Travel as an educational resource.
Case study of the Tahina-Can Expedition

El viaje como recurso educativo.
Estudio de caso de la Expedición Tahina-Can

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Abstract

The work analyses the possibilities of travel as a resource and innovative educational method based on the case study of the Tahina-Can Expedition, a travel journalism project promoted by the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB). Since 2004, it has allowed about 700 students to participate in an academic expedition that brings together content production workshops in the field of digital writing, television, photography and radio. The initiative has obtained the first prize by the Telefónica Foundation in the category of "Learning on the Net". The study proposes the conceptualization of the trip as a constructivist practice that assumes the challenges of the 21st century student profile. Through the methodology of the case study, the article describes the particularities of the travel project, as well as it analyses its results and its impact. This is done through the technique of focus groups, which are developed with the participation of the expedition members who have taken part in the trips of Tahina-Can. The study concludes, among other aspects, that the trip is considered as an active learning practice and that constitutes a stimulus for the students. The experience enhances the commitment of the participants with their own learning process and it allows the advanced development of different professional journalistic roles and competences.

Keywords

Journalism, education, travel, communication, internet, learning.

Resumen

El trabajo analiza las posibilidades del viaje como recurso y método educativo innovador a partir del estudio de caso de la Expedición Tahina-Can, un proyecto de periodismo de viajes impulsado por la Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona (UAB) desde el año 2004 y que ha permitido a cerca de 700 estudiantes participar en una expedición académica que aglutina talleres de producción de contenidos en el ámbito de la redacción digital, la televisión, la fotografía y la radio. La iniciativa ha obtenido el primer premio por la Fundación Telefónica en la categoría de "Aprendizaje en la Red". El estudio propone la conceptualización del viaje como práctica constructivista que asume los retos del perfil del estudiante del siglo XXI. A través de la metodología del estudio de caso, describe las particularidades del proyecto de viajes al tiempo que analiza los resultados y el impacto del mismo a partir de grupos focales desarrollados con la participación de los expedicionarios que han hecho parte de los viajes de la Expedición. El estudio concluye, entre otros aspectos, que el viaje es considerado como una práctica de aprendizaje activo y que constituye un estímulo para los estudiantes. La experiencia potencia el compromiso y a la entrega de los participantes con su propio aprendizaje y permite el desarrollo avanzado de diferentes roles y competencias periodísticas profesionales.

Palabras clave

Periodismo, educación, viaje, comunicación, internet, aprendizaje.

Communication, education and travel

University and, therefore, education need to be the object of a deep reflection. The professor and researcher of Public Policies of Harvard University, Dan Levy (Amiguet, 2017), the director of the eLearning Center of the UOC, Lluis Pastor (Farreras, 2016), the innovation expert and member of Singularity University David Roberts (Torres, 2016) or the dean of the University of Paris -known as the Sorbonne-, Francois-Guy Trebulle (Fernández, 2018), among others, coincide in pointing out that universities are in danger of disappearing if they do not adapt to the particularities of the current scenario. This warning or prognosis -beyond its realization- results in the need to rethink education from the particularities and transformations of the different actors and processes that have a prominent role in it: the student profile, the teaching methodologies, the role of the teaching staff and the type of evaluation applied to certify the acquisition of skills and competences.

Since McLuhan predicted in 1960 the irruption of "classroom without walls", several authors, such as Stinson (1997), Prensky (2007), Piscitelli, Adaime and Binder (2010), Pastor (2010), Pérez-Tornero, Tejedor, Simelio and Marín (2015), among others, have influenced the need to reformulate the training processes with the aim of increasing the ludic, motivating and immersive component of them, especially in the framework of the so-called network society (Castells, 2003). This group of works has been developed in a society impacted by cyberculture (Lévy, 2007) and by the liquid essence (Bauman, 2003) of a scenario marked by the progressive prominence that the technological component has acquired and, especially, the social networks (Pempek *et al.*, 2009; Tuñez, & Abejón, 2010), which have generated new habits among netizens (Waycott *et al.*, 2010). This set of changes has been linked to the transformations of the web, which in its version 1.0 has gone up to the stages of social web 2.0, semantic web or 3.0 and web of objects or 4.0. The collaborative, social, participative and bidirectional idiosyncrasy of web 2.0 made a profound impact on the educational scene. As pointed out by Castaño *et al.*, (2008) this renewed version of cyberspace directly impacts (see Chart 1) on educational processes, while opening interesting and profitable innovation opportunities that affect the roles of different actors (teachers and students, especially), to the content and the methodologies, among other aspects.

