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## Ethnographic "Experimental Collaborations" As Practitioner Methodology

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### Abstract

In this paper we discuss emergent cross-cutting themes across a series of educational intervention projects in which practitioners-in-training adopted and adapted in their proposals and work design the logic of ethnographic experimental collaboration (XCOL) and participatory action research (PAR) (Clark, 2010; Estalella & Sánchez-Criado, 2018) perspectives. We were involved in three interventions developed in Madrid (Spain) across formal and informal learning contexts as part of the internship/practicum of future educational psychologists. Our work was designed in response to the identified needs and demands of the internship sites. Yet, as educational interventions, they were explicitly conceptualized and implemented in ways that depart substantially from the common expectations of process-product educational intervention and dominant ways, at least in Spain, of constructing educational accountability (cf. Berliner, 1989; Gage & Needels, 1989). We unpack four themes relevant across the three projects, which emerged from our joint discussions of the three interventions: (a) how "outcomes/results" are reconstructed in XCOL/PAR educational interventions, (b) the transformations in our emergent professional identities, (c) the place of different materialities and expressive media in the work we planned (d) how space-time constraints were construed in our unfolding projects.

### Keywords

experimental collaboration, participatory research, educational intervention, professional development, gender socialization

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# Ethnographic "Experimental Collaborations" as Practitioner Methodology

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In this paper we discuss emergent cross-cutting themes across a series of educational intervention projects in which practitioners-in-training adopted and adapted in their proposals and work design the logic of ethnographic experimental collaboration (XCOL) and participatory action research (PAR) (Clark, 2010; Estalella & Sánchez-Criado, 2018) perspectives. We were involved in three interventions developed in Madrid (Spain) across formal and informal learning contexts as part of the internship/practicum of future educational psychologists. Our work was designed in response to the identified needs and demands of the internship sites. Yet, as educational interventions, they were explicitly conceptualized and implemented in ways that depart substantially from the common expectations of process-product educational intervention and dominant ways, at least in Spain, of constructing educational accountability (cf. Berliner, 1989; Gage & Needels, 1989). We unpack four themes relevant across the three projects, which emerged from our joint discussions of the three interventions: (a) how "outcomes/results" are reconstructed in XCOL/PAR educational interventions, (b) the transformations in our emergent professional identities, (c) the place of different materialities and expressive media in the work we planned (d) how space-time constraints were construed in our unfolding projects.

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## Introduction

Over the past years, social researchers, professionals, and community organizations have shown a growing interest in collaborative and participatory research methodologies, particularly (but not only) when associated with ethnographic research, qualitative, or visual research approaches (Clark, 2010; Estalella & Sánchez-Criado, 2018; Kullman, 2013; Lassiter, 2005). A part of this work has been conducted with children and youth and in connection to formal/informal educational settings (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Kullman, 2012; Unamuno & Patiño, 2017), but more broadly collaborative and participatory approaches have become increasingly relevant for policy discussions and community-level social interventions (Sánchez-Criado & Rodríguez-Giralt, 2019) capitalizing on a socio-political context in which it is believed that expert knowledge cannot operate without the cooperation of all social actors and social change must be defined cooperatively<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The Citizen Science movement ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizen\\_science](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizen_science)), now supported across disciplines by multiple educational institutions, organizations and national and transnational governing bodies, would be the most visible manifestation of this shift. See for example the Citizen Science Association

Yet, this momentum does not seem to have permeated many educational settings (at least in Spain). In education, collaborative and participatory approaches fall short from being seen as legitimate and "scientifically robust" ways of designing, conducting, and implementing educational interventions or innovations. Educational programs and interventions at all levels of the Spanish educational system (at the level of the school/educational organization, local, or regional policy level) are still framed and assessed within the expectations of process-product (P-P) educational research (cf. Berliner, 1989; Gage & Needels, 1989) and the forms of educational management in which definitions of accountability are aligned with the tenets of New Public Management (NPM; Fernández-González & Monarca, 2018; Gruening, 2001). In the Spanish context, this "evidence-based" approach dominates educational discourses, policy, and training programs despite critiques and alternative views on the place and purpose of educational research that have developed over the past couple of decades (e.g., Biesta, 2007, 2009).

From a P-P "evidence based approach," an educational intervention should have clearly defined objectives from the start, a well-defined assessment plan (ideally with pre-post measures and comparison groups), and given the constraints under which both formal and non-formal educational organizations operate (see Palomares et al., 2018), a carefully planned time-frame and sequential organization. Understanding the design of research and intervention in this way is radically different from how the process is construed in participatory or collaborative research, particularly within the traditions that center the notion of *experimental collaboration* (XCOL) (Mendoza & Morgade, 2018; Moscoso, 2018; Sánchez-Criado & Estalella, 2018). Ethnographic experimental collaboration refers to a family of approaches to social research (Corsín, 2014; Estalella & Sánchez-Criado, 2018; Kullman, 2013) that proposes a substantial reconceptualization of the research process, particularly in relation to the procedures and apparatus that define (social) scientific work. From this collaborative research perspective, what is understood as "research design" is seen as an open-ended and performative process where researchers and participants co-construct through their interactions, decisions, and engagements a research *device* (Ruppert et al., 2013) or *infrastructure* (Estalella & Sánchez-Criado, 2016) in which research goals, procedures and data emerge as the result of the joint efforts of all social actors involved in the research process. When this idea is applied to educational interventions, the carefully structured and pre-planned intervention design upheld by P-P approaches is reconfigured as a shared social space in which participants frame and reframe the objectives of the social/educational intervention and may have room to negotiate the procedures through which these objectives are achieved. In addition, ample room is left for emergent actions and situations to become educationally relevant moments.

