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'Because Sometimes Your Failures Can Also Teach You Certain Skills': Lecturer and Student Perceptions of Employability Skills at a Transnational University

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Abstract

This exploratory study investigates lecturers' and students' understanding of the concepts and language underpinning higher education strategies of developing employability skills. While a solid grounding in discipline-specific knowledge and skills is what most graduate degrees aim at providing, employability skills are increasingly becoming an important factor when evaluating prospective employees. Embedding the acquisition of employability skills into higher education courses has emerged as a response to industry demands for work-ready graduates. The forces of internationalisation and globalisation mean that employers the world over are looking for graduates with additional soft skills, abilities and achievements. The context for this study is Westminster International University, Tashkent (WIUT), a transnational university in Uzbekistan. By means of a qualitative case study, the views of lecturers and students were investigated and common themes and perspectives identified. The main findings indicate that although students and lecturers share similar perspectives on the importance of employability skills, the purpose of employability focused pedagogy is not easily communicated to students. Furthermore, students feel that a more systematic approach to recognising and demonstrating employability skills would help them in their transition from education to work.

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'Porque a veces Tus Fracasos También Pueden Enseñarte Ciertas Habilidades': Percepciones de los Profesores y Estudiantes de las Habilidades de Empleabilidad en una Universidad Transnacional

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Resumen

Este estudio exploratorio investiga la percepción de los profesores y estudiantes de los conceptos y el lenguaje que se utilizan en las estrategias de educación superior para desarrollar las habilidades de empleabilidad. Mientras que los conocimientos disciplinarios son el objetivo de la mayoría de los posgrados, las habilidades de empleabilidad son cada vez un factor más importante al evaluar a los posibles empleados. La adquisición de habilidades de empleabilidad en la educación ha surgido como una respuesta a las demandas de la industria de graduados preparados para el mundo laboral. La internacionalización y globalización hacen que los empleadores busquen graduados con habilidades blandas, destrezas y logros adicionales. El contexto es Westminster International University, Tashkent (WIUT), una universidad transnacional en Uzbekistán. Mediante un estudio cualitativo, se investigaron puntos de vista y se identificaron temas y perspectivas comunes. Los hallazgos indican que, aunque los estudiantes y profesores comparten perspectivas similares sobre la importancia de las aptitudes para la empleabilidad, el propósito de la pedagogía enfocada en la empleabilidad no se comunica fácilmente a los estudiantes. Además, los estudiantes sienten que un enfoque más sistemático para reconocer y demostrar habilidades de empleabilidad les ayudaría en su transición de la educación al mundo laboral.

Palabras clave: educación universitaria internacional, educación transnacional, pedagogía de la inserción laboral

I n the 21st century it has become widely recognised that employability skills are a valuable asset that university graduates must acquire to secure graduate level employment (Davies et al., 2012). Although a solid grounding in discipline-specific knowledge and skills is what most graduate degrees aim at providing, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) Employer Skills Survey 2011 ranked employability skills as the most important factor when evaluating job applicants (Davies et al., 2012). In response to this and previous studies (Bourne, McKenzie, & Shiel, 2006; Caruana & Spurling, 2007; CBI/NUS, 2011), UK universities have set upon a strategy of promoting and developing graduates' employability skills, often framed in the language of what it means to have desirable graduate attributes. This embedding of employability skills into course and curriculum design is aimed at reducing the perceived shortfall in the ability of graduates to perform tasks needed in the workplace. Looking beyond the UK into other parts of Europe, the 2014 Erasmus Impact Study also confirmed that 92% of employers recognised the importance of transversal skills (Brandenburg et al., 2014). These sentiments are echoed further afield as the forces of internationalisation and globalisation mean that employers are looking for graduates with the desirable skills. No exception to this is Uzbekistan, where a study by Ajwad et al., (2014) revealed that employment outcomes in Uzbekistan are compromised by skills shortages. The study argued that the education system in Uzbekistan was not providing the kinds of cognitive and non-cognitive skills that employers were now demanding in light of increased globalisation. Perhaps more revealing were the concerns raised about the quality of tertiary education and its apparent inability to provide the labour market with graduates skilled in the relevant areas. The extent of student awareness regarding employability is also something that is often overlooked, and this is a perspective that has not been explored in Uzbekistan. There are, however, challenges to a shift in international educational philosophy from traditional notions of intellectual enlightenment to a skills based agenda. For example, Jackson (2009) and Tymon (2013) have suggested that students and stakeholders differ in both expectations and understanding regarding employability skills. There are also considerable doubts about whether employability skills can be effectively taught in the classroom (Cranmer, 2006). Allais (2012) goes further to argue that educational policy has become nothing more than a

tool to promote neoliberal economic ideals. Nevertheless, universities compete on national and international levels to promote the success of their employability strategies.

Review of Related Literature

Recognition of Employability Skills

Students may have many different reasons for entering university, ranging from the idealistic notions of expanding knowledge and gaining valuable life experience, to more practical aims of getting a job. While no one would claim that a university education is a golden ticket to a highly paid career, students look at employment rates of graduates as a deciding factor in choosing an HEI (Brown et al., 2005). The importance of employability has risen to prominence in recent years, especially as the economic downturn of 2008 negatively affected the world jobs market. The increase in the number of graduates has led to questions about whether a university education equips students with the prerequisite skills for the labour market, so much so that levels of graduate employability are now included in higher education performance indicators, influencing the ranking of universities (Morley, 2001). This has posed the question of whether the development of employability skills is the responsibility of universities, students or employers. De La Harpe, Radloff and Wyber (2000) conducted a pivotal study that was one of the first to identify specific generic skills that should be taught to all undergraduate business students. It must be noted that such studies are context dependent, and directed towards a specific labour market, in this case Australia; although with increased globalisation there is the argument that localised contexts also require graduates with skills that are globally transferable (Harvey & Bowers Brown, 2004). In contrast, Cranmer (2006) argues that due to the highly specific nature of some skills, they can only realistically be acquired in the workplace. Despite these claims, it seems that developing graduate employability skills has now become a matter of policy in countries that wish to compete in the global knowledge economy.

Definitions of Employability Related Concepts

With increased interest in employability over the past decade many studies have tried to create taxonomies of the skills and attributes needed by graduates to enhance both their job prospects, and their chances of functioning at the desirable level in the chosen profession. Older taxonomies e.g. Hillage and Pollard (1998) had focused on broader definitions of employability relating to the areas of getting a job: ensuring that key skills and an understanding about the world of work are embedded in the education system; keeping a job: maintaining employment and making transitions between roles; and getting a better job: being independent in the labour market by managing employment transitions between and within organisations. Perhaps the most revealing findings of this research were regarding the direction of Government policy, which was aimed more at developing knowledge and vocational skills, perhaps at the expense of softer skills. In addition, the focus had shifted towards those entering the labour market from education or unemployment, with responsibility devolved to the individual and the supply side rather than the employers on the demand side. Although the report was not specifically directed at the graduate labour market, the findings were important in highlighting the need to acknowledge that employability was a collective responsibility. Dearing (1997) had previously identified key skills that should be taught at undergraduate level. The key skills were: communication, numeracy, information technology and learning to learn. As an addendum to this, Hillage and Pollard (1998) added team-working and problem solving. Thus was started a discussion around employability as a social construct, where the various concepts and key skills were at the same time applicable to many contexts, but at times highly context dependent. Brown, Hesketh and Wiliams (2003) elaborated on this, stressing that employability was both relative and absolute, as any individuals possessing a particular set of skills and experience (absolute) would not determine employment in an unstable and unpredictable (relative) jobs market. At the beginning of the 21st century researchers into employability skills became more concerned with the notion of graduates doing graduate level jobs; the ability to do a job rather than the skills and tactics needed to get a job (Harvey, 2001; van der Heijden, 2001; Yorke,

2001; Knight and Yorke, 2002). This shift in perspective required a more complex description and understanding of the skills, attributes and competencies; one which focused as much on generic skills as subject specific knowledge. Two definitions that invite comparison are as follows:

> A set of achievements, understandings and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and to be successful in their chosen occupations. (Knight and Yorke, 2002, p.3).

> A set of attributes, skills and knowledge that all labour market participants should possess to ensure they have the capability of being effective in the workplace – to the benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy. (Yorke, 2006, p.8).

While Knight and Yorke (2002) distinguish between the ability to get a job and maintain successful employment, Yorke (2006) emphasises skills and knowledge rather than achievements. It is clear both definitions recognise the importance *skills* and *personal attributes*, but the subjectivity involved in what these may be invites further discussion. Various studies have examined specific skills that employers require in respect to the disciplines, these include contexts such as chemistry (Hanson & Overton, 2010), Geography (Haigh & Kilmartin, 1999), and Business related subjects (Andrews & Higson, 2008). However, the past decade has seen an increase in the number of studies that stress the importance of generic skills. This has led to definitions of employability being defined as lists of desirable skills and attributes, with increasing weight placed on the acquisition of *soft skills*, which can be simply defined as 'personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people,' (OED online, 2016). Archer and Davison (2008) in their comprehensive survey of 233 large and small UK and International companies found that soft skills such as team-working are more important than most hard skills. Communication skills was deemed to be the most desired employability skill, although employers reported low satisfaction levels with graduates' ability to communicate effectively. The largest importance/satisfaction gaps in the capabilities of new graduates were in the areas of commercial awareness, analysis and decision making, and communication skills. The

main discrepancies between UK only and International companies were the desirability of foreign language ability, and the value of overseas work experience (Archer & Davison, 2008). Recommendations from the survey were aimed at employers, universities and graduates: Employers should better inform universities of their needs, stress the importance of soft skills, and recruit from a wider pool of universities rather than those with high rankings. Universities should ensure that degree programmes meet the needs of the employers, adequately communicate business' employability demands to prospective students, and incorporate reflective learning practices in course design. Students should demonstrate soft skills for employability through their university experience; and exploit opportunities for mobility and foreign language development, especially if considering working for an international company. However, as pointed out by Smith, Ferns and Russell (2014), the lack of an underpinning or overarching theoretical framework can lead to a fundamental misunderstanding about the level of development of particular skills, and whether their development constitutes an achievable goal of higher education. More importantly, any study aiming to address issues of employability should start with the stakeholders' conceptualisation of the construct itself.

Perceptions of Employability Skills

As definitions of employability have evolved in recent years, many studies have investigated reasons for the disparities between the objectives of educators and the requirements of employers. Leveson (2000) suggested that the problem could be one of perception, specifically differences in the understanding of the language that underpins the whole employability discourse. A lack of understanding between interested parties may lead to potential discrepancies in the aims of competency based higher education. A specific and problem is the meaning of the term 'generic'. Marginson and O'Hanlon (1992) questioned whether *generic* meant the same as *essential*, and in turn whether the acquisition of generic skills in higher education implied transferability to the workplace. This latter point is crucial, as a failure of graduates to apply what they have learnt can only result in a widening gulf between employers' expectations and graduates' ability to perform. More recently, Jackson (2013) observed that employers of business graduates were taking the transferability of non-technical skills for

granted. Increased collaboration between employers, educators and graduates was seen as the most effective way of closing the gap. Studies also emphasised employability's multi-faceted nature, with both internal and external features (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). The key point is the focus on the individual's perception influenced by both internal and external dimensions; what the prospective employees regard as their options for work, rather than the "the conception of employability as a human resources strategy promoted by organisations as an alternative to career or job-for-life" (*ibid*, p.24). The external factors include the reputation of the university, and the credibility of and demand for the students' chosen field of study. The internal dimensions include factors such as students' confidence, ambition, and academic performance. An alternative approach to conceptualising employability was put forward by Holmes (2001) in a challenge to the dominant skills agenda. The *graduate identity* approach argues that employability is best understood as being individual and subjective, underpinned by the twin concepts of practices and identity. In this interpretation the work outcomes of the graduates are shaped by their own individual experiences, and therefore more research is needed that focuses on individual identity. As an extension to the graduate identity approach, Tomlinson (2007) conducted a qualitative study of UK final year undergraduates. Here students developed individualised narratives regarding their career progression. It is clear that students constructed their own identities in relation to their individual perceptions of both their own employability skills and their position to the labour market.

Context, Purpose and Significance of the Study

Uzbekistan is a central Asian ex-Soviet Republic with a population of around thirty-one million (World Bank, 2015). Socio-political and economic changes since independence in 1991 have seen an increase in the scope and demand for internationally recognised higher education. In 1996 the British Council established a branch in the capital, Tashkent, with the goal of providing learning and development opportunities and access to information, ideas and expertise from around the world (Hasanova, 2007). Educational reforms have increased the demand for higher education, and in 1997 Parliament introduced the new Law on Education, which led to reforms in the structure of the education system. The population receives

nine years of compulsory general secondary education, and a further three years of specialised, or vocational training in colleges and lyceums (Ikramov, 2002). Currently, the higher education system consists of 64 establishments, including 19 universities, and six transnational universities. One of these is Westminster International University, Tashkent (WIUT) which was set up in 2002.

In 2011-12 there were around a quarter of a million students in the Higher Education sector in Uzbekistan. A survey of businesses in Uzbekistan identified a shortfall between graduate skills and those desired by employers (Ajwad et al., 2014). With the implementation of international quality assurance frameworks, most notably the 1999 Bologna Protocol, universities in Uzbekistan are under increased scrutiny as they are "still mostly governed by government ministries and have only limited freedom to tailor their programs to the needs and requirements of the Uzbek economy" (*ibid*, p.66). In this context, the development of transnational universities in Uzbekistan is an opportunity to bridge the employers perceived skills gaps. However, from the students' perspective, things may be different. A recent study into experiences of students at transnational universities across the world found that Transnational Education programmes were not addressing local skills gaps, nor sufficiently supporting students in their pursuit of international employment (Mellors-Bourne, 2014).

While research into Transnational Higher Education (TNHE) is relatively new, it is understandable that no specific studies have been carried out to evaluate the effectiveness of TNHE programmes in Uzbekistan. On a broader level, the European Training Foundation (2015) identified the need for a more flexible higher education system in Uzbekistan that produced graduates capable of working in a number of occupations. Since 2012 the trend in the country has been a move away from developing infrastructure for education to promoting growth of the community of professional vocational teachers, with an emphasis on quality, content and support for employability. Priorities for improvements include the continued professional development of teachers, and perhaps more relevant for WIUT and similar institutions, closer cooperation between employers and educators to promote employability. However, an investigation into stakeholders understanding of employability related concepts has not been investigated in relation to TNHE in Uzbekistan. A

localised study of one the country's most prominent transnational universities will provide valuable insights into how these stakeholders, specifically students and educators, position themselves in the ongoing debate.

Previous studies investigating the perceptions of employability skills, whether from the perspective of employers or employees, have typically employed quantitative methods. In these Euro-centric studies the aim was to quantify the notion of employability at a national level (Almeida, 2007; Bernston, Sverke, & Marklund, 2006), or at the level of industry (Grip, Loo, & Sanders, 2004). Studies that concerned the perceptions of individuals in matters related to acquiring work, or performing successfully in the workplace, also favoured quantitative methods (Van Dam, 2004; Schyns, Torka, & Gössling, 2005). These aforementioned studies were concerned with constructing multi-dimensional models of employability or research instruments.

Research Questions

The notion of employability skills is a construct which "grows by accretion with the addition of new sub-constructs" (Smith et al., 2014, p.6). Since no single body has control over the construct, it is subject to different interpretations from those with a vested interested, namely, government policy makers, employers, educators and students. Sin and Neave (2016, p.1) claim that, 'as a concept, employability commands little consensus. Rather it is interpreted in the light of each interest group's concerns […] as a floating signifier'. It is this position, with employability being a *floating signifier,* which informs the research questions:
- What are lecturers' and students' perceptions of desirable employability skills, and how do they converge or diverge?
- What strategies are used by students to develop their employability skills, and what strategies are used by lecturers to develop the employability skills of their students?

Method

People develop their own world view as an accumulation of experiences; researchers can add to the body of shared understanding and experience by

describing and retelling the natural experiences of others. Fundamental to this is the concept of *tacit* knowledge; the knowledge people have based on their own personal experiences, intuitions, and understandings of the world around them. This tacit knowledge is shared by means of association with other people. From an epistemological standpoint, it may be argued that truth lies only in propositional statements. While this may be valid in the natural sciences, where *explanation* is key, in social sciences the understanding of a phenomenon may be of equal importance. Case studies take place in a natural setting, such as a place of work or educational establishment, and aim at a more holistic understanding of the event being investigated. It is from in-depth study of participants in their natural setting that new understandings or further questions may be uncovered. This research is a case study, conducted by way of semi-structured interviews, that focuses on the bounded system of one educational institution, Westminster International University, Tashkent (WIUT). For these aims qualitative, open-ended semi-structured interviewing was used. The interviews were guided by an interview schedule, which included set questions and prompts. Example questions include:

- What does the term 'employability skills' mean to you?
- What do you think employers are looking for in graduates?
- How can WIUT graduates stand out from other applicants when applying for a job?
- Do you do anything in the courses at WIUT that you think has value for work situations?
- How can graduates demonstrate employability skills to prospective employers?

Participants

The participants were chosen through purposive sampling because of their roles at WIUT; lecturers and students from two undergraduate degree courses, BA Business Administration and BSc Economics. The two chosen courses covered a wide range of core and option modules available to students at WIUT, and would allow for sufficient depth of coverage of the research questions. Eight face-to-face semi structured interviews were used to collect the data. The lecturers, three female and one male, each had between six and eight years of teaching experience at WIUT. One of the

lecturers had also studied for an MA at WIUT. The students, two female and two male, were either 1st or 3rd year undergraduates. Three of the students had completed the pre-university foundation course at WIUT; one student had completed a foundation year at a local university. Ethical clearance was obtained from the university ethics committee, and all participants were briefed on the purpose of the study. The confidentiality of all data relating to the research was also assured.

Instrument

For the detailed analysis a thematic analysis approach was employed, as this is recognised as being both rigorous and flexible. The questions were designed to elicit participants' own perceptions of employability related concepts, and how their own individual experiences have shaped those perceptions. Each interview lasted around one hour. The final framework for analysis emerged as the themes were defined and refined. The QSR NVivo software package was used in analysing and organising the data. The final thematic map of the data (Table 1), under the global theme of *employability skills*, aimed to demonstrate how participants' perceptions were shaped by their own experiences of working, teaching and learning. The thematic map considered past, present and future issues, allowing participants to tell their story in a way that informed the research questions.

Table 1
Thematic map for data interpretation

Global theme	Main themes	Sub-themes
Employability skills	Influences	Work experience Teaching and learning
	Perceptions	Own definitions Importance of generic skills
	Current Strategies	In-class strategies External influences
	Outlook	Demonstrating employability Changes in behaviour

Key Findings and Discussion of Research Questions

Perceptions

What are lecturers' and students' perceptions of desirable employability skills, and how do they converge or diverge?

