Dollard's methodological essay in 1935 on the **validity criteria** of life histories and Blumer's critical evaluation in 1939 on the work of Thomas and Znaniecki (cf. Pineau and Mari-Michèle, 1983, 140) are of great importance. Amongst the most frequently studied topics, the world of **deviation** and the social leaders must be mentioned.

The biographic method disappeared from the academic scene between 1945 and 1960 (except in Poland). From the nineteen sixties and amidst the general context of incipient criticism towards positivism and the increase of qualitative methodological trends, life histories regained influence. One of the reasons for this development was due to Lewis' works. Another important factor was connected to the publication of Mill's work at the end of the nineteen fifties (1959) on **sociological imagination**. This is a vigorous methodological testament in which the writer settles his score with the North American university sociology and rejects its abstract jargon and fascination for figures. Mills (1959) vindicates the needs to situate social research in the crossover where history, social structures and biography converge:

"Social science is about biographical problems, history and the points wherethey cross over within the social structures... The life of an individual cannot be properly understood if there is no reference to the institutions where the biography takes place... In order to understand the biography of an individual, we need to understand the meaning and significance of the roles s/he represented in the past and continue to represent; in order to understand these roles, we need to understand the institutions that they form part of" (Mills, 1959, 157 and 174).

## **2 SOME BIOGRAPHICAL APPROACHS IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN THE NINETEEN NINETIES.**

Interest in the biographical methods for educational research is relatively recent. To illustrate some examples of the current rich panorama in this area, we have prepared a short discussion on various representative writers.

Goodson's studies (1984; 1991; 1992<sup>a</sup>; 1992<sup>b</sup>; 1992<sup>c</sup>; 1994; Goodson and Walker, 1990) on **the life and work of teachers** contain a clearly biographical perspective. Goodson, (1991, 40) believes that the way in which educational researchers have payed such little attention to the lives of the teachers is surprising. This lack of attention is a stark contrast to the importance that they attach to their vital evolution, which is a permanent feature of the teachers' conversations. On the other hand, Goodson criticizes the ideas of the ethnographical studies which are based on the here and now of classroom events as if these events existed indifferent to time and the biographical evolution of the professors and students (cf Goodson and Walker, 1990, 120; Goodson, 1984, 140)

Goodson (1984, 131-139) is one of the few researchers in the educational field (at least amongst the writers we have reviewed) who has worked on an historic synthesis on the origin and development of the life histories method. Taking this matter from a historical point of view, Goodson believes that life stories fulfill an **vitally important function** insocial research as they complement the interactionist and etnomethodological perspectives that are mainly based on the analysis of social interaction situations and does not lend importance to historical and biographical records.

Goodson's main arguments (1984, 142-143; 1991, 39-43; 1994, 36-37) that vindicate the life histories approach in research into teachers are as follows:

- a) Teachers' **life experience** and **careers** shape their vision on teaching and how they approach it.
- b) The life atmosphere of the teacher **away from school** and his/her latent identities and cultures can have a considerable impact on his/her teaching work.
- c) The teacher's career is an important focus of research. The concept of **career** is, in fact, a great help in understanding both organisations and individuals' roles within them.
- d) The life story of a subject should be situated within the history of his/her **time**.

Through the use of life histories, Goodson (cf. 1984, 147-152) has studied the **curricular change** that has led to the introduction of a new school subject: **Environmental Studies**. Instead of adopting a sociological or pedagogical viewpoint to analyse this curricular innovation, between 1945 and 1978, Goodson reconstructed the life story of the members involved in this curricular concept and the various difficulties that followed their ideas until they became a part of the school curriculum. To lend a structure to the biographical development, Goodson tried to integrate this development into the set of historical and institutional factors that made up the social and educational world during the period of time in question.