This inherent degree of uncertainty makes the design and implementation of an educational intervention that departs from the principles of P-P research and tries to draw from a collaborative perspective a challenging task for education professionals, particularly novel practitioners or practitioners-in-training who most often have not had much contact with collaborative methodologies during their training. However, it is also a choice an increasing number of practitioners are making and seeking support/mentoring to develop given the dissatisfaction with more conventional approaches to educational programming, especially considering who are often the recipients of an educational intervention. Socially engaged educational researchers repeat certain concerns with the logic of conventional educational research. These concerns resonated in our own work and the projects we discuss here and can be summarized in two points, First, there is a growing awareness, particularly within socially mobilized communities, that educational interventions and policy planning and implementation

cannot proceed without the active participation or listening to the voices of the target communities and recipients of the intervention (e. g., Aguirre et al., 2017). Second, traditional and pre-structured methods and educational activities fail to engage and mobilize a number of learners, particularly those who are more vulnerable in the educational system or are moving through less successful educational paths, as defined by the educational system and educational policy indicators (Cammarota, 2011; Glass et al., 2018; Mitchell, 2008).

In this paper, we reflect on shared challenges that emerged when practitioners-in-training (three co-authors: Inés Cruz, Natalia Piñeiro, and Rebeca Gallego) adopted and adapted in their work the logic of collaborative research (Clark, 2010; Estalella & Sánchez-Criado, 2018)—see the details of each experience below in the section presenting the projects. The interventions developed as part of the internship/practicum of future educational psychologists in formal and non-formal educational organizations in Madrid (Spain). A professional internship practicum is a requirement in our Psychology undergraduate and graduate programs that involves working in an organization under the supervision of a work-site professional tutor and preparing a project connected to the internship under the supervision of an academic advisor. This project culminates in a final report (undergraduate final report or master's thesis) that is assessed by a program committee. Typically, internships in educational organizations span a full academic year and involve a process in which interns participate in the activities of the organization and then negotiate and develop an intervention that responds to needs identified by interns, advisors, and/or the professionals in the organization. Alternatively, this intervention might emerge as a response to a specific demand of the internship site.

In our case, the three interventions we share were explicitly conceptualized and implemented in ways that, as said, depart substantially from the common expectations of process-product educational intervention and dominant ways of constructing educational accountability in Spain. Rather, practitioners-in-training working within a university research group (co-lead by co-authors David Poveda and Marta Morgade) with extensive experience in ethnographic and qualitative research, turned to emergent forms of inquiry in ethnographic research and participatory research for inspiration. This shift aligned the work of practitioners-in-training with the expertise and on-going methodological debates in the research group that hosted their work and built a "learning-by-doing" experience, as methodological issues were confronted while the educational interventions unfolded. The three interventions we put into dialogue in this article can be considered relatively successful interventions based on different criteria. First, as examples of collaborative educational interventions they showcase a full cycle in which a project is formulated, designed, implemented, and analyzed (within the time and material constraints of a one academic year internship experience). The projects were also well received by the participating sites, based on the feedback and commentaries the advisors (Marta and David) gathered during the experiences and the emergent dynamics in each site we discuss below. Finally, the three experiences were well-assessed by the program committee that marked the final report of these projects.

The three interventions/experiences developed independently from each other and took place in different educational organizations, yet they have a common thematic interest in exploring and problematizing gender, gendered identities, and gender relations in children and youth. This thematic convergence was not deliberate and is probably the result of different circumstances that reflect a historical moment in Spain and elsewhere in which gender issues are present in political and educational discourses (Goñalons & Marx, 2014; Rebollo et al., 2012) and educational organizations are open to (or demand) interventions connected to gender. Admittedly, the five of us are personally and professionally interested in gender issues, so we were inclined to focus on gender in the proposed interventions or quickly pick up on this thread if the need was expressed by the organization. Also, given the logic of the interventions

and some of the methodological issues we address in the paper, this convergence around gender allowed us to draw from recent methodological debates in research on gender in education (cf. Allan & Tinkler, 2015).

Our paper draws from the dialogue among the five authors that developed over the course of the supervision of each project and later retrospective discussions among all of us in which the possibilities of putting the three projects in conversation with each other became clear. In the paper we examine some affordances and constraints of a collaborative perspective for educational intervention programs, particularly within a disciplinary, professional, and policy context in which educational intervention and assessment are defined in very different terms (cf. Fierro, 2018). Therefore, a primary goal of the paper is to articulate a series of arguments in relation to our shared challenges and dilemmas that might pave the way for future emergent practitioners and educational researchers who want to build on collaborative approaches, especially when this potential work takes place in academic, organizational, and policy settings not familiarized with (or even reluctant towards) the logic of collaborative and participatory research. We focus on four issues that emerged across the experiences and our discussions. Each of us, particularly those of us directly involved in the field-sites, converged in seeing these questions as issues that needed well-shaped responses to explain to "others" (practitioners and administrators in the field-sites, colleagues, assessment committees) the logic and legitimacy of our proposals. The four questions we explore in the paper are (a) How did the projects (re)construct what was defined as outcomes/results of the interventions? (b) What are some of the tensions and transformations in educator/practitioner professional identities opened by a collaborative approach? (c) Why did the projects work with different materialities and expressive media and how were these received in each institutional setting? and (d) How did the projects manage time constraints within educational organizations? As we examine and answer these questions below in the paper and present key incidents from different projects to unpack our argument we hope to show, at the very least, how these questions capture relevant dimensions across the three interventions we present. Yet, we also think that these themes encapsulate more general issues that educational practitioners interested in collaborative approaches have to face. In this paper we discuss the specific ways we responded to these challenges in particular educational contexts and interventions but, as we turn to the final discussion, we will argue that it is important for emergent education professionals to articulate "good responses" to the questions and concerns that may be raised when an educational intervention departs from more conventional expectations. Being able to legitimize and articulate an argument in favor of particular methodological choices is part of practitioners-in-training professionalization (Prats & Marín, 2017). If this paper helps readers, especially novel educational practitioners interested in qualitative research, get a head start in this process we will have achieved our main reason for writing this paper.