It is clear that employability can be interpreted and understood in a number of ways. Sin and Neave's (2016) claim that employability is a *floating signifier* that commands various contended meanings certainly holds true in the light of the findings. The participants' own perceptions were shaped largely by their own engagement with both pedagogic and work related practices. Lecturers saw employability as something that they should equip students with; including the skills needed to get a job, as illustrated by these two lecturers' definitions:

> The skills that will add our graduates some value in the labour market, some skills that they   can sell to the future employer.

> Employability skills mean that we equip our students with the skills that would be helpful for them to get the job and function successfully.

Familiarity with the terminology was largely through university policy documentation regarding revalidation of modules and generic descriptors of course or module student outcomes, as explained by one lecturer:

> This is a familiar term especially with revalidation. I had to develop the course, that's when I was faced with terms such as employability skills.

The work related background of lecturers influenced perceptions; two of the lecturers came from an education and teaching background and two came into teaching after a period of working in industry. The lecturers from a teaching background had a clearer concept of what employability meant, and appeared to be more confident in discussing the topic. This might seem somewhat counterintuitive, as those with more experience of work in non-education setting might be expected to have a better idea of what is required to succeed in the labour market. However, a possible explanation of this, particularly regarding the experience of one participant, is the fact that employment was in family owned businesses, where the normal processes of applying for jobs, interviews, trial periods and promotion based on merit and performance might not have applied. There was much alignment among the student and lecturers with general definitions; all agreed that employability involved the development of generic skills, and these skills were linked to the needs of prospective employers. Interestingly only one student participant mentioned that the skills were ones that employers were looking for, perhaps showing a broader awareness of issues:

> The skills that employers look for when hiring graduates or students, the skills that are most desired by employers.

This may be expected as this student had the most experience of internships among the participants, which in turn poses the questions whether conceptual knowledge of employability skills can best be acquired through work experience. It is clear that all the participants buy into the notion of the skills agenda that has come to dominate HE curricula over the

past few years. While criticism of the skills agenda is a feature of UK HE discourse (Wolf, 2007), such discussions are not common in Uzbekistan. In fact, there is a discussion to be had as to whether UK based definitions of employability are relevant for developing countries such as Uzbekistan, where there may be a more rigid system of government central planning. Uzbekistan, since independence in 1991, has been slowly transitioning to a market economy, where elements of a Soviet style economy still persist with subsidies, price controls and extensive government planned production (Lasch & Dana, 2011). Such a demand-led system, where it is the providers of employment who dictate what is or is not important, can only lead to increased marketisation of institutes such as WIUT, where endorsing the discourse of employability equates to endorsing an emergent capitalist economic system (McCowan, 2015). In addition, the success of any government policy to promote employability might be measured in terms of the numbers of graduates in graduate level jobs, thus equating employability with employment (Wilton, 2008). The definitions chosen for evaluation by the participants of this study (Knight & Yorke, 2002; Yorke, 2006) were focused on the ability to attain and maintain graduate level jobs, but did not consider the changing structure of labour markets. When shown the two definitions some participants did not always find them to be clear, or even useful, as illustrated by one perceptive lecturer comment:

> Achievements? I would put this one into question because sometimes your failures can also teach you certain skills - everyone views achievement differently.

The students may take on board such definitions and frame their own perceptions in terms of competition for the limited number of graduate jobs available to them. This view may also be reinforced by university documentation and policies that are well meaning in terms of providing employment opportunities, but do not consider wider ethical implications such as making a valuable contribution to society, or the demands of the labour market looking ahead a number of years. The forty-one employability skills identified by Jackson (2010) are illustrative of the vast array of capabilities "vying for inclusion in the definition of employability" (Smith et al., 2014, p.2). It is not surprising that the skills identified by participants fell within this comprehensive list. A point to note here is that

participants, when referring to employability skills, did not distinguish between skills or attributes that may stem from broader values or attitudes; both skills and attributes were considered under the same umbrella term of employability skills. Table 2 shows the employability skills that were identified (without prompting) during the course of the interviews:

Table 2
Employability skills identified by participants

	Business administration	Economics
Lecturers	Adaptability	Analytical skills
	Communication skills	Communication skills
	Flexibility	Critical thinking skills
	Managing expectation	Numerical skills
	Presentation skills	Presentation skills
	Self-management	Punctuality
	Team-working	Research skills
	Time management	Social skills
	Transferable skills	Team-working
	Working to deadlines	
Students	Assertiveness	Critical thinking
	Language skills	Communication skills
	Presentation skills	Leadership skills
	Team-working	Research skills
	Work experience	Time management
		Transferable skills

The skills identified by participants were largely non-technical and generic. With the possible exception of numerical skills, presentation skills, and language skills all can be categorised as soft skills. These skills are more related to personal characteristics and are difficult to demonstrate or measure. A significant difference in perceptions between lecturers and students was not evident, but it can be noted that the two skills that were

given prominence by lecturers and students were *team-working* and *communication skills*. Across the two subjects it was interesting to note that the skills of *critical thinking* and *leadership* were identified by students and lecturers from Economics, but not from Business Administration. Jackson (2013) cites examples of deficiencies in specific non-technical skills identified by business graduate workplace performance, particularly in critical thinking and leadership. Many of the skills identified by participants could be seen as ones that relate as much to desirable academic outcomes than transferable employability skills *per se, i.e.* ones that can be practised and evaluated in a classroom or educational setting. These include presentation skills (assessed presentations), team-working (group presentations and coursework), numerical skills (coursework that includes a mathematical component), language skills (in English, as this is the language of instruction and assessment), research skills (assessed coursework which references academic sources), working to deadlines (submitting coursework on time), punctuality (arriving to classes on time), and time management (prioritising coursework in relation to deadlines). An interesting aspect to consider here is the reason why lecturers and students consider a particular skill or attribute to be of importance. Furnell and Scott (2015) emphasised their belief that graduate students primarily recognised the relative importance of skills as a direct result of applying them to work contexts. While there has been widespread criticism of how naïve conceptualisations bear little or no relationship to actual employment practices (Wolf, 2007), students in this study have identified what they consider to be the most important employability skills largely through their practical experiences of internships and through extracurricular activities that necessitated the use of cognitive, and social and behavioural skills. One student was keen to point out that one of the biggest challenges facing students is how to apply theoretical knowledge in practice:

> There are some things that you are not told at university which might help in the workplace. For example, how to work with colleagues; you should be more assertive and flexible. At university we get only theoretical knowledge.

This student recognised that her own work experience has gone a long way to bridging the gap between theory and practice. However, it is not just

a matter of recognition of the skills, but also the way they can be demonstrated and used as a valuable tool in both securing employment and working productively. One lecturer noted that students may have a practical advantage if their family are business owners.

> From my experience those students who have a family business or their own business are somehow more confident. They show they've already used their knowledge in some area.

This was echoed by another lecturer:

> The majority of students already have part time jobs by the time they graduate. Some of them work with their parents business. I know some students whose family have businesses such as banks. It is common to work at parents' businesses after graduation

Regarding specific skills, these were easily identified by participants, but conceptualisations seemed to be shaped more by pedagogical factors. The list of skills generated by participants is in line with competencies listed in employability frameworks such as Archer and Davison (2008). However, this is not to suggest that participants all agreed on the skills and attributes that are linked to employability. As noted by De La Harpe et al., (2000), the terms used to describe such generic skills are used interchangeably with *attributes*, *characteristics*, *values*, *competencies* and *qualities*, and these are often understood as being independent of learning contexts. It is clear that terms such as these are very different to easily identifiable skills such as presentation skills, which are more easily measured as a learning outcome of a particular course of study.

Strategies

What strategies are used by students to develop their employability skills, and what strategies are used by lecturers to develop the employability skills of their students?

The value of promoting employability as one of the aims of higher education is still a matter of contention, but as long as virtually all HE institutes are compliant in the process it would seem prudent to incorporate

employability pedagogy in the curricula. Lecturers at transnational universities may see the inclusion of employability pedagogy as an advance on more traditional methods of teaching, and from the interviews it was clear lecturers recognised the need to make their classes practical and interactive. However, it was evident that the benefits of certain types of learning activities, e.g. role plays and collaborative projects, were often not made explicit enough to students. All lecturers were enthusiastic in their description of the kinds of activities they encourage. When lecturers were describing specific classroom activities they tended to highlight those skills more related to the cognitive domain; logical and creative thinking, problem solving, and discussion based interaction. This can be contrasted with the previously mentioned definitions given by lecturers, which tended to focus on pedagogic aspects and more testable elements. One activity mentioned by a lecturer was simulations and role plays:

> We like simulations and role-plays. Participants take the role of managers or employers and   pretend to have a different cultural background. They have a problem solving task where they need to analyse the cultural profiles of negotiators.

Students also seemed to enjoy and recognise the value of such activities, with one being described as particularly useful; an activity where they had to communicate various emotions without using words, through saying numbers with different intonation:

> In Personal Development [module] we did simulations and role-plays. They were fun; they made us actors. In real life tone of language plays a big role when you are developing a relationship talking to other people

However, it may also be the case that not all students recognise simulations and role-plays as a beneficial activity:

> Many people do not perceive the simulations as something serious. They [fellow students] complain after the class that they are not getting much from the simulations, but I believe we enhance our emotional intelligence. The absence of such simulations in the

> Lyceum makes them [students] feel that this is something that has
> no value.

The student argues that the reason for this is that many students, before entering undergraduate studies, are used to a strict schedule of lectures and taught classes in their Lyceum (High School equivalent). A link here can be drawn with teaching methods in the Uzbek school system. It has been noted that teaching methods have not advanced significantly due to educational structures being highly hierarchical, with policy reform being developed in a top-down manner (Weidman & Yoder, 2010). Criticism of teaching methods in the schools have included outdated training that focuses on the transmission of factual information, and a distinct lack of opportunities for teachers to acquire strategies in using methods that are more conducive to the development of students' critical thinking or problem solving skills. When probed on this issue the student went on to state that during the set-up of role plays little or no explicit information was given as to why students were doing the activity:

> There were no specific explanations as to why we were doing this;
> the only instructions were we should just begin interacting. Maybe
> the absence of explanation affected the perception   and the value.

If the students did not always equate such activities with enhancing their employability skills then it seems likely that they would not take them as seriously as activities such as assessments that had concrete outcomes. As noted by Knight, (2003), "If your project fosters achievements valued by employers, does it also ensure that learners know this?" (p.5) This is at a micro level, but at the macro level of the degree as a whole, students may also lack the ability to adequately describe their experience of higher education. Although curriculum practices may aim to foster the development of skills that are valued in the labour market, if students are unable to either express or demonstrate their employability readiness to potential employers then there will likely be a continued shortfall in work-ready graduates. The context in which skills are developed is an important part of learning, and if employability skills are to be successfully embedded in curricula then the context-related implications of the skills being promoted should be considered in greater depth. Although team-working

was recognised as an important employability skill by all of the participants, the lecturers felt that it was difficult to incorporate it into the classroom activities, especially at higher levels. Moreover, there did not seem to be a clear distinction between team-work as an opportunity to foster mutual understanding and cooperation, and group assessed coursework, as this lecturer pointed out:

> On teamwork it's an interesting point because level 6 modules discourage teamwork as their summative component. We had the comment from the external examiner that we cannot have that many summative group courseworks.

This is not to say that lecturers do not see the value of such activities, but more they feel constrained by the academic regulations placed upon them from above. The reason for this may not seem perfectly logical in terms of pedagogy and practical application. One student described how one of the level 6 modules that previously had assessed groupwork, included in its learning outcomes *building a strategy that was communicated across the whole team*. There are difficulties involved in administering groupwork assessment. Students may feel that less hardworking classmates are benefiting (in terms of coursework credit) from the hard work of others, especially if a mark is given for the group as a whole. While this is not promoting the benefits of mutual cooperation, it is understandable that students want credit and recognition for their efforts, and if teamwork and collaborative activities are not contributing to marks then their importance may be undervalued. One student equated team-working, specifically when the team does not work well together, with problem solving, drawing on an example of a group presentation:

> You have to solve a problem for your group and for yourself - one student was ill, another one went home, the third just didn't come. I had to choose the topic myself. At the end we got positive feedback.

It is not necessarily the case that students see their progress purely in terms of assessment marks. As with many of the participants, the discussion of classroom activities revealed further insights into how skills related to employability are embedded in the curriculum. Another student was

particularly perceptive in his analysis of the importance of team-working, making astute connections which touched upon two skills for the future workplace (Davies, Fidler, & Gorbis, 2011); cross-cultural competency and novel and adaptive thinking:

> Working in a team teaches you how to work with different people from different countries.

Lecturers seemed less aware than students of the opportunities for development that existed outside of timetabled classes. The extent to which students engaged with extracurricular activities was impressive, but again the problem was that students either did not relate these activities to employability, or felt they lacked the ability to describe them in a way that encapsulated the employability element. Experiential and action learning strategies are most effective when combined with direct work experience, and are also strengthened by reflection and evaluation by participants (Davies et al., 2012). Students who participated in the peer-mentoring scheme recognised the benefits in terms of developing valuable skills, but felt they needed more recognition for their efforts. Zacharopoulou, Giles and Condell (2015) reported on how to maximise benefits from a similar scheme to the one used at WIUT. Participants recorded experiences of their peer-mentoring scheme in a reflective diary, took part in discussion groups and compiled a portfolio of evidence. Not only did the scheme enhance students' perceived competence in areas of employability, but also raised awareness of limitations in other areas. Knight and Yorke's (2002) USEM model of employability also stresses the role of metacognition and reflection to help students articulate their achievements. The benefits of experiential learning are well reported (Kolb 1984). More current iterations involve personal development planning (PDP) to enable students to be more proactive in their identification of both learning and career orientated opportunities within their undergraduate courses. The Personal Development module for Level 3 students at WIUT was mentioned by lecturers and students as being of practical value. However, Tymon (2013) suggested that employability related engagement increased with students as they progressed in their degree courses, and that students during the early stages of undergraduate study lacked interest in activities that tried to embed employability. Pegg, Waldock, Hendy-Isaac and Lawton, (2012)

advocate the integration of experiential learning and embedded employability approaches as long as it is backed up with effective means of documenting and recording. This enables students to reflect constructively on the experience, learning and development. Further integration of these practices with work experience and internship opportunities could be of benefit to WIUT students, especially during the later stages of the degree. One of the main recommendations of Ajwad et al., (2014) was to improve the flow of information between employers and prospective employees. This included ways of matching the supply of skills with the employer demand. For a university it would seem prudent that there is a strong relationship with local employers, and also that both students and lecturers were in a position to benefit from such a relationship. At WIUT both lecturers and students have opportunities to interact with employers. One lecturer expanded on this:

> We did have discussions with professionals from industry and I remember that they marked communication skills, technical skills and team building […] They want our students to be good communicators in different formats, so this is also writing, oral, being able to communicate with clients successfully, and being able to build personal relationships.

These comments highlight employers desire for graduates with skills related to social intelligence: "the ability to connect to others in a deep and direct way, to sense and stimulate reactions and desired interactions" (Davies et al., 2011, p.8). This lecturer also remarked that this was in the previous year before module revalidation, where employers and lecturers had a round table discussion. It was acknowledged that more could be done in this area:

> Here we need to improve our communications with the employers and organise events like the careers day more often. We need to get more feedback from the employers.

Meetings with employers also provided another lecturer with valuable information regarding desirable skills:

> When I was talking with the employers, which does not happen very often, they mostly seek the soft skills which are transferable, highly transferable, not subject specific.

One lecturer, who had also been a student at WIUT recalled that guest speakers were invited from an international bank. She enthused about these conversations she had, as a student, with prospective employers. She remembered students were keen on asking the employers what they wanted from graduates:

> We were students at the time, so basically we were asking them what they [employers] are looking for. Why are you [lecturers] teaching us this theory that cannot really be applied in the real world because of all the assumptions? He [employee of international bank] said we are not looking for your knowledge of a theory; it's the way you think.

This caveat suggests that employers have specific expectations on individuals' performance, in line with the skills for future workforce proposed by Davies et al. (2011). These include *novel and adaptive thinking* and having a *design mindset*; being able "to represent and develop tasks and work processes for desired outcomes" (*ibid* p.11). Through interactions such as this employers are also taking steps to communicate their needs to educational institutions. A student also recalls a visit from employers:

> Several months ago a representative of the HR department for [an international company] in Uzbekistan came to deliver a presentation, and I remember asking about the most important skills they look for in students. She said it was the ability to achieve results, to deliver results quickly. Results oriented people are in demand.

A way for students to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application is through undertaking an internship. The value of this was noted by the same student:

I recognised during my last internship that people learn their functional duties doing work. It is very seldom functional duties coincide with the curriculum they went through. Skills are more important than knowledge, that's what I saw in [international company]. They wanted skills.

Another student had a similar experience during one of his internships, where his qualifications and subject specific knowledge were not considered of great importance:

I think they [employers] are looking not at your subjects but at your character. They didn't ask me about my faculty marks. The subject knowledge was applicable when you were faced with practice. Usual theories may not work in real practice, even if your subject knowledge is not very deep you can learn a lot from working.

The internship experiences of students appear to confirm notions that internships are an effective way of developing employability (Shoenfelt, Stone, & Kottke, 2013). As well as trying to improve their future employment prospects through gaining valuable work experience, students expressed how engaging in extracurricular activities (specifically those organised through the university) could enhance their employability skills. While speaking about their extracurricular activities students made connections with areas of employability. For example, a student talked about her experience of one of the university clubs:

You don't always need to work for money, like being a volunteer. For example, I'm leader in the conversation and debate club. Leadership qualities are very important. In business you must have leadership skills in order to motivate your workers. It's not the same as management because managers and leaders are not the same.

Although this student did not make explicit connections between the skills gained or applied through extracurricular activities and their application in terms of employability, it is evident that key transferable skills can be acquired through engaging in activities other than internships, employment or academic learning. One student gave an example of how

some skills gained from participating in and organising extracurricular activities had a direct impact on a project he was tasked with during an internship:

> I am deeply involved in the social life of our university. I am general manager of the school volunteers. I have founded six clubs - the kinds of clubs that develop the skills of students. In your social life you do diplomatic approaches for administration. It was very important for me because in one internship I was asked to conduct a lecture by myself about the university, about something that I have learnt from university. It would be impossible if I didn't have experience from social life.

The student went on to mention that, in his experience, academic life was not as important as his social life in the development of his employability skills. He estimated it was 80% social life and 20% academic study. Views such as this were also raised by Lowden, Hall, Elliot and Lewin, (2011), who noted that graduates value their extracurricular activities above the degree content. The reasons for this are it embellishes their CV, and also helps secure graduate level employment. This raises further questions about whether it is beneficial for academic studies to have enhancing employability as a realistic learning outcome. An interesting comparison that emerged from the interviews was the disparities in level of awareness that lecturers have regarding the extracurricular activities at WIUT. The lecturer, who also had been a student, was particularly concerned with this. She pointed to an example of a peer-mentoring scheme where students were perhaps not receiving due recognition for their participation and achievements:

> This year we raised the issue of students who are doing mentoring activities and that they did not feel appreciated. They think about their future and they want to tell employers but they also want some immediate rewards like a letter of appreciation. They want to be recognised for what they do.