The studies of Butt and his collaborators (cf. Butt, 1989; Butt, 1990<sup>a</sup>; Butt, 1990<sup>b</sup>; Butt, 1992<sup>a</sup>; Butt, 1992<sup>b</sup>; Butt and Raymond, 1989; Touseid et al, 1991; Raymond et al, 1989) offer an interesting idea on the relationship between **collaborative autobiography** and professional development. Butt et al. (1992<sup>a</sup>, 51-57; 1992<sup>b</sup>, 208-209) suggest five arguments in favour of biographical research in teachers' training and knowledge:

- a) Research into teaching can benefit from the biographical approach because **teachers' knowledge is not a fixed thing**, but is shaped by personal and professional histories and by the ecological circumstances where the educational activities take place.
- b) The need to broaden views on the development and application of the curriculum, incorporating the **teacher's opinions**, as those responsible for shaping the curriculum in practice.
- c) An improvement in professional development requires the incorporation of **teachers' views as learner adults**.
- d) Public concern for the quality of teaching and appraisal of teachers. This point could be focused more effectively on the critical role in teaching of personal knowledge and knowledge of specific situations. These are elements that are ignored by the traditional methods of appraising teachers based on standard tests.
- e) The redefinition of the relationship between knowledge and **power**. Nowadays, the idea of teachers being semi-professionals who lack control over their own work and who, on a personal level, limit themselves to applying knowledge that has been developed by others, should be reconsidered, and we should be encouraging opportunities for teachers to manifest and develop their practical wisdom.

The writers identify **five trends in research** into the life course in relation to teaching. The **first** is Huberman's argument, which tries to describe the phases in professional development by using longitudinal studies on a large scale. The **second** has its main point of interest on the work of the teacher and their interaction with the context; Goodson's studies are included in this area, as we mentioned previously, and those of Woods and Sikes. The **third** idea in research is of a cultural nature; it is represented by Hargreaves' studies on the type of cultural contexts that the life of teacher revolves around. The **fourth** emphasises the existential nature of teachers' lives, which is unique, and personal and which reconceptualist writers have formulated like Pinar (1980, 1981) and Grumet (1990<sup>a</sup>, 1990<sup>b</sup>). **Lastly**, the phenomenological views, initiated by Van Manen, are based on discovering and representing experiences lived by the teachers (cf. Butt and Raymond, 1989; Solas, 1992, 212-215).

The objective of Butt's group is to broaden the perspectives that are used for researching into teachers' knowledge (Butt et al. 1992<sup>a</sup>, 60-61). They aim to articulate the personal notion of the architecture of the self, (a term invented by Pinar, one of the curricular reconceptualists; cf. Pinar, 1980, and 1981) which was formed in the context of the interaction between the **private individual** and the **public context** of teaching; another objective of this research is the study of integration between **personal knowledge** and **professional knowledge** which takes place in professional contexts. Finally, it is useful to know how the teacher perceives and maintains this knowledge.

Butt's group focuses on autobiography as it seems to be one of the most effective methods of approaching the teachers' own views on themselves. Autobiographies are done on an individual basis, although they are developed using a **collective and collaborative process**. Teachers are given a reflexive task to do which is divided into four phases: a description of the **context** and its current reality in the work place; a description of their **current pedagogy** and the features of the curriculum that they apply in the classroom; a description of their thoughts on their **personal and professional life** relating it to current time, and, finally, a project on their **future professional preferences** relating them to a critical assessment of the three previous reports. Butt et al. (1992b, 211-213) show the most important results that they have obtained:

- a) Teachers' knowledge and development are influenced by the **three main categories of experience** in the following order of importance: The teacher's private life story, their teaching experience and own experience as a learner at school.
- b) **Early personal experience** seems to be of great importance.
- c) The strong potential influence from private life includes **personal relationships** with parents, relations, spouse, friends and mentors. Life crises, significant events, successes, mistakes, discontinuities and changes play a decisive part, as do the nature of the family and religious beliefs.
- d) In the course of a teaching career, **private contexts**, the schools, colleagues, the local community and the kind of subjects studied seem to be very influential factors.
- e) In the teachers' school years (that is to say in their infancy and adolescence), the **teachers** they had and the **subjects** they studied stand out as important. The treatment they received as students together with their interpretation of the self both condition the way teachers think and act in relation to their own students.
- f) Each teacher's knowledge is **unique** in substance and structure.
- g) The teacher's favorite teaching method (maintained knowledge) **can be influenced**, directed and changed as a consequence of the classroom context (expressed knowledge).
- h) For optimum development it would appear that teachers need **to know themselves** and really capture the essence of their personal and professional styles.
- i) Teachers develop their work over long periods of time and in a very **individual** way, and, only in a sporadic way do they develop in group contexts. In any case, when they work in groups, teachers tend to experience a consolidation of their own development which stems from the fact that they are sharing a common objective and the same experiential context.

