

Shared Memories





Constelación
de los Comunes

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Localización
Marrón, Cantabria

Persona Entrevistada
Coeducadors

Entrevistadora
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Palmar Álvarez-Blanco: Shared Memories is a project, a process, and a methodology that was born about ten years ago. My name is Palmar Álvarez-Blanco. I'm a university professor in the state of Minnesota, and about six years ago I decided to turn a course I teach on Spanish Political History and Economy at the university—taught in Spanish—into an opportunity to apply the Shared Memories methodology.

The methodology is very simple; it's based on some of Pichón Riviere's teachings, and I apply the concept of “enseñaje” (teaching-learning). The people invited take part both as learners and as educators. In this way, once a week, students from my course and what I call co-educadors from different parts of Spain meet online to exchange impressions based on their biographical experiences related to the topics assigned in the course.

Overall, the experience has been extremely positive. We've been reproducing the methodology for four years now in different courses. But I won't be the one to explain it—it's much better to hear the people who are living it speak for themselves.

Soledad Monchalos: Shared Memories is a project that connects a group of students from an American university with a group of older people, to share—in other words, to talk about different topics. It's a way for them to learn through the life experiences that we have.

Araceli Gutiérrez: For me personally, the first thing it does is make me review my life, realize what I have, and share it. Reliving that stage, remembering again, has been very enriching.

Carmen Fernández: For us older people, it helps us delve deeper into our experiences. And for the young people, it helps them understand certain aspects of our country's politics.

Concha Calzada: It forces you to be specific, to reflect. And it also took away some important prejudices I had about certain parts of the younger generation and society.

Juan Gil: I think it's a very interesting opportunity, as the name says, to be able to share your own memories with people who will be affected by what you say, and who will be able to enjoy and become aware of what your life has meant.

María José Gutiérrez: Personally, I rarely reflect on everything I've lived through, on everything in my past. You tend to think more about what's ahead, but all that's behind you—your life story—is what shapes you, and you don't usually think about it. For me, what you are now

and what you will continue to be in the future is a result of that experience.

Francisco Saez: The adjective I'd use is "refreshing," and it allows learning not only for those who are listening, but also for those on the other side.

Pilar Gutiérrez Ocerin: It creates a relationship of mutual respect, and that's what I hold onto. I finish the conversation feeling happy.

Susana Rodriguez: It's about talking with people from different generations who are also not your family. I mean, it's not the same as talking to my nephews. These are people who live in another country, who have a different background, who don't know me at all—so it's totally different. It's not only about speaking with people from another generation, but also with people outside your environment.

Palmar: As part of the process and the methodology, I had to invent the figure of the co-educator. Co-educators are usually retired people who voluntarily offer their time to take part in these intercultural, intergenerational encounters out of a love for life and a desire to interact with younger people and learn from them.

To be an educator, you don't need any academic background. You simply show up to the sessions as a human being with a biographical experience you want to share. Each meeting is scripted, and the co-educator receives this information well in advance to prepare for the session. And we don't have to be digital experts either. There's a team member, Emmanuel, who helps us understand the digital side of the project and assists us in logging in and out of the sessions.

Francisco Saez: Well, it's a nice role because really the professor handles the little problems and leaves us with a lot of freedom to express ourselves—which is one of the most valuable things you can pass on to the listener. But as we've said before, it's not just one-way, from educator to student, but also the other way around.

Ana Hervás: The student also teaches us to open our minds, to feel more connected to real life, to other cultures, to other generations.

Araceli Rodriguez: And that theory, which sometimes stays just as theory, has turned into real knowledge of people we can now put a face to on both sides, allowing me to contribute basically my life experiences.

Soledad Monchales: For me, it's been about trying to teach from my own experience, from my own life stories, from my opinions on the topics we've discussed, and sharing them with others who are in the process of learning.

Juan Gil: I understood it from the beginning as a way to reinforce all the lessons they're receiving in a more theoretical way—on paper or on screens—and to let them confront that with the real-life experiences of someone who has been through those processes or is currently experiencing what's being discussed in class.