A peer-mentoring scheme can be effective as it "can develop employability skills through a programme of activity that formally rewards students for their participation and assists them in articulating their

competencies" (Zacharopoulou et al., 2015 p. 1). As highlighted by Clark, Marsden, Whyatt, Thompson and Walker, (2015), it is not necessarily the kind of extracurricular activity pursued at university that is important, but more what the student does within the activity and how well the achievements are communicated to potential employers. This raises some issues regarding how students can demonstrate their employability skills to employers. In their report on employers perceptions of the employability of new graduates Lowden et al., (2011) stressed the importance of the ability of graduates to demonstrate employability skills during the application stage; with particular importance placed on critical and evaluative skills. As well as having an effective CV that is tailored to the specific employer, applicants also need to have the ability to impress and stand out during initial meetings and interviews. Both lecturers and students recognised the importance of CVs, although it was remarked by one lecturer that not all employers in Uzbekistan take CVs, preferring application forms and interviews only. A major point of concern among the students was how they would be able to demonstrate their employability skills to prospective employers. Lecturers generally agreed that timely completion of coursework and active participation in seminars and discussions was a way for students to demonstrate skills such as time management, working under pressure and communicative competence, as these two comments suggest:

> Working to deadlines – it is part of their time management skills. How well they organise their resources and their time.

> Leaving coursework to the last minute signals bad time management. Certain pressure may exist when they don't know the peers with whom they work, when you randomly select students [to work in groups]. So being able to work with the team of unknown people, and then successfully produce an outcome within the timeframe, and with good quality.

Students, however, may see this type of activity as something that they are expected to do in their day to day university activities:

> Being responsible, especially working in team projects. You have to be responsible if you want to get higher grades.

When asked how they could demonstrate desirable employability skills in an interview situation, one student referred to achievements in extracurricular activities:

> The extracurricular activity I took part as a team leader and as a presenter. I was given a team. I had to tell them which part to take. I would tell them this in a job interview.

This is not to say that students do not see the connection between class activities and employability, it is more that they see coursework as a means to an end; achieving the grades necessary for a good degree classification. Knight and Yorke (2002) advocate an approach to teaching and assessment that is directed towards students becoming aware of their achievements, and documenting them in a formalised fashion. Doing this will perhaps better equip students with the tools needed to demonstrate their employability skills to employers, something that students of this study would benefit from.

Conclusion

This research aimed at contributing to the discussion on the understandings of the concepts underpinning the topic of employability and employability skills. It has specifically examined the views and concerns of lecturers and students at Westminster International University in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Definitions of employability are numerous and varying, focusing on short-term job acquisition, long-term career development, productivity and sustainability. At WIUT there was much alignment between student and lecturer views, and with the extant literature, and the importance of the topic was recognised as a responsibility of both the University and individual students. However, it is clear that the way that graduates align themselves to the labour market is heavily characterised by their experience in higher education. Students at WIUT recognised the value of work-based training and internships as best equipping them with their perceived employability needs, but also questioned the value of employability focused pedagogy if its purpose and rationale was not communicated effectively. As discussed, understandings of employability skills are individual and subjective, linked to previous education and work experiences, as well as

issues of self-esteem and confidence. In light of this perhaps it would be worth pursuing an alternative to the dominant skills agenda, and exploring an approach where employability is promoted indirectly by providing opportunities for students to develop, reflect, record and showcase their employment-ready graduate identity.

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Stroking the Net Whale: a Constructivist Grounded Theory of Self-Regulated Learning in Virtual Social Spaces

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored the self-regulated learning (SRL) of teachers and their students in virtual social spaces. The processes of SRL were analyzed from 24 semi-structured individual interviews with professors, instructors and their students from five Lithuanian universities. A core category stroking the net whale showed the process of SRL skills development of university teachers and their students. This core category was constructed from three categories: building boats, angling in the multifaceted ocean, nurturing the big fish. Building boats showed social networking and identity marketing processes which are the same for both research participant groups. Angling in the multifaceted ocean implied personal capabilities and mutual trust dimensions, applicable to both teachers and students. Other dimensions of Angling in the multifaceted ocean differ: maintenance of liquid identities was observed for teachers; students stressed reinforcement of formal studies in virtual social spaces. Nurturing the big fish for both participant groups means academic communication; for university teachers, it also means professional knowledge development, and for students, virtual learning skills development. These findings contribute to understanding how the SRL of university teachers and their students progresses in virtual social spaces.

Keywords: constructivist grounded theory, self-regulated learning, university teachers, university students, virtual social spaces

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Resumen

Este estudio cualitativo exploró el aprendizaje autorregulado (AAR) de docentes y sus alumnos en espacios sociales virtuales. Los procesos de AAR se analizaron a partir de 24 entrevistas individuales semi-estructuradas con profesores y estudiantes de cinco universidades lituanas. Una categoría núcleo, trazar la red ballena, mostró el proceso de desarrollo de habilidades del AAR por parte de los profesores universitarios y sus estudiantes. Esta categoría se construyó a partir de tres subcategorías: (a) construcción de embarcaciones, que muestra redes sociales y procesos de marketing de identidad, los mismos para ambos grupos; (b) la pesca en el océano multifacético, que implica capacidades personales y dimensiones de confianza mutua, aplicables tanto a profesores como a estudiantes. Otras dimensiones de esta categoría difieren: para los profesores se observó el mantenimiento de las identidades líquidas, mientras que los estudiantes subrayaron el refuerzo de los estudios formales en espacios sociales virtuales y; (c) cultivar el pez grande, que significa comunicación académica para ambos grupos; para los profesores universitarios, también significa el desarrollo de conocimientos profesionales y para los estudiantes, el desarrollo de habilidades de aprendizaje virtual. Estos hallazgos contribuyen a comprender cómo el AAR de los profesores universitarios y sus estudiantes progresa en espacios sociales virtuales.

Palabras clave: teoría fundamentada constructivista, aprendizaje auto-regulado, profesor universitario, estudiante universitario, espacios sociales virtuales

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A virtual social space is a network in which flux, open-ended, liquid and flowing learning occurs. Virtual social spaces were studied and theorized by philosophers and sociologists (Bauman, 2013; Braidotti, 2013); psychologists (Csikszentmihalyi & Wolfe, 2014); scholars in education (Griffith, Sawyer, & Neale, 2003); new media and communication (Castells, 2013); science and technologies (Varnelis, 2012). Self-regulated learning (SRL) concerns application of general models of human (self) regulation to learning (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2012). All the models of SRL share common assumptions: actors are treated as active builders of their personal learning processes; they construct meanings, goals and strategies from external and internal environments (Romero & Lambropoulos, 2011); learners can monitor, control and regulate their learning behaviors (Karabenick & Zusho, 2015); actors can set learning standards and motivate themselves to reach these goals (Littlejohn, Hood, Milligan, & Mustain, 2016); self-regulatory activities are directly linked to achievement and performance (Pintrich, 2000). SRL processes that evolve in virtual social spaces transform human relationships: most of the time learners virtually communicate, exchange mediated experiences, share live moments everywhere, and crowdsource. Learners are challenged in developing SRL skills with permanent uncertainty, and in all forms of communication meltdown. Self-regulated learners continuously expand their fields of interests and make short-term commitments (Bauman, 2005).

Social media has the potential to bridge formal and informal learning through participatory digital academic cultures. The importance of blurring boundaries in formal and informal pedagogical practices increases, and formal and informal learning converge within the social media (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). Complex student-teacher relationships and interactions predict academic achievements (Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004). Student formal engagement increases because of the non-formal support provided by teachers (Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2012). It is important that this type of support could be transmitted when both actors are positively positioned, motivated and self-regulated to receive, absorb and share knowledge.

In formal studies, students' and their teachers' communication is public. Informally, virtual contact is freely agreed and sought by both agencies. During formal lectures, active participants are known and teacher-learner roles are generally set in advance. On the other hand, informally, in virtual social spaces, academic agencies can remain anonymous and continuously

change their roles (Eisenbeiss, Blechschmidt, Backhaus, & Freund, 2012). Self-regulated learners constantly construct and de-construct their multiple identities within virtual social spaces, producing and consuming knowledge (Solomon, 2014) and developing virtual identity marketing strategies. Identity marketing is increasingly challenging in virtual social spaces where identity performances are seemingly untethered from the user's body that is sitting at the computer (Schultze, 2014). In their study on informal collaboration in groups, Griffith et al. (2003) found that development of creativity requires that actors develop feelings of mutual trust and empathy. In addition, the individual intentions should be in harmony with others in the group.

An observation of 70 university students' Facebook use made in Australia by Vivian, Barnes, Geer and Wood (2014) showed that many students leave their "academic journey traces" online and interact with their teachers. By this present study, we attempted to understand the processes of SRL of university students and their teachers taking place in virtual social spaces. We hold the position that SRL goes behind the walls of formal university teaching and learning and both main academic actors (university teachers and their students) in virtual social spaces become learners. We investigated the SRL of professors, instructors and their students meeting virtually after formal university classes in *Facebook*, *LinkedIn* or *Research Gate* virtual environments. The main research question was: how does the self-regulated learning of university students and their teachers develop in virtual social spaces?

Methodology

Study Design

The research was conducted in Lithuania amongst only Lithuanian academics. In total, 24 semi-structured interviews with 6 professors and associate professors, 6 instructors, 6 undergraduates, 6 graduate and PhD students from 5 Lithuanian universities were conducted to understand SRL in virtual social spaces.

A constructivist grounded theory method was applied in this study for gathering data, coding, sampling, sorting and theory constructing. This implied that; (i) the research process was treated as a social construction,

letting new insights and additional questions emerge, observing and including them in a whole structure; (ii) methodological and analytical strategies of research were improvised and slightly changed if data showed it to be necessary; (iii) research decisions and descriptions were carefully studied and evaluated; (iv) tacit data meanings and silent processes were described and explained (Charmaz, 2008). After defining the research problem, research questions were chosen and a flexible interview plan created. Following data and constructed codes, the interview plan was adapted and additional questions formulated. Initial coding started after the first data collection. Data were analyzed comparatively with new data. Focus coding started after the first interview collection and initial coding. Constructing categories from data, codes and subcategories started after the focus coding of the first data. This process was iterative until the saturation of categories. Analytical memos were written, mapped and sorted during all the process of grounded theory construction. Later memos were integrated with the final grounded theory. Data collection procedures were implemented simultaneously with qualitative data analysis and concept generation (Charmaz, 2006).

Sampling and Data Collection

Professors and instructors were selected using snowball sampling. The first author chose the first participant who subjectively illuminated initial research interests for the interview. Later participants themselves proposed the new ones. Teachers were asked to recommend students from their virtual circle for further interviews. All interviews were held at university campuses over a period of two semesters during the academic year 2014/2015. The sample comprises 17 females and 7 males.

In-depth individual interviewing was chosen as the data collection method because of the research participants' inter-relations. University teachers are knowledge workers: they teach, share and express thoughts during formal lectures and other university activities. By the nature of their work, teachers are used to conversations and thus did not express any discomfort in being interviewed. Interviews help to learn of participants' experiences, to find out about their life situations and to explore their living worlds (Kvale, 2008). The interviews were actively evolving and the discussions spontaneously evoked additional questions. The shortest

interview lasted 23 minutes and the longest took 1 hour and 42 minutes. The in-depth nature of individual interviews invoked the participant's online experiences. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Researchers conducted interviews in Lithuanian (informants' native language). Each interview consisted of two question parts: first, a description of the participant's activities and online friends; and, second, virtual communication experiences. Some examples of questions about virtual activities and friends were: *"Tell me about your activities in a virtual space. How did they emerge? Have they changed over time? How have your personal actions evolved through these activities? Could you please describe the latest situation in which you learned, gained knowledge, received some benefits while networking in virtual social spaces? Do you follow/have friended persons, groups or institutions? Describe in more detail. How do you pick, chose, select persons, institutions, sites? Describe the process and its conditions in more detail."* To explore virtual network activities, understand how people make sense of their situations in virtual social spaces and act on them, the researcher asked questions about virtual communication, for instance: *"Tell me about the instructors, professors, students with whom you are online friends, who you follow. How and why did you become virtually connected? Could you please describe this virtual interaction? Please tell me the reasons why you invited them and/or accepted virtual requests/decided to follow? What is the value and meaning (for you) of online social communication with teachers and/or students? How have you personally contributed to the teachers, students and what do you gain while communicating online? What have you learned from online connection with your professors, students? What do you think they learned/achieved from a connection with you?"* Following the interview plan, the questions to teachers and their students remained similar. Open-ended questions with focus on significant statements allowed different stories to emerge.

Interviews were conducted in the participants' natural environment – university classes, professors' and instructors' rooms, auditoriums, public university halls and corridors. All the data collection and analysis were performed simultaneously.

Data Analysis

Charmaz (2006) proposed a constructivist grounded theory coding or, in other words, defining what the data are about, in two main steps: initial and focused coding. The first step – initial coding – leads to close reading of interview texts, distinguishing various fragments of data and naming them. During the second step – focused coding – initial codes are selected, combined, compared and tested with other codes and extended data, integrated to larger amounts, synthesized and named again. Focused coding leads to theoretical coding and grounded theory construction (Charmaz, 2006). In our study, initial and focused coding started straight after gathering the first interview and was done incident by incident. This approach was chosen to extract the main idea or initial code from the event or proceeding. One incident was collected from a part of, or a few, logically related interview sentences. In vivo codes were used to characterize participants' social worlds and academic settings (Holton, 2007). Focused coding was done through comparing data to data, still keeping codes close to the data. This approach helped synthesizing and explaining larger data segments; going backwards and forward to new data. Coding helped to see the participant stories grounded in the data and lead to theoretical insights (Charmaz, 2011).

Extended theoretical graphical memos were drawn during all data collection and the analysis process to facilitate conceptualization of the data and to enable the open codes, sub-categories and categories to move upwards. Analytical maps (Clarke, 2005) analyzed data that were already collected. They showed the road to future data collection and pointed to the new interview participants (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). They allowed constructing analytical notes, freezing the ongoing ideas, concepts and theoretical meanings. Finally, they provided a space required for new data collection. Graphical memos were done spontaneously after finishing each interview and contained everything that came to mind about codes, categories, interview participants, environments, and theoretical insights. Memo texts, maps and visuals helped to gain insights and explained already developed categories (Clarke, 2005). Clustering technique (a shorthand prewriting that gives a non-linear, visual, and flexible understanding and organization of materials) led to diagram relationships and situations. It

provided a blueprint of how the data and topics fit together and how they were related to the phenomena (Charmaz, 2006).

Ethics

All the interview participants were informed about the purpose, methods and intended use of findings. The interviews were conducted with sensitivity, respecting the confidentiality of data. To ensure research confidentiality it was agreed with participants that names, places, schools, and subjects would not be announced. In accordance with international guidelines for research ethics (General Assembly of the World Medical Association, 2014), participants were introduced to the research topic in general. However, the interview questions were not revealed in advance. All students expressed their willingness to participate in a research. They responded: "*being a student I am happy to contribute to quality of studies and science in general*". There were teachers that refused to take part claiming they have "*no time*" or "*were not active in virtual environments*". Others asked for the interview questions in advance but these were not provided. All the participants were informed that data would be audio-recorded and later analyzed anonymously. Participants felt at ease only when provided official guarantees of anonymity. Potential threats arising from the research, such as psychological and emotional distress recalling specific learning situations; a decline of self-confidence; virtual reputation damage; and online relations were predicted and justified as low.

Findings

Teachers and their students are equally important actors in formal university teaching and learning processes. In non-formal and informal settings, many university students in Lithuania face the challenge of virtually communicating with the professors whom they know in real life, even if internet social spaces open the opportunities to communicate with or without showing your real identity. To better characterize the results of our grounded theory analysis, i.e. the SRL processes developing in virtual social spaces, we constructed categories using metaphors from the ocean and sea life.

It was clear from our data that virtual social spaces are treated and experienced as liquid and flowing, "live" networks in which different unpredictable virtual activities happen: virtual links and connections emerge, vanish, and revive. The use of metaphors in grounded theory methodology facilitates explanation of social processes. The metaphors and their explanations in grounded theory research are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
The list of constructed grounded theory categories and related metaphors

Category explaining Metaphor	Dimensions of category	Research participants
Stroking the net whale	Exploiting virtual social spaces for ubiquitous learning	Students
	Exploiting virtual social spaces for creative activities	Teachers
Building boats	Social networking Identity marketing	Both groups
Angling in the multifaceted ocean	Personal capabilities Mutual trust	Both groups
	Enforcing formal studies	Students
	Maintaining liquid identities	Teachers
Nurturing the big fish	Academic communication	Both groups
	Developing virtual learning skills	Students
	Developing professional knowledge	Teachers

In the following section, we present the constructed categories that taken together give an understanding of the processes of SRL of teachers and their students taking place in virtual social spaces and summarize its different components. The interview data were codified using a two

symbols system. The first symbol showed the interview number. The second symbol identified the type of participant: interviews with students were codified with the symbol S, while lecturers and researchers were codified with the symbol A. For example, codification 6A showed that this was evidence from the sixth informant teacher.