The **interaction between people and the context** can fall into one of three categories: **congruent**, in a situation where both are mutually compatible; **dialectical or dialogal**, in a situation where the teachers find themselves in a process of negotiation trying to deal with dilemmas, paradoxes or contradictions in the medium they are working in; and **problematic**, if there is no adjustment between personal disposition and the severe limitations of the context (cf. Raymond et al., 1989, 15). These concepts are illustrated by examples taken from a collection of a hundred autobiographies gathered by Butt's group.

In some of their publications, these researchers have described the main features that characterise the application of collaborative autobiography, in both their **initial and permanent training**, as well as the working methodology and the role played by the university teacher as encourager and coordinator of a training group (cf. Butt, 1989; Touseid et al., 1991).

Pajak and Blase's studies (1989) lead us to a different perspective to that of Butt's group. Pajak and Blases' objective is to analyse the **impact of the teacher's personal life on his/her professional role**. With this in mind, these writers have carried out a study on 200 teachers who have filled in questionnaires with open answers. The questions posed aimed to identify the personal factors which affect their teaching work, the feelings that these factors generate in the teacher and the way in which they influence the relationship that the teacher has with his/her students, colleagues and principal.

The data analysed shows that there are thirteen categories of personal life that reflect either a positive or negative influence on the professional terrain: **parenthood, marriage, personal characteristics, personal interests, spiritual beliefs, personal experience, finance, recognition from others, family and friends, single status, health, social status** and a category which groups together various less important questions. Pajak and Blase have tried to relate the **positive or negative influence** of the different categories with four of the teacher's dimensions: The **self**, the **students**, the **colleagues** and the **principal**.

The writers break the categories listed above into three main areas: **interpersonal relationships, personal characteristics** and **socio-economic factors**. The discussion of these three areas is accompanied by literal quotes taken from the answers provided by the teachers. In the final discussion on their work, Pajak and Blase (1989, 305-308) state that despite the fact that the majority of teachers appear to lead a conventional life, they do enjoy great freedom to choose their life style and personal style. Another important element that the study raises is the need teachers have to overcome the **isolation** that they experience in their work. In this case the writers suggest that teachers try to strengthen their social relationships away from school life and that they cultivate different interests that are not related to teaching. In our opinion, this study falls into the realm of ideas to improve teaching life, a result of research into the so-called **burnout teacher syndrome** (cf. Esteve, 1984, 1987).

Knowles' research (1992) is an attempt to try to conceptualise **the biographic influence on the teaching role**. This writer's basis is the concept of teacher role identity, originally suggested by Crow (cf Knowles, 1992, 99). Using this concept, he aims to describe the way individuals see themselves as teachers. The case studies he worked on aimed to explore the relationship between new teachers' biographies and educational practice in the classroom, especially in situations related to **Coping Strategies**. That is, when teachers try to find a solution to cope with a difficult situation. Knowles' idea is not only to describe the biographical processes, but also to **generate theory** from the case studies he has analysed. The five participants in the research were following training programmes for secondary teachers who were preparing to start teaching. Amongst the techniques used, Knowles mentions the following: the teachers in question writing a reflexive diary which the researcher, upon reading it, would use as a basis to provide answers to the questions raised; and finally non-standardized interviews and weekly observations. The trainees were observed during the first semester of their work as teachers once the initial training was finished.

