

Lucio-Villegas, Emilio

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Kontakt / Contact:

peDOCS
Deutsches Institut für Internationale Pädagogische Forschung (DIPF)
Informationszentrum (IZ) Bildung
E-Mail: pedocs@dipf.de
Internet: www.pedocs.de

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Like a rolling stone: non-traditional spaces of adult education

Emilio Lucio-Villegas

University of Seville, Spain (elucio@us.es)

Once upon a time you dressed so fine
You threw the bums a dime in your prime, didn't you?

...

When you ain't got nothing, you got nothing to lose
You're invisible now, you got no secrets to conceal.

(Bob Dylan, Like a Rolling Stone)

Abstract

In this article, I try to explore the squeezing concept of adult education that provides a kind of identity to the field characterised by vagueness, diversity and the links to social justice. This diversity is also present when talking about the participants in the process. After presenting the concept of adult education, I explore three different experiences that I have referred to as non-traditional spaces of adult education. In the conclusion, I consider that the diversity, the production of knowledge, and the role of both teacher and learners are essential to define non-traditional spaces and non-traditional participants in adult education.

Keywords: adult education; diversity; knowledge; non-traditional students; participation

A personal introduction

In a novel based on Oxford—‘All Souls’—the Spanish writer Javier Marías talks about the custom of some academics—when they lack a topic of conversation—to ask the other: What is your field? Usually I have problems explaining my own field: Is adult education only limited to literacy? Is it addressed to old people? Is it training for a job?

Is it a second chance? Where adult education is taken place: in classrooms, in social movements, in factories, in communities?

Sometimes I miss the clarity of my oldest brother. In the past, when somebody asked him: What is your field? He could reply: I am a nuclear physicist and he could also add some examples of his work easily understandable: Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and Fukushima!

The problem in defining adult education is the fact that it is a very wide concept, replete with diversity and vagueness, but also committed to common people. Paraphrasing Bob Dylan it is possible to say that once upon a time an adult education tried to provide an answer to the needs and people's wishes. It was born and grew in the struggle of working class and common people to have a better life. It dressed fine for a while. For instance, in Spain it was a 'rising star' linking learning and community life (Lucio-Villegas, 2012) in the period from the beginning of the Constitutional State to the end of the 1980s. But now adult education is invisible. As Gelpi (2004) stated: 'Adult education in Europe seems to have progressively forgotten its history made of fighting, resistances, creativities and it is transforming into an instrument of power only used for personal development and in the logic of the market' (p. 153). I think that—as teachers of adult education, adult or community educators—we can ask ourselves, while taking into account the current situation: how do we feel? Perhaps our answer could be: Like a rolling stone lost in the darkness of Lifelong Learning policies and practices.

However, adult education is still alive in liberating practices that come from the grassroots. I will try to present some of these practices by introducing examples that can help us to define some non-traditional spaces: the (re)construction of the own history by people themselves, a school to encourage and train people to participate and become citizens, and the process of organising a museum. I will try to present spaces where adult education takes place and how these spaces can enable people—teachers and learners—to constantly (re)construct a liberating adult education for emancipation that confronts the homogenisation tendencies derived from the policies and practices of Lifelong Learning. In this way, I hope to contribute to the debate about who are non-traditional participants in adult education.

Before this, in the next section, I want to approach to a specific view of adult education.

Does adult education even exist?

Using a quotation from McCulloch, Jarvis (1986) tries to present the difficulties in defining adult education.

To extract adult education from its surrounding world—or at least differentiate adult education from its social environment—is as difficult as considering how many angels can dance on a pinhead. Is adult education a practice or a programme? A methodology or an organization? A *science* or a system? A process or a profession? Is adult education different from continuing education, vocational education, higher education? Does adult education even exist? (as cited in Jarvis, 1989, p. 23, italic type in the original)

Considering these difficulties in the definition of a vague and wide field, I have explored different explanations. Faure et al. (1986) defined adult education in a way nearest that of McCulloch's statement.

Adult education gives a response to multiple definitions; it replaces elementary education for a significant number of adults around the world; it is supplementary to elementary education for a lot of people holding an incomplete education; it enlarges the education of those by helping them face the new demands of their environment; it improves the education of those who hold a higher level of education; it makes up, at last, a way for an individual expression for everybody. (p. 289)

In a similar direction, Barbier (2009) talked on *formation des adultes*, and asked himself how it could be recognised? At the end, when he is looking for a definition, he decides to start from the activities that are considered *formation des adultes*: social work, issues related to social environment, communication skills, management and others related to working places, therapy or spiritual life.