Chart 1
Main transformations of the educational scenario

Individual content production	Teachers and students as active creators of knowledge.
Harnessing the power of the community	Learn with and from other users.
Architecture of the participation of services	Everyone can be active actors.
Empowerment of simple and intuitive tools	The user does not have to be a specialist technician.
Bet on open software	Philosophy of "openness" to non-proprietary standards.
Creation of learning communities	Users compromised by interests, themes, etc. shared.
Web Effect	From individual work to cooperation among equals.

Source: Castaño *et al.*, (2008).

In this context, the so-called "millennial" (Francese, 2003), whose profile approaches that of the "prosumer" coined by Toffler (1980), give shape to

a student body that, both in its access to information (Akter, & Nweke, 2016) as in their professional expectations and in their daily work confers great importance on technologies. This "Generation of the Millennium" or "Generation Y" is composed of users who stand out for their multitasking profile, for their intuitive capacity in the management of digital ecosystems (Ruano *et al.*, 2016) and for having an attention that has been defined as "Floating" (Crenshaw, 2010). Several investigations have diagnosed a loss of interest or distancing of these students regarding the contents and work dynamics of the current education system. In Spain, according to a study by the professor of Sociology, Mariano Fernández Enguita, one out of every three students gets bored at school and leaves school (Fernández, 2016). This type of data occurs in a scenario marked by a set of technological changes that affect professional profiles (Lin, 2012).

In the field of communication, the training demands have been diverse. For Pavlik (2005), technological innovation has modified journalism studies in four major areas: the way of teaching and research; the content of what we teach, the structure of the departments of journalism and the faculties of communication and the relationships between teachers and their audiences (students, funders and competitors). Authors such as Pavlik (2005), Tarcia and Marinho (2008), García Avilés and Martínez, (2009), López (2010), Roblyer (2010), López García (2012), Silva (2014), Singh (2015), Pérez -Tornero y Varis (2012), Pérez-Tornero (2016), Sánchez, Campos and Berrocal (2015), Tramullas (2016), Sánchez-García (2017), Tejedor and Cervi (2017), Tejedor, Giraldo-Luque and Carniel (2018) have proposed in different works the importance and urgency of rethinking the focus of the curricula (both in their curricular offer and in their methodologies) of the communication scenario. In the field of journalism, a study conducted in mid-2006 in Spain concluded that most faculties failed to meet the training needs demanded by the industry (Tejedor, 2007).

The Tahina-Can Expedition is a project that, since 2004, organizes an academic trip to different enclaves of the world in which university students of the field of communication predominantly participate. Organized in press, photography and television teams, the expedition members participate in workshops to produce content, debates and other activities that, in all cases, are based on the methodology of learning by means of a close link with everyday life and life stories of the locals of the countries visited. The project was born as a response to the need to devise new scenarios and new learning

methodologies, especially in the field of journalism and communication where the contents have been transformed into portable, personalized and participatory units (Matsa, & Mitchell, 2014).

Starting from this scenario, the research, based on a case study, has analyzed the possibilities of travel as an educational resource from the fourteen editions (2004-2018) of the Tahina-Can Expedition, a project organized by the Department of Journalism and Communication Sciences of the Autonomous University of Barcelona, through the research group of the Communication and Education Cabinet. The study answers the following research questions with a descriptive scope:

- What are the strengths of the expedition as a training project?
- What are its weaknesses or aspects to improve?
- How do the participating students (from the field of communication) value the experience at the training level?

Travel as an educational resource

The idea that travel is a source of continuous education and can be understood as a constructivist practice (Vygotsky, 1978). The systematization of travel as a curriculum is manifested through various initiatives that not only reflect the formative value of cultural exchange, but also propose an education in values based on responsibility, commitment and understanding towards other countries and cultures. A vital experience integrated by interdisciplinary teams in which there is a very intense before, during and after.

