
ARTÍCULO DE INVESTIGACIÓN

INTEGRATING MEMORY, HISTORICAL REMEMBRANCE AND DRAMA IN COLOMBIAN SCHOOLING: PEDAGOGICAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

INTEGRACIÓN DE LA MEMORIA, RECUERDO HISTÓRICO Y TEATRO EN LA EDUCACIÓN EN COLOMBIA: IMPLICACIONES PEDAGÓGICAS Y PSICOSOCIALES

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Abstract

This is a research study that explores the kind of pedagogical and psychosocial possibilities that collective remembrance, mediated by practices of drama in education, might offer to the work of memory. Under study is a drama-remembrance project that explores individual and historical memory in conjunction with critical remembrance through the classroom drama praxis. Assuming the school as a terrain within which a community of memory is possible, this research is concerned with educational experiences that facilitate the understanding of the 'work of memory'. I am also situating drama praxis as an alternative performative form of remembrance. The hypothesis is that through drama framed as a performative practice of remembering, students can productively explore the work of memory; its functioning, implications and structures. I call this approach "Drama-Remembrance Praxis", as it constitutes a particular application of theatre to the memory and remembrance framework.

Keywords: psychosocial dimension of memory, pedagogy and remembrance, theatre- collective memory, communities of memory.

Resumen

Se trata de un estudio de investigación que explora el tipo de posibilidades pedagógicas y psicosociales que el recuerdo colectivo, mediado por las prácticas de teatro en la educación, podría ofrecer a los trabajos de la memoria. El estudio es un proyecto de teatro-recuerdo que explora la memoria individual e histórica en relación con el recuerdo crítico a través de la praxis en el aula de teatro. Suponiendo que la escuela como un terreno en el que una comunidad de memoria es posible, esta investigación tiene que ver con las experiencias educativas que faciliten la comprensión de la obra de la memoria. Se sitúa la praxis de teatro como una forma alternativa de interpretar la memoria. La hipótesis es que a través del drama enmarcado como una práctica para recordar, los estudiantes pueden explorar de manera productiva el trabajo de la memoria, su funcionamiento, consecuencias y estructuras. Se denomina este enfoque como "Drama-Recuerdo de la praxis", ya que constituye una aplicación particular del teatro a la memoria y al marco de recuerdo.

Palabras clave: dimensión psicosocial de la memoria, la pedagogía y el recuerdo, la memoria colectiva de teatro, las comunidades de la memoria.

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Introduction

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, one of Colombian most important contemporary writers, entitled one of his last novels with the provocative name *Vivir para Contarla*¹. This title suggests more than one level of interpretation regarding processes of recovering individual and social memory. As an autobiographical text, this work is a significant attempt to organize at the last minute the relation between one's past and its remembrance. The title possibly implies remembrance as an act of surviving that allows one to get to a privileged point of life that gives the time and the place to the re-telling of the more significant memories of our existence. It might imply as well a form of social responsibility regarding the lessons of the past, given the reality of having experienced or witnessed historical events and later on attempting to re-signify them publicly.

In one sense or another, Marquez's novel seems to be a kind of public call for learning and remembrance in an ethical way. By ethical it is understood the taking of responsibilities for moving memories and re-setting them and giving them new meanings. At the beginning of the book there is an epigraph that states: "*La vida no es la que uno vivió sino la que uno recuerda y cómo la recuerda para contarla*"² (Márquez, 2003, p. 7). These are poetic words that define life as what is left in our memories, rather than the real events that once took place in our existence. Life is then what we remember and the way one remembers. In *The Myths We Live By*, in a different time and different latitude, Samuel and Thompson (1990, p. 25), also declared: "Literate or illiterate, we are our memories".

Memory has many different meanings as well as profound and diverse implications in and for the lives of individuals and societies. Fentress and Wickham (1992) affirm that we are what we remember and underscore that our past determines our present and our future in so many and diverse aspects that memory becomes an essential element of our individual and social identity. When we remember, says Fentress and Wickham, we try to re-present ourselves to ourselves giving face and sense

to our existence. And we do so, not only to ourselves in a very personal and intimate space, but to others in order to show to them, in social spheres, our individual and collective nature. As far as we have memory we reveal our individual and social selves intellectually, psychologically, culturally, and politically.