Diversity and vagueness are also related to different landscapes. Rubenson and Elfert (2014) differentiate between a North American and a European approach. Plus, the inclusion of China and the Republic of Korea in this map introduces new perspectives. After analysing some of the published research, they conclude:

In reflecting further in the fragmentation of the map of the territory, it is important to observe first at all that the field of adult education as such has begun to be split into its components with the parts becoming fields of studies in of themselves. (Rubenson & Elfert, 2014, p. 34)

This diversity, and perhaps the vagueness in defining it, is an essential element in understanding adult education. The diversity is either in conceptual terms or geographical. In fact, as Lima and Guimarães (2011) state, Lifelong Learning policies and practices have broken the ‘heterogeneity that is the feature of adult education in many European countries’ (p. 105). On the other hand, it is important to stress that this diversity seems to be what guarantees an adult education committed to people and communities.

In this direction, one of the most powerful—in my opinion—attempts to conceptualise an adult education committed to people derives from the work done by UNESCO.

Adult education denotes the entire body of ongoing learning processes, formal or otherwise, whereby people regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, and improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction to meet their own needs and those of their society. Adult learning encompasses both formal and continuing education, non-formal learning and the spectrum of informal and incidental learning available in a multicultural learning society, where theory and practice—based approaches are recognised. (1997, p. 1)

Let us examine some findings derived from this definition. Firstly, we have the cultural dimension of adult education. On the other hand, there is the wide spectrum of activities that can be considered as it, and the link between personal development and community circumstances. An emergent issue here is the things that people learn and not how, when or where. Education becomes, in this process, as diverse, continuing and global (Guimarães, 2011).

Adult education could also be considered as characterised in terms of methodology and individuals involved in the process of teaching and learning. A specific methodology that merges people’s daily life and curricula. In a Freirean way, I can say that adult education is related to the possibility to read and say the world at the same

time that people read and say words. People become more aware of their own situation starting from generative words as a basis of adult education (Freire, 1970). It could also be said that it uses methodologies based on the experiences of people and focuses on the surrounding environment in a perspective close to Popular Education defined as: i) rooted in the real interest of ordinary people and in their struggles; ii) overtly political and critical of the status quo; iii) committed to social and political change; iv) the curriculum comes from the experiences of both people and communities; v) pedagogy is collective, stressing the importance of the group; and vi) it tries to forge links between education and social action (Crowther, Johnston, Martin, & Merrill, 2006).

Adult education has been traditionally associated with decolonising programmes, social, cultural and productive projects. As Gelpi (1990) noticed, there is a long way from 'adult education as a both social and political project to an adult education focused on professional training' (p. 152).

In this train of thought, Finger and Asún (2001) follow Ivan Illich considering that adult education is characterised by: i) learning as opposed to schooling; ii) conviviality as opposed to manipulation; iii) responsabilisation as opposed to deresponsibilisation; and iv) participation as opposed to control. The latter is, for me, an essential element because 'In adult education, knowledge is created *by* the people, not *for* the people' (Finger & Asún, 2001, p. 13, italic type in the original).

According to Quintana (1986), I define some characteristics of adult education that can also help in its delimitation: a) it is a participatory education. Teachers and learners are the main actors in the educational process that has to take place in a context that promotes participation; b) it is an active process starting from the curiosity and the search for responses by the participants; c) the educator has to take a specific role, such as animator, supporting every proposal coming from the group; d) adult education is a collective process with a powerful social dimension; e) it also is a process of social transformation, either in an individual or collective perspective; and f) it is an attempt for adult people to discover their surrounding environment.

To finish this section, I would like to define adult education based on five dimensions and confront this view with the hegemonic one represented by Lifelong Learning. These five dimensions are (Lucio-Villegas, 2015): Dialogue, Participation, A Collective Approach, Experience, Diversity, and Autonomy and Emancipation.

Dialogue is the core of Freire's philosophy and methodology. Dialogue guarantees communication and establishes education as a cooperative process characterised by social interactions between people in which new knowledge is created by joining and sharing the knowledge that people have. In the current dominant view of adult education, it has shifted to learning as an individual process out of the social relations that dialogue produces (Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2012). In this time of Lifelong Learning, cooperation and social interactions are not needed and they have been substituted by skills and competences to compete for a job.