Under the paradigm that knowledge is constructed, the constructivist model interprets travel as a learning process based on the autonomous construction of knowledge. On the one hand, it allows the assimilation of new knowledge with exercises in which active subjects give meaning to new experiences (Blashki, & Nichol, 2008). On the other hand, the learning process generates states of imbalance -in its confrontation with new contexts in which the traveler faces unknown scenarios- that demand from the subject moments of readjustment that favor changes in the structures of thought and promote the assignment of meanings through experiences (Medina Gallego, 2003, pp. 115-162).

Piaget (1973), Kohlberg (1992), Ausubel and Sullivan (1983) and Vygotsky (1978) agree that the construction of knowledge is made from

individual cognitive structures. Constructivist theory points out that this structuring is propitiated from everyday spaces such as home, school, society. On the journey, daily life takes the form of continuous coexistence, during a period of time, with the daily space of the experience that is lived. Constructivism takes up the direct experiences of the traveler and reorganizes them to, with the experience of travel, generate a conceptual change that favors meaningful learning (Ausubel, & Sullivan, 1983). By confronting hypotheses and methods of solving problems and their observation the individual constantly makes a diagnosis between their own level and the potential level of development, the diagnosis being the scope of application of the "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978). The relationship established as a learning framework towards a higher level of knowledge reinforces the traveler's own contributions in their cognitive development. During travel, the acquisition of knowledge will be a process in which the new information will be incorporated into the preexisting structures, modifying them.

At the same time, constructivism points out that knowledge is not a faithful copy of external phenomena. It is a construction of the human being. The aim of the learning framework is to organize the experience in such a way that its sequentialization allows a distinction to be made between the external and the internal -the individual or the group- to create a new reality (Medina Gallego, 2003, pp. 163 -189). Constructivism recognizes that there is an active subject that comes to the educational process with a worldview that influences their way of acting. Therefore, it gives learning a need for the production of individual change (attitudinal, methodological, axiological, aesthetic) and a projection towards the construction of scenarios that facilitate these changes.

Constructivist learning is concerned with the development of useful knowledge, not for learning for learning sake. According to their logic, new knowledge must be able to be applied in the world in a practical way (Doolittle, & Camp, 1999). Constructivist learning thus finds, in travel, an authentic context to be able to show the students the absolutely practical application of what they learn. In addition, students need to work as a team and interact with their peers in order to understand concepts through the construction of knowledge obtained through experiences of the journey itself. The practices related to reflection will increase the metacognitive skills of the students.

Constructivist theories assume, therefore, that learner-travelers create mental representations of their environment using their knowledge in real contexts (Doolittle, & Camp, 1999, Driscoll, 2005, Mayer, 1999). Through personal experiences, social interactions and metacognition, the participants of the journey acquire the ability to think critically, to reason and to develop understanding (Driscoll, 2005). In travel, the constructivist model proposes a conceptual change in two dimensions: a semantic change, because knowledge is broadened by producing a crisis in the previous ideas of travelers with the intention of being re-evaluated, and a theoretical change, due to the review of previous knowledge that produces a change of ideas about the phenomena object of knowledge. Constructivism promotes dissatisfaction with initial theories or previous ideas and promotes the integration of new explanatory theories based on experience, travel, which will serve to distort the previous theory (Medina Gallego, 2003, pp. 275-323) and overcome it.

The described constructivist framework, within an educational scenario of the 21st century, can also be encompassed under the conceptualization of a competence understood as the ability to solve problems. For Cano (2008), proposes a series of characteristics that encompass the concept of competence from a review of more than fifty definitions of different authors, a competence a) is composed of skills or abilities related to know-how (actions) of an individual, b) requires a process of reflexive action on the part of the subject that performs them (action + reflection), c) is acquirable through different processes (learning) and, in that sense, is updatable, d) allows to solve problematic situations in a specific context in an efficient, autonomous and flexible way, and e) has in its execution, according to the previous factors, individualized or diverse responses taking into account the specific contextual factors.

Methodology

The development of the article has been proposed as a qualitative case study focused on a specific object: The Tahina-Can Expedition as an example of an educational trip. At the same time, the analysis complements its qualitative approach through the development of a focus group that allows corroborating the theoretical approaches with the vision that participants

of the Expedition have about their own conception of travel, lived as an educational experience.

