



Reconstructing Teacher Identity: A Narrative Journey through the Life of Angelito

Reconstruyendo la Identidad Docente: Un Viaje Narrativo a través de la Vida de Angelito

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ABSTRACT

This document presents the experience of the research carried out during the elaboration of the Final Postdoctoral Work in Social Research, carried out at the Koinonia Foundation. The focus of this work is on the reconstruction of the life story of Ángel Chalán, a teacher and researcher belonging to the Saraguro people. The main objective is to explore the influences of personal, social, family, political, cultural and economic aspects on his personal, professional and family development. The reconstruction of Ángel's identity involves rediscovering, through his past, the present meaning, where memories of lived experiences in the form of emotions, feelings, deeds and words shape his identity as an individual and educator.

Descriptors: ethnic identity; education and culture; educational anthropology. (Source: UNESCO Thesaurus).

RESUMEN

Este documento expone la vivencia de la investigación llevada a cabo durante la elaboración del Trabajo Final de Posdoctorado en Investigación Social, realizado en la Fundación Koinonia. El enfoque de este trabajo se centra en la reconstrucción de la historia de vida de Ángel Chalán, un maestro e investigador perteneciente al pueblo Saraguro. El objetivo principal es explorar las influencias de aspectos personales, sociales, familiares, políticos, culturales y económicos en su desarrollo personal, profesional y familiar. La reconstrucción de la identidad de Ángel implica redescubrir, a través de su pasado, el significado presente, donde los recuerdos de experiencias vividas en forma de emociones, sentimientos, hechos y palabras dan forma a su identidad como individuo y educador.

Descriptorios: identidad étnica; educación y cultura; antropología educativa. (Fuente: Tesoro UNESCO).

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Research articles section



INTRODUCTION

The socio-political environment that contextualises Angelito's narrative reflects the situation of a country immersed in a post-colonial phase, where the predominant slogan in the classroom was to observe, listen and remain silent. Angelito was born on 6 October 1963 in the midst of the military junta, where he experienced misery in one of the darkest periods of Ecuador's history. Influenced by the submission imposed by the military regime, Ángel was forced to face the fear of reprisals in a society that did not tolerate behaviour outside unconditional obedience. As a result, his life is replete with stories of racial discrimination, as well as the machismo and ethnocentrism that deeply characterised that era.

Despite experiencing difficult situations, the individual's skill in his role as a teacher, creating small imaginary worlds through literature, which eventually became his solace, refuge and vocation, offered students the opportunity to cultivate themselves as critical individuals with the ability to express opinions and reflect. This implies recognising the value and dedication of an educator to teaching and to his or her students.

According to Rivas & Herrera (2009, p. 23), identity formation develops in connection with the experiences that each individual acquires in specific environments and institutions. Therefore, analysing Ángel's teaching identity through the shared environments and the dialogue that emerges in them provides the opportunity to understand that his account is "influenced and shaped by and in historical, social and political contexts" (Leite, 2011, p. 139). In this way, exploring personal experiences in the various facets that make up the researcher's teaching practice involves revealing the processes of adaptation and change throughout his career as a Language and Literature teacher, in accordance with the claims of Rivas & Herrera (2009) and Leite (2011).

This paper presents the experience of the research carried out during the elaboration of the Postdoctoral Final Project in Social Research, carried out at the Koinonia Foundation. The main objective is to explore the influences of personal, social, family, political, cultural and economic aspects on their personal, professional and family development.

METHOD

In the 1970s, the transition to the "Hermeneutic Turn" in the social sciences represented a shift from a positivist perspective in research to an interpretative perspective. In this new perspective, actors become the central focus of the research as they are seen as experts of their environment, their lives and the organisations in which they are involved (Marquez, 2011, p. 117).

The research adopts an interpretive narrative perspective, seeking to understand "social phenomena from the actor's own perspective (...) The relevant reality is that which people perceive as significant" (Douglas, 1970, as cited in Taylor & Bogdan, 1987, pp. 15-16). The use of narrative as a tool for recounting and sharing experiences plays a crucial role in this study, as it provides an equitable and democratic platform between the researcher and the participant, strengthening trust in the interview process (Ibanez, 2020).

In this vein, (Clandini et al. 1995, as cited in Mattos-Medina et al. 2013, p. 256) argues that narrative enables the most authentic manifestation of the thoughts, emotions and aspirations of the people involved in the research. By examining participants' contributions, the narrative approach enables the analysis of discourse from a unique perspective, recognising it as a narrative inherently linked to life, experiences and experiences.

In this study, it is essential that the individual who is the subject of the research is seen as an integral part of the process. Following Márquez's (2011, p. 129) vision, narrative, rather than conceiving of people solely as performers in the work and daily environment, or from a researcher-researched hierarchy, provides the possibility for the research subject to take the lead role in their own story.