Adult education has to be a participatory education and potentiates participation. As Botkin, Elmandjara, and Malitza (1979) stated, 'Participation is something more than to formally share the decisions taken. It is an attitude characterised by cooperation, dialogue and empathy' (p. 35). But participation in terms of adult education also means to build the knowledge collectively, develop a reflection and a mutual educative experience. But, the evolution of the policies and practices of Lifelong Learning show us that the approaches focused on community life as well as the approaches focused on the development of an active citizenship have lost their way and now the messages have its focal point in both the labour market and employability.

A Collective approach denotes, among other things, a specific concept/notion of community. According to Kurantowicz (2008) community is based on three elements: 'local resources, participation and citizen's actions as well as on reflectivity (reflexivity) of a community' (p. 55). In the world of Lifelong Learning, community, as a specific place where people create relationships, is not important. The singularities of the communities have been substituted for a catalogue of 'good practices' that can be implemented in every place.

Experience is a strategic element to develop an adult education full of significance for people. Experience is, in some ways, the result—and the process—through which an individual organises knowledge and shares it with others. The experience, and the expression of it, is decisive in this case because it is an important element in defining the role of the adult. 'What mobilized the desire and the ability to learn was the simple fact that the teaching was a real part of the reality that is outside of the courses as such' (Olesen, 1989, p. 115). Lifelong Learning policies and practices are only concentrated in the contents to become a 'good' worker and, for that, experience is not important. Even the processes of recognition seem to be an attempt to domesticate people's life experience.

It is possible to undertake diversity in two different aspects. The first one is related to the diversity of activities and the places where they take place that could usually be denominated of adult education: universities, adult education schools, companies and enterprises, social movements, community centres, and other informal spaces, etc. However, the most important thing is related to people involved in adult education's activities. I will focus on diversity in the next section.

Autonomy and Emancipation. From his early works, Freire (1965, 1970) considered the educational process as one of liberation that would enable people to move away from a *Culture of Silence* and to have the experience and confidence to say their own word. To maintain the oppression—the Culture of Silence—the prevailing sectors in society maintain an educational system that Freire called banking education: deposits are made; rules are given; knowledge is memorised not built. All these kinds of things maintain people in a state of alienation. To turn this around, his proposal is for a liberating education that encourages people to say their own word / world. This means that people can express their dreams, desires, hopes, and find ways to act on these as I referred to above. This cannot be done in the narrow framework of Lifelong Learning and, for that, adult and community educators are looking for non-traditional spaces.

Non-traditional learners?

As I noted above, an element that could be useful in defining adult education is related to people participating. Apart from a very confusing age criteria—varying in different societies and cultures—it seems important to stress people's experiences either in educational terms—people usually come from a previous experience of schooling—or life experience. Adult education can help individuals to understand and reorganise their own experience to deal with and change their personal and community situation. On the other hand, it could be supposed that an adult is a mature person that looks to improve both their own sense and opinion in facing the things that happen around him or her. But most importantly, in this direction, is to understand that adult education is diverse thanks to their participants. They are: women, men, older people, migrants, workers, and youth.

It is also important to consider the needs and desires that people have in the moment/process of becoming a learner. Those that Pineda (1999) named as *falling in love* (*enamoramiento* in Spanish). They are individuals that tend to strive for new knowledge not only related to the labour market, but to leisure time, cultural creation and expression, etc.

A last important issue is related to the context where adult people come to adult education. This last element correlates with their experience either in school or in life. In the current policies and practices of Lifelong Learning it is sometimes taken for granted that the context is not important. This is the essence of the transfer of ‘good practices’.

The main point here is how to deal with diversity and what is the meaning of this diversity. Sometimes the problem is that when people talk about diversity the first idea is always related to multiculturalism. In this sense, Besalú (2010) states that the difficulties that teachers stressed on diversity are defined as: ‘Difficulties in communication, either with learners that have a very limited knowledge of the official languages, or their parents that join with a lack of knowledge, they have a very significant ignorance about the usual functioning of the things’ (p. 156). This is a very limited position, based on the language and practices such as punishment, reward and a kind of stereotype that teachers sometimes create regarding diversity. Since Besalú is talking about primary school, this approach to diversity could be presented as something that disturbs the homogeneity of the process of teaching and learning. As Gelpi (2004) stated:

Differences owing to the language, religion or ethnic are significant, but it is necessary to not forget other elements that make up other different types of diversity such as: age, sex, access to training and education, access to information, relationships with productive work (the identity of an unemployed person is not the same as the one of a worker with a job), access to medical care, the right to a salary, the environment where people live, the degree of freedom (the citizen being free to go somewhere or the prisoner), the disabled, etc. Such differences also indicate the complexity of including a person in a specific group, or the membership of an individual to a collection of shared diversities. (p. 57)

Diversity is related to the context, the culture, economic situation, etc., but it takes form in individuals that feel threatened about their own way of life. In fact, the same person could experience these threats in a different way in different moments of their life. In this sense, the Freirean concept of the Culture of Silence is very important. People tend to silence their own voice and this voice is manipulated by the dominant culture. experiences presented below have, amongst others, as one of their main characteristics, the challenge of the Culture of Silence represented today by Lifelong Learning.

Spaces of adult education

When researching the situation of education in the world at the end of the 1960s, Coombs (1978) discovered the existence of diverse educational practices. One of their main characteristics was that they took place outside of the schooling system. From here, he differentiated among formal, non-formal and informal education. According to Coombs, in this first report and in the second one (1978, 1985) the most surprising fact was the richness—either in economic or educational terms—of the experiences and initiatives that took place outside of school.

The most important contribution of Coombs' ideas on different spaces in education is very useful to the field of adult education. It is considered that adult education was born out of school—see Cook-Gumperz's (1988) contribution on literacy—and closely linked to people living in communities. I think that this last issue is very important when talking about different and diverse spaces in adult education. In a Freirean perspective (e.g., Freire, 1970) the things that people learn in the cultural circles coming from the daily life of individuals. This means—among other things—that school is not the exclusive place for conducting education. Adult education is characterised by organising educational processes based on the place where people live.

The main argument to distinguish from formal, non-formal or informal education is based on two dimensions (Trilla, 1985): intention and institution. Intention, according to Trilla (1985) means that the goals of the process are clearly defined as educational ones. Institution, also according to the same author, means that the institutions responsible for the process are clearly recognised as educational in social terms.

In short, Trilla (1985) differentiates between: i) formal education: educational institutions and clearly defined educational goals; ii) non-formal education: non-educational institutions recognised as such but with a clear definition of educational goals; and iii) informal education: non-educational institutions and not educational goals defined as such.

This scheme could be very useful but it could also be very confusing because some new agents of education are arising at this time. Some institutions, and not only educational ones, have an important role in defining educational goals. For instance, a factory can have educational budgets greater than some schools. Therefore, today it could be not considered only as an element in the production system. On the other hand, some experiences that occur at school cannot be only considered as formal education as referred to above.

After presenting three experiences, I will return to these matters in the conclusions.

Non-traditional spaces of adult education. Three cases

I have decided to present three different experiences that I think can be defined as non-traditional. I name as 'traditional' the practices of adult education that are linked to a curriculum previously defined; the contents come from legal regulations and not from the curiosity of the people participating. I also name as 'traditional' the practices of adult education focused on the transmission of contents and organised in a hierarchical way.

On the contrary, I consider the experiences briefly described below as non-traditional because they mainly reside outside of the schooling environment and they present us new approaches to adult education. From now, I will briefly describe the experiences and later on discuss them in the conclusions.

Our painful history

This experience is related to the collection of both individual and social stories related to the Civil War and the Dictatorship. It is an attempt to help people recover their own memories yet at the same time connect them with history.

Starting from these interests, a group of people emerged, deciding to actively engage in the labour of recovering the memory of their neighbourhood, its inhabitants, its neighbours, and themselves. Therefore, a research group was formed within an adult

education school, composed by eight persons and one coordinator. From this point, the work begins. First, the collection of information was done, which was crucially dependent on the collaboration of other students who were available to write their life histories and/or to be interviewed and video recorded. It was decided that the older people should be interviewed first, in order to go back to the historical period correspondent to the 2nd Republic, the Spanish Civil War and the years of the post-war and Dictatorship. It is important to highlight that some of the members of the Workshop were also participating as informants, which further enriched the experience.