The case studies are defined as a method to learn about a complex instance (US General Accounting Office, 1990), from the comprehension and description of it as a whole and its context, through data and information obtained by extensive descriptions (Mertens, 2005). Gillham (2000) points out that the case study details a unit related to human activities that take place in the real world, understood in its context, that exists in the present and that mixes with the context in such a way that it is difficult to specify their borders.

Gerring, for whom the research designs of the case may cover one or several units of study, (2007) appreciates the case study as a work whose method is qualitative and holistic, and which offers a complex and comprehensive examination of a phenomenon, which uses a evidence and that uses data triangulation. According to Hernández *et al.,* (2006) the method can be defined as a study that can use qualitative research processes and that analyzes in depth a unit to respond to the problem statement, test hypothesis or develop theories.

The case study applied to this research takes the Tahina-Can Expedition as a unit of analysis and is therefore defined as qualitative and synchronic. The analysis of the case uses the description as a methodological basis, which includes the contextualization of the program, the construction of the academic plan and the media impact obtained in its editions.

The case study is complemented and triangulated with the development of a focus group in which five students, who had participated in past editions of the Tahina-Can Expedition, participated. The development of the focus group had the objective of promoting a deep conversation about the travel experience of the participants in the described editions of the Expedition. The method is conceived as a space for interaction and dialogue between people who share a series of common characteristics and which leads to the group construction of meanings, based on the collective narrative of the participants (De Miguel en Berganza, & Ruiz, 2005, p. 269). The results of the focus group were used to verify the theoretical arguments previously presented, in which travel is conceived as a constructionist learning experience, meaningful and of high interest for its participants.

The Tahina-Can expedition

The Tahina-Can Expedition is a travel journalism project organized by the Communication and Education Office of the Autonomous University of Barcelona, directed by Professor José Manuel Pérez Tornero, with the aim of promoting a different and genuine way of understanding and carrying out trips. The project, awarded in 2004 with the first prize of the II International Intercampus Competition on Research and Teaching in the Network 2004 organized by the Telefónica Foundation, in the category of "Learning on the Web", aims that university students -of different careers and universities - embark on an initiatory journey that confronts them with socio-cultural realities different from their own and that "educates" their way of seeing and explaining what they have seen and what they have experienced. Within the framework of the Expedition, the participants organize themselves into press, radio, television and photography teams; and they must produce traveler reports who flee from the conventional or tourist in order to produce critical "messages" that invite reflection from otherness.

The project that began in 2004 aims to promote the interest of the university community for the culture and customs of the visited country. After fourteen editions, the initiative promotes strong bonds between the expeditionary and the students, institutions and means of communication of each destiny. It is, above all, a proposal that aims to establish a new conception of travel oriented towards commitment, understanding and analysis towards the destination covered. This approach to journalism, adventure and international cooperation takes the form of a set of thematic lines such as knowledge of other socio-cultural realities, knowledge of how the media of the country in question works and participation in development of different journalistic projects through the production, during the trip, of journalistic contents of different nature.

For almost two weeks, the expeditionaries travel a country of the world, studying the particularities of the cultural and media landscape through an itinerary that moves away from the traditional tourist circuits. Each year Tahina-Can convenes Spanish students of all university degrees with the purpose of creating a multidisciplinary profile.

Chart 2
List of editions of the Tahina-Can Expedition

Expedición	Año
Mexico: Travel to the Mayan world	2004
On the way to the equator: From Quito to the Amazon	2005
Dominican Republic: By land of taínos. The door to the new world	2006
Cuba: An island at its crossroads	2007
Peru: Towards the Inca world - Cooperation in the Andes	2008
Ecuador: From Middle the world to the heart of the Amazon	2009
Chile: Chronicle of the reconstruction	2010
Morocco: Journey to the kingdom of the distant west	2012
Thailand: Adventure in the Kingdom of Siam	2013-2014
Uzbekistan: To Samarkand on the Silk Road	2015
Dominican Republic: The adventure of education	2016
Colombia: Tribute to peace - In search of the lost city	2017
Yucatan: Treasures of the Mayan world	2018