Memory and identity are tied inseparably as two sides of the same reality. Relations of memory and identity are common, frequent and prolific, for memory in all senses is a constant and dynamic search for individual, existential and historical meaning. On such terms, Fentress and Wickham (1992) has called for an awareness that through the study of memory it is that we produce the understanding of our identity: "A study of the way we remember –the way we present ourselves in our memories, the way we define our personal and collective identities through our memories, the way we order and structure our ideas in our memories, and the way we transmit these memories to others– is the study of the way we are" (p. 7).

In the introduction to the edited collection *Between Hope and Despair: Pedagogy and the Remembrance of Historical Trauma*, Simon, Rosenberg and Eppert (2000) highlight the importance of conceptualizing remembrance as pedagogical. In discussing the particularities of this conceptualization, they explain that remembrance is deeply involved in the constitution and regulation of perceptions, understandings, and meanings of the past, as well as "the imaginative projection of human limits and possibilities" (p.2). In this sense, the nature of this pedagogy is based on two constitutive elements; a prospective dimension and a formative character.

On the one hand, the practice of remembrance in itself bears a capacity to generate and shape formations of memory in terms of understanding and interpretations of the past. On the other, remembrance structures a prospective ground, a creative terrain for human futurity framed by its limits and possibilities. Both the formative character and the imaginative projection of remembering contextualize remembrance as a powerful psychosocial and pedagogical praxis that while intervening in the present brings forward traces of the past and structures the potentiality of a future.

In this respect certain conditions of drama praxis appear similar to practices of remembrance carrying

1 *Living To Tell The Tale.*

2 "Life is not what one lived, but what one remembers and how one remembers it to tell it".

analogous formative and prospective implications. Gallagher (2000) for example, commenting on experiences of remembrance in classroom, comes to the conclusion that the interrelation of past and present events mediated by artistic means produces knowledge and structures a prospective pedagogy. She holds that “the arts can inform us about the past while allowing us to envision the future” (p.27). Her words basically point to a double educational flow as a result of the dynamics of “time-bound events” (2000) that constitute the pedagogical elements of learning processes in drama. Drama produces knowledge while structuring a ground for the imagination of a futurity.

Relevant here as well is Philip Taylor’s idea (2003) of theatre as a praxis that might become a pedagogical medium for action, reflection, and transformation. His concern is for a theatre that could enable people to discover their own existential potentialities; “a theatre in which new modes of being can be encountered and new possibilities for human kind can be imagined” (2003, p. xxx). This pedagogical referent based on time-bound dynamics (past, present, and future interrelations) a prospective dimension (futurity, envisioning and imagination) and a formative character (knowledge and understanding) complements and might well constitute, along with remembrance’s formative and projective character, the communal and necessary educational horizon for practices of remembrance framed by drama contexts.

Theatre has been extensively recognized as an art form concerned with performative memory and remembering devices. Herbert Blau (1990) in *The Audience* affirms that “Theatre is, in whatever revisionist, futurist, or self-dissolving form – or in the most proleptic desire to forget the theatre – a function of remembrance; “Where memory is, theatre is” (p.47). Marvin Carlson (2001) in his text *The Haunted Stage, The Theatre as Memory Machine* calls our attention to the sense of re-turning and the uncanny practice of revisiting that very much characterizes drama. His words refer basically to a strange dynamic audiences experience during theatrical performances. That is, a particular sense one feels of visiting places or perceiving circumstances we already have attended in the past. Or, simultaneously, to have the rare impression of being re-visited by facts, images, situations, we have experienced before.