### **Notes on the Three Cases and our Joint Reflexive Work**

#### **The Three Educational Interventions**

The three projects we discuss were designed and implemented between 2016-2018. The three projects are framed as specific educational interventions within educational psychology internships lasting a full academic year. A summary of the goals, context, methodology, and dataset of each project is provided here:

*Deconstructing "machismo" with secondary education students:* This project developed in the 2016-2017 school year and explored gender identities and gender discrimination in a group of 15 adolescent students (between 14-16 years of age) in a "remedial" track of a charter secondary school in Madrid. The goals of this project emerged in

conversations and discussions between Inés and her supervisors in the counselling department of the school during her graduate practicum. The intervention responded to concerns expressed by teachers and counselors in the school about the gender attitudes the mostly male students in this remedial track were starting to display. To work on this identified need, Inés Cruz co-designed a collaborative workshop (Cruz, 2017) over the course of 8 weeks in which students in the group met twice a week for group discussion and worked with different media (photographs and written documents) to explore their gender ideologies and gender experiences (Cruz et al., 2020). In the second half of the workshop students organized in small groups, and worked on producing "dramatizations" (two short plays and a comic strip) around gender relations. The different activities were proposed by Inés and negotiated with the group and aimed at changing the classroom dynamics of the group, which was seen by teachers and counselors as passive and disengaged from the educational aims of the program in which the students participated. Documentation of the process included audio/video-recordings of all the sessions, field-notes, and interviews led by Inés Cruz with all participants, the teachers of the group, and members of the counseling department, along with extensive participant observation in the school and gathering relevant documents.

*Creating gender-inclusive spaces with a non-binary trans-sexual student in a secondary school:* This project unfolded as part of an undergraduate internship experience in a counseling department of a public secondary school during the 2017-2018 schoolyear. Natalia Piñero (2018) took the lead in co-designing with the case student a collaborative process aimed at rethinking the gender-inclusive practices and policies of the school in response to the enrollment of a non-binary trans student in the school (12 years of age at the time of the intervention). This work developed as a way of supporting the efforts of the counselling department and the administration of the school during their first experience with a trans/non-binary student, but candidly, Natalia's initial interests were connected to other issues and shifted as she responded to the demands of her supervisors and the school. The experience unfolded over the course of a semester as a dialogue between the student and Natalia in which through different activities and media and procedures, such as walking tours of the school (cf. Pink, 2008), the discussion of diaries and discussions regarding how gender inclusiveness could be addressed in the school, they explored and re-imaged the gender order of the school. The process culminated in the collaborative creation of two posters between the case participant and zie<sup>2</sup> best friend in the school around gender diversity and tolerance. In this collaborative process Zie was very proactive in defining the direction and meaning of the different activities Zie co-built with Natalia. Documentation of the process by Natalia included extensive participant observation, field-diaries, analysis of the relevant policy documents of the school, and interviews led by Natalia Piñero with teachers, counselors, the case student, peers, the parents of the student, and external experts on gender and sexuality.

*Gender play with children in an after-school organization:* This project developed in an organization that provides after-school support for at risk children and youth. During her graduate internship in the academic year 2017-2018 working with 11 children from the "younger" group of children in the program (7-9 years of age), Rebeca Gallego (2018) proposed a collaborative workshop centered on exploring the meaning of gender and peer relations during childhood. The project developed in response to her own interest in gender relations in childhood, visual methodologies, and working collaboratively with children and not a specific demand from the organization. Yet, these interests are compatible with the general goals of promoting positive social development held by the organization and follows a tradition in the

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<sup>2</sup> In original Spanish the key participants referred to zieself as *Elle*, a gender neutral/inclusive pronoun and neologism. We will use zie (zim / zir / zis / zieself) as the English translation equivalent (adopted from <https://uwm.edu/lgbtrc/support/gender-pronouns/>).

organization of giving pre-service interns relative freedom in developing their proposals. For 2 months Rebeca explored in weekly sessions with the children gender typing and their gendered relations. They started with different activities such as drawings, murals, group discussions, and peer interviews which led to the creation of short videos by groups of students centered on gender relations (see Table 1 below). Rebeca geared the students towards working with different media and creating video-narratives, but these moves were taken up enthusiastically by the children, especially as working with video would allow them to have their sessions in the neighborhood and use digital devices that the organization had recently acquired. Documentation of the process by Rebeca included participant observation, audio-recordings of all the sessions, field-notes, interviews with professionals in the program, and access to the relevant documentation on the organization as well as some information from children's individual case files.

