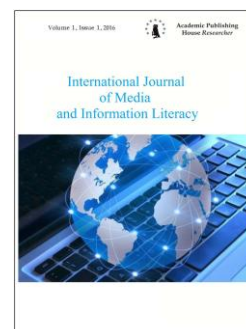


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Published in the Russian Federation
International Journal of Media and Information Literacy
Has been issued since 2016.
E-ISSN: 2500-1051
Vol. 1, Is. 1, pp. 4–10, 2016

DOI: 10.13187/ijmil.2016.1.4
www.ejournal46.com



Life Story as a Research Technique for Evaluating Formation Processes in Media Literacy for Social Change. Approaching a Case of Success of the Educational Project "Training, Education and Innovation in Audiovisual Media to Raise Awareness of Hunger in Nicaragua"

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Abstract

Life story has been repeatedly resorted as a research technique in the field of social sciences. The data provided of life stories in the context of the assessment of how learning in media literacy could serve to improve the living condition of an individual, are especially interesting. This paper presents a first scientific approach to study of a success story in media literacy through education project "Training, education and innovation in audiovisual media to raise awareness of hunger in Nicaragua (Nica Project)". It shows how narrative knowledge is created and constructed through the story Oduber Guevara – one of young people without resources who has participated in this formation- tells about his lived and trained experiences, and explores the concept of 'narrative knowing' (Bruner, 1986). Information provided by his live story has been completed with other investigative techniques, which add data about the relevance, appropriateness and necessity to creation of a model of media literacy focused on social change in order to promote empowerment and employability in poor communities.

Keywords: Life story, media literacy, education, social change, case study, audiovisual media, qualitative method, Nicaraguan, training, empowerment.

1. Introduction

From August 2011 to February 2014, with the support and funding of the University of Salamanca (USAL), the regional government of Castilla y León (Spain), the non-profit organization Action Against Hunger-Central America (ACH-C), the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), and the collaboration of Nicaraguan official institutions, the project "Training, education and innovation in audiovisual media to raise awareness of hunger in Nicaragua (Nica Project)" took place. This initiative was integrated in a European Union grant, within the Food Security Thematic Program Europe Aid. The main aim was to promote training in audiovisual and media literacy for rural and urban young poor people. The training focused on proficiency of video production and editing, networks, radio and graphic editing with accessible audiovisual technology, available to the communities. The goal was that they achieved communication abilities and knowledge about hunger and food security, using innovative methodologies to strengthen local institutions and its technical capacities, and sensitize public

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opinion towards articulate synergisms between local actions and public policies for social change. This project acted in the interests of the Nicaraguan youth without financial resources, in urban as well as rural areas, with the aim of eradicating audiovisual and media illiteracy, using accessible technologies, becoming aware of food security, and thanks to this specialized training, becoming agents of local development and improving their career prospects. (Camarero, Cuadrado y Herrero, 2015)

One of the main objectives of media education is, in fact, to teach the audience not only to analyze media texts of various types and genres, but also to understand the mechanisms of their construction and functioning in society (Fedorov and Levitskaya, 2015: 115). This training was essentially carried out in intensive courses in Managua, which involved 30 participants in different phases, selected by local partner institutions through cover letters. Young people from 17 to 21 years old, most of whom came from very poor families, told the purposes whereby they wanted to be accepted in this training. Once different phases of education project were finished -including their participation in the production and shooting of a documentary about their experiences-, in April 2014 we carried out online interviews in order to analyze this project such a case study, and evaluate the degree of satisfaction of both participants and institutions responsible and their point of view about the need to implement new training projects in media literacy for social aimed to new groups of young people.

However, from our point of view, these documents are partial data because it does not allow properly assess the scope of an educational project as Nica Project and its possible influence on the social and professional change of individuals who participated in. Neither does it acknowledge the importance of this training as a pivotal moment between the starting point of these young people and its current social and economic situation as well as their current knowledge in media literacy. So we also decided using the quantitative point of view of life story as a version of narrative inquiry. This paper shows the first data about this case of training in media literacy for social change after inclusion of Oduber Guevara's life story. We think that life story is a relevant and appropriate methodology so this kind of knowledge construction invites us to pay attention to the details of local stories and the contexts in which they are embedded (Etherington, 2009: 225), and it help us to assess to what extend a particular educational process may be essential for promoting social change.

2. Materials and Method

For analyzing the scope of Nica Project in relation with increasing or not of the chances of young people to finding a better job, improving their economic status and involving in social change through their knowledge in media literacy, we use different instruments, materials and data.

Firstly, the case of study was driven through 32 online interviews, 21 from participants and 11 from institutions. The participant's interview had 39 questions, and the institution's interview had 31. These in-depth interviews used closed and open questions to valorize and organize the obtained results. We carried out these interviews in November 2014.