The idea of something that was already witnessed and something taking place in the past but being re-enacted in the present, transgressing time and place, refers as well to drama’s theatrical simultaneousness nature. Carlson (2001) believes that there is something particular in the very nature of theatrical experience that allows audience to experience “a simultaneous awareness” of something that though it occurred in the past, when displayed in the present, is perceived to be both the same and the different. The perception of the same (past experience, something known, previous text) places us before something familiar that is witnessed again from a different perspective, filtered by the eyes and the reading of the here and now conditions.

Theatre can be understood as a sophisticated art form of re-turning and memorial re-articulation, but this theatrical praxis is not something fixed and pre-established, repeated and reinforced over and over again without any significant change. Every re-enactment is as well a sort of re-setting of memories and re-interpretation of past performances that combines what comes from the past and what is added from the present. The main implication of this past-present performative interaction is that it opens the possibility of challenging that which is understood about the past –what we used to know, our familiar perceptions, what we always see and regularly understand, transforming what is remembered.

When by means of drama performances people are invited to come together to deal with memory, experience history, practice social remembrance, and confront their psychosocial and moral engagement with the past, a performative and pedagogical call is made to engage in the process of memory work (Zarecka, 1994). I see in theatre education a potentiality to perform that call, to awake our sense of the past, and enliven willingness for undertaking the work of memory.

When our sense of the past becomes activated, memory becomes remembrance, states Zarecka (1994). It could also be said that when memory – by means of drama – becomes performance (drama in action) remembrance takes place. The dramatic action I am referring to here, involves a double dimension: the enacting character typical of theatrical performances and the consequences of such an enacting. In other words, a dramatic action empowered by its performa-

tive conditions as well as its individual and collective consequences.

The general hypothesis here is to situate theatre-in-education as a pedagogical context for the work of memory and drama praxis as a methodology and process useful for enacting remembrance and deepening one's understanding of and relation to past events. In this sense, drama praxis is consistent with Zarecka's notion of memory work (1994) as the way we construct our attachments with memory. Her analysis particularly points to those moral and psychosocial ties that we have built in regard to our individual and social memory. She remarks that one important way to understand how collective memory works is to look carefully into our personal engagements with the past. "To understand how collective memory works, we cannot restrict our inquires to tracing the vicissitudes of historical knowledge or narratives. We must also attend to the construction of our emotional and moral engagement with the past. When looking at public discourse, this translates into questions about how the past is made to matter" (p.7).

Finding out how the past is made to matter requires an exploration of how our formations of memory have been shaped and what social, psychological, historical and pedagogical experiences have intervened in their formation. It is a search for the configuration of the past in terms of its structural, pragmatic, and formal elements. "To trace how – and which – past is made to matter, we also need to ask: by whom, to whom, when, where, and why" (Zarecka, 1994, p. 8).

Zarecka's (1994) definition of memory work as a special attending to the construction of moral and psychological engagements with the past could well be taken in the context of theatre education as the work to be done by processes of drama. It would be a performative attending to our psychosocial formation of memory and a public confrontation with the collective articulation of the past. The subject matter for drama praxis dealing with memory might be this public articulation of collective memory.

Drama-remembrance praxis might constitute an experiential-pedagogical context to undertake processes of de-constructing/reconstructing individual and collective memory and the re-articulation of the past. What might be interesting here is to consider drama-remem-

brance praxis as a work of memory in terms of tracing the 'vicissitudes' (borrowing Zarecka's term) of formations of memory, and their 'implicit and/or explicit' (paraphrasing Simon's words) pedagogical assumptions.

Methodology

Research design

This is a qualitative research, exploratory and analytical, with emphasis on content analysis of participants' reactions-relations to individual and historical memory –through practices of social remembrance-, mediated by drama in education dynamics. Data was collected within participants' natural environment, the school and the classroom, while interacting with formal and institutional pedagogical practices that traditionally take place in the Grade 10 drama class.