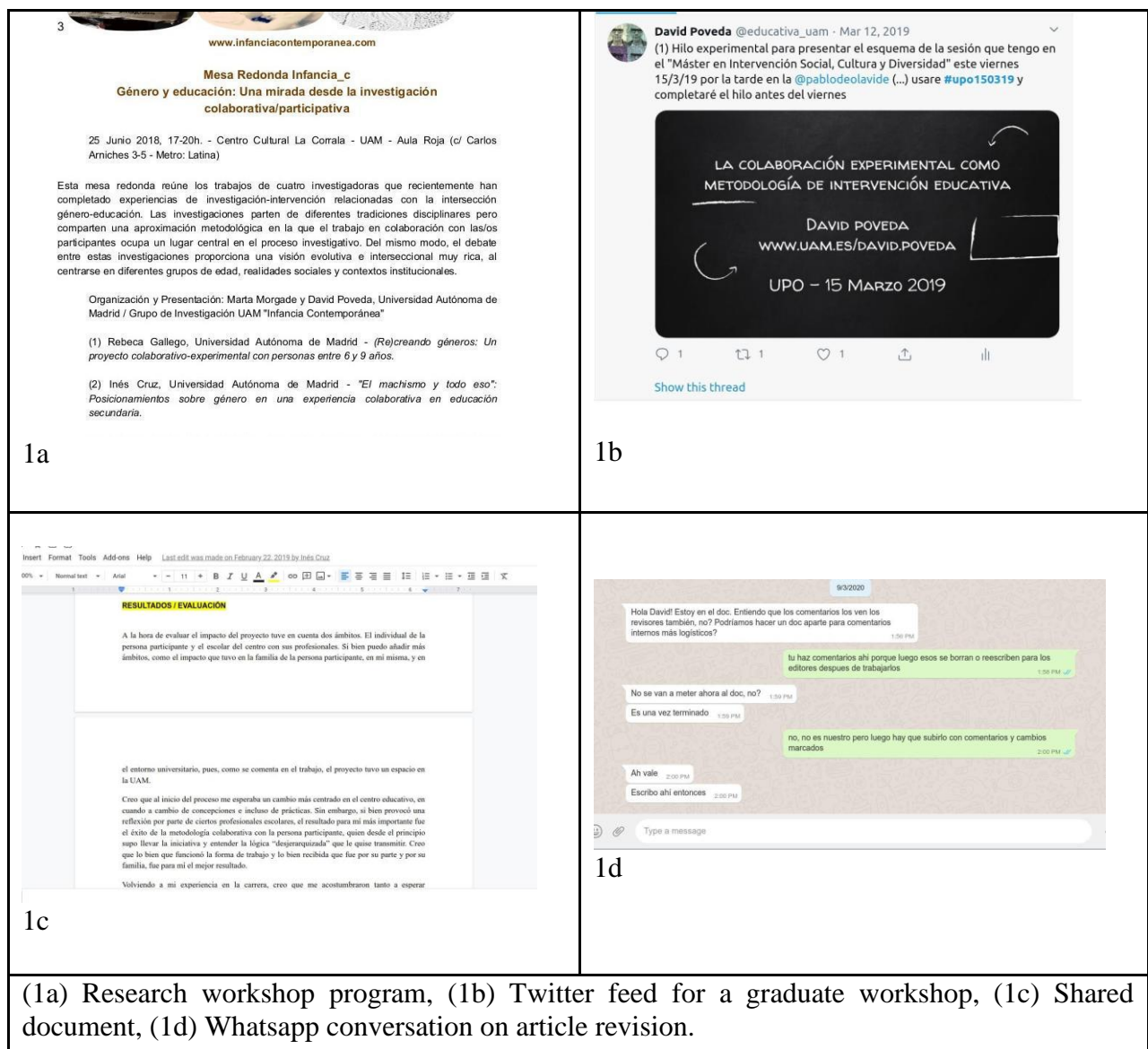
### **Some Notes on Our Joint Analysis**

Our paper draws on the reflexive discussions among the five co-authors, as pre-service interns (Inés, Natalia and Rebeca) or supervisors (David and Marta), of the three projects. "Reflexive discussions" do not involve a specific supervising/training methodology but build from "reflexivity" in ethnographic research (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007; Davies, 2008) and a revised notion of "teacher reflexivity" (Tardif & Nunez, 2018). It also involves a retrospective comparison of each of the projects, and the final documents that culminated the projects, and revisiting the field-diaries and supervision sessions during the projects. This paper developed after all projects were completed and the possibilities for comparison and the opportunity to take stock of shared experiences became clear so, admittedly, we did not develop a systematic documentation methodology of the process from the start. Interns are asked to keep a diary and have regular meetings with advisors to discuss their field experiences and the formulation of the project. Our research group favors a small-group discussion format in which advisors and different undergraduate and graduate students can share their work and issues. Given the unorthodox (for our professional and institutional setting) methodological direction of the projects, these group discussions were a combination of reading sessions on qualitative research methodology and collaborative/participatory research approaches and very practical oriented sessions centered on the implementation of each particular interventions (cf. Creese et al., 2008).

By the late spring of 2018 Natalia and Rebeca were completing their projects and preparing their reports and we began to see potential connections between the experiences and the possibility of producing a joint reflexive piece across the three projects. Up to that point each project had benefited from each other in "informal" ways through reading each other's work or participating in the same seminars and reading groups and in more "structured events" such as research workshops organized by our group (see Figure 1a). The goal of the comparative piece was to organize more systematically our experiences across the projects and build a document that would be useful to each of us and others in different ways. David and Marta could use the document as a source for subsequent cohorts of pre-service students interested in collaborative educational interventions. Inés, Rebeca, and Natalia could draw on the document to help present the type of educational professional work they can engage in and the skills it involves. Also, we hoped that, as an academic publication, it would be useful to a wider academic community interested in qualitative collaborative educational research.



**Figure 1**  
Examples of the Backstage and Frontstage Work of our Analysis



The first step was to identify the themes we wanted to include in this joint analysis, so we had a few face-to-face meetings and electronic conversations in the fall of 2018 to establish this plan. The five of us discussed the issues to be included in the paper and agreed on the four questions we advanced above and worked during the 2018-2019 academic year in way that fit the circumstances of each co-author, particularly Natalia (who had begun graduate studies) and Inés and Rebeca (who were navigating the labor market outside the university). We created a shared online document in which Natalia, Inés, and Rebeca wrote up their personal account on their recollections and reflections around each theme (see Figure 1b) and we later used these materials as the starting point of each of the headings of the joint comparison. During 2019 we had a couple of opportunities to share and present our work in other settings: in a master research methodology workshop David led at another Spanish university (see Figure 1c) and at an international educational research conference. The preparation of these events and the

feedback that we obtained from them allowed us to organize further the materials and confirm the relevance of the four themes we had initially identified. In the Fall of 2019, we began the materialization of our discussion into a journal manuscript format, with the writing led by David. For the article we decided to turn to specific examples and dynamics in the interventions that we argue serve as telling cases (Bloome & Carter, 2014) or methodological rich points (Hornberger, 2013) for each theme. Identifying these examples was relatively easy as they were important in our discussions during the supervision process and were singled out in the reports and analysis of the materials. During 2020 we continued the revision process of the manuscript, led by David, building on the feedback from TQR reviewers and editors, work that was even more distributed across different digital platforms given the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic (see Figure 1d).