Stroking the Net Whale

Whale is a common name for huge marine creatures. Whales live in an open ocean. They are wild and dangerous if you don't know how to deal with them. *Stroking the net whale* was constructed as the core category that explained the main actions in our data. This category showed that students exploit the virtual social spaces for ubiquitous learning and their teachers exploit virtual social space for creative activities. Students learned effective information while being connected; treated the online information and texts as equally important for learning as formal class materials; sought more active involvement of their teachers' in common virtual activities; and used networks for solving formal class challenges. Their professors created social network groups and shared materials:

> Most of us spend a lot of time on Facebook. We always have smartphones on hand. We receive notifications if someone is uploading. And we quickly find out all the related information (5S)

> I hadn't expected that my virtual groups would become the space for the texts and information sharing and students would be so eager to do that. I even didn't appreciate how much time the young people spent in networks. This discovery astonished me. <...> I did my first posts and shares I thought that this group needs me as a teacher because I needed a space for my communication with them. I thought I would write: "let's meet here and there; you need to bring this or that; read this post". I thought the group that I created was for publishing the assignment texts, but as time passed, I realized that students also want to share, not only me posting. They wrote to me: "could I post this for other people in my group?" These were the first steps, the first virtual group where they, my students, also started sharing, following, reading, and becoming interested (6A)

Teachers used networks for creative activities and explored virtual social spaces for creative group work with their virtual friends:

> I re-use the net materials in my formal classes. I use networks searching the ideas for lectures. I search for the pieces that would be possible to apply. I search for some ideas, scientific and popular science papers, hints and references, some other texts. I need only some parts of the materials. There were no situations that I used all the materials without my personal changes and additions. I could say that I adapt some papers for my classes. Sometimes I find "pearls" (1A)

> I was invited by a stranger. When I added him to my network, he wrote me a message saying: "hello, maybe we can write common articles. These conferences are planned"<...> this is an example how to exploit the networks. International networks. <...> adding people to your network, you can openly say: "Hi, maybe we could write an article together?" If you want and are brave enough, you can invite virtual friends to create academic outputs. (8A)

University professors valued network data and even used it in personal lectures. Besides that, they respectfully and responsively use the technology:

> I do not like intimacy in networks. For me, networks are first of all tools for getting information faster. Networks are sharing channel, but not a place for personal life. (3A)

> I think that social networks are very welcome for solving problems that ask for your creativity and contemplations. We need to use networks to search some materials or virtually create (4A)

The core category – *Stroking the net whale* – was constructed based on data illustrating how the participants grow in the process of stroking/exploring the net whale. Research participants develop their academic, study and occupational skills with new information and knowledge in academic communication, during virtual learning and professional knowledge development. The process of academic

communication was the same for both groups, teachers and students. Additionally, students develop virtual learning skills whereas their teachers develop professional knowledge. Involvement of active students and their teachers in networking activities was influenced by social networking and identity marketing and depended on their individual capabilities, enforcement of formal studies and maintenance of virtual identities. The different components of the *Stroking the net whale* process show why participants made decisions to participate and develop active involvement in SRL and were explained by the categories *Building boats*, *Angling in the multifaceted ocean, and Nurturing the big fish.* Different processes or components of the processes were applied to university teachers and their students. Figure 1 illustrates how these categories are linked to each other and to the core category. The arrows indicate the direction of SRL skills development and growth (Fig. 1).
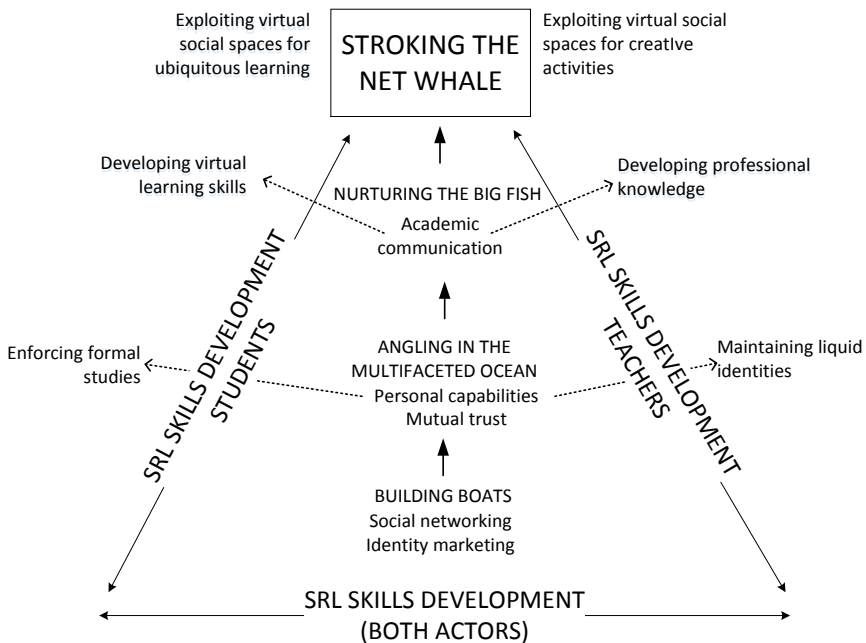

Figure 1. Stroking the net whale: mapping the constructivist grounded theory of SRL in virtual social spaces.

A whale is an animal that needs to be tamed before putting to work. In virtual social spaces you make friends with other people and start common activities: communication, collaboration, sharing, and crowdsourcing before you begin to exploit the net materials. Findings showed that mastering how to manage the net materials helped both groups of participants to exploit the net for versatile learning and creative activities. The constructed grounded theory described the continuous and never-ending process of developing SRL: Building boats precedes Angling in the multifaceted ocean which leads to Stroking the net whale influenced by Nurturing the big fish. Because of its fluid nature, the SRL of university teachers and their students could be suspended, stopped, and revived at any point; and teacher-learner roles can change. University teachers and their students at the same time could learn and teach their virtual friends.

Building Boats

Building boats is a category metaphorically explaining the processes of preparing self-regulated networked learning. Symbolically speaking, human identity in virtual social spaces could serve like a fishing boat. While in virtual social spaces people construct, present and market their identities (build boats) to catch the audience (big fish). Students are curious about their professors' online profiles. Teachers want to learn about their students' lives to improve communication and even formal lectures:

> I connect to my teachers to find out what they are doing, how they live. Once connected, I can contact them quicker. I notice when they see what I wrote on the net. While connected, I have permanent contact with the teacher. It's not the same as just observing people. You can see if he saw your question, the websites he is visiting, what his interests are. By watching them online, I understand more about my teacher's activities (3S)

> It's important for me to see my students' living world. If I can monitor my students online, then there's the value of the network. While connected, I can feel the rhythm of students' life. I see what events they are involved in, what they are interested in. It's interesting to me because these things say a lot about students. I see that my students do not "accidentally apply for university". I see

that some of them are very busy, do things related to studies, improvement and self-learning (12A)

Some virtual friends could tolerate your "boat" (or the online identity you created) with caution. If you chose appropriate casting equipment you would surely catch the desired fish quickly. If you construct your identity with responsibility and actively go for social networking you will find colleagues, friends and congenial people from whom you could learn, get inspiration, or compete.

> I observe virtual accounts of all Lithuanian and some foreign universities. I observe their lives, their activities on social networks. I learned from networks how to attract new students to the university. I observe competition authorities. From these observations I get my work inspiration (6A)

Actions and interactions forming the SRL of university teachers and their students consist of social networking and identity marketing. Social networking for teachers consists of searching for online materials and shared virtual texts. Also, keeping virtual contacts with the students is important to them. Through the networks teachers could motivate and encourage students, but they prefer to connect only with group leaders:

> I do not have any special content on my account. There is no information such that I cannot publicly display. I connect with one or two students and later they add the rest of the student group. If I do not see a student for a while, I write him a message: "Where are you, why are you not attending my lectures?" (5A)

Social networking for students meant managing and helping in organizing their formal studies, as well as participating in net activities and surfing for the learning materials. Some students themselves create academic content and discuss it with their peers and groupmates:

> It's easier to share academic information through the Fb group. For example, we need to do some work and we do not completely understand the task. So we ask the group: "have you already done this task? Could some of you share how you did it?"(9S)

> I'm looking for others with whom I could talk virtually about an issue that interests me. I am looking for groups to get involved in. I find other people's posts and we talk, we interact. <...> I'm thinking about the content I'm posting. I publish content and wait to see who responds. I always ask myself: "Are there people for whom this content is interesting? Does it affect them?"(12S)

Identity marketing for both participant groups is online self-presentation and open-ended account construction. Students also stressed passive net membership. Some professors virtually consult students and communicate with them treating students as professionals. Other teachers feel the necessity to control students because of lack of their motivation:

> You can login to Facebook and you can logout <...> but the learning always has some elements of compulsion. <...>Yes, the learning is compulsory. <...> a student is born to be forced. I never met a person who says: "I can sit and study that subject myself". All the students face periods of groans and low motivation. <...> if there is a control mechanism, student could easier overcome the difficulties (15A)

Teachers guessed student intentions virtually to befriend them, but not all the teachers expressed the initiative to be connected. Students asked for virtual friendship with their teachers because they hunted for the contacts or wanted to present their academic achievements personally:

> Normally students ask to connect because of a willingness to start the common activity. <...> they ask for non-formal individual assignment evaluation, remarks and jottings or help accomplishing their formal study-work. They ask for written explanations how to solve the task, why something is not working etc. (19A)

> Creating a group would encourage student interest in the subject. If students see their teacher logged in – they would quickly write subject-related questions. The probability of a student overcoming fear of communication with a teacher would increase. The student's interest in the subject would increase (6S)

Social networking and identity marketing mostly comprised conditional actions to initiate SRL.

Angling in the Multifaceted Ocean

Angling in the multifaceted ocean is a category explaining uncertainties and feelings of insecurity and at the same time new valuable opportunities while being involved in networked SRL. Angling in the ocean is a challenging adventure. The sea is always unpredictable – wind could generate waves, weather changes from sun to rain and fish hide from being caught. Fishermen could use cages, pots, traps, lines, or gillnets to attract and catch sea creatures. With a rod, you could catch fewer fish but you can choose the ones you like. Using a rod while angling in the ocean will not harm the environment. The research findings showed that personal capabilities (how, where and when you catch your fish) is a common property to both actor groups. For academics, personal capabilities mean control over technologies (controlling your fishing rod) with, at the same time, limited use of various social technologies (limited usage of different fishing lines). Net time management was recognized as an important issue by both groups of participants. Besides that, students talked about the inconsistency of various internet technologies, software and devices (lack of boats) as well as instability of individual net activities; liquid activeness influenced by other non-education interests; even mood changes influenced by posts:

> Some of the time on the net is pointless… The network "caches" you. You spend more time than necessary. The net sucks you in. The same as the gambling games do (2A)

> Spending time on Facebook is a way of passing time. When I have nothing to do I go to Facebook. I spend fifteen minutes on Facebook, then I go to eat or read a book. After this I'll return to Facebook. When I spend time on Facebook I relax. I smile when I see funny posts (1S)

> My mood lifts while I'm following and browsing (7S)

Teachers observed and evaluated the network with all its virtual activities, assessed virtual friends, and verified validity of online texts.

Teachers observed liquid identities of other net members and sought self-preservation and a protection of their virtual accounts. Some university teachers reservedly friended students and deliberately chatted (fishing was not their main life activity):

> For me, the virtual world is more dangerous than real. I feel myself not secure. <...> If I live-talk – this is not an argument. Even if we chatted I could say we were not. But if something is posted or messaged – everything is fixed. If you wrote something in social networks environment – it would be hard to delete that text. If you have used your voice – this is safer (3A)

> You know that term – lurker? That is how I identify myself. I enter, I see what's being posted. I rarely answer the posts. I follow discussions; I them. Anything I find interesting I recheck on various sites. But I never contribute. I'm just watching (10A)

Maintenance of liquid identities was observed as an important issue for teachers. Incidents of hacked accounts and stolen information are known and are treated carefully. Teachers discussed net security with colleagues, even thinking about quitting their accounts because of privacy issues:

> I suggested using personal security applications. This is necessary for not letting other people observe your account and tag your photos without your permission. If somebody tags you – you definitely need to know that (7A)

> My private space is mine alone. Network tells me to open it, but I don't want to <…> I know that twenty or thirty people will see my "button click" and I don't like it (4A)

In building friendships over the network, relationships between co-workers and work-subordination issues were recognized as key factors. Findings showed that personal information from the networks of teachers could be applied and adopted according to the employers' demands; work activities could be observed; conflict situations aroused. Besides that, the university teachers solved professional issues virtually; communicated and

collaborated, crowdsourced with their peers and scholars from the entire world:

> I can hardly find congenial company in real life <...> those people who could be my ideal professional partners. <...> even in my work environment I couldn't find such creative communication. Though, on LinkedIn I could find that type of communication. On a narrow level, but I accept that (2A)

Mutual trust was a breakwater for university teachers and their students. Students and teachers solve academic and non-academic problems together. Even crowdsourcing was observed:

> I had a point to deal with, and other network members helped me a lot. Some of them I don't know in real life, but they have also encountered a similar problem. I talked to people who understand me perfectly because they are or were in a similar situation. I don't know where to find such a group, if not online (1A)

Both research participants' groups were concerned about academic consciousness; respect; disjuncture; recognition. Some students saw not much online confidence in teachers, followed their own preconceptions, and created opinions from the texts they observed and read. Students do not always think before they post. They publicized trash information, shared study materials, results and assignment answers and exam texts, and bullied online:

> When I share the posts I never think why I do that <...> it seems to me that we all exchange posts without thinking. We litter and make rubbish everywhere (12S)

> This wonderful tool – the network – is being used for spam. I could sense that. Nobody is responsible and everybody has the power to advertise and publish some kind of nonsense. This is absolutely not the purpose of the network (2A)

Not all students reacted positively to their teachers' virtual requests. Some students avoided attention themselves, but searched and reviewed

their teachers' accounts. Some students did not connect with their professors because they felt afraid of future consequences. After communicating with their teachers, students appear to be changed:

> Our university professor asked us to create a group. He came to a lecture and said: "We could communicate through Facebook platform". One of the students founded a new virtual group. Invited teacher and other students... From the very beginning it was very unaccountable and funny for me. Our professor is superior so how he could so easy virtually communicate with us? But later I really liked that (4S)

Enforcement of formal studies for university students was related to study motivation issues. Self-regulated students in social networks made and discussed proposals for learning process acceleration, because they felt responsible for learning (more advanced and less complicated fishing using the same ocean angling techniques).

Nurturing the Big Fish

Nurturing the big fish is a category describing how academic communication and skills development progress. Sea fish are not pets; only an experienced aqua culturist could take care of them. Research findings showed that university teachers and their students occupy virtual social spaces through academic online communication which leads to virtual learning and academic knowledge development.

Academic communication for students means teacher-inspired socialization; students' contacts with their teachers and peers; private communications; commenting and discussing. Academic communication for their professors and instructors means communication with their colleagues and students; and personal communication on non-work-related issues. Teachers observed and studied the consequences of virtual communication; and evaluated the reliance on virtual communication:

> Networks are substitutes for real life. The problem is that live communication skills are declining. A lot of people are addicted to these social networks. For them the first thing on waking up is to check their personal accounts. They check their accounts even

> when sleeping! I saw one person who commented online how many messages he sent. All the time, whatever they do, even while eating, they chat. They cannot be disconnected. All the time they are online. They are connected in a family and in class environment... This is an addiction. They become dependent. (17A)

Virtual learning for self-regulated students means knowing from the new posts as quickly as they arrive; reading popular science texts from their professors' posts; effective finding of required information; selective information sorting; group work and formal study tasks solving initiation in networks; following the scientific news; learning while reading virtual friends wall posts:

> How honestly do students share? Enough. As far as I've noticed, if someone asks for an opinion, they get the answer quickly enough (5S)

> I had a study assignment – to perform practice in a school. I was told to observe the class work. I needed to find a class to observe teacher-student school activities. I asked for support from the teachers whom I had in my virtual friends' list. I wrote them a private message asking to visit their educational activities in class. I wanted to sit physically in a class and to observe the work. They agreed to let me in, they didn't object. <...> and, I remember I needed something for my studies. I sent an electronic form, and they completed it and sent me their answers (9S)

Academic knowledge development for professors and lecturers means continuously learning; development of skills; gaining professional information; testing the new technologies and investigating; contemplating the application of net tools:

> I think that for every subject of educational work – it doesn't matter that exactly we do or develop we need to find proper tools. Using tools that are specially created for this specific purpose will achieve the best results. To tell the truth, if I compare it with other systems, formal learning using Facebook would be a challenge to me. This system is complicated because it doesn't have tools for evaluation and convenient learning material posting <...> it is complicated to

> write feedback on the uploaded materials. If you want to stress that students upload materials before the specified deadline, if you want to see how students upload – Facebook is not an educational tool for you (9A)

Both groups of participants treat their network contacts as an opportunity to *Nurture the big fish* which they need to breed for the academic communication, virtual learning and academic knowledge development issues. Sea fish are sensitive creatures. Only your personal efforts, motivation communicate and collaborate could build the result of self-regulated networked learning.

Discussion

This study focuses on processes of networked SRL and draws parallels with the human actions of sea fishing. University teachers' and their students' SRL in virtual social spaces were described as a process metaphorically called *Stroking the net whale.* Participants' learning followed different paths: university students exploit virtual social spaces for ubiquitous learning and their teachers exploit networks for creative activities. The study showed that contrary to traditional curricula based on long-accepted knowledge, research participants themselves created and developed networked knowledge circuits. Networked SRL is not easily compared with any formal teaching-learning structures. Construction of multiple meanings researched by Romero and Lambropoulos (2011) as a construct of SRL was found in different means of net exploration.

Social media has the potential to bridge formal and informal learning through participatory digital cultures (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). Our research showed that only students exploit virtual social spaces for ubiquitous learning. Greenhow and Lewin (2016) described two different perspectives on young people's social media use, and in both cases elements of self-determination in learning purpose and self-direction of learning process was established. For our research participants, self-direction of learning was also expressed, but some learners (both teachers and students) lacked motivation and final learning targets. They "touched" the learning and were not immersed in the depths of the process.

The *Building boats* category metaphorically explained university teachers' and their students' networked SRL initial processes (virtual identity marketing and willingness to test social networking activities). Dunne, Lawlor and Rowley (2010) explored young people's participation in social networks from a uses and gratifications perspective, finding the main gratifications as communication, entertainment and friending. Our findings enlarged these results adding the new gratification: identity marketing. In our study, the entertainment part was not pursued. Dynamics of knowledge development and transfer in teams as described in Seddon (1988) and later researched in virtual environments by Griffith et al. (2003) was observed for both groups of participants.

The *Angling in the multifaceted ocean* category explained university teachers' and their students' SRL in virtual social spaces stressing that how you create and re-construct your identity influences from and with whom you learn. Findings indicated that personal capabilities and mutual trust changed the way how participants build their virtual relationships. This is in line with Ellis' (2016) research on creative learning principles, which found that learning is acquired through the creative process of problem solving when persons trust their peers. Creative solutions are attributed to previously known, recalled, applied, practiced and re-created person's knowledge and this work only in safe environment build on peer-trust. In virtual social spaces where teachers and their students make virtual friendships and communicate they continuously adjust their digital identities collaboratively constructing new knowledge.

Mutual trust is the main building block for virtual communities and crowdsourcing platforms (Agreste, De Meo, Ferrara, Piccolo, & Provetti, 2015). Research participants (teachers and students) did not express concern for the well-being, learning process and outcomes of their fellows, but concentrated on personal capability growth. This feature was especially manifest in teachers. To prove this, teachers gave examples of some of them not adding their students to personal networks so as "not hamper their professional growth". This resulted in *Angling in the multifaceted ocean*, meaning in many cases finding learning solutions alone or without the help of the crowd.

The *Nurturing the big fish* category we constructed out of virtual student-teacher communication in non-formal and informal environments, virtual learning and professional knowledge development. Our study

revealed academic communication as one of the most challenging processes of SRL in virtual social spaces. University students and their professors are challenged by virtual peer and group communication in non-academic environments. These findings broadened Crosnoe et al. (2004) research about the connection between student-teacher relationships and intergenerational bonds to learning results and partly contradicts Pianta et al. (2012) research on students' engagement direct dependence upon academic support.

Conclusions, Study Limitations and Future Research

The constructed grounded theory *Stroking the net whale* explained the SRL processes of two academic agencies – university professors and instructors and their students – in virtual social spaces. *Stroking the net whale* comprised three categories: *Building boats*, *Angling in the multifaceted ocean and Nurturing the big fish*. *Building boats* referred to social networking and identity marketing in virtual social spaces. *Angling in the multifaceted ocean* had two dimensions that were common to both academic agencies – personal capabilities and mutual trust. While *Angling in the multifaceted ocean,* teachers maintain their liquid identities and students reinforce their formal university learning. *Nurturing the big fish* showed different components of the SRL process development – both actor groups learn the building of academic communication, while in addition students develop virtual learning skills, and university teachers develop professional knowledge.