Participants

The setting for the drama-remembrance project was the Escuela Normal Distrital Maria Montessori, one of the very few Normal schools that still exist in Colombia. This is an art-based and teacher education oriented public school that functions in a middle-low socioeconomic neighborhood. The Normal Montessori is an institution oriented to the formation of primary and pre-school teachers with a clear emphasis on artistic education. The students in the Grade 10 drama class attend the second, out of three, art-based courses that take place from Grade 9 to Grade 11. Different options are offered to students in Grade 9 to undertake their art-based academic courses such as music, dance, painting, and theatre. The Montessori Grade 10 drama class that participated in the research project was a group of 16 members, 9 female and 7 male students between 14 to 17 years old, and its drama teacher.

Ethical Considerations: The Montessori Grade 10 Drama Class, Participant-Researchers

Participant-researcher, in methodological terms, means working together (Gallagher, 2008). Participant-researcher is an expression that refers to a research context of collective collaboration as well as collective reflection. It alludes to the roles as well as to the relations that are established among the participants and their relation

to the research project. On the one hand, it refers to an active and participatory performance in the developing of the project and a commitment related to participation, observation, and reflection. On the other hand, it designates the net of methodological accountabilities and ethical relations, which in this case was intended to be as 'equitable' as possible.

My ethical methodological assumption was to put participants at the same level as the principal researcher. I overtly and clearly asked the students and the teacher to be co-researchers in this project, sharing power, benefits, and responsibilities. From this perspective, I was inviting participant-researchers not only to work and create together in democratic conditions, but to be part of the intellectual property of the research; what Gallagher (2008) calls a "collective ownership" (p.70). This was also a way to take seriously the role of the participant-researchers of the project (Goldstein, 2008), respecting their creations, interpretations and words.

Research instruments

Interviews: Initial (pre-research process) and final (post-research process) interviews were conducted with students, drama teachers, some parents, and the school principal. The interviews were structured based on three major topics: issues of drama class praxis, issues of memory and collective remembrance, issues of pedagogical practices

Diary notes: Qualitative data was collected through participants' diary notes. Students were asked to follow up their research participation with diary notes, commenting and reflecting on the drama strategies used, memory-remembrance dynamics, and their personal experiences and learning of the research process.

Audio and videotapes: Interviews, class sessions, and drama activities were audio and videotaped. Audio and video recording of the development of the research study was not only a way to save important data to be analyzed during later research steps, but constituted a memory document for students, school, teacher, and researcher.

A historical source: The historical source chosen for the process drama exploration was the story of the Colombian Afro-descendant Manuel Saturio Valencia, one of the last persons to be put to death by State execution in Colombia.

Process drama: a group-centered working strategy. According to Philip Taylor (1998) process drama is a strategy where participants from within a fictional-imagined world, provide pedagogical contexts for critical inquiry, dramatic action, and perspective changing. It is a structured improvisational activity characterized by "its concern with imagination and thematic development, reflecting learning and an emphasis on using the art form to assist students in confronting aspects of their lives and the world in which they live" (p.16). Quite frequently, psychosocial problems, political issues, historical themes, and cultural topics are explored and questioned within this form of working.

Development

After searching among several Colombian high schools, the Normal Superior Maria Montessori School was chosen as research location because of its art-based curriculum, pedagogical emphasis, and teacher education orientation: all appropriate components for the basic interests of the research. Previously, I had met teachers and principal, introduced the project to the students – explaining the purposes, methodology and objectives of the study – and attended classes and theatre activities, trying to become familiar with, and understand the schools' functioning, institutional rhythms, the drama curriculum, and the drama teacher's pedagogical *modus operandi*.

To get initiated the research process, we began using the notions of communities of memory developed by Simon and Eppert (1997), and Zarecka (1994). Communities of memory states Zarecka are formed and informed by collective actions of remembrance that open spaces for the telling and the articulation of the "reality of the past" (1994, p.15). Simon and Eppert refer to communities of memory as formalized sets of relationships through which people, in touch with events and stories of the past, work out the moral and ethical accountabilities of the social praxis of remembrance.