#### **Four Themes/Questions in Collaborative Research as Practitioner Methodology**

##### **How Did the Projects (Re)construct what was Defined as Outcomes/Results of the Interventions?**

A first thread of recurrent discussion deals with how the outcomes of an educational intervention are defined and interpreted (Fernández-González & Monarca, 2018). From a P-P and NPM logic, educational results are measured through quantifiable and objective indicators. These indicators are encapsulated in an "instrument" that is external and independent of the educational intervention in itself and is administered within a combination of two-ideal designs, pre-post measures and/or in comparison to a control group (cf. Biesta, 2007), but most often, only through pre-post measures given the ethical and practical complications of maintaining control groups within school-based educational interventions (Morgade et al., 2016).

In contrast, our three interventions unfolded within a different logic in which the "process" and the "product" are deeply intertwined and constitute each other. The material outcome of each of the interventions was the design and production of some kind of expressive artifact/artistic production (see the point on materialities below): micro-theatre plays, posters, or video-narratives (see Figure 2). These artifacts emerged during the educational interventions, are an inherent part of the process (rather than an independent/external indicator) and cannot be operationalized before the intervention/collaborative projects were launched. At the same time, each of these expressive products provide materials and data to examine the type of transformations, or lack of, enacted by participants. The micro-dramas, video-narratives, or posters can be examined in themselves but are also enriched, as we did in the three educational projects, when interpreted alongside other data such as retrospective interviews and the analysis of daily observations and interactions during the process.

This understanding of how "outcomes" are defined in collaborative interventions does not mean that there is a lack of accountability or that the organization in which the action takes place does not have elements to assess the impact or transformations that emerged from the participatory project. It involves a different way of defining and reclaiming accountability. Drawing from the critical review of the concept by Fernández-González and Monarca (2018), in a collaborative project the definition of goals and expected outcomes are defined much more horizontally, with the participation of different actors. This alternative approach to accountability also mobilizes social and institutional dynamics that are different from those in place when accountability is defined through external (and high stakes) procedures. In addition, while each of the educational interventions had specific goals it was also possible to observe potentially educationally relevant changes in other aspects of participants' experiences. Drawing on these premises, there are three features we want to highlight in relation to how "results" were reconstrued in our interventions.

## Figure 2

### Examples of the Products of the Three Educational Interventions



Micro-theatre performance for students in the school (Cruz, 2017)



Posters created by students (Piñeiro, 2018)



Screen-capture from children's video (Gallego, 2018)

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First, as advanced above, the interventions involved creating a *deliverable* of some sort (drama performances, posters, videos) (Leavy, 2020; Mitchell, 2011)<sup>3</sup>. Participants were invested in completing these projects and the schedule of the interventions was structured to complete these expressive productions and adjust the expectations, design, and depth of these products to the available time and resources. Thus, the interventions were not structured as a series of presentation and drill sessions conceived to accrue on the final assessment. Rather, they were planned around a design cycle (Cobb et al., 2003) relevant to each of the products the projects centered on.

Second, all interventions involved *showcasing* the products: sharing and discussing with all participants in the group the expressive product generated in the smaller groups or by individuals. These showcasing events have a dual purpose and effect on the intervention: (a) they contribute to redefine assessment as something collective and embedded in the

<sup>3</sup> Around this point (and others) there are clear parallels and connections with participatory arts-based approaches. However, as can be seen in the framing of the article and our introduction we only intersect partially with this literature. Briefly, we have a couple of reasons for this prudent engagement with arts-based research traditions. First, because theoretically and methodologically our background and experience is with collaborative and ethnographic research and not so much with art-based work and this is the literature that has shaped our thinking. Second, at a much more personal level and especially at the time the projects were developing, because we were personally reluctant (i.e., insecure) to self-describe the projects as arts-based interventions, particularly, as Leavy (2020) points out, given the familiarity and expertise with different media that is seen in projects that involve collaborations with trained/professional artists and the high-level of craftsmanship (cf. Finley, 2008) present in many examples of arts-based research. This also involves particular identities and dispositions that none of the authors of the article felt ready to fully inhabit. Unfortunately, exploring these issues would require a whole new paper.

collaborative process, and (b) they allow for additional opportunities to document and scrutinize transformations and reflexive work during the interventions.

Third, given that participants in the experience created some sort of expressive artifact/media and experimented with some type of public display of the project, the organization (in this case, school or NGO) may take up the results and present them in other spaces or events as part of the broader work of the institution. For example, the artistic productions may be displayed or performed for other audiences connected to the organization or turned into wider community events in ways not originally planned by the initial "intervention project." Specifically, in the three examples we discuss, these transformations became very prominent in one case (see below) and in another case the organization planned an additional event with families and the community that eventually did not take place. This move and willingness in the organization to re-appropriate and showcase the results of an educational intervention is relevant, at least, for two issues. On the one hand, as a form of feedback, it validates the educational relevance of the work done during the intervention and the transformations it has generated. On the other hand, it contributes to a process in which participants (children/adolescents) not only engage with the particular content of the intervention, in our cases centered around different dimensions of gender/sexuality but have the opportunity to transform more broadly how they are construed and construe themselves as learners and members of the educational community in which they participate. As the example we discuss immediately below shows, this second dimension is especially relevant when the co-participants of the educational intervention have learning and institutional trajectories in which they are defined as unsuccessful or occupy marginal positions in those organizations (Cammarota, 2011).