Knowles (1992, 116.125) presents a summary of the development of the five teachers who participated in the study. Amongst the areas researched, we should mention the teachers' school context when they were pupils, the school context at the beginning of their teaching practice, the components of the teacher role identity, family experience, early school experience, previous contacts with teaching, other significant experience and finally, their teaching behaviour in the classroom throughout the development of the research project. In each of the five cases, Knowles aims to establish the way in which the experiences lived by the participants (and which styled their teacher role identity) are reflected in their attitudes, coping strategies and teaching styles shown in the classroom.

Knowles (1992, 126ss) states that the teacher role identity has four main components:

- a) **Experience during infancy**, which contributed greatly to the way individuals felt about teaching and their behaviour in the classroom. This was reflected in aspects such as personality, social skills, self-confidence, the way they generally approached conflict-solving, working habits and attitudes towards work and responsibility.
- b) The **teacher role models learnt**. All the subjects had been powerfully influenced by their old teachers.
- c) **Previous teaching experience** (meaning the subjects' teaching activities) provided a framework within which they gradually situated their classroom experience afterwards.
- d) A less important factor than the previous ones is **the influence of significant people and important previous experience**.

Pedagogical training received at university did not prove to be significant, at least during the period of six months during the academic year that the researcher was observing. The teachers mainly drew upon experience-based learning, whilst learning of an intellectual nature was not drawn upon when they started teaching.

In order to conceptualise the influence of biographies on teaching practice, Knowles (1992, 136-143) proposes the "**Biographical transformation model**" which consists of the following phases:

- a) **Formative experience**: Family experience during infancy, experience with teachers and school experience.
- b) The **interpretation** of this set of experiences.
- c) The **creation of schemata**, that is, establishing cognitive filters and categorisation of the information available in such a way that it can be used significantly: family role models, negative teacher role models, positive teacher role models, development of their own educational philosophy.
- d) An **action framework** using the schemata that have been created and formulating a series of ideals regarding specific aspects of educational activities: ideal adult/child relationships, ideal teaching strategies and the ideal classroom atmosphere. In this framework, it is also necessary to include known people and recent experience that have proved to be significant.
- e) The overall set of factors listed above shapes **the teacher's role identity** which is manifested in initial training and when the teacher first starts teaching.

Kowles' conclusion is clear: students who are going to receive teacher training start their training programmes with preconceived role identities. Therefore the role of training institutions should be revised in order to provide training which would connect with the students' previous experience. Knowles (1992, 143-146) also analyses the role of the school context in relation to the teachers and the interactive dynamics between the teachers' role identity and the school atmosphere.

### **3. AIMS, DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY OF OUR TWO CASE STUDIES.**

The main aims of our study were as follows (cf. González Montegudo, 1996, 331-404)

- 1) To study several teachers in a small, urban, state EGB (Basic General Education) and Primary Education school that had an innovative approach. The objective was to define a narrative picture of their educational theory and practice, from the perspective of the different participants (pupils, teachers, parents and colleagues).
- 2) To observe, analyse and interpret classroom activities in two classes of the small, innovative urban state EGB and Primary Education school, from the perspective of the different participants' points of view (teachers and pupils) and the school context.
- 3) To observe, analyse and interpret the development and current situation of the small, urban innovative school, from the participants' viewpoints (principal, teacher, pupils, porter, parents and Parent-Teachers' Association).

- 4) To study the educational and school innovation processes and describe the features of these processes in the small, urban EGB and Primary Education school, making specific reference to the following areas: the school's teaching staff as a whole, the classrooms and the teachers on an individual basis.
- 5) To explore the way the biographical approach is applied to personal and professional life studies (with special reference to professional socialisation) of the teaching staff in the school mentioned above, with the aim of establishing possible relationships between the personal and professional spheres as well as what this implies for the teachers' understanding and professional teaching development (in this paper we will only discuss this last aim).