Combination of originality and credibility increased resonance, usefulness, and the subsequent value of the constructed grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). The research credibility was developed through systematic comparisons between interview data, memos, codes and categories. As research participants, university teachers were asked to recommend their students for new interviews to cover a wider range of observations. Text, visual and audio memos helped not to be lost in data, gathered new arguments, and helped to compare categories with categories. Visual memos, describing research participant experiences, were discussed with participants seeking to understand whether the graphical explanation made sense to academic parties. These sessions specified data and offered deeper insights about SRL.

Research participants were Lithuanian university teachers and their students. Findings showed that our participants were virtually connected not only with local and national parties. The selection of research participants from only one country was perceived as study limitation. On the other hand, such a pool of participants allowed understanding and inclusion of cultural issues such as student-teacher peer communication in virtual social spaces. Data grounded in voices of international academics and non-academics, related with academic parties, can benefit the findings.

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El Aprendizaje de la Escucha en la Investigación Educativa

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Learning to Listen in Educational Research

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Abstract

Despite the fact that listening is at the core of teaching, pedagogical literature has paid very little attention to listening. In this paper, we echo this absence of research and try to explore some of listening's pedagogical and training possibilities. We move away from the kind of listening that underlies relationships of power, trying to find a pattern of listening in which our presence becomes important and related research activity is seen as a transformational experience. We address these matters on the basis of some learning experiences arising from a recent study in which we analyzed, by means of a narrative methodology, the experiences of academic failure of three adolescents. The article concludes with proposals of some principles which served as the basis and guidelines for our conduct in the course of the study, and which are an example of our concept of listening for educational research.

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Resumen

Pese a que la escucha está en el corazón de la enseñanza, la literatura pedagógica le viene prestando escasa atención. En este artículo nos hacemos eco de esa carencia de pensamiento sobre la escucha, buscando explorar algunas de sus posibilidades pedagógicas y formativas. Nos alejamos de la escucha que se sostiene en las relaciones de poder para buscar aquella en la que cobra importancia nuestra presencia y donde la práctica de la investigación se enfoca como una experiencia de transformación. Abordamos estas cuestiones apoyándonos en algunos de los aprendizajes que se derivan de un estudio reciente en el que, a través de una metodología narrativa, nos hemos acercado a las experiencias de fracaso escolar de tres estudiantes adolescentes. El artículo finaliza proponiendo algunos principios que han sostenido y orientado la forma de conducirnos en dicho estudio y que ejemplifican nuestra concepción de la escucha para la investigación educativa.

Palabras clave: escucha, investigación cualitativa, pedagogía, alteridad, experiencia educativa

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N uestra experiencia docente e investigadora[1] nos ha enseñado que resulta necesario aprender a escuchar como una disposición que nos abra al intercambio que supone toda relación, también en la investigación, cuando ésta tiene un sentido educativo. Como la educación, también la investigación tiene que ver con el encuentro y lo que en él está circulando; un encuentro movido por propósitos pedagógicos que enraíza en la propia biografía y que conecta con la tradición y los bagajes culturales (Caparrós & Sierra, 2012).

En la escucha hay patente un esfuerzo por tratar de entender desde sí y en relación a la otra, al otro, concreto y singular. Cuando la pensamos para la investigación educativa, la escucha no se orienta a desbrozar un asunto o un fenómeno, sino que proporciona un medio a través del cual dejarnos decir acerca del sentido que para una persona concreta van cobrando determinadas vivencias; y explorando con ello lo que se va abriendo en nosotros como pensamiento. De ahí que sostengamos que las prácticas de investigación pueden llegar a constituir una relación de producción de sentido en la que tengamos la oportunidad de aprender sobre nosotros mismos y sobre nuestra relación con la alteridad.

A lo largo del artículo proponemos resignificar la escucha para la práctica de la investigación educativa. Planteamos una serie de consideraciones acerca de *las voces* en la investigación y el tipo de escucha que entraña la pedagogía. Finalmente, exponemos algunos planteamientos que se derivan de un estudio reciente (Sierra, 2013) en el que la escucha ha jugado un papel determinante como disposición para la indagación.

Del "Dar Voz" al "Ponerse a la Escucha"

Entendemos la educación y la investigación como una experiencia, es decir, como una relación con la alteridad en la que algo *nos pasa* (Larrosa, 2009). Una vivencia que acompañamos de una dimensión receptiva y reflexiva, aceptando lo que sucede y deteniéndonos conscientemente en lo que *nos sucede* como fuente de transformación. Hay en ello un trabajo persistente y delicado de relación con *lo otro* que nos requiere partir de sí para ir hacia lo que es exterior a una, a uno. Pues, como señalan Contreras y Pérez de Lara (2010):

> la experiencia del otro, de la otra, de lo otro, es lo que se nos pone
> delante en la investigación; <la experiencia del tú> es lo que hay
> siempre en juego en la investigación educativa. Pero la experiencia
> del otro no es sólo intentar entender su experiencia, sino pasar, en
> el transcurso de la investigación, por la experiencia del encuentro
> con el otro. (p. 68).

El encuentro nos pide el reconocimiento de la irreductible originalidad de la otra persona y hacerlo más allá (no en contra) de aquellas dimensiones que puede compartir con otras y que suelen configurar las adscripciones de identidad (de género, de clase social, de grupo étnico; estudiante, docente, fracasados, talentosos…). Algo que resulta tan crucial como difícil, pues a menudo se nos enredan los hilos identitarios, las concepciones previas que hemos construido sobre quiénes pensamos que los demás son, o deberían ser, o necesitamos que sean. Y es que, como señalan las mujeres de la Librería de Milán (2006), "el dominio le ofrece identidad a quien lo ejerce, pero también a quien lo sufre, y mucha servidumbre se perpetúa precisamente por la necesidad de identidad" (p.186).

Ya hace mucho tiempo que Lather (1999, p. 104) advirtió sobre el proyecto de la pedagogía liberadora que "requiere de un sujeto que es un objeto de nuestros deseos de emancipación". Podría decirse que es nuestro deseo, o nuestra necesidad, quien crea a un sujeto al que se mira desde aquello de lo que carece; un sujeto que se piensa sin capacidad o sin posibilidad de tomar la palabra o de salir del silencio en que otros le mantienen.

Pero insistir en mirar la carencia puede dificultar ver quiénes son. Cuando pensamos en alguien a quien hay que "dar" algo es porque creemos que carece de ello y que nosotros tenemos la posibilidad de ofrecérselo (porque lo tenemos). Y con Orner (1999, p. 118) habría que preguntarse hasta qué punto este supuesto "perpetúa las relaciones de dominación en nombre de la liberación". Algo que Ellsworth (1999) comparte cuando habla del "mito represivo del otro silencioso". Lo denomina *represivo* porque parte del supuesto de que la "voz" de ese otro sólo aparece cuando alguien le ayuda a "empoderarse", a expresar sus conocimientos reprimidos o sojuzgados. Y se trataría de un *mito* porque lo que sucede es que quienes son calificados como "silenciados" no es que lo estén, sino que "los educadores críticos son incapaces de reconocer la presencia de

conocimientos que desafían sus propias posiciones sociales y que son muy probablemente inaccesibles a ellas" (p. 75). Por tanto, continúa Ellsworth, no se trata de *grupos silenciados*, sino de que no hablan con la voz que la pedagogía crítica puede reconocer.

En lo anterior se encuentra el riesgo de simplificar las particularidades de cada vida humana, al prevalecer nuestro *sentido del bien* (Sartori, 2004) por encima de los deseos, necesidades y motivaciones de las otras y de los otros. Y ese *sentido del bien*, como el sentido de justicia que impregna la pedagogía crítica, está siempre en juego en la indagación y la comprensión de aquello que es pedagógicamente crucial, hasta el punto de que habríamos de cuidarnos por atemperar nuestras aspiraciones si a través de ellas lo que ocurre es que nos posicionamos en un movimiento dialéctico que difícilmente nos permite la apertura a lo real en su complejidad paradójica (Piussi, 2008).

Porque somos conscientes de que toda práctica investigadora conlleva una *política de la representación*, creemos preciso detenernos a pensar en lo que (nos) significa la escucha buscando sortear los riesgos de que se convierta en un ejercicio de poder, así como tratando de aprender a reconocer las dificultades y los obstáculos de ponerse a la escucha para dejarse decir como acontecimiento pedagógico (Bárcena, 2005).

Avanzando en un Pensamiento Sobre la Escucha

La reflexión que proponemos surge de nuestra experiencia en tanto que investigadores, apoyada más en lecturas filosóficas y pedagógicas que en literatura estrictamente metodológica. Tomar este punto de anclaje se debe a que, como indica Arévalo (2010), las lecturas sobre metodología suelen carecer de aquella capacidad mediadora que permite expresar el modo en que alguien vive su relación con el mundo, señalando el sentido y el valor de verdad de cada colocación personal ante la realidad. Es esa distancia la que nos lleva a involucrarnos en la reflexión sobre lo que implica y compromete la escucha para la educación y para la investigación de orientación cualitativa.

Aguilar (2010) llama la atención respecto a la falta de pensamiento sobre la escucha que se produce cuando se supone que "para escuchar no se requiere habilidad ni aprendizaje ni cierta destreza, como si se tratara de un don natural". Esto lleva a pensar que escuchar es algo que todas y todos

sabemos hacer y que, en todo caso, se trata de una cualidad que tenemos o de una capacidad que podemos activar cuando la situación lo requiera (por ejemplo, durante la realización de entrevistas en una investigación). Sabemos, sin embargo, que dar algo por supuesto supone un gran problema, porque queda fuera de la posibilidad de ser pensado y nombrado.

La Importancia de las Palabras: Oír, Escuchar, Obedecer

A menudo utilizamos como sinónimos oír y escuchar, términos próximos pero no equivalentes. Acudir a la etimología nos puede ayudar a profundizar en la comprensión de lo que la escucha significa y a orientarnos sobre su riqueza y su dificultad.

Oír procede del latín *audire* y, en primera instancia, se refiere a la percepción de los sonidos a través del oído. Pero la RAE también recoge significados que se ligan a la relación entre quien oye y quien es oído; una relación autoritaria, como sucede con la expresión "oír a alguien" que nos remite a "atender los ruegos, súplicas o avisos de alguien"; o, en el terreno del derecho, "tomar en consideración las alegaciones de las partes antes de resolver la cuestión debatida".

Por su parte, la etimología de *escuchar* hace referencia al gesto de *inclinar la oreja* (*auscultare*, formado por *auris -oreja-* y por *la* raíz indoeuropea *klei -inclinarse-*). Indica que escuchar significa "aplicar el oído para oír algo", y también "prestar atención a lo que se dice". Así pues, aunque se relaciona con oír, se trata de algo más que de percibir sonidos, reflejando -en ese *inclinar la oreja*- la voluntad de prestar atención a lo que llega del otro, a través del gesto simbólico de inclinarse y de lo que nos sucede con ese gesto y en ese intercambio.

Aún hay otro término cuya etimología resulta de interés para tratar de pensar sobre lo que la escucha pueda entrañar. Se trata de *obedecer*, que procede del latín *oboedire* y éste de *ob audire* (el que oye). Y, para este caso, distintas referencias hacen equivalentes oír y escuchar, señalando el significado de obedecer como saber oír, saber escuchar.

La diferencia de significados entre estos términos nos podría estar indicando que hay escucha cuando, en ese gesto de prestar atención a lo que alguien nos dice, existe la voluntad de obedecer a aquello que nos dice, de ser fieles al sentido que hay en lo que escuchamos. Esta es una conexión potente en términos pedagógicos y de investigación, porque nos hace

conscientes de la presencia de un sentido genuino en la palabra o el gesto del otro, que necesitamos reconocer y acoger sin que por ello quedemos anulados nosotros mismos (con los significados y sentidos que, a su vez, portamos).

No se trata de Cualquier Escucha

La escucha depende de quién la sostiene, de a quién se escucha (un niño, un educador, una madre, un investigador), y de la relación con aquel o aquella a quien se escucha. Depende también de lo que la motiva, de ahí que sea importante preguntarnos para qué escuchamos, deteniéndonos tanto en la intención -en lo que nos orienta- como en sus consecuencias, en lo que (nos) mueve -o no-. Y sabiendo que la escucha nos implica completamente y que no se reduce al oído, a la palabra, sino a todos nuestros sentidos y sentimientos.

Desde una perspectiva psicoanalítica, Aguilar (2010) llama la atención sobre una forma de practicar la escucha que nos parece importante para la reflexión pedagógica. Habla de un modo muy extendido de escucha donde se concentra la atención en el resultado, en el saber obtenido del proceso de escuchar (un diagnóstico, una sentencia…); así, el escuchar se convierte en un ejercicio de poder y el saber obtenido, en un medio para "gobernar" la conducta de quien habla.

Este es un riesgo que vemos en nuestra práctica investigadora y docente y que reconocemos también en las actuaciones de las alumnas y de los alumnos, ya se trate de enseñantes, pedagogos o educadores sociales (Sierra et al., 2017). Cuando sostenemos una relación basada en el poder no hay una apertura a lo que el otro dice y pone en juego; es decir, no hay *obediencia* a sus palabras, siendo fácil caer en una instrumentalización de la relación. Es desde este lugar, que bloquea las posibilidades educativas de la escucha, desde el que nos planteamos la necesidad de pensar sobre lo que ésta significa, apostando por cultivar la disposición de ponerse a la escucha que se aleje del poder y alimente relaciones de autoridad (basadas en la confianza y el reconocimiento).

Esta clase de escucha requiere proponer y mantener un contexto de comunicación (Mortari, 2003), pues la escucha se da siempre en el seno de una conversación. Conversar, etimológicamente, tiene que ver con vivir juntos, en compañía, con conocimiento. La conversación puede ser,

entonces, una experiencia de pensar en presencia (Zamboni, 2009); pero lo será si, en tanto que educadores e investigadores, podemos reconocer a la otra, al otro, como alguien con quien abrir un espacio de diálogo y no como alguien de quien obtener información.

Reconocer al otro en la conversación es dejarse tocar y decir por él, alguien con quien se entra en relación, a quien se reconoce como quien es y se autoriza como origen de palabra y de sentido. De acuerdo con esto, la conversación, como forma de relación en la investigación, supone que el otro, "es alguien *con quien* se habla y no alguien *de quien*, o *sobre quien* se habla" (Arbiol & Molina, 2017).

Ponerse a la Escucha, Dejarse Decir

Aprender a vivir la diferencia entre hablar *con alguien* y no *de alguien* o *sobre alguien*, es algo distinto a *entender* lo que puede significar lo que dice en cuanto que contenido intelectual. Así, por ejemplo, *aprender a vivir la investigación como hablar con la maestra y no de ella o sobre ella* (esto último puede indicar hablar *acerca de* y, también, hacerlo *por encima de*) es un ejercicio difícil porque supone un desplazamiento de la atención: de mí, de lo que estoy buscando en la investigación, de lo que pienso sobre la educación o lo que siento como educadora, a lo que no conozco, a lo que es nuevo, a lo que no había pensado, a lo que puede descolocarme o con-moverme (Blanco, Molina, & López, 2015). Y esto no es algo que suceda, sin más, porque así lo queramos sino que requiere de un ejercicio consciente y sostenido para reconocer que la escucha es una oportunidad de transformación; sobre todo de transformación propia, dejándome mover por alguien cuya palabra reconozco "como única, como irreductible, sobre todo a la mía, como nueva, aún desconocida" (Irigaray, 1994, p. 166).

De lo que hablamos, por tanto, no es sólo del acto de escuchar sino de la experiencia de ponerse a la escucha (Molina, 2014). Esto último significa cultivar la disponibilidad para poder recibir y, por tanto, tiene más que ver con acoger que con dar; así como con atreverse a hacer algo con aquello que recibimos. Escuchar, entonces, es dejarse decir; lo que requiere un ejercicio de pasividad, de suspender lo que ya creemos saber, pausando la pretensión de interpretar, o la tendencia a hacerlo demasiado rápido. Para ello hay que estar abierto a oír lo que no sabemos, lo que no conocemos, en

esa peculiar relación entre el saber y no-saber que provoca incertidumbre (López, 2010).

Indica al respecto Contreras (2013) que el escuchar está más en la pregunta ¿qué me dice?, que en la de ¿qué significa? Y no porque ambas estén desconectadas, sino porque hemos de aprender, cada vez, a estar entre ellas; buscando que la comprensión de qué significa no bloquee demasiado pronto la apertura del qué me dice.

Para acercarnos a la experiencia de otras, de otros, ya sea en la escuela o en la investigación, debemos hacer un ejercicio de alejamiento de las "verdades sabidas"; bien desde la experiencia adulta, bien desde las teorías pedagógicas. No hay posibilidad de escucha si creemos que todo está interpretado y pensado. Acercarnos a la experiencia de alguien nos requiere, primero, "salir de los territorios ciertos", hacer el ejercicio deliberado de alejarnos de lo ya sabido para ir a esa escucha fina que es muda, "[que] está desorientada, es decir, privada de referencias, abierta a cualquier imprevisto" (Puleo, 2010, p. 114). Algo que esta autora identifica como una posición interior, una disposición a la escucha del otro que nos ofrece la posibilidad -que no siempre ni automáticamente es fructífera- de captar algo esencial de su experiencia. Y siempre, también, algo esencial de nosotros mismos, pues la escucha es autobiográfica.

La Escucha en la Investigación de la Experiencia Educativa

Nos preocupa que en la investigación se de por sentado que escuchamos como consecuencia directa de utilizar recursos metodológicos de naturaleza cualitativa (por ejemplo, en las entrevistas en profundidad). Una preocupación que va de la mano de nuestro progresivo interés por incorporar en la práctica de la investigación una intencionalidad pedagógica.

Siguiendo a van Manen (2003), entendemos que lo pedagógico precisa ser explorado a partir de lo que lo vivido llega a significar como modo de construcción subjetiva y de lo que como teóricos y educadores nos sugieren esas vivencias. Siendo así, el conocimiento que alcanzamos es siempre tentativo, de tal modo que tener la sensación de que sabemos más (de una situación, de nosotros mismos) convive con un no saber, a ciencia cierta, cómo responder y cómo conducirnos.

Desde estos planteamientos, sostenemos que el propósito de la investigación educativa no es tanto dar cuenta de las realidades educativas cuanto desvelar la cuestión pedagógica que nos suscitan aquellas experiencias que estudiamos. Pues la pregunta pedagógica que late en todo proceso indagador -y lo orienta- solamente puede ser sostenida personalmente.

El punto de anclaje aquí es la experiencia como lugar para la investigación educativa, lo que implica tener en cuenta tanto lo vivido por quienes investigan como por quienes ofrecen sus vivencias a la mirada investigadora. Significa, también, asumir que al indagar hemos de poder dar cuenta de lo que nos pasa como aprendizaje. Y desde reconocer esa presencia, y movilizarla conscientemente en un ejercicio de ex-posición, podemos hablar de la escucha en el sentido de receptividad y apertura en que lo estamos haciendo aquí.