The case in which all these features materialize more clearly is in the intervention with secondary school students around machismo and gender discrimination that culminated in mini-drama productions. As negotiated between Inés and the counselling department of the school, the intervention targeted a group of students who were already placed in a special educational support stream (*diversificación curricular*) and were seen as passive and progressively disengaged from the school and from advancing their schooling. The intervention began in January and through changes in the class methodology, giving voice to students and transferring decision-making to students it generated (from Ines' perspective) important changes. The process culminated with small groups in the class creating mini dramas that enacted gender discrimination and sexism in daily life. These small scripts were shared with the group but then drew the interest of the counselling department and the school administration. Eventually the class was invited to perform their productions in front of younger students as part of the activities the school prepared for March 8th, International Women's Day (Figure 3). The students led these sessions and adopted the role of instructors in the activity with other students. Further, given the positive reception of the activities, the school decided to showcase the workshop and dramatizations with students in the school bulletin in an article connected to how the school celebrated gender equity and March 8th. In other words, the workshop opened different spaces for students to reflect on gender relations and discrimination (arguably having some impact on their gender discourses and ideologies), but also allowed a group of students placed in a peripheral position of the academic hierarchy of the school to reposition, even if temporarily, their roles as competent learners and engaged students in the school. Each of the successive relocations of the mini-drama performances (from the workshop group to other events in the school to being singled-out in a school bulletin) was at the same time an index of how the intervention and students were being assessed and a formative action connected to the unfolding goals of the intervention.

**Figure 3**  
*Preparation of a Performance in a School Classroom*



### **What are Some of the Tensions and Transformations in Educator/Practitioner Professional Identities Opened up by a Collaborative Approach?**

The emergent practitioners directly in charge of the collaborative interventions also had to work through the professional identities and professional positions they developed during their internship experience. As graduate and undergraduate educational-psychologists-in-training, professional novices, and peripheral participants (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in an educational organization, it cannot be said that Inés, Natalia, and Rebeca entered the field with fully shaped professional identities or crystalized discourses about their professional roles (Gee, 2000; Wenger, 1998). In fact, in many ways, the goal of the internship experience is precisely to contribute to the development of these professional identities and voices and from an institutional perspective, the design of the training program and internship attempts to steer students into assuming certain type of professional stances and ways of being in a work setting (Dall'Alba, 2009; Solari, 2017). However, in these early experiences it also became clear that engaging in participatory and collaborative dynamics meant confronting central assumptions in their initial training regarding how professional competence is displayed. Our joint discussions uncovered three interrelated issues that required substantial rethinking and repositioning on the part of Natalia, Rebeca, and Inés: handling uncertainty, handling expertise and the role of reflexivity in professional work.

Engaging in an open-ended collaborative design process necessarily entails moments of *uncertainty* in which the outcomes or subsequent steps of the process are not closed or pre-defined. Arguably, this is a source of anxiety for novice (and not so novice) professionals and a possible solution could be to pre-structure and carefully plan all steps and materials of the intervention process. In many ways, this is also the preferred action mode of current forms of public and educational management. However, from our perspective it is also a conceptualization of work that contributes to the deskilling and deprofessionalization (Ozga, 1995) of educational workers as it, among other things, transfers responsibility around the design (or co-design) process from on-site educators to external educational programmers or resources. In contrast, the challenge was to learn how to handle the open-ended nature of

educational processes and incorporate this as potential, as an approach that allows practitioners to take advantage of and explore emergent interests and opportunities.

It also involves re-constructing how *expertise* is enacted and perceived by others (particularly administrators and other educators who have to collaborate or supervise educational interventions). In particular, the psychology programs in which we participate couch the display of expertise on a technical and statistical vocabulary and the use of instruments and devices that are amenable to quantitative measurement. Further, reliance on these devices and procedures can be done (and work successfully) without a clear understanding of the underlying principles or the assumptions behind quantitative or statistical procedures. In contrast, expertise in a collaborative intervention is an emergent feature of the process that materializes in how trust is built with co-participants and how responsibilities are distributed and legitimized among participants (Glass et al., 2018).

These two aspects, as they involve confronting and handling affective aspects and monitoring transformations in the process, rest on a *reflexive* attitude (Davies, 2008) that has to be incorporated as part of the professional identities and developing work-kit of practitioners. Natalia's retrospective account of her intervention and work process crystallizes well how an emergent collaborative professional handles uncertainty, reconstructs expertise, and reflexively reexamines these dynamics in practice. Natalia's experience is also an interesting telling case as she is the professional-in-training who conducted her intervention during her last year of undergraduate training. Thus, at the time she began to reflect on her professional position and standing in the school, she had the shortest academic trajectory or methodological-practical experience of all co-authors. As expressed in her notes (originally in Spanish):

### **Excerpt 1**

#### *Natalia's Retrospective Notes*

(...) At the beginning of the process, the center was reluctant towards my intervention, as it did not fit within the planned school hours and they saw little use to the methodology I was employing. This created an emotional barrier in my work, as I felt that at the start, I had little support and trust from the school and the school counselor. However, this barrier started to dissolve as we moved forward with the work. Different professionals started to show an interest in how the project was progressing, the methodologies we were using, and some came to discuss their questions about the topic we were working on (non-binary transexuality). Eventually, the head of studies of the school and the school counselor gave me access to some information and useful contacts on the topic of the project and showed an interest in learning about the project and topic. Yet, even as I broke down these barriers, I did not manage to find a space for the project within the school curriculum and the work sessions [with the students] continued to take place during recess time (...)

In this account we see how Natalia was aware of how her work and proposal were perceived by the school and how this marginal status was reflected in the work hours she was assigned to the project, such as recess breaks and student's free periods. Yet, Natalia, rather than revise her approach and work with a methodology or language that was aligned with the initial perceptions of the school counseling department that supervised her internship, persisted in her approach with the support of her main collaborator and case student. Despite the uncertain work path, she embarked in, the effort started to "pay off" in relation to other educators in the school who started to see value in her proposal and approached her to discuss

issues related to the topic of the project. In particular, we see this last transformation as an indicator of her shifting professional identity in the school from a marginal/novice educator to a legitimate (with certain expertise) interlocutor with other professionals in the school.