The basic suppositions that I have made in this study are as follows:

- 1) An **interdisciplinary approximation**, supported by the conviction that real progress in educational research is undeniably linked to the current trends in theory and research that shape current philosophical thought and the social sciences (Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology, History, etc).
- 2) An **interpretative approach**. This approach is coherent with the aims of this study and with the dynamics of fieldwork that has not required interventionist or action-research methodology. The focus of the research, as Husen states (1988, 52), largely depends on the objectives that one intends to achieve.
- 3) An **ethnographic approach** (in the same vein as Spindler, Wolcott, Woods and others).
- 4) Amongst the more specific **theoretical research frameworks** (some of which have been developed and refined throughout the research process) we must include:
  - \* **Symbolic interactionism**.
  - \* **Research into classroom studies, teachers' practical knowledge and the processes of professional socialisation** (especially by writers such as Elbaz, Clandinin, Zeichner, Arnaus and Rivas, amongst others.).
  - \* **Biographical focuses, both by sociologists and anthropologists and by educational researchers** (Goodson, Butt, Knowles and others) who we have mentioned above in the first few parts of this paper.

Respecting the basic initial assumptions and the current trends in theory and research mentioned above, the focus we choose has the following features, which generally coincide with the characteristics of qualitative research:

- 1) **Open and emerging**. The initial questions in research can be redesigned as the fieldwork progresses.
- 2) **Inductive**. The categories that have been drawn up, the interpretation and the proposed theories all stem from the data obtained in the field and are closely related to this data.
- 3) **Phenomenological**. The participants' subjectivity in their perspectives becomes a decisive element in the research process. This implies natural observation and the most spontaneous register possible of the participants' linguistic discourse in an everyday context over a prolonged period of time.
- 4) **Holistic**. Comprehension of the activities and the subjects' perceptions takes place in a broad contextual, institutional, social, and cultural framework.
- 5) **Implicative**. This focus supposes that the subjectivity of the researcher is recognised throughout the process, from the preliminary design to the last stage phase of report writing.

Consequently the design of this research contemplates the development of the two case studies based on two teachers (Coral and Jaime) from the same centre (The Puntal School in the town of Deba in the Province of Seville, Southern Spain). I thought it convenient (in accordance with the aims, suppositions and methodological focuses adopted) to spread the fieldwork over the period of one year.

Generally I have based my fieldwork on the following points: participant observation supported by continuous field note-taking, holding, recording and transcription of in depth, non-standardized and semi-standardized interviews and the gathering of official, public and personal documents.



The analysis units which I have based this study on are: the education centre as an institution with special reference to the teaching staff and their perspectives as a group; the classroom as the physical and social scenario of the teaching-learning process and the medium of the participating subjects (teachers and students) and the two teachers chosen for the ethnographic and biographic case studies, with special reference to educational conceptions, teaching practice and their careers (understood in the sense of different states, schools of thought and positions that people experience throughout life; cf. Bogdan and Biklen, 1982).

In accordance with the characteristics mentioned by Santos Guerra (1990a, chapter 8), the observation carried out in our study was **free, significant, with immediate registration (although not always), using natural situations, longitudinal, holistic and ubiquitous** (as opposed to standardised, attributed, perceptive, with deferred register and laboratory situations, transversal, fragmentary and one single location).

Most of the **time that I was observing** in Puntal I spent in Jaime's (4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> years of Primary Education) and Coral's classrooms (7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> years of EGB, an educational programme soon to disappear as the educational reform is gradually introduced). Generally I stayed sitting at my desk, writing notes as the classes developed. Sometimes I sat alone and other times I sat with a pupil or a group. Occassionally I walked around the classroom, sat at the teachers' desks or sat in a free seat left by an absent student. If I needed to leave the classroom or had to enter once the class had begun, I did so without the slightest of problem.

When I could **help** the teachers I did so, (with, for instance, the following kinds of tasks: correcting 2<sup>nd</sup> year dictations, helping with Preschool, getting the pupils to sit down after finishing assembly, keeping order if the teacher had to leave the classroom, offering brief explanations on subject matters being studied, or participating from my desk to either clarify or comment on something).

I took **field notes** in the classrooms as the classes developed. On some occasions, when I was involved in explaining something or doing some kind of task that made it impossible to take notes (for example, taking the students to the orchard or an exhibition in the school), I wrote the notes down afterwards, both in Puntal and at home.

During **break**, I could normally be found either in the staff room or out in the playground. Once break had finished I would take notes in the staff room (empty by now) or in class if I was due to be in class, whilst I waited for activities to begin.