In a second phase, we used documents -in particular life story and cover letter-, related to Oduber Guevara, one of the participant of Nica Project. Oduber Guevara was 21 years old when he participated in different phases of Nica Project from 2011 to 2013. Currently, he works as director of Communication of Radio Sandino and director of contents of CCEN Online Radio (Cultural Center of Spain in Nicaraguan Radio), and production chief of Canal 6 TV. After analysing his social and economic starting point before this training, and analysing his currently situation we can considerate Oduber a case of success.

We conducted a conversation with him, literally recorded and transcribed it. This conversation took place in March 2016. The date was not chosen at random; Oduber had finished his training in Nica Project two years ago, and at this moment we could analyse if this training period had a significant relevance, medium and long term, on his social change, improvement of his employment and economic status and his ability in media literacy.

Subsequently, data was crossed and categorized for carrying out the biographical text. For this analysis of these data, we used NVivo, a qualitative treatment software. This software

facilitates the issues' organization, the discovery of recurring elements in the story and the creation of a categorization scheme for a socio-educational analysis.

3. Discussion

Certainly, first research results presented in this paper show, mainly, a particular analysis of data obtained of Oduber Guevara's life story, and therefore it would be essentially a qualitative biographical methodology, which allows to can address complex individual problems and to go deeper into the past and previous experiences as key factors in the analysis of the present and the current circumstances of individuals. As Bertaux (1981) says, biographical research is ideal for understanding personal experiences in poverty, oppression or exclusion. Understanding, on his own point of view, how the participation in Nica Project has influenced on Oduber's life, and also analyzing the information from online interviews from both participant and institution, we obtain data that allow us to make a first assessment of the results of this project, the level of satisfaction of participants and institutions and its effectiveness linked to social change (media literacy, employment, knowledge of general problems of Nicaraguan, etc.)

When we talk about life stories, we highlight this is one of descriptive research methods more pure and powerful to explore links between people and the world around (Cordero, 2012). Traditionally, life stories have been applied to disciplines such as Sociology, Social Psychology, Antropology or Psicothepary; and, according with the research focus, structure and treatment can vary. When we talk about life story as a research technique addressed to understand the individual evolutive process after receiving, as in this case, a specific training, the structure of story life has to be essentially open to allow sujet's creativity and subjetivity to add data to the biographic story. In that order, Oduber's life story has been based on a procedure wich consisted in evoke and structure his life memories from a subjetive point of view, from his own look. We were interested in rebuilding his present not only with objective data, such as dates and places, but, specially, searching for information related to his ideas, values, projects, social relationships, etc.

In the case of Oduber, life history, and qualitative research seeks to discover the dialectical relationship, everyday negotiation between aspiration and possibility, between utopia and reality, between creation and acceptance; therefore, its data comes from everyday life, common sense, explanations and reconstructions that the individual makes to live and survive daily (Ruiz Olabuénaga, 2012). In short, and as Etherington (2009: 225) says, life stories allow us to bring together many layers of understandings about a person, about their culture, and about how they have created change in their lives: we hear people struggle to make sense of the past and create meanings as they tell and/or 'show' us what happened to them.

According to Brine (2006), individuals are not in a process of precise and passive reproduction but resist and answer the conditions of their experience. The individual is therefore an active agent, who is able to build its identity with a logic that allows us to better understand the sociocultural space which is part element.

So this research analyzes the scope of Nica Project as a possible model in the training process in Media Literacy for social change, and its ability to replicate in other individuals and groups of young people without resources and use in this study of history life as a research technique for obtaining relevant data, taking into account the personal experience and the positive socio-economic evolution that transcends this first analysis Oduber Guevara 's life story.

Oduber's life story in relation with his participation in Nica Project. Analysis of first results

Oduber's life story is also a document of a well-known person to one of researcher of this paper, who was also director and teacher of Nica Project and filmmaker of the associated documentary. Over this period between training and interview, their relationship are be continued, in the same way as it was with other young people of this project. A training like that, whom main goal is to teach for empowerment and improvement of social and economic condition of participants, must be monitoring over a long period. We needed to know the evolution or involution of participants because these data are essential if we wanted to repeat this training with success. Richardson (2000) reminds us that context for sharing stories does not need to be limited

to face-to face meetings. In this case, we believe this relationship have been positive for this research in the context of the creation a relaxing and free atmosphere in Oduber's interview.

Oduber Guevara is 25 years old, he is just married and he works for Radio Sandino, Radio CCEN and Canal 6 TV in Nicaraguan when we interviewed him. At the same time, he is finishing Management Communication studies. It is very common to be a moonlighter in this country, where most of jobs are part-time or with low salary. He was born in his mother's home in Somoto, capital of department of Madriz, in Northern Nicaraguan, after the end of war and Sandinista revolution. It was a very hard period; people returned from the line of battle, there were no work and a lot of villages and cities were destroyed. He is the second of five brothers and sisters. His parents came from Las Sabanas (mother), and Telpaneca (father) two very little and poor rural communities of Madriz.