### **Why Did the Projects Work with Different Materialities and Expressive Media and How Were These Received in Each Institutional Setting?**

The third theme that we critically examine across projects is connected to the fact that the three interventions engaged with particular forms of expressive media and involved thinking about why and how these media were selected for the collaborative interventions. Focusing on media/expressive formats that move beyond conventional print-based literacies also opens up questions in relation to their fit and reception in current educational settings. Finally, turning to the particular forms of expressive media used in the projects, retrospectively, helped us raise critical questions regarding assumptions about expressive socialization and participants' engagement with the materials that we offered in the projects. The three intervention projects involved creative activities building from multimodal and sensorial data sources (photography, walking, photo-voice, drawings) and led to the co-creation of different types of artifacts: min-dramatizations, comic strips, posters, and video narratives (Mitchell, 2008, 2011). As said, none of the interventions were designed or planned from the start to culminate in these productions, nor were they explicitly conceptualized as arts-based intervention projects (Finley, 2008). Rather, they emerged "organically" through negotiations and decisions made by participants in the process, and it is, precisely, this emergent aspect that raises critical questions.

First, there is the question of *how* decision-making was distributed among participants and, specifically, how much voice children and youth had in choosing to work through specific types of expressive media. Particular dynamics unfolded in each of our projects reflecting the situated circumstances of each intervention (e.g., time constraints, age of participants, institutional requirements). Broadly speaking, the project co-led by Natalia with a non-binary trans student mainly reflected the student's decision to work on counter-posters regarding transgender discrimination. Inés in her intervention around machismo with adolescents offered a limited set of choices to work for students and Rebeca geared her younger children directly towards the use of video. However, from our perspective, it is not simply an issue of situating projects along a continuum of the degree of voice/decision-making that is granted to children and youth. The apparent continua between adults/educators-students/youth are, in reality, an intersection of multiple considerations operating at many scales. In particular, there are three issues to be considered. Project design involves many actions and decisions, each of which can be opened (or not) to negotiation (Poveda, 2020). Each type of expressive media has its own technical and material requirements and affordances, influencing how labor and engagement are distributed among participants. Finally, we must also contemplate that deferring responsibility is a way of exercising agency and this delegation is, in turn, a process that can be renegotiated and fluctuate throughout a collaborative experience.

Second, there is the issue of *why* particular types of media. In this case, what we want to stress here is the role played by the personal interests and experiences of the professionals leading the interventions. Each co-author came into the intervention with particular sets of skills, experiences, interests, and dispositions to "tinker" with different materialities and expressive media (Leavy, 2020): Inés has a background in amateur theater and drama, Natalia had experience with plastic/visual arts, and Rebeca enjoyed working with digital video editing. These experiences were crucial to the unfolding of the interventions and we would argue provided pre-professional practitioners with resources to improvise and work with the students and create opportunities for guided participation within the group. In short, we want to

legitimize that educational interventions in which expressive media plays a role gravitate towards the particular and idiosyncratic interests and skills of participants (including those of teachers/intervention co-leaders), and therefore, draw from the past experiences and knowledge they can bring into the project. This way of working also means not moving from the start towards particular media because it is "fashionable," it responds to the interests of external third parties or is chosen based on certain assumptions (or at worst stereotypes) about the interests and experiences of the children and youth who are the focus of the intervention.

Third, there are questions regarding *where* the work with particular types of expressive media takes place (see also the heading below on spatio-temporal constraints). As said, working with visual, multimodal, and performative materials may involve engaging with practices and semiotic tools that often do not occupy a visible space in the type of school or after-school support settings discussed here. This means that it will probably not be easy to make connections with other parts of the curriculum, establish early a dialogue with other professionals in the setting or carve out a strong space for the intervention experience in the organization. However, this does not necessarily imply that the intervention clashes or is incompatible with what is provided by the educational program of the organization. Rather, the collaborative intervention can be seen as an opportunity to expand students' experiential and semiotic repertoires and this might involve moving educationally productive work to other spaces. The case that best illustrates these dynamics is Rebeca's intervention in a non-formal educational setting. Of the three cases, it is the project that worked with smaller children (7-9 years of age), which raises issues regarding what responsibilities can be taken up by the participants. It is also the intervention that took place in a non-school community organization, potentially favoring accessing other spaces in the neighborhood beyond the classroom. Table 1 summarizes the different phases and sessions the workshop led by Rebeca had (adapted from the master thesis report, Gallego, 2018, pp. 12-14):

**Table 1**

*Temporalization of the Collaborative Intervention on Gender Typing*

Session	Activity Title	Description of activity and distribution of responsibilities
Part 1: Situating gender		
1	Drawing gender	Children freely draw a person "doing something" and then make a second drawing depicting a person with another gender. Children choose the activities and the characters.
2	Interviews	The whole group jointly discusses and defines an interview script. Then children interview each other in pairs, they use the drawings as materials for the interview.
3	Mural - Museum	All drawings are placed on a wall and the class jointly discusses how the drawings could be connected and grouped. The children then build a mural with the drawings.



Part 2: Re-constructing gender		
4	Revision - Video Planning	The whole class reviews the discussion from previous sessions and how gender typing occurs. The class divides into smaller groups and each group, supervised by Rebeca, begins to plan their video-narrative on gender.
5	Video Planning	Small group planning of the videos continues, Rebeca points each group to issues that should be considered for recording and production: script, settings, musical effect, credits, or materials for the recording.
6	Video Recording	Children record their videos in a single afternoon in different neighborhood locations. Each small group uses a tablet device provided by the organization and is closely supervised by an educator of the organization.
7	Video Screening	Rebeca uses the video materials and the guidelines from each group to edit and produce the video-narratives of each small group. In the final session these videos are shown to the whole class, each group presents their project and what they hoped to capture and the session closes with a group discussion.

This chronology illustrates how working with different media intertwines with the unfolding of activities and the distribution of decision-making among participants. As said, of the three interventions this is probably the one in which the adult researcher-practitioner "imposed" more working with particular media: drawings and video. Yet, working with these materials allowed children to play a very active role in different parts of the project, such as co-designing and co-leading interview dialogues or building their own murals and visual narratives—within a thematic orientation towards gender issues. At the same time, it also shows how a collaborative infrastructure (Estalella & Sánchez-Criado, 2016) with young children may still require close adult input and adults taking charge of different components of the process, especially when the technical requirements of the media in questions become more complex. For example, here we see how Rebeca oriented children to different issues in the planning of the video narrative and took charge of the video production and editing process. Also, using complex and expensive materials such as digital tablets involved closer adult monitoring, but at the same time, this arrangement allowed children to develop their work in the streets, parks, and plazas of their neighborhood.