30 life histories were recorded in video, and more than 20 were written. The work of analysis, systematisation and elaboration of such material was carried out by all the members of the Workshop, which demanded profound discussions about the centres of interest, which could be defined as *generative themes* (Freire, 1970) and serve as categories to organise the information that arises from the reports and life histories. Three centres of interest were defined for this historical period during the process of analysis: repression—during the Civil War and the Dictatorship—work and education. A second book—forthcoming—of collected histories is focus on the history of the neighbourhood and it is associated to the fight for the restitution of democracy: political parties, trade unions, civil rights, etc.

Parallel to the analysis of the information, a literary and historical contextualisation of the period studied was made from an extended bibliography. The members of the Workshop read such texts and used them to frame the content narrated by people who were interviewed in a broader context. This, among its diverse effects, gives the possibility to enormously enrich the analysis (including the assistance in the definition of the generative themes), and to definitely deepen the knowledge about the historical period at issue.

Finally, selection was made on the narratives that were estimated to be more opportune under the light of the new understanding. This was the starting point for the first book that would bring together all the collective research labour, its design, development and effective or material execution: *El olvido está lleno de memoria. Relatos e historias de vida* (*The oblivion is filled with memory. Tales and Life Histories*) and a namesake DVD containing a small documentary with some selected interviews. As this article is being written, the new book is in the works and the group has told and reflected on their work in other papers (e.g., Taller para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica y Social, 2009).

Democracy

In the context of the Participatory Budget experiment at the city of Seville a *Participatory and Citizenship School* was launched. The main goal here was to do democratic work both within and outside social movements. While Offe (1990) suggests that new social movements have a non-hierarchical structure, this did not seem to be empirically true. In fact, as Tsuchiya (2007) states, deriving from a research on social movements in Japan, ‘it is still essential for the core members of NPOs [sic] to constantly scrutinize their practice in a democratic light’ (p. 82). The major finding of this research conducted in 2003,

Show that the organizational and social context was overshadowing the democratic practices of the respondents’ organizations. Many of the respondents, as managers, felt the need or pressure to value organizational efficiency and consistency or to lead their organizations in that direction (Tsuchiya, 2007, p. 81).

For that, the Participatory and Citizenship School sought to change the structure of social movements. For instance, a prerequisite of taking part in these courses was that one could not have been a leader of a specific association. Apart from this, the main goal of the initiative was to teach people how to do a project. In short, the major goal was to empower them to research and transform their own community.

The Participatory and Citizenship School (Lucio-Villegas et al., 2009) during the time of the Participatory Budget experiment was planned and organised through 14 courses that amounted to 24 hours each, concentrated in two weeks from Monday to Thursday, usually in the evening. The courses focused on participation, conflicts, mediation skills, community analysis, and finally, the development of a community project. In short, every course was divided into four components: (1) definitions of community problems; (2) a reflection on democracy and citizenship both at a macro (community) and micro (association) level; (3) the development of a project; and (4) finally, a section on how to look for and manage resources. Courses took place in community centres located in different districts around the city. This became a very important issue: these public places were, at that time, privileged spaces in terms of public and popular participation. The average number of people who attended the courses was 12, with the prerequisite that participating students had not had previous roles in leading association groups. Another important aspect of each course was that the collective of participating associations was heterogeneous. For instance, a course included a flamenco association, a fishing club, an immigrant workers association, a neighbours association, and a cyclist group. An outcome of this process was that membership in these different groups created networks in each district. It is important to remember here that knowing people from other neighbourhoods and organisations is the ‘Indicator of Learning and Change’ with a higher average increase in Lerner and Schugurensky’s (2007) research on the Participatory Budget in Rosario, Argentina.

Finally, two courses were addressed to specific groups: a gypsy women’s association, and adults attending an adult education school.

Blowing in the river

First, the major goal of this project could be defined as such: to recover the people’s memories of their own territory. These memories should also enable young people to know and understand their roots and the history of the place. I can also add two more goals: a) To recover and systematise the experiences of people living in the village that are related to the River, and b) To elaborate teaching materials that enable both young people and adults at school to reflect on their shared experiences. In the specific case of young people, the project stresses the importance of linking teaching materials to the history of the place.

At present time, the research team is working on recovering and systematising the experience by doing non-structured interviews. The criterion to select people to interview has been related to age: the older people that can give a framework of the history, changes and situation of the River in the last 50 years. A second criterion is related to interviewing people working—or who have worked—in crafts and trades linked to the River such as fishermen, sailors, potters, shipbuilders, etc. At present time, we have 9 interviews at an average of 50 minutes each. Some interviews were taped in both audio and video while others only in audio. There is not a balance in gender terms and this could be considered an important matter. In a previous research on fishing places, I have stressed the important role of the women in fishing villages (Lucio-Villegas, 2006).