It is essential to approach the teacher's reality through narrative, since, according to Connelly & Clandinin (1995, p. 11), "the use of narrative in educational research is grounded in the idea that human beings are storytellers, living individually and collectively narrated lives". The integration of narrative into research makes it possible to explore Angel's past experiences from a unique perspective. In other words, the narrative reveals events or situations experienced by the person under investigation that, from the present, acquire different meanings depending on the context in which they are found.

Early stages of the research

The relationship with Ángel began at the National University of Loja, where we shared teaching and research experiences. The initial invitation and established agreements underline the importance of collaboration and ethics in research. The continuous interaction and dialogue between the researchers and the participant is fundamental in research that focuses on individual experiences.

We met Ángel in the teaching profession, where we shared many experiences in the classroom and in research. Ángel won the merit-based competitive examination for the position of full professor in the interculturality department of the Basic Education degree course. Listening to the narration of his trajectory, which spans from childhood to his current role as a teacher of Language and Literature and interculturality, we realise that he has a deep knowledge of Andean wisdom. His wealth of teaching experience has the potential to be transformed into a narrative life story, characterised by an irreverent and disruptive perspective.

At the start of the research, the first step involved sharing with the interviewee the letter of invitation, which detailed the terms and objectives of the study. The letter addressed aspects such as the tools used to collect information, especially the in-depth interviews, the confidentiality of the data obtained, the agreement of availability for future meetings, the use of the digital recorder during the interviews, and the commitment of the researchers to provide the participant with the work resulting from the transcriptions, using the collaborative platform Drive. This would allow the researcher to make changes, modifications, additions or transformations to the written information.

In addition, the participant was given the possibility of preserving the anonymity of his or her identity. This research method, which gives a voice to the subject under study, is based on a continuous negotiation between researchers and participants, this exchange being the centrepiece of the process. The methodological journey requires reflective and shared agreements that guide the researchers' decisions. In this sense, as Mattos-Medina et al. (2011, p. 101) point out, "Research focused on the thoughts, emotions, experiences and behaviours of the individuals involved motivates us to forge collaborative connections and ethical commitments".

Role of researchers

Scholars who adopt the narrative perspective focus on describing and recounting lives, collecting stories and elaborating accounts of experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1995, p. 12). At the beginning of the research, reflections on how the interviews were to unfold and the expectations we placed on ourselves as researchers generated nervousness in the first session. Angel's office, offered as a space of trust, was initially unfamiliar and raised the possibility of invading his privacy, thus affecting the research approach. The first decision as researchers was to recognise that this space was comfortable and safe for Angel, who chose it as a setting to share his life "for the first time". This made us understand our position as researchers, recognising that our work would consist of being at Ángel's service. The ability to adapt to diverse contexts proved to be a key part of the narrative research.

During the days spent in Angel's office, conducting the interviews, we experienced a significant revelation. In particular, we discovered the ability to connect empathetically with him and the narratives he shared. As we listened to him, various feelings surfaced in us, and we considered the possibility that his experiences were having a dazzling impact, clouding our perception of



the reality he was telling us. Reflecting on this aspect, we strived to prevent our fascination and admiration for Angel from diverting the focus of our research. In this sense, the reflections of (Mattos-Medina et al. 2011) lead us to consider some fundamental characteristics for researchers.

Sensitivity, derived from the active interaction of the researcher in the environment; adaptability, which facilitates a more complete immersion in the situation, allowing the simultaneous management of different types of data and the ability to adjust behaviour and intuitions in the face of new demands or changes in the environment; and the ability to observe holistically, using all capacities (affective, physical, emotional, ideological, etc.), are essential elements for the researcher. These qualities collaborate from a global perspective to integrate the emerging knowledge in the research context (Mattos-Medina et al. 2011, p. 105).

In this way, we sought to balance the emotions experienced during the interviews with the structure outlined in the methodological process. Simultaneously, while absorbing Ángel's account, we took concise notes in a notebook, detailing his reactions when addressing aspects related to his personal, family and professional life. These concise and succinct notes recorded the impressions and feelings he expressed during the talk. At the end of each interview, these notes helped us to recount the experience and enabled reflection on the development of both the researchers and the interviewee. Over time, greater comfort was evident on Angel's part, and his account became more profound (Mattos-Medina et al. 2011, p. 105).

We also faced concerns during the interview transcription procedure. By listening to our own voices, the questions asked and, especially, the moments when we intervened and interrupted the story, we identified aspects to take into account for future interviews. From these reflections, we recognised the importance of allowing space for the silences inherent in the dynamic between interviewers and interviewee. We also recognised the importance of allowing the interviewee to articulate his or her thoughts without substantial interruptions, and of minimising the importance of comments that, from our perspective as researchers, might divert the narrative towards different stories, possibly related to our own personal experiences. We also understood that the questions posed by the researchers should emerge from the interviewee's account and not so much from an outline previously elaborated by us as researchers (Mattos-Medina et al. 2011, p. 105).