Certainly, his childhood was very poor, almost without economic resources. His father, after fighting in the revolution and coming back home, constantly changed work –precarious jobs–, and passed many periods far from his family. Her mother has always worked in a plant nursery, and all of her children helped her after the school. Despite this poverty, Oduber has not a negative feeling about this period of his life; on the contrary, he is very proud of his origins and the effort of his family to give him an education:

They came to Somoto ... with the goal of building a new life...basically I worked at home and worked at school, with lessons ... I worked in the morning... always studied the late shift ... in the morning, we basically dedicated ourselves to be with her, at plant nursery ... I studied from 12 am to 5 pm, and when I came back home, did homework ... weekends worked with them ... then, there was a time when my dad lost his work, he moved to work in Managua, as security guard ... he was long time out of home ...

... With 15 years old I had to start working to study in the university, I had to work to pay it ... so it was very difficult. My older brother had already happened it, I knew his experience ... because we had no the chance to study or have money, then we always are behind in our studies...*

... That feeling that dad and mom are proud of me, and tomorrow will help them... I know that chances I have had with this, they did not have ... always you want to do anything else for your parents...

We can noted that Oduber has not any trauma about his childhood or poverty situation, and he does not feel any resentment of injustice about his personal social and economic previous situation. He felt loved by his family and he appreciated the few chances they gave him. In fact, positive experience in his early years, make him to see all of circumstances of his life (including his participation in Nica Project), as a chance to seize:

I thought if only we approved... we had thought that Somoto is 216 kilometers from Managua, is a little town with only eleven districts, Managua is much larger city ... one comes there with fear ... but it was a chance ... that a kid from 216 kilometers away, among many people, could be in this process of training, and learned with professional people. So that fear was passed ... the feeling of this situation, that we could participate in that process, was larger. Then we took up the challenge...

... Then we applied, a huge number of people around the country applied too... I always wanted to take up the challenge no matter how big it was, working in community radios, and also work on local television and then work on a national radio, I always take up the challenges...

... I've always preferred to get out of the comfort zone, I never liked to say that and I just did it all ... then in the future, my first goal is to finish, because I am very close to finish my degree in business and then continue my training ...

* In Nicaraguan, university system is not comparable with others countries. People can enroll with 15-16 years old, and most of these institutions have not a quality system of evaluation, so the level of teaching and research are very low. Popularly, Nicaraguan people calls these kind of institutions as “garage universities”.

... Dreams could be met because there have always been people who have pushed one in a race and so dreams can be achieved. I think there are many good people who can help us to build our dreams, and dreams are not built for one, so you have to be clear, dreams are built for all, dreams y are built giving ... dreams are built with effort, with people who give you the tools to fight and go in your life, basically that. You have to take every opportunity, and success is achieved from failure to failure and I think that will continue going through many challenges and many barriers...

... Maybe some people could think it is as any one project (Project Nica) ... but really, its value is what it means for the people's lives. And this experience I have personally lived was nothing of this, for me it was a transformation.

For Oduber, Nica project was a chance to change his reality and improve his social economic and professional situation, but not only; during the interview, he referred to the importance of using his knowledges and skills in media literacy, acquired with Nica project, to promote empowerment and social change, demonstrating in this way his sense of belonging to his community. In addition, he spoke about the need for repeating this kind of training in new young people generations:

Basically, it is not the same that a single individual wants to transmit a message that ... when we explain things in an audiovisual way. I have always believed that through the screen one can transform messages in magic and if it's magic goes even further ... to share ideas through television, through audiovisual ...

... we have the same goal: helping and sending a message to the people. And the messages that we usually send are negative, and conversely, constructive messages and this is how I think you can make changes ... I think we have contributed, everyone involved, teachers and students, kids that even now engaged in communication, I think that's the most important thing: people who have your same goal and that if we joined we could do it. I believe it was shown, it has been achieved and we will be able to continue to achieve, I'm sure ...

... We did the training, which was necessary for us to work video from a traditional way, why? Because we were just landed and it was the way in which we could do it. What I would change? Well, I think it should not be a project for one year, two years, but should always be ... new generations of kids have this dream of forming ... even we can tell them that we were young like them and we have achieved our dreams thanks to Nica Project ... and to be decisive to change the life of a kid and the communication of a country.