Source: own elaboration

The academic program

The Tahina-Can Expedition revolves around an academic program produced by the team that directs the project, and whose preparation, prior to the trip, also has the advice of teachers, journalists and professionals from the world of communication in the country of destination. This experience of cyber-journalism is built according to the objective of strengthening cooperation relations between Spanish university students and students, institutions and media of the visited country, through the analysis and study of the particularities of the cultural and media landscape that it presents. In this sense, the expedition members delve into other socio-cultural realities, learn how their media work and participate in the development of journalistic projects. Throughout the trip, the program is articulated according to the planned activities, among which are talks, seminars, conferences and colloquiums on aspects linked to the current situation of the place and given by specialized journalists from different media, interviews with media

professionals, production of reports and other types of journalistic products. The participants, on the other hand, have the opportunity to inform about the course of the Expedition through the website of the project with their chronicles, interviews and other materials (See Figure 1). The expeditionaries learn from a country, its people, its history, its folklore, its gastronomy and its problems, its strengths, its needs, its contradictions. Especially, they learn the importance of placing themselves in the "other's" place. This means learning to "look" and process our environment and our world. They learn to reflect on their priorities and their scale of values and put them into question. They also learn from themselves and their professional and human vocation.

Figure 1
Website of the Tahina-Can Expedition

Source: www.tahina-can

There are different workshops that, in all cases, intend for the expedition members to practice in the field production of journalistic content based on the use of journalistic production techniques and routines and the use of the different information attributes they possess. (See Figure 2).

Figure 2
Example of report elaborated by expedition members

Source: www.tahina-can

After the trip, the team of the Communication and Education Cabinet organizes the presentation of the different journalistic works elaborated by the students in the press, photography, radio and television workshops. The event takes place every year and is celebrated in a Spanish university. As a complement, an itinerant photographic exhibition is also carried out in Spain, where the most representative photographs made by the expedition members themselves are exhibited. The project is completed with the creation of a travel book focused on the visited country and conceived with a different philosophy. It is a work that includes, mainly, the chronicles of the expedition members, the socio-cultural data as well as the articles of specialized travel journalists.

Figure 3
News about the project disseminated in the media

Más de 60 estudiantes se convertirán en 'corresponsales' desde la República Dominicana

REDACCIÓN
11/06/2006 12:40

Actualizado a
31/06/2006 19:51

Barcelona. (Redacción).- Alrededor de 60 estudiantes de universidades de toda España participarán en la Expedición Tahina-Can Bancaja 2006 que recorrerá durante este verano la República Dominicana en un viaje que combina periodismo, cooperación y aventura.

El proyecto se dirige a estudiantes universitarios de cualquier licenciatura de toda España. Durante el viaje, los participantes se organizarán en equipos de radio, prensa online, televisión y fotografía.

En el caso del equipo de prensa online, los estudiantes publicarán cada día en la web del proyecto las crónicas, reportajes y entrevistas que vayan haciendo a partir de sus experiencias, en una especie de 'redacción online itinerante' que, a veces, publicará desde la mitad de la selva y, en otras ocasiones, lo hará desde unas legendarias ruinas mayas.

Source: www.tahina-can

Discussion

The description of the studied case, the Tahina-Can Expedition as an educational trip experience, demonstrates -both in the theoretical discourses about the educational construction model and the new type of student profile of the present, as well as in the students' own narratives, evidenced in the focus group carried out- an evident proximity between the educational program offered in the trip and the fundamental concepts that constitute the pedagogical change oriented to the formative needs of the 21st century.

In the focus group one of the students pointed out that "the trip made allowed me to get away from the comfort zone in which I normally find myself, causing a clash between my own reality and the new explored reality". The development of disequilibrium states or rearrangement between previous knowledge or imaginaries and the new contexts of learning is one of the axes of the constructivist exercise because it promotes the assignment of meanings and the construction of new concepts through living experience (Medina Gallego, 2003).