Somos conscientes de que la escucha es, a lo sumo, uno de los ángulos posibles desde los que interrogar la práctica de la investigación. Aun así, se trata de un ángulo importante y poco atendido que, además, concentra enormes posibilidades para la reflexión pedagógica.

Para explorar lo que la escucha pueda entrañar para la investigación educativa, tomaremos como foco una investigación reciente en la que estas cuestiones han estado muy presentes. Un trabajo en el que, a través de una metodología narrativa, hemos buscado explorar las vivencias de desvinculación de estudiantes PCP[2] con la institución, el profesorado y los contenidos culturales.

Hemos tenido presente como motor de la indagación la noción de *escucha,* que posee una dimensión amplia y otra más concreta. La primera se refiere al sentido que le damos a la investigación educativa como vía de comprensión pedagógica, comprometiendo nuestra manera de percibir, representar y de vivir las relaciones intergeneracionales. En una segunda dimensión, la escucha atraviesa la relación particular con cada estudiante.

La Investigación Educativa como una Práctica Conversacional y Textual

En toda propuesta de investigación cualitativa hay inscrita una atención a las voces de los sujetos, aunque su consideración y tratamiento varía según el enfoque metodológico. En todo caso, es habitual que hablemos de esas

voces como datos que hemos de poder recolectar, codificar, categorizar, analizar e interpretar. Sin embargo, y según venimos planteando, la investigación educativa requiere una atención al sentido que cada quien da a sus vivencias, a lo que vive como verdad interior.

Como pensamiento metodológico, aspirar a captar esa verdad significa, entre otras cosas, aceptar la exposición al intercambio. La escucha se da en el seno de una relación; y toda relación acontece, simultáneamente, hacia dentro y hacia fuera. Como Contreras y Pérez de Lara (2010) insisten, en la investigación educativa la preocupación pedagógica solo puede ser sostenida en primera persona, pues no hay forma de expresarla sin que cobre presencia la subjetividad de quien realiza ese recorrido de ir conociendo. Y ahí es donde la escucha va revelando su importancia para la exploración y la comprensión pedagógicas.

En la investigación a la que vamos a referirnos (Sierra, 2013)[3], la práctica de la escucha se ha concretado en dos momentos: el trabajo de campo y el trabajo de análisis y escritura de los relatos de vida. Hemos organizado este apartado siguiendo esa distinción, tratando con ello de evidenciar cómo la idea de escucha se cristaliza en procesos diferentes aunque complementarios: cuando se refiere a la relación de investigación con los estudiantes (lo que hemos llamado *escucha en directo)*, y cuando se refiere a la relación con las evidencias (lo que hemos llamado *escucha en diferido*).

La Entrevista como Conversación. La Escucha en Directo

En esta investigación el interés ha estado en las repercusiones subjetivas de unas trayectorias académicas poco exitosas y se ha concretado en la composición de relatos biográficos de estudiantes. Precisamente, esta aproximación narrativa a la experiencia fue demandando la revisión del formato convencional de las entrevistas cualitativas que, lejos de repetir el esquema pregunta/respuesta, permitiera dar rienda suelta a la conversación.

La idea de conversación, traída al marco de la relación de investigación educativa, aporta muchas posibilidades para repensar una concepción más convencional de entrevista cualitativa. Para van Manen (2003), la entrevista así enfocada posee un impulso hermenéutico y no meramente testimonial, dado que su propósito es el de dar sentido a aquel núcleo que mueve o estimula la conversación (en este caso, el sentido subjetivo de la

desafección y el rechazo escolar). Bajo esta orientación, participar de una entrevista-conversación implica ceder el control, colocándonos como un participante más en la producción de sentido (Kohler, 2004) y aspirando a ser capaces de proyectarnos hasta la perspectiva y el mismo ser del otro, sin imaginarlo ni suplantarlo.

Hay en esto una exigencia muy alta y de difícil traducción a la hora de preparar la investigación pues, tal y como ha apuntado Bárcena (2005), una conversación no puede ser controlada de antemano; se entra en ella, dejándonos llevar por su flujo, pero no podemos dominarla. Y, además, dirá el autor, "toda conversación deja una marca, una huella en nosotros" (p.114). Una huella que no es sólo un aprendizaje de algo nuevo sino un redescubrimiento del yo, fruto de encontrarnos frente al otro (Palou & Fons, 2008).

La indagación de la experiencia demanda una disposición a la escucha; esto es, una actitud que podemos trabajar-nos y que, en última instancia, quedará a merced del acontecer de la propia conversación. La escucha del otro puede originarse cuando nos dejamos ir en el curso de una conversación; entonces, preparar(nos) para la entrevista se expresa bien con la idea antes comentada de escuchar como dejarse decir.

Según lo anterior, podemos explorar la noción de disposición como una forma de dirigir, durante el curso del trabajo de campo, ese impulso hermenéutico que señalaba van Manen. Hablar de disposiciones para la investigación significa precisar un plan de trabajo que permita recoger los propósitos educativos y que oriente la práctica de la indagación, tratando de equilibrarla y procurándole coherencia interna.

Dado que siempre escuchamos con un propósito y orientados por una inquietud, podemos hacer un trabajo previo sobre su origen. Una forma de decir que, de manera pre-interactiva (utilizando un término propio de los diseños de investigación cualitativa de corte clásico), es posible realizar cierta escucha interior que ayude a entendernos en la manera en que nos colocamos ante la investigación, la forma en que estamos condicionados y el poso pedagógico desde el que enfocamos la búsqueda y dirigimos nuestros pasos.

En la investigación a la que nos referimos, este trabajo de preparación se concretó en dos formatos. De un lado, practicando la escritura autorreferencial (Gil & Jover, 2000), con la que se buscaba relatar experiencias propias que mantuviesen cierta conexión con cuestiones

sustantivas sobre la investigación. De otro, formulando una serie de principios de procedimiento que tradujesen las inquietudes pedagógicas en orientaciones para la acción (Sierra, 2013): (a) Considerar a los estudiantes como protagonistas de la investigación; (b) Atender a la singularidad de los relatos a través del reconocimiento de la singularidad de cada estudiante; (c) Confiar en que tienen algo que decir y desean ser escuchados; (d) Cuidar y sostener la relación de investigación, trabajando la negociación más allá del consentimiento informado, promoviendo un contexto conversacional amable y respetuoso, yendo en busca de respuestas, aguardando; (e) Practicar la política del partir de sí -aprendida de *la política de las mujeres*-, haciéndonos presentes en la investigación a partir de la propia experiencia.

La Práctica de la Escritura. La Escucha en Diferido

Lo que pretende la escucha en directo, a través de la conversación orientada fenomenológicamente, es poner pensamiento a lo vivido para trascenderlo, posibilitando así que sedimente como experiencia vivida. Este propósito, en el paso al análisis y la escritura, me fue llevando a replantear el sentido de los relatos biográficos hacia un formato narrativo que respetase la viveza de la conversación, dando cuenta de ella y del saber que emergía. Así fui buscando una escritura que hiciera de mediación entre el vivir y el pensar (que no son la misma cosa); un tipo de mediación que fuera mostrando la vida del otro, así como los efectos de mi exposición al relato que alumbraba esa vida. Y es por esto que he llamado a la producción textual *relatos de encuentro* (Sierra, 2013).

Estas reflexiones fueron acrecentando el interés por la naturaleza textual de la investigación. No sólo en el sentido de que la escritura sea un medio para la investigación sino en cuanto que la investigación es el trabajo de escribir (van Manen, 2006). Esto es así, utilizando las palabras de Bauman (2012), porque somos incapaces de pensar sin escribir, pues es al hacerlo cuando las ideas nacen; o como ha dicho Germano (2015), porque éstas "sólo se avienen a salir de las sombras cuando te tomas el tiempo de ponerlas por escrito" (p. 38).

En el transcurso de la investigación he podido dar mayor firmeza y recorrido a la idea de que necesitamos la escritura (la *reescritura*) para avanzar en el aprendizaje que entraña todo proceso de investigación.

Aquella clase de escritura que nos permite explorar -y elaborar- el sentido de lo que vivimos y que contiene y proyecta la escucha.

Lo que llamamos con Contreras (2010) la escritura de la experiencia es una forma de expresar la necesidad de reconocernos inmiscuidos en primera persona en la práctica de la investigación; expuestos a la pregunta sobre *qué me está diciendo* aquello que vivo. De este modo, avanzar en el análisis de los datos y la confección de los relatos, requería mantener una relación de escuchante con las entrevistas (Marí, Bo, & Climent, 2010), en lo que hemos llamado escucha en diferido.

Los procesos de tematización y de categorización transcurrían a través de la reescritura de sucesivas versiones de los relatos. Versiones con las que además de poner orden a la información biográfica recogida en las entrevistas, se encauzaba el proceso de análisis propiamente dicho; y en él la escritura es tanto el medio como el fin.

En la escritura de los relatos aquello que podemos llamar decisiones de estilo iban apareciendo y puliéndose como consecuencia de esta relación de escucha en diferido con los datos. El qué y el cómo avanzan de la mano, y van emergiendo recursos expresivos y narrativos que, progresivamente, se nos vuelven más consistentes. Así la escritura, en su cadencia y ritmo, también en su estilo, evoluciona como una narración que transcurre impulsando la lectura. Y de este modo, la comprensión y el análisis avanzaban en el ir tejiendo con palabras la trama de los relatos e ir apuntando claves que, con posterioridad, dieron origen al análisis pedagógico de los relatos y a la escritura de los hallazgos de la investigación.

Principios que Sostienen y Orientan la Escucha en la Investigación Educativa

Lo que mostramos a continuación son aquellos principios que hemos formalizado como consecuencia de reflexionar sobre la escucha en el estudio al que nos venimos refiriendo (Sierra, 2013). Se trata de principios que, si bien tenían una orientación previa, han madurado y se han fortalecido como consecuencia del ejercicio mismo de la indagación y de la reflexión. Los acompañamos de ejemplificaciones a través de las cuales mostrar una mayor concreción respecto de lo que la escucha, como forma

de conducirnos en la investigación, nos ha significado (tanto en el *directo* como en el *diferido*).

   - *La escritura de la experiencia ha de poder reflejar el acontecer del encuentro y la viveza de la conversación.* En el estudio se buscaba una escritura que fuera mostrando al otro en su mundo vital, enunciando sus decisiones y las tensiones que afrontaba. Y habría de ser, al tiempo, una escritura que evidenciara cómo quien investiga -que es quien narra- se ve afectado por la propia conversación. Se trata, entonces, de llevar la conversación a la escritura, recreándola.

> Según cuenta, su éxito este año pasa por tener que enfrentarse a un volumen de trabajo menor al que se propone en la ESO. Pero esta explicación no resuelve la tensión entre la falta de capacidad y la falta de esfuerzo. Insisto en ponerle frente a su reflejo (el que muestra con su discurso), y le devuelvo sus propias respuestas. Le pregunto cómo cree que estudia la gente que, por ejemplo, está en la Universidad. ¿Acaso hay tantas diferencias con lo que él está planteando? ¿Le parece realista el ideal con que se está midiendo? (p. 285).

   - *En la exposición al intercambio con el otro, nuestros sentimientos están presentes como potentes mediadores de la escucha.* En toda conversación están presentes nuestras emociones; y es que "pensar es ante todo -como raíz, como acto- descifrar lo que se siente" (Zambrano, 1993, p. 36). Reconocer, expresar y comunicar nuestros estados emocionales es una poderosa herramienta de mediación, ya que permite apoyar una comprensión más atenta a la relación. Además, permite a quien lee entender con más hondura el marco comunicativo que origina las interpretaciones y las inferencias que se comunican. Son múltiples las formas en que he captado y representado esta exposición de las emociones (*este fragmento me resulta revelador...*; *sentí que me estaba diciendo...*; o: *me asombra -casi me asusta-...*). En algunos casos, reconocer cómo ciertas respuestas se confrontan con nuestras ideas, manifestando los sentimientos de frustración, nos ayuda a entender que quizá lo que hubiera en juego en la conversación serían las preocupaciones del investigador; puede que hasta el punto en que éstas sobrepasasen la verdad del estudiante.

> En el tono y el contenido de mi respuesta se puede apreciar cómo me sentí: muy desalentado. No sólo porque Alberto no rescatase ningún contenido o ámbito de conocimiento, algo esperable si asumimos (aun a riesgo de ser prejuicioso) el carácter academicista de la cultura escolar. Mi desaliento tenía que ver con el vacío de experiencias educativas significativas vividas. ¿Acaso no estaba sabiendo preguntar o, en efecto, la experiencia de Alberto me ofrecía "la nada"? (p. 249).

  - Al atender lo educativo que está en juego hemos de aceptar su labilidad, aprendiendo a interrogarnos sobre ello. Aspiramos a captar parte de lo que está en juego, de lo que (nos) parece apremiante representar para discutir, sin clausurar los sentidos que emergen. La escritura de la experiencia puede propiciarlo cultivando el arte de hacerse preguntas para profundizar pedagógicamente en algún asunto; y aprendiendo con ello a comunicar dichas preguntas como una forma de orientar la lectura y de proporcionar elementos para la discusión. No se trata de no estar lo suficientemente seguros para afirmar algo, sino de no desear cerrar la mirada para mantener vigente la incertidumbre pedagógica, dejando abierta la cuestión, algo que requiere un fino trabajo de pensar con firmeza pero sin rigidez.

> […] Aun así le insté a reflexionar un poco más, preguntándole directamente qué se llevaba de su paso por IES. Su respuesta, otra vez, me dejó sin aliento: Que estuve una pila de años y ya está. (p. 268).

> Enumera las múltiples alternativas metodológicas y didácticas que les ha propuesto; y esto sólo sirve para sentirse más frustrada. Ahora piensa que quizá debió ser más estricta, más directiva, no negociando tanto. Creo que entiendo lo que dice. Y sus palabras me llevan a pensar justo en esto mismo pero para la investigación: ¿Les estaré prestando demasiado atención? ¿Qué atención? ¿Cuánto es demasiado? (p. 192).

A través de las preguntas mantenemos presente y en primer plano el cuestionamiento pedagógico, esto es, la pregunta por qué me dice**.** Así

exploramos y expresamos cómo se despierta el interés por algún nudo de la narración, cómo evoluciona dicho interés, y vamos armando la trama.

> Para Juan, quienes como él llevan tanto tiempo repitiendo y fracasando, han de saber bien dónde está su techo. ¿Sensatez o resignación? Le pregunto por el presente, al modo en que cuando hablamos de los "buenos alumnos" le incité a comparar si sus esfuerzos estaban o no a la altura de estos. ¿Qué ocurre con lo que está viviendo? ¿Acaso no se trata de una experiencia de éxito? Ahí Juan difiere, y matiza esto de "tener éxito". Si bien reconoce que este año -como el anterior- sí que está aprobando, explica que se debe a que en el PCPI se maneja un nivel muy bajo. De tener que enfrentarse a un nivel normal o alto, explica, no aprobaría. ¿Está quitando importancia a su éxito dentro del PCPI? De ser así, ¿qué puede significar que trate de restar valor a lo que está consiguiendo? (p. 290).

- La escucha reverbera en distintos niveles y sus resonancias se espacian como las ondas en el agua al lanzar una piedra. Esto se observa muy bien en el uso de los pies de página, que funcionan como una meta-escucha*,* como un eco que se recoge y comparte.

> En ese momento me cuesta sacar en claro los móviles de ese discurso tan alarmista. Me hace pensar en cómo resuenan en él las peroratas adultas que tanto habrá escuchado, e incorpora en su propia narrativa acerca del pasado y las oportunidades perdidas. Esto es sólo el efecto que tienen en mí sus palabras, efecto que, en cierto modo, comienza a colocarme en relación de escucha y comprensión hacia su relato. Esto guarda relación con la narración que Pepe hace de su temprano rito de paso de la niñez a la adolescencia (era más mayor que los niños de su edad fruto de las experiencias que vivía con las junteras que tenía). (p. 198).

- Relacionarnos con la verdad interior del otro o de la otra, reconociéndolo por quien es y no por quien necesitamos que sea. El sentido de la experiencia vivida responde a lo que personalmente se construye como verdad interior. Una verdad que se caracteriza por ser dinámica, provisional y relativa; y, también, intersubjetiva. Es la mediación con otro la que encauza la reflexión acerca de las propias vivencias. En otras

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palabras, y como hemos apuntando, es la conversación (el contexto relacional y comunicativo que puede proporcionar el encuentro de una investigación cualitativa así enfocada) la que propicia cierta colocación reflexiva ante lo vivido. La clave está en las cualidades de esa relación, en cómo entablarla y hacerla funcionar como un espacio comunicativo rico en posibilidades para la comprensión del mundo de la vida. Como educadores, esta clase de atención a la verdad interior del otro es una forma de expresar la prioridad de reconocerle, atemperando la tendencia a juzgar y valorar, incluso la inercia a sobreponer los marcos teóricos frente a esa verdad interior. Y esta clase de colocación, que es también una ramificación de la noción de escucha, entraña algunas dificultades a las que me he visto expuesto. Una de ellas, y de mucha importancia para la reflexión pedagógica, es la de sobrepasar al otro al movilizar, en la escucha y la comprensión, cuestiones propias no resueltas.

> Ahí las entrevistas parecían hacerle bien. Parar-se en compañía para decir-se, despojado de la presión de ser evaluado o, al menos, sin la presión de acabar poniendo una nota a su vida, parecía ser algo que agradecía. Y contaba con un espejo ni demasiado cóncavo ni demasiado convexo, que le permitía mirarse, al tiempo, hacia-dentro-y-hacia-afuera. Quizá entonces se tratase de mis propios fantasmas. Quizá Juan no fuera tan frágil. (p. 271).

La Tarea que Queda

Pensar en la investigación como una experiencia que se tiene, a la que se aspira, significa disponerse a entrar en la práctica de investigar concibiéndola como una praxis en la que nos vamos haciendo como educadores. Siendo así, investigar será una acción -en el sentido *arendtiano*- que nos expone a una búsqueda de comprensión acerca del mundo y de nosotros mismos en relación a él, comprometiendo nuestras formas de implicación en el hacer (Contreras & Pérez de Lara, 2010).

Desde esos planteamientos hemos explorado el aprendizaje de la escucha como la posibilidad de tener una experiencia trans-formadora; algo que creemos que pasa por cultivar la disponibilidad, la atención y la pasividad.

Para escuchar, para dejarse decir, hay que dar tiempo y crear espacio. Tiempo para recrearse en la palabra, para la espera y el silencio; tiempo necesario para favorecer la reflexión, para el diálogo interior. Y espacio para no ocuparlo todo, para crear la distancia necesaria para reconocer(nos), para que quepa lo que la escucha trae como nuevo.