On **school excursions** I would take a notebook in my pocket where I would note down a summary of the main events that I would normally write up once I got back to the school or home.

As my presence in the field developed my system of note-taking improved and included **more methodological and personal notes**. I would read and re-read the notes on a regular basis. This reading enabled me make a better outline of subsequent observations, of the focus of the research and the need to write up the information in neat.

In accordance with the basis of interpretative theory and the aims of the study, **the analytical process** that I have followed in my research is far removed from the objective procedures based on coding. On the one hand it is a descriptive and exploratory study with an open focus. On the other hand, I have applied the interpretative process from a personal perspective, although in my opinion this does not mean that it is either arbitrary or whimsical, as I have tried to reason and contrast my interpretation.

First of all, in the analysis of the ethnographic case studies, I began with a **description** of the daily academic life of the scenarios (in this case, the classrooms) during my time in the field, also taking into account the participants' points of view (pupils, parents and teachers). I ended with an **interpretative synthesis**. In this

interpretation I have taken the observations I made into account and the participants' points of view, especially the teachers themselves. I have read and re-read the contents of the interviews.

The steps that I followed in this task are:

- a) **Identification** of the different topics; b) the **relationship** between them; c) any **agreements or contradictions** between the different textual segments; d) a **review of the literature** to generate ideas and interpretation. The information has been treated **very exhaustively** with the resulting **saturation** of the significant capacity of the contents from the interview transcriptions. Finally, I asked the teachers themselves to read the written material (both the transcriptions, the descriptions and the interpretations) so that **together**, we could improve the overall picture of the case. Throughout the **ethnographic case study**, I have provided extensive **literal quotes** of the participants' opinions.

In the **biographical case studies**, the procedure was similar. At the beginning, I built the **chronological and thematic axes** of each of the two cases based on the textual contents of the interviews. After that, I offered a **tentative and exploratory interpretation**. I consider these texts to be the riskiest part of my work. In order to **contrast the perspectives** of the two teachers, I held interviews with two people who knew both of the teachers during their training. I used the biographical research on the two teachers to generate comprehension of the biographical cases.

#### **4. REFLEXIONS ON THE RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS.**

Both Jaime's and Coral's cases, apart from the singularity of each one independently, represent a specific teacher profile. In the first place, we are dealing with teachers who have approximately two decades of school experience; that is to say, they are half way through their professional career. Consequently, I have not dealt with either new teachers (who would therefore still be shaping and adapting their teacher identity), or with teachers who are reaching the end of their working life. Secondly, both cases maintain a personal and professional perspective (each subject with different contents and processes) that is relatively defined, stable and consolidated. Thirdly, both respond to the pattern of a structured career (in the sense of Abercombrie et al, 1984, 41-42). This means that both have stable, civil servant's jobs and they have both been in this situation since their youth. Fourthly, both Jaime and Coral respond to the profile of teachers who have developed the whole of their careers (at least up to now) continuously to teaching pupils directly. I feel it is important to explain these features of the two teachers that I have worked with in order to clearly establish any possible influence in the results from any of these characteristics. For example, Goodson (1984,51) refers to the differences he found in some of his research between a 25 year old teacher and a 34 year old teacher, attributing the differences to the different developmental stages that each were at.

From these ethnographical case studies, I believe that I can draw conclusions that suppose a line of continuity as far as pioneers' work on teachers is concerned by writers such as Elbaz (1983) and Clandinin (1986). The practical knowledge that Jaime and Coral handle has a fundamentally **experiential and personal** basis. The theory that they uphold together with the practice that they develop are based on their own experience and personal biography. This is true both of Coral, who studied Magisterio (Bachelor of Education) and Jaime, who did not receive any pedagogical training initially.

Therefore, this study can be considered as forming part of a trend in research that aims to broaden, deepen and **contextualise** (in different registers: social, cultural, personal, ideological) the most conventional and restrictive views on teachers.