A fundamental choice in this procedure has been to determine how to end the interviews. Despite the fascination that Angel's story generated in us, the commitment to finish the Postdoctoral project within specific deadlines led us to communicate that the conclusion of the interviews took place during a fourth meeting (Mattos-Medina et al. 2011, p. 101).

Experiencing the in-depth interviews

The methodological approach has focused on the execution of in-depth interviews. According to Prados et al. (2012), the in-depth interview is presented as an arena for the exchange of reciprocal knowledge, where relationships explain and argue the construction of subjectivities that are intertwined in the practice of knowledge and the understanding of professional contexts (p. 149). The relationship established between the participant and researchers has created several encounters, fostering an atmosphere of listening, sensitivity, empathy and respect. These interviews have provided the opportunity to explore aspects of Angel's life that contribute to understanding the historical and social environment in which she existed and developed personally and professionally.

The interview, conceived as a conversational space and as a possibility to create and recreate a dialogue, has been the central component of the methodological process. In turn, this process articulates and reflects a fundamental epistemological and ethical vision in working with biographical accounts (Leite, 2011, p. 183).

At the beginning of the research, the completion of the interviews was agreed with Angel according to the requirements of the study. As previously mentioned, all meetings took place in



the interviewee's office, where he carries out his academic work, attends to students at the university and immerses himself in reading about intercultural issues.

The first interview began with general questions about Angel's childhood and family. During this session, questions were asked cautiously. As the conversation progressed, aspects were revealed that Ángel had never shared before, even with his closest circle; feelings and emotions emerged that surprised both Ángel and us. This first meeting was very substantial in content, addressing topics such as his childhood, his great-grandfather, his grandfather and his father, his experience in an indigenist school, his grandfather's influence on his life, his relationship with his teacher, memories of problems of fear and loneliness in his school years, and the evocation of past feelings.

From this interview, more specific aspects could be identified for further research. This guided the process towards the stated goal, always bearing in mind that the interviews were opportunities to establish relationships and that initially unanticipated themes might emerge in the conversations. LeCompte & Goetz (1988) suggest that an interview with a "conversational approach that is close and comfortable for the interviewees is one that fosters the trust and naturalness necessary for the information obtained to be detailed, refined and valid" (p.145). This provided the possibility to explore issues that Angel focused his attention on and considered most relevant.

During our meetings, it was essential that Angel shared aspects of both his close and distant environment. This enabled the exploration of themes related to observation, allowing us to nuance his account with the emotions expressed at any given moment. As well as providing accurate and direct information about his experience, he contributed additional bodily testimony that significantly enriched the connection to the narrative. Taylor & Bogdan (1987) describe participant observation as "research that involves social interaction between researcher and informants, and during which data are collected in a systematic and non-intrusive manner" (pp. 31-32).

Reviewing the transcript of the interviews, we can affirm that according to his expressions, Angel experienced a racial imposition that left a significant imprint on his life. However, he shows considerable sensitivity and consideration for the people who have shared his life, even in moments of helplessness or fragility, both in his personal and family life.

It was an indigenous school Celina Espinoza, it was a school only for indigenous people run by Franciscan priests... when we spoke in Quechua, they would bully us when a word came out or when they crossed us; you guys have to civilise yourselves. Ángel, April 2022.

During the interviews, it is also possible to identify the interviewee's own great imagination and sense of humour, as well as the way in which these aspects are reflected in his approach to everyday life.

(...) and there everybody wanted to copy during the exams, everybody was behind me to copy, the teacher once, I remember, the teacher, so that they wouldn't copy me with some big newspapers from El Universo, I think it was, she made me bend down to write in the exam and she covered me with newspaper, I felt very lonely in my world. Angel, April 2022.

The in-depth interview, which was spread over four sessions totalling 6.5 hours, together with the field diary and the collection of other materials provided by the participant, such as photographs, letters and written narratives about their professional career in the classroom, involves "immersing ourselves in the meaning and sense of the story, the life and experience of the person" (Márquez, 2012, p. 123). The notes made during the interview process have also been a valuable source of information, in line with (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2001)'s perspective on field notes.

After completing the four interviews, we continued to visit Angel's office. Each visit brought a warm welcome from him. These meetings were instrumental in organising, together with Ángel,



the information and documentation arising from his teaching experience. There is a possibility that this work could be extended in the future through an undergraduate or postgraduate thesis. For this reason, the additional information gathered could become valuable resources for further research into the life story of our protagonist. These interactions continue to enable us to exchange experiences, thus building a connection that transcends the conventional researcher-participant relationship. In this group, we have forged a relationship based on collaboration and friendship.