The research team is composed of people coming from diverse backgrounds: retired adult education teachers, civil servants working in the City Hall, people coming from Social Movements, from the university or teachers and students from the adult education school.

The diversity of people holding the research team is, at the same time, a richness and a disadvantage. Some branches have derived from the original project and some troubles have appeared during the first year of the research. We have dealt with these problems thanks to a very slow process of dialogue and by a participatory approach.

At present time, the research project is focused on two different issues. On the one hand, interviews are being analysed in a preliminary way to systematise some categories that allow us to classify not only the interviews but also to organise other diverse materials such as pictures, artefacts, etc. These categories are related to the fact that the river is considered as both a source of richness and, at the same time, a danger; the craft is a familiar issue passed from fathers to sons; or the close relationships between industrialisation, emigration and the loss of crafts. Additionally, an exposition on the crafts associated with the River, including both pictures and objects, is being prepared to 2016.

If I consider this experience as one related to adult education in non-traditional spaces it is because its main goal are based on elaborate learning processes addressed to adult education students in adult education schools, but also addressed to people committed in different associations in the village. Finally, it is non-traditional because ‘teachers’ are the inhabitants of the village that, in some cases, are at the same time ‘learners.’

Conclusions

Why the experiences described above can be considered as non-traditional spaces in adult education? What are its contributions to define non-traditional participants in adult education?

My first answer to this question is related to the hegemonic view of adult education. This hegemonic view is today shaped for the policies and practices of Lifelong Learning. They are based on promote learning capable to dispatch diplomas to maintain people ready for employability. The target for Lifelong Learning is the producer and consumer, not the citizen, not the individual living in communities. Plus, the contents that it wants to transmit are related to the acquisition of some skills and competences defined in advance to the educational processes.

In the experiences described, the major goal is people’s emancipation. In the first case, people are encouraged to know about their painful history—that is a common history in the country—and transmit it to new generations. It is not only to reflect about their own experiences but also to create new learning experiences (Olesen, 1989).

Participation, citizenship and democracy are something more than elements to maintain social cohesion that enable the power to maintain specific social relations (Martin, 2003). As the participatory budget demonstrates, it is possible to expand democracy starting from social movements. But participatory democracy also means that individuals have to have some skills to understand the rules and the process of participation (Lerner & Schugurensky, 2007; Lucio-Villegas et al., 2009; Santos, 2003). Understanding these rules and participating in the making of the city is an emancipatory process that challenges the established system and builds really useful knowledge based on different social relations.

Lifelong Learning policies and practices are closely linked to Globalisation processes. The idea of ‘good practices’ (Lima & Guimarães, 2011) is based on the denial of local specificities in different territories and societies. The third case presented is focused on the idea of recovering the memories of the river linked with a specific cultural and productive settlement that is adequate to the resources and needs of people living in its environment and it shapes their cultural identity. It is not based on the exigencies of the global economy.

My second conclusion is related to the places where these experiences took—or are taking—place. It could be surprising that I consider as non-traditional an experience that resides in an adult education school. As I affirmed above the scheme based on intention and institution could be simplistic and not represent the complexity of some experiences.

The first example described above takes place in an adult education school and it could be expected to define its goals as educational too. In fact, some teaching materials were produced to explain the quotidian people’s life in the time of the Dictatorship, and research about the whole Spanish history was undertaken in the process. For me it is a non-traditional space because it challenges the way to build and transmit knowledge. In a traditional view of the school, knowledge is transmitted starting from the contents that the learners—adults in this case—have to learn. But in this case the construction of the knowledge is a collective process that comes, mainly, from outside the classroom and the school, and it is created and developed in the margins of the classroom and the school. Finally, it is a knowledge that challenges the dominant knowledge. As Santos (2009), when talking about the ecology of knowledge, states:

The ecology of knowledge does not perceive knowledge in abstract, but as practices of knowledge that are made possible or prevented by specific actions in the real world... life experiences of the oppressed are intelligible to them for an epistemology of the consequences. In their world [the world of the oppressed] consequences always appear before causes. (pp. 50–51)

The other two cases can be analysed in a similar way: the edification of a more powerful democracy inside social movements or the preservation/reconstruction of community identities also mean to build alternative knowledge. The major element here is that knowledge is collectively created—and for that, it is non-traditional thinking in terms of schooling system. As Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) state:

The emphasis is more upon the ways in which production of knowledge shapes consciousness of the agenda in first place, and participation in knowledge production becomes a method for building greater awareness and more authentic self-consciousness of one’s issues and capacities for action. (p. 71)

My third conclusion is related to the role of the educator in these kinds of experiences. In the scope of Lifelong Learning it is possible to find the educator’s role defined as mediator, facilitator or somebody that encourage the adults to take part in the process of learning.