The most relevant data obtained through this study is based on the **dialectic conceptions of the relationship between the subjects and their social structures** (cf Sartre, 1960). By rejecting both sociologism and psychologism, this study aimed to account for the way in which two teachers socially build their own reality in accordance with their personal resources and the limiting framework of a set of social objectivities (such as, for example: the social, economic and historical contexts; the structure, characteristics and rules and regulations of the educational system; the organisational and reglementary atmosphere that is inherent in a school; the characteristics, age and backgrounds of all types of pupils; the stage, level and educational specialities; etc...). The objective conditions make up a reference scenario, although the subjects lend sense to this scenario with their daily activities. Through these two cases I have tried to demonstrate that the subjects build different universes for themselves and that they can only be understood according to the significance that each universes has for its creator.

In this sense I believe that we can achieve a better understanding of the extent of the task of **resistance** (in the sense of Woods, 1994) that these two teachers have to cope with (and, on a broader level, some other teachers in the Puntal school) in order to offer quality teaching to the students. It is a question of teachers that have assumed as strong sense of committment regarding educational innovation and who try to develop a teaching ideal that, in many senses, implicates going against the conventional tendencies, the routines that have been consecrated by time, victimist attitudes and the disimplication that charaterises the majority of the teaching collective.

According to my criteria, the data collected in this study demonstrates the clear deficiency that the reproduction theories suffer from when trying to explain the teachers' functions in current educational systems, as well as the active role that teachers can lead in pupils' learning processes.

One of the most relevant results in this research refers to the **individualistic** nature of Puntal's EGB and Primary School teachers' ideas on education, at least as regards planning, development and assessment of daily school activities. (I am not referring to extraordinary events such as parties, excursions or educational programmes proposed by external agents).

The **difficulties in team work** seem to be numerous and the developments in Jaime's and Coral's cases show us this very clearly. The Puntal teachers have experience in teamwork although for very limited periods of time. This would appear to coincide with the results of other research and with the impression that numerous teachers have communicated to me from very different characteristics over the last years.

One of the questions where this research could contribute some ideas and suggestions is the **relationship between theory and practice** (On this topic, cf. Carr and Kemmis, 1987; Elliott, 1991, 63-66; Clandinin, 1986, 167-171). In the two cases analysed, the educational theory upheld does not depend on a set of rationalisations formulated in a suggestive way. On the contrary, the Jaime's and Coral's educational theory is deeply rooted in their personal and professional experience. The theory is interlinked in the same network as practice. In reality both are two dimensions of the same structure: on the one hand, it is an issue of global values, suppositions, criteria, procedural rules, etc; while on the other hand, there is the question of activities developed in the classroom and the school which imply the continued and problematic use of knowledge maintained, most of which is, in turn, generated in a variety of situations in the personal and social life, in school practice itself, in the observation of school situations, in the comparing of opinions with colleagues, in the activities of initial and ongoing training, and finally, in the memory of important school events that leave a deep mark on the teachers.

Like other studies, such as Zabalza's (1998) and Arnaus' (1993, 467-486) in the cases that I have analysed the **dilemic, conflictive and contradictory character** that the task of teaching implies for the teacher, both explicitly and implicitly, becomes evident. Teaching constitutes an activity in which teachers have to face

multiple requirements that are often contradictory amongst them. The teachers' desire to aspire to harmonious and horizontal relationships with their pupils is contradictory to the need to maintain order in a numerous collective whose interests and needs do not tend to coincide with the ideas of the teachers. The teachers' educational ideals should be translated into an educational project and daily practice; these ideals and this practice are often worlds apart and teachers try to reduce this distance using different strategies. In short, the teachers are accompanied by ongoing dilemmas in their professional work which form an integral part of the teaching activity itself, and that normally enables them to choose from various alternatives.

As regards the **educational innovative processes**, it is obvious that it is easier to practice innovation individually than collectively. In some cases the teachers in Puntal have heard about innovative experiments by other colleagues indirectly. For example, Coral heard about an experiment carried out by Francisco and Antonio on teaching without text books through her daughter Maite, who was one of Francisco's pupils.