A su vez, dar tiempo y generar espacio requiere cultivar la atención y la pasividad activando aquella atención solícita y completa que nos permite abrirnos a la relación. La atención, dirá María Zambrano (2007), es la receptividad máxima, "una disposición y una llamada a la realidad […] la apertura del ser humano a lo que le rodea y no menos a lo que encuentra dentro de sí, hacia sí mismo" (p.61). En la atención voluntaria, dice la filósofa malagueña, se trata, por paradójico que parezca, de quitar y no de poner. Así que frente a la expresión cotidiana de poner atención, dirá la autora que para atender tenemos que dejar de hacerlo. Simone Weil (2001), por su parte, dirá que la atención es eficaz porque es pasiva: exige la detención de la voluntad de buscar y, solo entonces, podemos centrarnos en aquello que está fuera de nosotros. Buscar algo concreto es una mala forma de buscar, dirá, porque nos volvemos dependientes del objeto que buscamos, porque se nos hace necesaria una recompensa por el esfuerzo que hacemos. La atención, entonces, requiere pasividad, aquella en la que el yo no concentra en él la atención y, así, queda disponible para dirigirse a lo nuevo, a lo que está por llegar. Prestar atención a algo, a alguien, significa apartar la mirada de uno mismo para volverla hacia el exterior, hacia el otro. Es entonces cuando la escucha opera como una suerte de *pasividad activa* (Contreras & Pérez de Lara, 2010) o de *receptividad* (Zambrano, 2007).

De acuerdo a ello, nos ha interesado pensar la escucha como una disposición que sostiene y alimenta la relación educativa y, también, la que pueda darse en la investigación. La escucha como un saber de la alteridad, de cómo hacer espacio para la otra, el otro, y lo nuevo que trae; y de cómo hacer lugar al desplazamiento necesario para dejarse transformar por lo que la experiencia de la escucha puede traernos como hallazgos.

No hablamos, entonces, de una técnica que se puede entrenar, ni de algo que se tenga o no. Se trata más bien de una orientación, que es tanto emocional y simbólica como pedagógica. Un saber experiencial que cultivar con atención, con consciencia, que no se acaba por dominar nunca. Y es que el aprendizaje de la escucha no se alcanza de una vez y para

siempre, sino que es un trabajo sobre sí que siempre está abierto a ser más sensible, más sutil, más fino. Para algunos puede tener que ver con preguntarse qué significa lo que les llega de la relación; para otros, aun antes, puede tener que ver con dejar de esforzarse por no quedar tocados, es decir, por reconocer que pueda existir en sí un cierto bloqueo, una cerrazón respecto de la posibilidad del intercambio, de la reciprocidad.

Las tribulaciones que atañen a lo que cada quien experimenta son incontables y necesitamos poderlas pensar en relación a vivencias concretas. Entonces se hace necesario tener posibilidad de vivir situaciones en las que podamos cultivar esa disposición a la escucha; tener oportunidades para pensar sobre sí, para poner pensamiento a lo que vivimos, para preguntarnos por el sentido que ello tiene y adquiere. En definitiva, poner palabra (oral y también escrita) a lo que vivimos, pensamos y sentimos como investigadoras, como investigadores.

Agradecimientos

Notas

[1] Las reflexiones desarrolladas en este texto son fruto de nuestra experiencia en los proyectos de investigación: "Factores pedagógicos que favorecen el éxito escolar en estudiantes de enseñanza postobligatoria" (PRY031/11, CEA), y "El saber profesional en docentes de educación primaria y sus implicaciones en la formación inicial del profesorado: estudios de caso" (EDU-11-29732-C02-01, MEC).
[2] Se trata de una medida de atención a la diversidad (LOE, 2006) cuya finalidad es ofrecer una vía alternativa al alumnado que no haya obtenido el título de Graduado en Educación Secundaria Obligatoria y, al mismo tiempo, conseguir una cualificación profesional que facilite su acceso al mundo laboral. En la actualidad, estos programas han sido sustituidos por los Programas de Formación Profesional Básica (LOMCE, 2013).
[3] Puesto que se trata de una tesis doctoral realizada por José Eduardo Sierra Nieto -dirigida por Nieves Blanco García-, en lo que sigue utilizaremos la primera persona en aquellos casos en que sea pertinente.

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Why Teach? A Project-ive Life-world Approach to Understanding What Teaching Means for Teachers

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Abstract

Previous literature has examined teachers' motivations to teach in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic motives, personality dimensions, and teacher burnout. These findings have been cast in the rubric of differences between teachers and non-teachers and the linear relations between these measures among teachers. Utilizing a phenomenological approach (Giorgi, 1970) to analyze data generated in structured interviews with four tenured professors from small, liberal arts universities whose central mission is teachin, this paper presents the telic or project-ive horizons of teaching – those motives aimed at what is 'not yet' (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Results revealed that teaching is understood by teachers to be a dialogical enterprise between a teacher and learners across dimensions of transformation, knowledge, and personhood. This dialogue entailed an abiding tension between self and other, activity and passivity, giving and receiving, preparation and spontaneity, instructing and learning, leading and following, asserting and withdrawing. It comprised an orientation to a teachers' vision for the possible future personhood of the teacher and their students and to the character of the world which teachers and learners inhabit together. These findings are discussed in terms of the reviewed literature and as a case in point for a vital complementarity of research approaches.

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¿Por qué Enseñar? Un Proyect-ivo del Mundo de la vida para Entender qué Significa la Enseñanza para los Maestros

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Resumen

La literatura ha examinado las motivaciones de los docentes para enseñar en términos de motivos intrínsecos y extrínsecos, las dimensiones de la personalidad, y el desgaste. Estos hallazgos han sido expuestos mediante diferencias entre maestros y no-maestros y las relaciones lineales de este indicativo entre los maestros. Utilizando un enfoque fenomenológico (Giorgi, 1970) para analizar los datos generados en entrevistas estructuradas con cuatro profesores titulares de una pequeña universidad de humanidades cuya misión central es la docencia, este trabajo presenta los horizontes telic o proyect-ivos de la enseñanza - esos motivos que apuntan a lo que "no es todavía" (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Los resultados revelaron que la enseñanza es entendida por los maestros como una relación dialógica entre un maestro y sus estudiantes a través de dimensiones de transformación, conocimiento y personalidad. Este diálogo implicaba una tensión constante entre el yo y el otro, la actividad y la pasividad, el dar y recibir, la preparación y la espontaneidad, instruir y aprender, dirigir y seguir, afirmar y retirar. Esto comprendía una orientación de los maestros hacia su posible futura personalidad y la de sus estudiantes y sobre el carácter del mundo en el que profesores y estudiantes cohabitan. Estos hallazgos se discuten en términos de la literatura revisada y como ejemplo de una complementariedad vital de los enfoques de investigación

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Why do teachers teach? Previous literature has examined this question from the standpoint of motivation to become a teacher, personality dimensions associated with teaching success, and factors associated with teacher burnout. Given that much of the literature seeks to provide an 'explanation' (see Garza, 2007), answers to the question 'Why teach?' remain incomplete. Utilizing a phenomenological approach (Garza, 2007; Giorgi, 1970) and a modified thematic collation analysis (Garza, 2011) of data generated in structured interviews with professors at a small, liberal arts university whose central mission is teaching, this paper presents a reframing of this question in terms of what teaching means to teachers. By employing a phenomenological approach, our aim was to understand how, with respect to teaching, "the motive, the act and the end are all constituted in a single upsurge" of meaning (Sartre, 1956, p. 565).

Review of the Literature

Defining and understanding an individual as a teacher has been studied in a variety of ways. Primarily, previous studies have defined teachers by assessing motivations for teaching, researching prominent personality characteristics among teachers, and studying aspects of teaching associated with teacher burnout.

Motivations to Teach

Analyzing teachers' motivations for teaching has consistently revealed intrinsic and altruistic motivators as the primary factors in one's decision to become and to remain a teacher. Interview-based studies found the desire to help children, to make a positive difference in society, to experience personal growth (Struyven, Jacobs, & Dochy, 2013), and to experience high job satisfaction (Williams & Forgasz, 2009) as the most prevalent motives among teachers in addition to widespread attitudes of selflessness and altruism (May, Mand, Biertz, Hummers-Pradier, & Kruschinski, 2012). Additionally, studies using the factors influencing teaching (FIT) measurement revealed high levels of motivation to teach in those who desired to enhance social equity (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2012) and had high levels of intrinsic career value (Klassen, Al-Dhafri, Hannok, & Betts, 2011) as well as social utility value (Lin, Shi, Wang, Zhang, & Hui,

2012). In contrast, external factors including time for family, salary, status (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2012), and self-expression (Lin et al., 2012) were lower in participants motivated to teach.

Further, self-efficacy not only impacted participants' motivation to become a teacher but also their decision to remain a teacher. Studies have found that those highly motivated to teach were also motivated by positive teaching and learning experiences (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2012), a high perceived ability to teach (Klassen et al., 2011), positive experiences with adolescents or young people, positive training or instructing roles experience, and the feeling that teaching would coincide with their skill set, interests (Williams & Forgasz, 2009), and future goals (Richardson & Watt, 2006). Both the intrinsic and extrinsic motives to teach as well as the experienced self-efficacy and altruism of teachers presented in the literature suggest a nexus of meaning out of which teaching emerges as attractive and desirable to certain individuals. This attraction or motive points to a telic dimension of teaching for teachers, an orientation to possibility and the future comprising aims or goals for oneself, others and the world which call for a research approach attuned to meaning in order to be illuminated.

Personality among Teachers

The literature on teachers has also explored the role of personality. Students who rated teachers more satisfactorily also perceived them as humorous, positive, (Huang & Lin, 2014; Poraj, 2010), agreeable (Kneipp, Kelly, Biscoe, & Richard, 2010), energetic and engaging (Senko, Belmonte, & Yakhkind, 2012). Extraversion was also identified as a positive characteristic in teachers as it negatively related to burnout (Kokkinos, 2007) and emotional exhaustion (Basim, Begenirbaş, & Yalçin, 2013). Furthermore, conscientiousness was revealed as a prevalent personality trait among teachers as well as a predictor of high personal accomplishment (Kokkinos, 2007) and student academic success (Tok & Morali, 2009) in conjunction with low depersonalization (Kokkinos, 2007) and burnout (Sulea, Filipescu, Horga, Orţan, & Fischmann, 2012). The most prominent personality characteristic negatively associated with teachers was neuroticism as these individuals were more emotionally exhausted (Basim et al., 2013; Pretsch, Flunger, & Schmitt, 2012), more mentally distant (Sulea et al., 2012), and were associated with lower academic success

among students (Tok & Morali, 2009). While this literature sheds light on the prominent personality characteristics of successful teachers, it also suggests a nexus of meaning of teaching for teachers such that teaching is understood as expressing and resonating with some core values or understandings of oneself in relation to others and the world, and out of which teaching is understood as desirable and attractive. An investigation of these dimensions using a research approach attuned to meaning would help to illuminate this.

Teacher Burnout

Previous research has also investigated burnout among teachers as a third way of characterizing teachers and to understand the distinction between those who teach and those who have stopped teaching. Such research characterizes burnout as a concept involving increased emotional exhaustion and depersonalization in addition to a lack of personal accomplishment (Cenkseven-Önder & Sari, 2009; Hultell & Gustavsson, 2011), vigor, dedication, and absorption (Rey, Extremera, & Pena, 2012). One contributor to burnout was one's level of stress and ability to cope in a healthy and effective manner. Research has revealed job stress among teachers to be positively correlated with burnout rates (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008) as well as aspects of burnout including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, depression, and reduced personal accomplishment (Steinhardt, Smith Jaggars, Faulk, & Gloria, 2011). Further, studies found ineffective coping strategies for stress such as passive coping or surface acting, in which the teacher hides genuine emotion by putting on an emotional mask, to be associated with burnout (Hultell & Gustavsson, 2011; Noor & Zainuddin, 2011) and related constructs including low subjective well-being, life satisfaction, and high negative affect (Cenkseven-Önder & Sari 2009). Thus low levels of stress and effective coping strategies were prevalent characteristics of individuals who continue to teach.

A second category studied in relation to burnout was self-efficacy. Previous research found self-efficacy was negatively associated with burnout (Friedman, 2003; Hultell & Gustavsson, 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007) and job stress level (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008) while positively associated with job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014).

Additionally, one's teaching experience was positively related to self-efficacy (Chang, Lin, & Song, 2011; Yeo, Ang, Chong, Huan, & Quek, 2008) and job satisfaction (Thomason & La Paro, 2013). Therefore, confidence in one's teaching ability, significantly related to level of experience and job satisfaction, was identified by previous research as a contributing factor to burnout among teachers.

   A third contributor to burnout was the level of support received from students, parents, and colleagues. The behavior and response of students to a teacher's instruction was identified as an influential factor in teacher burnout. Specifically, both increased stress and decreased job satisfaction, both aspects of burnout, were found among teachers experiencing poor student behavior (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Kokkinos, 2007). Lack of parental support and cooperation were also identified as contributing factors to burnout and to lower teacher retention (Hughes, 2012). Further, support (Friedman, 2003), cooperation (Koruklu, Feyzioğlu, Özenoğlu-Kiremit, & Aladağ, 2012), and positive interpersonal relationships (Hultell & Gustavsson, 2011) with and from colleagues were all negatively related to burnout. While these studies indicated the importance of factors in the teaching milieu that significantly contribute to the retention of teachers in their profession, they also suggest a telic horizon regarding the future and possibilities of one's world and one's place within it upon which the meaning of teaching emerges. Approaching this question from an approach attuned to such meaning might enable us to understand stress, efficacy, and burnout as expressive of an understanding of teaching in light of one's standing with respect to one's aims and goals for oneself in the world.

Current Study

Previous studies have revealed the motivational impact of intrinsic factors, altruistic attitudes, and self-efficacy, the prevalent personality characteristics of those who teach, as well as key factors contributing to teacher burnout. While these motives are associated with the decision to teach, they also imply telic, future and possibility oriented meanings of teaching not yet explored in the literature. Similarly, personality dimensions and traits associated with teaching outcomes may be an expression of these aims of teaching for teachers. The literature regarding teacher burnout demonstrates that motivation to remain a teacher is related to whether and

how teachers understand their telic visions for themselves, their students and the world are being enacted and supported. The current study therefore aims to augment and compliment the insights offered by this literature by exploring the question, "Why teach?," in view of the nexus of lived meaning out of which a teacher's answer to this question emerges. (See Landrum & Garza, 2015, for a discussion of the complementarity of understanding proffered by quantitative and qualitative approaches).

Method

Approach

To illuminate this telic meaning dimension of motivation to teach, we undertook this research from a phenomenological 'project-ive life world approach' (Garza & Landrum, 2015) situated within the 'Dallas Approach' to phenomenological research (Garza, 2007) and rooted in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1927/1962). Following Heidegger, a person's world is understood in reference to a fundamental 'being ahead' of oneself, a characteristic he calls *projecting*. Heidegger recognizes these *projects* need not be explicitly known but instead form a matrix of *possibilities* and meanings in reference to which one *understands* oneself, others, and the world. This research seeks to illuminate this interplay to describe the *projects* which undergird teachers' *understandings* of what teaching means to teachers.

Participants

Guided by the principle that the best participants for a phenomenological investigation are those who have had the experience being investigated and are willing and able to describe it (Polkinghorne, 1989), we sought participants who are teachers motivated and excited about teaching across a range of disciplines. They were chosen based upon their reputations among both students and faculty as especially good teachers. These individuals were contacted via email or in person and asked about their willingness to participate. All approached expressed an interest and excitement about the topic; many remarked that they often did not get a chance to talk about teaching and were excited about this opportunity to do so. In total, 4

tenured Full or Associate Professors (3 males) from 3 disciplines participated. All participants teach at small, liberal arts universities whose central mission is teaching. All participants provided written consent to participate in this study and agreed to have their interview audio-recorded. This research project was approved by the university's institutional review board.

'Socrates' is a Professor of Philosophy and has been teaching at his university for 30 years. He teaches both introductory classes taken by non-majors as well as upper level classes in the Philosophy major.

'Albert' is a Professor of Psychology who teaches introductory classes to underclass students interested in psychology as well as upper level electives for the Psychology major. He has been teaching at his university for 28 years.

'Homer' is an Associate Professor of English who teaches both introductory classes required for all students and upper level classes for English majors. He has been teaching at his university for 20 years.

'Emily' is a Professor of English who teaches introductory classes required for all students as well as upper level classes for the English major. She has been teaching at her university for 42 years.

Interview

Participants were contacted via email to set up a meeting time for the interview at their convenience. They were provided with the following list of questions in preparation for the interview. We encouraged them to look over the questions, but not to necessarily write their answers down, in an effort to enable them to reflect upon their teaching career prior to the interview. Interviews took place in faculty offices on campus, ranging from approximately 60 – 90 minutes, and were conducted by the first and/or third author(s). All interviews were audio-recorded and selections of the data were transcribed.

The following list of questions was used to conduct a guided interview and was also provided to the participant prior to the interview:

- How did you come to the realization that you wanted to teach?
- What do you most love/enjoy about teaching?
- What are your biggest challenges/concerns regarding teaching?

- Can you recall an instance when you felt you were most enacting what it means to you to be a teacher?
- Is there anything else you would like to convey to help us understand what it means to you to be a teacher or what motivates you to teach?

During the interview, participants were asked each of these questions and asked to elaborate and expand on their own experiences and understandings of what it means to be a teacher. The interviews were open-ended without restrictions on time.

Data Analysis

Using a phenomenological 'approach' (Giorgi, 1970) focused on the interplay of *project*s and *understandings* (Garza & Landrum, 2015; Heidegger, 1927/1962) and a modified version of Garza's (2011) thematic collation technique, the following steps were conducted to analyze the data: First, all three authors independently listened to the interviews in full to become familiar with and develop an impression of the entire collection of data. Second, since we were interested in exploring the meanings of being a teacher, we listened to the interviews a second time explicitly noting places in the data, or moments, that revealed a dimension of meaning of being a teacher. Our analysis was hermeneutic in that we interpreted the data in light of the following questions: *What does it mean to be a teacher? What concerns, projects, horizons, ie what dimensions of meaning emerge when discussing teaching? How do the participants understand their role as a teacher?* Third, the moments were transcribed and collated together to create overarching themes. All three researchers met several times to discuss these themes and begin elaborating upon the specific ways the themes were manifest in the data as well as the best way to organize and express the themes in a final narrative. This narrative comprises the results section and is organized around the three central themes identified through this process: *transformation, knowledge, and personhood.* Each of the themes was taken up in light of various concerns or projects of the participants along dimensions for self, others, and the word. Throughout the results, quotes from the participants are used to shed further light on what it means to be a teacher.

Results

Teaching is understood by teachers to be a dialogical enterprise involving a teacher and a learner across dimensions of transformation, knowledge, and personhood. This dialogue entails an abiding reciprocal interplay and tension between self and other, activity and passivity, giving and receiving, preparation and spontaneity, instructing and learning, leading and following, asserting and withdrawing. It comprises relationships to the material or subject matter, the mode of discourse within which it is disclosed, and a vision on the teacher's part of the personhood of the teacher and learner as well as the world which such persons would inhabit. Across all these horizons, teaching is understood by teachers as moving oneself and the learner beyond where they are now and towards a vision of a life of inquiry and authority with both particular regard to the subject matter and more generally with regard to knowledge/learning as part of a vision of meritorious personhood and community.