For students, Tahina-Can is an educational journey because "every day and every activity imply a learning experience", or because "we have an evolution from the first day of work and coexistence that is projected even after the trip". For some of them, the trip represents a point "beyond the academic level we have as an idea of education". The change of perspective on their own learning experience, and the change internalized by the travelers, denotes the confrontation of previous hypotheses from an experience and the individual and group daily diagnosis on the scope and overcoming of the "zones of proximal development" defined by Vygotsky (1978). The new information, linked to a reception that is also emotional and not only rational, incorporates -not without a cognitive rearrangement- the structures and schemes previously constructed in the student. In the process of the trip, as shown by the students participating in the focus group, the previous schemes end up being modified. Travelers, therefore, attend the two dimensions of conceptual change presented by Medina Gallego (2003). On the one hand, they make a semantic transformation by reevaluating their own imaginaries about a reality that they end up knowing directly and without intermediaries. On the other hand, they generate a theoretical change by propitiating the own revision of their explanations. The trip demonstrates dissatisfaction with initial theories or previous ideas and facilitates the creation of new explanations and social descriptions of the lived reality.

At the same time, the need to conceive the student as autonomous subject of the learning process (Blashki, & Nichol, 2008) is present in the experience as a framework of possibilities to give meaning to new experiences: "The Expedition was presented to me as an opportunity to meet and discover my own curiosities. To learn from my own interests ", indicated another of the students participating in the focus group. McLoughlin and Lee (2008), as well as Robinson (2006), point to the concepts of curiosity and creativity as active principles of the student's interest towards their own learning context and towards the resolution of the problems proposed in the educational process.

Some students also mentioned that the journalistic practices developed during the Expedition:

> They were not understood by us as a formal work of the University. In the travel experience we forced ourselves to look for stories and really ask questions. We were aware that the products we made would come out of the classroom, which would be published. We had an extra motivation in the conception of our journalistic exercise as a real practice.

The testimony also implies a very clear connection with the practical sense and with the real application of knowledge to a particular context defined by the constructionist model (Doolittle, & Camp, 1999). The students manage to develop a good part of the seven competency needs described by Nightingale and O'Neil (1994) through an absolutely practical work. At the same time, the relationship between the curricular objectives and real projects developed during travel is palpable (Trilling, & Fadel, 2009): "In the Expedition we managed to improve our skills in technical aspects of journalistic production, while we made our own the productive routines of each of the media in which we work," said one student.

Knowledge constructed in the real context, through practical experiences (Doolittle, & Camp, 1999; Driscoll, 2005), helps students to better understand their own reality. Each of them creates a mental representation based on their life experience. Its proximity to context and reality, guided by the approach of problems and by collaborative work, also allows the formation of critical thinking and the development of more complex processes of understanding and rationalization (Driscoll, 2005).

Conclusions

The fourteen editions of the Tahina-Can Expedition project allow us to extrapolate a series of conclusions about the potential of the trip as a constructivist practice that assumes the challenges of the student profile of the 21st century. The analysis of the particularities of the project, through the methodology of the case study together with the results derived from the focus groups, leads to the following conclusions:

Travel as an adventure of exploration and discovery: The study developed, and the experiences derived from the different editions of the project allow us to affirm that the trip constitutes a solid experience of

exploration and discovery for the expeditionaries that is not limited to the Expedition but is projected in the post travel. The expeditionaries state that after the experience they have a greater interest in aspects of their daily life that had not previously been of interest.

The experiential component as an outstanding stimulus: The combination of an academic program together with the experience of visiting a country (through different visits: cultural, environmental, sports, etc.) is a great encouragement for the participants who, according to what has been stated in the research, especially highlight the important to carry out a journalistic coverage in the field establishing a direct contact with reality. The participating students confessed to be stimulated by the orders they received during the expedition, while demonstrating a great motivation to strive in order to generate content that would be published on the project website and that would be viewed and commented by their own colleagues.

Travel as a dynamic of journalistic roles: The project is consolidated as an ideal setting for the application by the students of the journalistic production routines of the press, radio, television and photography. In addition, a trend towards convergence among teams or workshops is detected, which is given not only by the exchange of content but also by the conception and collaborative development of information coverage and reporting based on the contributions of the members of different teams. In this way - it is observed - on the one hand, a familiarization and identification with the transmedia logic and, on the other, the efficiency of the Expedition is confirmed to enhance a decisive competence in communicators, such as teamwork.

Finally, the study of the project together with the students' reflections also warns of a series of aspects that should be remodeled or improved within the framework of this initiative or similar projects that locate travel as the driving force of a training process. Finally, based on this research, the importance of consolidating and projecting this line of research in which education, travel and communication converge due to their interest and relevance in the current educational scenario is considered.

Acknowledgments

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