Contextually, I thought about the possibility of the school – and particularly the drama class – as a terrain within which the formation of a community of memory was possible and a process of drama where the exploration of the past could take place. It would also be a

collective-collaborative research context in a pedagogical environment in which to work out the psychosocial and ethical accountabilities of the exploration of the past. The memory work I was particularly interested in is comprised of the public acknowledgement of individual memories as well as forgotten collective stories and their contemporary re-articulation in specific socio-pedagogical and political settings; the class, the school, and the community.

The sources to be explored in the process drama and collective remembrance project were the participants' personal memories and the historical account of the Colombian Afro-descendant Manuel Saturio Valencia. Saturio was one of the last persons to be put to death by State execution in Colombia, 1907. Students' memories, the research process memory and Saturio's story, constituted the subject matter of the whole project. Individual, historical and process memories were analyzed and reflected in an individual-collective, personal-public and past-present perspectives. The following strategies and historical material were provided during the class sessions, as entry points to support the drama-remembrance working process:

Circles of memory and remembrance: Students re-visiting their school memories and writing about their collective experience of remembrance

Linking the past, the present and the future in participants' lives. Students seeing from the present their childhood memories and writing a Letter-Legacy for the future about the past

An official telegram, May 7, 1907, which introduced the story of Saturio and put participants in contact with historical archival documents.

Execution Minutes: historical document that describes legal aspects of the trial as well as formal details of execution rituals.

Newspaper *Ecos del Choco*, May 10, 1907: An extensive report about Saturio's story published three days after the execution.

Discussion

There were important goals to be accomplished by the research project in terms of memory and remembrance in its psychosocial and pedagogical dimensions.

These objectives were also related to the idea of the drama class understood as a community of memory and theatre as a tool for exploring the past and collectively undertaking the work of memory. In this sense, an important result was students' personal and collective experiences in relation to the past. These experiences were not only about their own individual memories and historical remembrance, but about the meaning and consequences of the past in students' lives and their present time.

A main characteristic of the research process was its strong collective and collaborative dimension. As a community of drama and remembrance, the work of memory involved participant-researchers in a learning process of working together. It was not only that we collectively took responsibility for the research development, but we explored the past through drama together. A community of drama and remembrance is constituted of individuals with different ideas, histories and identities. Different perspectives, opinions and voices were heard and taken into account in the process of exploring the past, personal and collective.

In this respect, an important component of this drama-historical memory journey was learning. The collective exercise of listening to other's stories, to the history of others, to what has happened to others, translated into the learning of recognizing and respecting the voice of the other, the other's words, and the other's being. Because of the intertwining connections established between the process of drama and historical remembrance, this individual and collective work compromised a complex pedagogical process of negotiation between different levels of learning; personal, social, historical, and disciplinary learning.

A third important characteristic of the research project was its psychosocial and pedagogical implications. On one hand, students gained a crucial awareness in terms of the powerful links that take place between theatre and society. In this case, using a theatrical metaphor, drama became the lens that enabled participants to look into the Colombian's past and the medium through which they could figure out their own relationship to that past. On the other, this drama-memory way of working became the social laboratory where students came across with a sense of social inclusion, civic identity and community belonging.

These are essential results about extremely sensitive issues for both Colombian reality and young people. First, these are major concerns in regard to the intellectual, social and psychological factors that intervene in the growth and development of the personality of teenagers. Second, identity belonging and inclusion are also the civic and political basics necessary for young people in the process of becoming. These elements are particularly relevant in a country like Colombia, where intolerance, socio-economic exclusion, political radicalization, and ethnic discrimination, permeate citizen relations.

The outcomes of the research transcended the limits of the classroom and implicated the Montessori school community. A final artistic outcome was shown publicly; a theatre play assembled by the participant-researchers, and presented to the Montessori school community. The content of the play reflected in theatrical terms the outcomes of the research, the individual and collective learning, and the tensions and dialogues between individual, collective and historical memories. This final theatre presentation became a community event for collective exploration of the past and social remembrance. Through drama means –in the public time of a social assembly – the students brought to the community’s present their memories, individual and historical, and in a post-show public forum, reflected on the social and pedagogical meaning of the remembrance gathering.

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