Transformation

"My explaining helps me understand [the content]"- Homer

"You lose the capacity to engage students if it's too fixed…You have to find a different way into [the books]." - Emily

"You see them not just walking with confidence but approaching their work with a kind of confidence and approaching one another with a kind of confidence." - Socrates

"I participate and give guiding questions…but they really are exploring the text together" - Homer

For teachers, a primary dimension of teaching is the transformative relationship they have with the material or subject matter. This relationship, in which the individual converses with the material as both a student and a teacher, involves a movement beyond the foundational content to a particular engagement with the world in light of the content. The teacher oscillates between engaging in this transformation as the learner and as the

teacher whose goal is for students to join them in a transformational conversation with the material. As a learner, the teacher understands the material as inexhaustible and ever renewing such that a continued engagement with the content furthers one's understanding and transformative experience. In this engagement, new and different perspectives, interpretations, and understandings are sought through continued discourse with the content as well as through openness to the thoughts and questions of students. For example, Homer discussed an instance when he could not achieve by himself "the rich interpretation that we as a community have had," revealing how the learning emerges in dialogue with the students. For teachers, this never ending engagement with the material is imperative for teaching and involves one seeking out and being open to being drawn into the subject matter again and again. In finding different ways to engage in the material, excitement and enthusiasm for the content is reignited for the teacher and is brought into the classroom. For example, Emily stated that she "read some books and got interested again in [subject matter], got excited about [subject matter]" because "you lose the capacity to engage students if it's too fixed…You have to find a different way into [the books]." Engaging the material as a learner is therefore not understood by teachers as a relationship pursued for their own benefit, but rather as an essential part of one's goal of bringing students into this transformative relationship with the teacher, the material, and ultimately, the world.

In relating to the material as a teacher, an aspiration for students to engage the content through a transformative relationship is proffered by the teacher. Rather than handing students information to learn and repeat back through a paper or test, for teachers, teaching is seeking to facilitate a discourse between the teacher, students, and the subject matter. Through participating in this conversation independently, the teacher has developed a kind of ground from which an on-going transformation in relation to the material occurs. For teachers, however, teaching not only involves a transformation of self through engagement with their discipline but an aim for students to join them and participate in this transformative discourse is also essential. Homer recalled an inspirational teacher who had a "genuine concern that [he] have a genuine relationship to [the material]." For a teacher, the content is not understood as the end goal, but rather as the foundational piece in which a transformation takes place and the students'

worlds are influenced in light of the material. Teachers recognize students' new confidence, willingness to think with others, and engagement as indicating the fulfillment of an aim to foster the possibility of this transformation in which the student has gained knowledge and is prepared to author their own on-going transformative journey. In the fulfillment of this concern, a new excitement for the material is experienced by the teacher. Homer described this excitement when saying that "when majors fall in love with a [subject matter], you fall in love with that [subject matter] all over again." For teachers, teaching is therefore a discourse between the teacher, students, and subject matter that calls for the teacher to continuously engage the content as both a learner who is being transformed and a teacher who is working to foster the possibility of a transformation for others.

Knowledge

"The way I think about a class is, we're all learners." – Albert

"Professing implies you know something, which I don't...I'm just here a little bit ahead of you." – Homer

"[Teaching] makes the world appear to them more truthfully…and more interestingly...knowing you have a companion in the sphere of truth." – Socrates

"Good teaching is leading students beyond where they are in terms of thinking...to where they can be more open to real questioning." – Albert

"The content is easy, it's disposing the kid, and I've got to figure out what the roadblock is." – Socrates

"It's a matter of how much you allow yourself to lose your script." – Emily

"[Teaching is] a performance in which you really do have to internalize it and then you just have to let go…and that letting go is exhilarating." – Homer

In teaching, the aimed-at transformation of students involves the acquisition of knowledge such that the students' understandings of themselves in the world is deepened, broadened, and enhanced. Knowledge is understood by teachers as an integration of the material and one's individual perspective to engage or 'shake hands' with the world, to paraphrase Socrates. This engagement involves moving beyond where students are in their thinking to a place where they become more open to thoughtful, thorough, and contemplative questioning and conversation with each other, the teacher, and the material. For teachers, students' acquisition of knowledge is distinct from obtaining information, for knowledge requires participation in a transformative engagement beyond the classroom while acquisition of information does not require activity but only a passive receptivity to content that remains confined to the classroom. While mastering a class means accumulating information, a transformation is an entering into "a sphere of truth" according to Socrates. In this transformation, the world is understood differently, more truthfully, and more interestingly and the goal of the teacher has been achieved, for a teacher understands students' knowledge as moving beyond the confines of the classroom to more richly engage in a mutually transforming relationship between self, others, and world.

The acquisition of knowledge not only allows for a transformation, but according to teachers, also allows for fluidity between the roles of teacher and student. In this fluidity, teachers are able to fulfill a desire to pass on their *at-homeness* with the discipline such that knowledge gained by students continues to influence their future engagements and opens up the possibility for a continued 'handshake' with the world. According to the participants, the "epitome of the life of learning" is when there is an "alternating [of] the role of teaching and students." Teachers do not understand teaching as an "abstracted watching," "imparting of wisdom," or a professing of information but rather as the fostering of an environment in which "we are all learners" with the teacher accompanying the students on this journey. Teachers ultimately understand teaching as a relationship with transformed students in which both students and teacher converse within a realm of truth and walk together in an understanding of the world that has become evident to students in light of knowledge imparted by the teacher.

Teachers understand decisions regarding the presentation of subject matter, the structure of the class, and the role of grades and evaluations as necessary, but not sufficient, aspects of fostering the possibility of a transformation in students. In deciding how to best present the content, a question of spontaneity versus preparedness arises as part of teaching, for how one disposes the students to information and knowledge greatly influences the way in which it is received and understood. Though teachers understand the teaching process as one needing some preparedness, a level of spontaneity is also experienced as necessary to allow for the class to organically grow in knowledge and naturally move in the direction that best fits the particular class. This balance between spontaneity and strict structure is a prevailing question that constantly arises in teaching for each class of students is different and every time the class meets a different balance between the two poles must be struck. As Emily said, "it's a matter of how much you allow yourself to lose your script" within the flow of a class. The information that needs to be taught is understood as needing to be more strictly held to while the way in which it is presented can and does often involve flexibility and spontaneity.

In addition to the flow of the class, grades and evaluations play a particular role in teaching. For teachers, while grades are understood as necessary for assessing individual students and introducing the dimension of a universal rubric, they can also be a hindrance to a teacher's aimed-at transformation for students. Albert expressed this danger in grades and stated, "grades are a necessary evil" for there is a real danger that a focus on grades makes collecting information the job of a student and grades become their wages. Teachers understand grades in part as capable of prohibiting the possibility of transformative knowledge when high grades become the priority of students rather than acquiring transformative knowledge and understanding. Because grades are also experienced as necessary for the assessment of students and for a universal rubric, a second difficult balance must be struck between lenient grading and harsh grading in order to create an environment that fosters the possibility of transformation for students. Therefore, teaching is understood as a conversation between teacher, students, and material that reaches beyond the classroom to a transforming relationship with the world which is only possible when dichotomies within classroom structure, presentation of content, and grading are delicately balanced and tailored to the specific needs of every class.

Personhood

> "[Teaching is] the best part of myself." - Emily

> "You see them not just walking with confidence but approaching their work with a kind of confidence and approaching one another with a kind of confidence." - Socrates

> "Any one in that classroom could be my daughter's husband or my son's wife...[wanting them to be] the kind of person who is worthy of that relationship." - Socrates

> "[I] try to teach them [students] as human beings...help them grow up a little bit." - Albert

> "[We model] forms of citizenship." - Socrates

> "If they catch what the place is about, they also want to be learners and that's a never-ending process." - Albert

Teaching is understood as intimately intertwined with the personhood of the teacher for one's way of orienting and understanding as a teacher is not a way of being that is separate from the individual. Being a teacher is not experienced by our partiipans as an occupation that one participates in while at school and turns off elsewhere but instead is part of who the individual is and understands themselves to be. A teacher does not understand their *teacherly self* as a separate identity but rather as part of who they are and a way of thinking and being that is an organic expression of one's learning that cannot be escaped, turned off, or put aside. When teaching, therefore, a kind of *at-homeness* is experienced for it is in accompanying students towards a transformation that a teacher feels comfortable, at home, and most themselves. In this *at-homeness* a teacher experiences the teaching environment as in their possession such that one's intentions and aims are being met and reciprocated in this domain. It is the desire of teachers to share their *at-homeness* with the material with students through knowledge and the transformative experience. Therefore, teaching is a way of existing and understanding one's world that cannot be separated

from the individual and is accompanied by a desire to share this understanding with students.

In teachers' aim to share with students their *at-homeness* with the material through transformative knowledge, the personhood of the student is also involved in teaching such that a concern for the students as members of a shared community and world is experienced. The classroom environment, including content and discourse, is understood by teachers as a privileged and sacred domain when students share in the transformative relationship and *at-homeness* with the material. For teachers, this privileged and aimed-at relationship between themselves, the students, the material, and the world calls for a level of care and honor for its sacredness. The sacredness of the content and discourse opened to students by teachers is experienced as most honored when the transformation of students enlightens their way of understanding the world and impacts the greater community. Teaching involves a vision of a community populated by thoughtful students and consequently a concern for the knowledge and understanding of these students not only within the community of the classroom but within the community of the world. Socrates, for example, remarked that any student in the classroom could be the spouse of the teacher's son or daughter. Hence, for teachers, teaching involves making available the sacredness of the content and discourse of a class for students whose way of understanding the world in the present and future is of concern and value. Though the desire and aim for a transformed student and citizen to emerge from one's class is present for teachers, ultimately, teaching is an act of faith and trust, for one seldom knows the influence or impact experienced by the students. From the perspective of teachers, teaching is therefore a discourse between the teacher, the students, and the material in which the teacher trustingly strives to create an environment where students join the teacher in a transformed understanding of the world that positively influences the community they inhabit in the future.

Discussion

Summary of Results

Our phenomenological analysis of the interview data revealed teaching to be understood by teachers as an abidingly dialogical enterprise between

oneself and one's students, aiming at the enactment of a vision of a life of inquiry with both particular regard to the subject matter and more generally with regard to knowledge/learning as part of a vision of meritorious personhood and community. It is understood as an organic dialogue between self, students, the subject matter and a vision of community across a reciprocal interplay between self and other, activity and passivity, giving and receiving, preparation and spontaneity, instructing and learning, leading and following, asserting and withdrawing. This interplay is understood as advancing and enacting a vision on the teacher's part of their own and their student's' personhood and the character of world which they inhabit together. Complementing the literature's findings regarding motives, personality traits, or efficacy and coping skills, teacher's answers to the question 'why teach' emerged as 'vocational' – as the expression, fulfillment, and enactment of a telic project for oneself, students and the world. Let us now return to the reviewed literature to examine the implications of these findings.

Return to the Literature

Motives

Dimensions of the reviewed literature regarding intrinsic motives such as a desire to make a positive contribution to society and experience personal growth (Struyven et al., 2013), attitudes of selflessness and altruism (May et al., 2012), and high job satisfaction (Williams & Forgasz, 2009) were apparent in our findings. Similarly, extrinsic motives such as concerns for social equity and self-expression (Lin et al., 2012) also were apparent in the interview data. However, the dialogical character of our findings augment this literature to express a broader nexus of meaning of teaching for teachers. Our themes of transformation, knowledge and personhood all were seen to refer to both the teacher and the student in reciprocally intertwined ways that seemed to go beyond the categories of self and other, intrinsic and extrinsic. For our participants, the enactment of their projects for an extrinsic world and for students was seen as the concurrent fulfillment of a project of self, each mutually dependent upon the other aspect of a univocal project in teaching wherein neither aspect alone could

be said to motivate that project. These motives are as much expressions of an orientation to teach as they are motives for it.

Personality

Our results were not focused students' perceptions of teachers nor on the personality dimensions described in the literature. Nonetheless, all the participants alluded directly or indirectly to the importance of openness to their students' experience and perspectives and a desire to foster such reciprocal openness in their students as an important dimension of their teaching. Beyond the literature's descriptions of highly rated teachers as humorous, positive, (Huang & Lin, 2014; Poraj, 2010), agreeable (Kneipp, Kelly, Biscoe, & Richard, 2010), energetic, engaging (Senko, Belmonte, & Yakhkind, 2012), and extroverted (Kokkinos, 2007) our results spoke to an abiding sense of teachers becoming most alive and most themselves in their vocation to teach. Emily stated this succinctly, saying, "[teaching is] the best part of myself." In this light, the findings in the literature that neuroticism and being distant were associated with poorer student outcomes (Basim et al., 2013; Pretsch et al., 2012; Sulea et al., 2012; Tok & Morali, 2009) shed light on these factors, not so much as predictors of such outcomes, but as expressions of such teachers' understandings that their valued telic projects for themselves, their students, and the world in teaching are not coming to fruition such that they are unable to envision a path to their enactment.

Burnout

The literature regarding teacher burnout perhaps most strongly underlines the value of our integrative project-ive phenomenological approach. Emily initially declined our invitation to participate citing her concern with having just experienced a semester where her teaching had not met her expectations. However, she eventually agreed to participate citing a renewal of interest in her teaching. Her experience illuminated how the question 'why teach' can sometimes be answered negatively and that even in these cases the nexus of meaning highlighted in our results were the ground from which the meaning of teaching was understood. All of our participants noted the value of a continued return to the material taught in their desire to

share their knowledge and vision with their students. Homer described this counterpoint to burnout captured in our theme of 'at home-ness' within teaching, saying that "when majors fall in love with a [subject matter], you fall in love with that [subject matter] all over again." This 'at home-ness' is manifest in teachers' understandings that they have created a community of learners whose transformation extends beyond the classroom into a model of virtuous living. The lack of personal accomplishment (Cenkseven-Önder & Sari, 2009; Hultell & Gustavsson, 2011), vigor, dedication, and absorption (Rey, Extremera, & Pena, 2012) characteristic of burnout in the literature can now be understood as expressing a teacher's inability to envision a path to the enactment of their telic vision or project(s) for teaching and the understanding that these project(s) are not or are no longer held in similar esteem by their students, institutions, or possibly by themselves. Indeed the literature's findings that 'surface acting' (Hultell & Gustavsson, 2011; Noor & Zainuddin, 2011), low subjective well-being, and negative affect (Cenkseven-Önder & Sari 2009) as well as low self-efficacy (Friedman, 2003; Hultell & Gustavsson, 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007) and job stress level (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008) are related to burnout seem to support this understanding.

Across the three main threads of the literature we reviewed, our results shed further light on these insights in view of the telic and meaning dimensions of teachers' understandings of their teaching. In view of our results, motives to teach, personality dimensions associated with teaching outcomes, and burnout and efficacy can all be seen as manifestation of a teacher's understanding of the degree to which his or her vision of an aimed-at self, other, and world across dimensions of transformation, knowledge, and personhood are being realized and made possible.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The current study must be understood within its limitations. The sample comprised successful, full time tenured faculty, all in humanities disciplines, at liberal arts teaching universities, and all participants were personally known by the interviewing researchers. While all the participants seemed eager to talk about teaching with the researchers, it is not clear whether or how our pre-existing relationships may have impacted the course and content of the interviews. Some dimensions of social desirability

may have been in play, but it seems equally likely that familiarity with the researchers may also have facilitated openness and honesty. The homogeneity of the sample in regard to tenured status, disciplines (all humanities, two from English), and university level instruction might also constrain the generalizability of the findings. While it is our expectation that the imaginative variation in our analysis would enable us to arrive at the 'trans-situational' elements of our findings (see Garza, 2007, 2011; Giorgi, 2009; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, Wertz, 1983, 1985), and even as phenomenological researchers have shown that in-depth analysis of even a single case can suffice to develop a general structure of a phenomenon (see Wertz, 1983, 1985) it would be beneficial to expand the current analysis to include a greater variety of teachers, across a greater variety of disciplines, with a greater range of experience and within a greater variety of educational settings in future research.

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Mezzi di Educazione di Massa. Saggi di Storia della Cultura Materiale della Scuola tra XIX e XX Secolo, por Juri Meda

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Review I

La historia de la educación ha dado un giro en su investigación y perspectiva en las últimas décadas, abrazando el uso de fuentes interpretativas tales como la fotografía, las memorias, las historias y relatos de vida y el material escolar, entre otros. El uso de las mismas es hoy objeto de múltiples estudios, proyectos e investigaciones de largo alcance en el panorama histórico-educativo a nivel nacional e internacional.

Prueba de ello es la obra que presenta el profesor de la Universidad de Macerata (Marcas, Italia) Juri Meda, quien fuera investigador del Istituto Nazionale di Documentazione, Innovazione e Ricerca Educativa (INDIRE) de Italia y presidente del Osservatorio Nazionale Permanente, encargado de la elaboración del Fondi Italiani Storici di Quaderni ed Elaborati Didattici (FISQED) en Florencia.

Ya desde el inicio, Meda deja constancia del viraje interpretativo que aborda en su obra, alejándose del paradigma histórico puramente político, concibiendo la escuela no sólo como un espacio para la difusión de los hábitos culturales, sino también como un escenario donde convergen además los intereses económicos. Relacionado con éstos surgen los "medios de educación de masas", un término que el autor acuña y que concibe como aquellos que son producidos a escala industrial y que uniformizan la educación.

Para ello, el autor nutre su obra con fuentes como catálogos y material escolar tales como el mobiliario, los cuadernos y diarios escolares, que ponen de relieve no sólo el alcance e interés de mercantilizar la educación y exponerla a las leyes de la oferta y la demanda, sino que además ubica el foco de las editoriales en otros elementos que no eran necesariamente los

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libros, como las sillas y mesas, los mapas o el material científico entre otros.

La obra en cuestión dedica a cada material un apartado donde recorre su trayectoria. De ellos, cabe señalar el minucioso estudio interdisciplinar realizado en cada fuente, combinando el enfoque pedagógico, histórico, económico y político en todos los casos. Resulta destacable el caso de los diarios y cuadernos, los cuales durante el régimen fascista de Mussolini experimentaron una fuerte estandarización y homogeneización.

Quizá la mayor aportación de la obra sea su planteamiento metodológico sobre la diversidad de fuentes históricas y la importancia de su triangulación. El estudio de diferentes materiales y su posterior combinación, contribuyen a la composición de un relato que narra la historia de la educación nacional de una forma inédita. La recomposición de la escuela a partir de fuentes alternativas ayuda a entender concepciones hasta ahora desconocidas. Además, el uso de enfoques disciplinares complementarios nos permiten visualizar agentes educativos, como el profesorado, de un modo distinto. En este caso, nos muestra el autor con la visión economicista de la educación y su material, cómo el maestro vira de un rol "artesano" al de "cliente" de una industria capitalizada que sigue siendo hoy parte de nuestra realidad educativa.

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