... Although we were from communities, neighborhoods, very poor families, we could made a training ... we have been many us who have followed this way and I think that we will continue for a long. I think what we should do is to promote a genre of educational spaces, spaces that transform and contribute to society ... using tools like this that can reach the people, educate people in a positive sense.... there are young people who are showed all these social problems ... making them part of the message, because they suffer these kind of social problems ...

... I believe there is a lot to do and contribute to society ... and then I have a goal that I'm sure I can accomplish that is to teach communication and not here in Managua, no, I want to do there, in the northern of the country, Somoto, Esteli, there are very few opportunities to study communication there is very little space, but I think I have a future and that if I put my mind I will succeed. Creating my own space or regional media ... that it may be self-sustaining and may generate opportunities in kids...

... There are many kids and girls in communities, young people of those generations that technology ... radio, layout, all about new technologies ... the need to generate that kind of content. So I think that Nica Project is basically essential...

... Making actions that give our people, if we form the kids in communication, we may make products with ever increasing technical requirements and quality... I also think that there are people working this kind of social issues and I think we have to move to this level to communicate in a clearer way and with better results.

...I could ensure that the issue of communication is essential to give a message to our peoples, municipalities ... when they see us, to be folk. So when you see a kid in a poor neighborhood in a communication media, the message is we have produced and we succeeded.

In his interview, Oduber show himself as a person with a deep feeling of his role in Nicaraguan society. His story make sense of his experience, but also the present and future experience of others kids like him: poor, without few economic resources, in marginal neighbors or villages, but full of dreams. He based his point of view in what he has experimented, media literacy as the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts (Buckingham, 2007: 44). Access thus includes the skills and competencies needed to locate media content, using the available technologies for social change. Maybe this is a so much positive view of real range of possibilities for young people in Nicaraguan, but it has the value of being his particular point of view. In this sense, life story, as qualitative methodology seeks to capture such a process of interpretation, seeing things from the perspective of people who are continually interpreted and defined themselves in different situations (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). Therefore, qualitative methodology allows working reality from a humanist perspective and trying to understand human behavior from the framework of people own.

4. Results

The results obtained from the analysis of the participant's in-depth online interviews largely confirm some of the Oduber's statements, especially those related to improvement of personal and family economic situation of participants. These results have been subject to a first analysis by Camarero et al. (2015). For instance, some of the results obtained from these interviews indicate that:

- 90.4 % of interviewees are currently working. Of these, 80.9% work in a job related to communication and/or media.
- 71.4 % opine that the training has helped to find a better job.
- 66.6 % believe that the training has also helped to improve their family lives.
- 76.1 % think that the media literacy achieved has helped them to know the reality of their own country.
- 100 % of interviewees believe that training can help to improve the lives of their fellow citizens and neighbors.
- 81.8 % of the interviewed institutions opine that training in media literacy and audiovisual technology can help to improve the economy of development.
- 100 % of the institutions believe that this training model is able to be applied to other poor communities or countries.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we add to these results the first analysis of data of a qualitative technique. Life stories make up a phenomenological perspective, which displays human behavior, what people say and do, as the product of the definition of their own world. But we must be aware that when we speak about media literacy, even when people speaks about their own experiences, it is important to recognize the continuing existence of a 'digital divide' in young people's access to technology. The gap between the technology rich and the technology poor is apparent at a global level, yet it also persists in many of the apparently 'wired up' regions of the world. (Buckingham, 2007: 50) These differences are also important in relation with how young people take up the chance to produce media products as video, podcast, layout or digital text for social change. Training in poor communities about media literacy must adapt it to the real circumstances of classroom groups; it is not only a problem of access of technology, we must know the need of communication of young people, the social environment and the use of media in their communities. Media Literacy is shaping up to be an emerging topic at the intersection of field of communication and education (Hobbs, 2005).

This first approach to analyze of Oduber's life story, together with the analyze of online interviews as well as the data collected on field in Nicaragua, confirm that Nica project could

become the base of the creation of a model of media literacy focused on social change in order to promote empowerment and employability in poor communities is possible. The case study observes the main bases of building a model of media literacy; in summary, thanks to specific training of video, radio, networks and layout editing for social change, these young Nicaraguan people have become spokespersons for their communities, empowering them to develop future communication projects and greatly improving the socioeconomic status of them and their families. (Camarero et al., 2015). The use of life story as a research technique in this study, show us a particular perspective of importance of media literacy training for an individual. Events from the past take on extraordinary meaning over time as their significance in the overall story of our lives and times is realised, depending on the stocks of knowledge we have available to us at any one time, and this changes as we mature and learn (Etherington, 2009: 232).

Life story in this research is a really useful skill in the design of programs to training the use of technology and media literacy, which is based on psycho-educational settings that encourage young people to use it in a positive way, and among other aspects, there is the personal contribution of those who will want to develop their interactive projects, yet as an opportunity to make the world a better place.

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