### **How Did the Projects Manage Time Constraints within Educational Organizations?**

The last dimension we want to discuss centers on how time and space is often construed in educational interventions, and in turn, how these conditions can be reimagined. Often, space and time are defined as constraints and a limited resource. As Excerpt 1 suggests, educational interventions of the type presented here have to be planned by carving out a limited set of timeslots and spaces to work on the project - especially within an already packed school curriculum or organizational planning. This was clearly a characteristic of our three pre-

professional interventions, which were structured around multiple demands: to find times/spaces within the educational organizations, to meet the deadlines and calendar of the academic programs in which the pre-professional internships were inserted, and to plan and implement the work within expected timeframes. In fact, all the three project reports include in the final discussion a reference to the time limitations of their interventions and a note on how a more prolonged engagement in the field would have facilitated a better collaborative and educational experience. Yet, rethinking this assessment, we also wonder if it possible to construe in alternative ways the supposed space/time limitations and move beyond the common-sensical assumption that "more is better."

To begin, educational time and spaces are scalable (Lemke, 2000), they operate and are assessed/adjusted in relation to the particular activities, materialities, and unfolding goals of an educational intervention and each of the events and components through which the intervention is built. In other words, "having more time or space" to work on a particular task does not simply mean it will produce "better outcomes." Changing the spatio-temporal organization of a task changes the nature of the task itself: the elements that compose it, the expectations around the activity, the temporal sequencing and unfolding of the activity (Erickson, 2004). Thus, time and space calibrations are intimately tied to how educational activities are assessed, how impact/change is defined and the expectations that are developed for each educational intervention.

As the field excerpt above also suggests, another concern related to spatio-temporal constraints is the relative peripherality of the educational interventions within the educational program of the school or organization. We also discussed how this relationship changed over time and how our interventions increased their visibility and relevance in the organization as they unfolded. Yet, it might be possible to take this a step further and consider if there are particular advantages to working in a peripheral space and allowing the goals, methodology, and experiences of the educational intervention to unfold "under the radar" of the school or organization (at least for some time of the process). Arguably, as was the case for the three interventions discussed here, this grants more freedom for methodological experimentation and probably facilitates engaging with certain topics and issues that might be difficult to address in ordinary classroom settings. The three projects discussed here played with this in different ways: the work with children on gender typing explicitly moved the video-recordings outside of the organization and into the neighborhood and community, the work with the non-binary trans student eventually created open and safe spaces to discuss issues during recess and other activities outside the school, and the mini-dramatizations with secondary school students brought into the classroom imaged experiences from out-of-school and family life.

## **Conclusions**

To summarize, the methodological approach in educational research and intervention work we have discussed throughout this paper puts an emphasis on creativity, participant's inventiveness, and a disposition to tinker and explore by trial-and-error different paths, instructional devices, and possibilities. Arguably, this way of approaching the design of educational interventions as emergent processes (Estalella & Sánchez-Criado, 2016; Ruppert et al., 2013) goes against the flow of dominant methodological paradigms and policy management principles. Further, this approach, which we have broadly discussed under the umbrella label of collaborative research and intervention is not the only paradigm that draws from some of the principles we have discussed. From our perspective, in many ways the methodological principles we have discussed are similar to educational design experiments (Cobb et al., 2003) and the iterative logic of design research. Moving beyond these conceptual convergences, in this article we focused on the dilemmas and the situated decisions that we

confronted as practitioners in educational settings who turned to alternative ways of approaching educational work. We started to unpack four themes that emerged drawing on shared reflections from three independent interventions that were relevant to us as practitioners-in-training across three independent projects. These themes are also interrelated. A participatory/experimental educational intervention requires reworking more conventional expectations about educational outputs and the spatio-temporal constraints under which educational processes operate. This reworking will often involve tinkering with and manipulating artefacts and media outside the mainstream practices of schools and other educational organizations. Practitioners working from these perspectives must learn to articulate and communicate a discourse around these transformations, which involves incorporating certain ways of being an educational professional. In other words, we believe they address issues that are relevant to a larger audience of educational researchers and practitioners interested in developing their work from a collaborative and experimental perspective.

In this context, we want to close the paper raising one more question connected to our focus on practitioners and practice. Adopting some of the principles of collaborative approaches to plan and implement an educational intervention, at least in Spain and Spanish educational organizations, will probably be perceived as an unconventional path. Consequently, arguably, this decision might generate resistance and skepticism on the part of other actors and interlocutors in the intervention sites (see Excerpt 1). One way to prepare for this is to develop counter arguments and responses to the set of criticisms and questions that may be raised about the methodological and practical choices being made in a collaborative educational intervention. However, this "preemptive" approach to the preparation of an educational intervention can also have disadvantages. On one hand, we may be able to predict or foresee possible areas of resistance or critique (based on previous practical experiences, ongoing academic/professional debates, the experiences of other colleagues) but these are only predictions which may or may not materialize or may or may not capture well the actual concerns of participants and the different interlocutors and stakeholders with whom educational interventions have to be negotiated. It could also be that presenting too early "responses to questions that have not been raised" may, in fact, backfire. It could bring into the conversation concerns that were outside the awareness of key participants but then need to be addressed. More importantly, stressing issues that do not capture the actual concerns of interlocutors may turn into a concern in itself as it says something about the (in)capacity of practitioners and the work-plan to gauge the actual circumstances and needs of the educational setting where the intervention will take place. In fact, if we begin from the premise that all educational interventions and practices are situated within particular social, historical, and material contexts, it may make sense to take a prudent approach in relation to the preemptive work to be done at the earliest stages of the process. As the experiences discussed here suggest, responding to the concerns of participants may be something to be incorporated as part of the process and unfolding of the intervention.

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