Transcription of the interviews

The transcription stage is a challenge given the density and length of the hours recorded during the interviews. This process required constant attention and reflection as we converted the recording into text.

Angel had access to the real-time transcription of all the interviews through the document stored in the cloud. When he reviewed the transcripts and noticed that the literalness of the recordings was respected, one of the first drawbacks emerged. Since he is a Language and Literature teacher and is used to precise language, he contacted us to offer to conduct the interviews again.

In response, we detailed some of the methodological procedures used in the narrative research and how we would approach the information collected. We also shared our doubts and approach as novice social researchers. We communicated our intention to turn the interviews into a shared dialogue, emphasising that our role would be to explore and organise the information obtained. We also shared with him the result of previous work using in-depth interviews to dispel any doubts that might persist after the explanation.

RESULTS

This methodological process of the research is still open-ended, so the results will take time to emerge. However, considerations related to our experience as social researchers have already emerged, which we consider crucial to understanding decision-making regarding the results from a researcher's perspective.

After completing the transcription of the interviews, we have started the corresponding analysis process. Thematisation as part of this process is gradually revealing some fundamental themes that constitute Ángel's life story. According to Leite (2011), thematisation involves identifying "elements, themes, aspects" (p. 197).

One of the themes addressed focuses on Ángel's family, including his role and position in it. However, one aspect that causes him concern and influences his trajectory is the relationship with his grandfather, his aunt and his parents, as well as the feelings associated with this experience.

(...) I was practically my grandfather's secretary That's where I learned, how I learned to knit, he died, I stayed there for a while, until I was 12 years old, I went to live with my parents but when my grandfather died I stayed with my aunt and my single aunt, she was 48 years old and we lived happily, the two of us; with my aunt, but when my aunt was 48 she got the idea of getting married, she looked for a partner so it seemed to me that the sky was falling on my head, I became desperate and everything and then my father and my mother appeared and said don't cry, she is your aunt, she has the right to have her partner, we are your parents, come on, they took me to the house, and that's how I started living with my parents. (...) Angel, April 2022.

One of the most interesting facets of his love of reading came when he was invited to join the Piarist seminary in order to "fulfil his religious vocation" (...).

(...) the former rector of the school where I graduated meets me, he was a very good friend of mine and says what do you do, Ángel Polibio, I want to go to Cuenca, if you would like to go with us to Cuenca, because now in October we are going to open the



first Piarist seminary for a house of formation for Piarist priests and we have seen you interested and everything, I put the savings I had there in the convent in the hope that they would support me and everything, and that was the pact, I put my savings and my things. (...).

(...) I had everything and I liked to read more history and within history I started to look for things, that's where I got to know for the first time for example the works of Inca Garcilaso de la Vega by Guamán Poma de Ayala, like the story of Túpac Amaru by Fernando Daquilema and in all those stories of blood and abuse there were priests involved, then everything collapsed; all the imagination I had, to live, to live as an accomplice in that world, no, that's not mine and I did not know how to get out, I felt trapped there (...). Angel, April 2022.

After leaving the seminary, he finds his space and completes his degree in language and literature. The experience as a teacher in his first assignment, a Franciscan Brothers' school in Saraguro, leaves a significant mark on his professional career. Another important milestone was his work in the Zonal Directorate of Intercultural Bilingual Education in Zone 7, where he gave a profound meaning to his vocation. His experiences shed light on intercultural, socio-political and other aspects of the environment in which he carried out his teaching work. They show how she has had to adapt and transform her educational thinking, teaching practices, as well as her research and investigation in language and literature and interculturality. They also reveal his authentic passion for the rescue of ancestral identity, participating actively in the National Academy of History, Loja Chapter, and as a teacher at the National University of Loja. In teaching, she sees a way of approaching the truth to share it through this space of communication, expression and learning, enjoying it with her students.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

After completing the in-depth interviews, we are now immersed in the process of thematisation, which involves a thorough analysis of the corresponding transcripts. This procedure is dynamic and emergent, since, by repeatedly reviewing the interviews and field notes, new themes emerge that require investigation, connection and deepening.

Progressively, the successive reflections, guided by Ángel's expressions, are reconstructing the interviewee's teaching identity, this being the central purpose and objective of the research. At the same time, this process is creating a relational space for learning, where the link generated during the encounter connects us as researchers with Ángel's experiences. This makes it possible to reinterpret, in the future, the social, political, cultural and personal elements that give meaning and give sense to the teaching work from a social need to unite and not to separate, from a natural need to build that true interculturality and harmony, seeking to live the here and now from a past that serves as a reference to propose a future in community in diversity, respecting the cosmic principles of complementarity, respecting individuality, thus influencing the construction of a world based on personal life history rather than on hegemonic educational models and discourses.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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