Susana Rodriguez: I went through different stages. When a friend—Juan—suggested it, I thought, "What if I get tangled up? What if I don't know how to do it?" because I wasn't very sure, and I also don't have a teaching background. At first, I was even nervous, and I told a friend, who said, "How can you be nervous?" But later, I found it to be a very beautiful experience.

Palmar: When the courses end—in my case, each lasts ten weeks—we usually hold an online evaluation, both for the co-educators and the students, to assess the process, rethink it, and reflect on it. At the end of each year, in June or July—when I can travel from the U.S. to Spain—we hold what we call a co-education meeting.

Last year, that meeting took place in Galicia, this year, in Cantabria. They're heartwarming gatherings where we come together to share, to get to know each other—because often, co-educators only see each other online—to share experiences, evaluate them, analyze them, and plan for the future.

At these meetings, some of us meet for the first time in person, because as I said, many of us only ever see each other online. Little by little, this creates what we call the co-education community—a group of people who stay in touch throughout the year, not only to prepare the courses but also to continue getting to know each other and walking together.

At the end of each meeting, we have a small celebration, and as part of that celebration we present the co-education certificate. This certificate is a symbolic way of thanking people for the journey we've taken together, but also of recognizing the social role each person plays in these courses—especially because we believe education doesn't happen only in the classroom; education happens in society.

So, it's our way of recognizing the value of biographical experience applied to education.

Concha Calzada: This is a project that really motivates you, stimulates you, teaches you, and frees you from prejudices.

Pilar Gutiérrez Ocerin: It establishes a relationship of mutual respect, and that's what I hold onto.

Carmen Fernández: I've learned that deep down, human beings aren't so different. It's very enriching, because young people bring us that energy and vitality that's wonderful, and we older people bring our experiences, hoping that what we share will be useful. And if not, we're still happy to have passed it on.

Concha Calzada: It boosts your self-esteem, makes you feel great, clears your mind, helps break your routine, and introduces you to something unique that will give you things you never expected, and help you understand young people—which is complicated. Do it, because it will do you a world of good.

Palmar: So, it's not hard to be a coeducator—quite the opposite—whether you're a retired person eager to participate or someone working in education. On our website, there's a contact link where you can write to us, and from that first contact, we'll tell you how you can participate—either as an educator or as a teacher interested in applying the methodology we're developing to any of your courses.

I hope you're encouraged to become part of this co-education movement!

"I really enjoyed the opportunity to learn from the co-educators in Spain. Hearing their perspectives and experiences was super interesting and also inspired me. It was valuable to be able to hear from people who have lived more than me, and

hear what they had to say about the topics we were wrestling with in class."

"I loooooooved these conversations. I genuinely really value talking to older people and understanding their life perspectives. It's super important to value older people and listen to their lived experiences. Also, the co-educators were so lovely and sweet and it was a pleasure getting to talk to them."

"I really enjoyed these conversations! Intergenerational connection is quite important to me, and while at Carleton I seldom get to interact with older people who aren't professors (talking with staff is awesome but often they're too busy for long chats), so I appreciated hearing from our co-educators their points of view."

"I personally was always very nervous prior to the interviews, but they were incredibly valuable."

"One of the most unique and important things I have ever done in my life. Talking with knowledgeable and interactive individuals all the way across the world in my second language was definitely a challenge, but honestly an amazing experience overall. Please keep doing this. I will remember this experience for the rest of my life."

"I wish there were more. I enjoyed being able to learn from them. I enjoyed connecting with the co-educators and am grateful for the time that they spent with us and their openness to sharing their ideas and reflections with us. I wish that we had been able to talk to the same person multiple times to get to know them better and become more comfortable talking to them."

"This was a highlight of my Carleton experience. Everyone I talked to was so kind and had such great thoughts. I learned so much from them."

"Very helpful, as these allowed us to get a perspective from someone living in a culture with different values than the US tends to have. I would say these were the most helpful learning opportunities, as they opened room to talk about many different ideas."

"Talking to the co-educators in Spain was beneficial because we got to see real world perspectives of how capitalism and aging were impacting real people, especially learning more about Spanish history and what it was like to live there compared to the United States."