Another important feature of innovation is that it tends to be carried out partially and on specific subjects or learning areas. Generally, innovation tends to affect the non-conventional curricular contents more (for example educational programmes proposed by external agents) and the less important academic subjects. In this way, it will prove more difficult to apply innovative methodologies in areas such as teaching language or mathematics. This problem can perhaps be partly explained with sociological reasons, given that these subjects have enjoyed a high level of prestige and have played an important role in the processes of social differentiation.

On the other hand, innovation carried out by teachers is based on a specific structure of thinking and beliefs, whose contents are relatively stable (at least amongst the teachers at Puntal). The projects taken on by the teachers are based on this previous conceptual structure and are developed, modified, assessed and abandoned depending on the cognitive structures developed throughout the personal and professional life.

I believe that the study of the personal life reveals the decisive importance of the relevant subjects and individuals in as much as the way teachers feel, think and act regarding education and the school.

The two cases observed in this study very clearly show how the knowledge that the teachers handle, their basic educational attitudes and their classroom procedures together with other professional activities that are developed outside of the classroom, basically stem from their personal history, all in a double sense. They bury their roots in the events and facts that they experience (for example, la lack of financial resources, educational training in a religious boarding school, and so), whilst they also, depend, in a subjective way, on each person building their own reality, in the affective, cognitive and interpersonal areas. This is demonstrated, for example, in the different conceptions about time that the two teachers had.

History itself happens to each subject in question in a personal and unique way, although in an irrefutably interpersonal and social framework: Therefore, I feel that Sartre's contributions are important (1960) as they critically re-elaborate the ideas stemming from Marxist thinking.

Amongst the most decisive questions in the two biographical cases studies, I would like to point out the pedagogical **implications in the constitution process of the human being**. In this area I feel that the two cases in hand contribute suggestive elements for a critical discussion, not only regarding the more classical concepts such as the relative problems of socialisation, but also regarding less dealt with and more novel topics within the social sciences such as the aforementioned constitution of the subject. One of the key problems that appeared in this debate is connected to the marks that educational and school experience leave in the person. Sometimes teachers tend to attribute the reason for their pupils' success (be it academic, work or social) to themselves, especially the most outstanding ones. I now remember a significant sentence by Coral, who, when speaking about her professor, Anselmo Timón, said: "And then, he was a little proud, as if I

was a creation of his". Here I can see a summary of the central issues of the debate on the influence of scholarisation in the constitution of the subject. Probably, for Timón, Coral was a product of his enthusiasm and tangible proof of his teaching work. However, Coral was thinking that the student she was two decades ago achieved specific targets for herself, thanks to her effort and dedication.

Another question that stems from the biographical study is connected to the problems of **identity** (cf. Berger and Luckmann, 1966, 216ss) and the **self** (cf. Elbaz, 1983, 46-50 and 153-154). From the two cases we can appreciate the importance of **self-concept** as well as the concept that others have of the subject. In the study, I feel that there is sufficient data to be able to relate the **personal identity** maintained by the teachers, with the way in which they develop educational activities. This is a relatively unexplored area that requires a more in-depth study. In my opinion it constitutes a challenge that educational research should confront. Investigation into personal identity and its relationship with teaching has been dealt with generally from the point of view of teaching pathology (cf Esteve, 1984; Esteve 1987) although it appears (and I say with caution, as it is a field that I have not touched upon in any depth) that it has not been approached from a generic viewpoint. This topic could prove interesting not only for basic research but also for ideas for intervention and training of teachers, given that the strengthening of the personal identity could be related to professional consolidation and to improvements in the teaching developed by teachers. Finally, I believe that these questions are where the importance of teamwork between the pedagogues and psychologists lies, as it is an area where the disciplines of pedagogy and psychology coincide.

From this study on the personal and professional life histories of teachers, the following questions could be explored: a) personal experience and the influence of teachers' school experience when they were pupils; b) the dynamics of family relationships during infancy and now and how they relate to educational ideas and practice; c) the level and stage of the teachers' cognitive and moral development; d) personal and professional identity and their possible relationship with educational ideas and practice; e) the different professional stages and the search for common features in each stage; f) the professional careers of teachers, with special emphasis on the situation and perspectives of women teachers.

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