The future role of guidance and counselling professionals could be described as ‘brokerage’. With the client’s interests in the forefront, the ‘guidance broker’ is able to call on and tailor a wide range of information in order to help decide on the best course of action for the future. (Commission of the European Communities [CEC], 2000, p. 16)

In the Freirean approach the educator is somebody that works alongside people in a dual process of teaching and learning. As Stenhouse (1984) stated:

From this perspective, teachers' development implies that teachers define their profession, carrying out a personal assessment of situations and how these can be improved. Consequently, [teachers] do not face problems in generalising beyond their experience. In this context, theory is simply a systematic structuring of the understanding of his own work. (p. 211)

In the non-traditional spaces that I have presented, the role of the educator seems to be very diffused. Only in the case of the Participatory and Citizenship School was there an educator and a group of learners in a more traditional way, but also working in a Freirean approach. In the other two cases it is difficult to define an educator as such. In the first case, we can consider that each person in the group that tells, recovers and/or organises the histories is an educator. The teaching materials published—two books, a DVD and some other papers—are a collective work, and the concept of memories is, in fact, collective.

Finally, in the case of the river I do not consider there to be an educator. The work was undertaken for a very diverse group of people that, in this case too, can be considered as a kind of collective educator.

In short, I think that these non-traditional spaces of adult education are characterised by the breaking of some borders. In first place, the frontier between knowledge, which is only useful for attaining a diploma, compared to a knowledge coming from the people's desire and curiosity to learn something really useful to their life. Second, these non-traditional spaces are based on the collective production of knowledge. There is no border between the producer and the owner of the knowledge. The last breach is, in my opinion, related to the educator's role, which obliges us to rethink our own role.

As Williams (1961/1993) stated, when addressed to WEA tutors, 'It has been a job, but always, as for most tutors, it has been more than a job' (p. 222). Is in this sense that I think that we have to rethink the role of the educator and consider, paraphrasing Williams (1961/1993) that

The W.E.A [the liberating practices of adult education] represents a vital tradition which we are always in danger of losing and which we can never afford to lose. The organisation of social justice and the institutions of democracy are worth working for, in the society as a whole. (p. 223)

Finally, my last conclusion tries to provide an answer to the question: what could be the contributions of this article to define non-traditional participants in adult education? I have studied participation rates in adult education in Spain (Lucio-Villegas, 2012). One of the conclusions of this research was that participation rates were very low—at the moment of publishing the paper but also now. The change that occurred in 2010 is more related to the way of holding people accountable, than to the people's interest in taking part in adult education activities. Why are people not interested in taking part in adult education? The answer to this question is, from my point of view, an answer to the previous one.

Adult education today is only focused on the development of skills and competences addressed to the labour market; this is the seal that policies and practices of Lifelong Learning want to mark in adult education. But,

Out of the narrow walls of the school we see a new hope rising. Learners, in a true Freirean approach, are organising for the return of the older practice of adult education that is appropriate for their needs and wishes. (Engesbak, Tønseth, Fragoso, & Lucio-Villegas, 2010, p. 631)

At the end of the day, it is possible to say that the foundations for organising learning processes with adults lie in the curiosity that derives from the surrounding environment as Freire said (e.g., Freire, 1965, 1970). This curiosity is also related to the possibility to create knowledge that enables people to understand and transform their daily life together with others, as it is one of the basis of Participatory Research (Fals-Borda, 1986; Hall, 2001).

In the cases described above it is possible to find individuals that, joined with others, are looking to find creative responses to their curiosity and desire to learn. As Gelpi (2004) stated: ‘Adult education is made hierarchical and, related to production, there are adults without any right to formal education. Fortunately, these adults, non-integrated, hold creative responses and look for a self-education by their own resources’ (p. 147). Unfortunately, in this age of Lifelong Learning, the ancient search for the truth has transformed the searchers in non-traditional participants in educational processes.

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