HELPING ADULT LEARNERS TELL THEIR STORIES USING PHOTO-LITERATURE: The FotoDialogo Method

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ABSTRACT: This article focuses on the use of the FotoDialogo Method as a research and education tool to engage adult learners in dialogue. The article provides ideas for those in community-based education regarding methodological issues of recording and portraying adult learners' lifelines. It argues that the use of learner-produced photo-literature not only entices the unveiling of personal histories, but it also provides an appropriate atmosphere for the sharing of collective experiences.

Introduction

My experience as both an artist and adult educator has made me aware of the arts as powerful instruments in the learning process, especially in multicultural adult literacy and multilingual settings where alternative means of communication can make up for participants' low literacy levels. As educators, we may look at the arts as tools in the meaning-making process of teaching and learning; as artists, we make tools that educators and learners use to build knowledge. In this article I describe the process of developing a new research and education tool—the FotoDialogo Method—in which the arts and social inquiry merge. The FotoDialogo Method (Ramos, 1999) is a research tool aimed at building dialogue among culturally diverse groups and examining individuals' perceptions of social reality through the use of drawings. In the FotoDialogo method, the process begins with interviews and conversations with participants to unveil significant themes. Then, based on these themes, the researcher prepares a series of pictures and

uses them to initiate dialogues, inspire participants to tell their stories, and analyze the connections between their experiences and the sociocultural context in which they live.

The FotoDialogo pictures were inspired by real life stories told by inner-city women of color. The name was suggested by a woman who said, "What we are creating here is a *fotonovela* of our own lives!" Photo-novella or photo-literature is a common genre of comic strip in Latin America that uses pictures of people to illustrate narrative plots similar to those in soap operas. The FotoDialogo draws from Paulo Freire's (1973) adult literacy method. As one of the most prominent thinkers in the field of education and social change movements, Freire collaborated with artists in his literacy campaigns in Brazil, and in his development work in Africa and other Latin American countries. The use of what Freire called "codifications" introduced a new perspective on teaching and learning through the use of media such as games, pictures, literature, theater, and folk art to help learners reflect upon projections of their living situations in order *to read the word and the world* by critically analyzing the new situations presented to them.

Developing a common language and understanding the life experiences of adult learners is extremely important for adult educators working across cultural borderlines. In culturally diverse urban settings in the US, educators and human service providers struggle with the problems of miscommunication with the multi-ethnic and language-minority groups they wish to reach. Adult educators and literacy workers also need to listen to the voices of adult learners, particularly those of poor women of color who have been in underprivileged positions in society, in order to build on their strengths, and to challenge the beliefs and practices that keep their voices unheard. The FotoDialogo Method is an effective tool to bring out the voices and life-based narratives of women of color and to engage them in a process of self-discovery and transformation that empowers them to become change agents within their families and communities.

The FotoDialogo pictures were created during a pilot study that took place within the context of a community-based organization (CBO) in Massachusetts dedicated to providing education, health promotion, and empowerment programs to the Latino community. From 1995 to 1997, I moderated weekly dialogue sessions involving a group of Hispanic women, which we called the *Latina Women's Dialog Group* (LWDG). Over a two-year period, 20 Hispanic women between the ages of 55 and 70 years old participated in dialogue sessions conducted entirely in Spanish—the participants' native language [1]. These sessions were recorded and later transcribed and translated from Spanish into English. The purpose of the LWDG project was to explore the potential benefits of using pictures and storytelling to examine women's perceptions of social reality in order to assist traditionally disadvantaged women to speak their voices and to share their concerns regarding issues that are relevant to them. The use of pictures and storytelling in the LWDG sessions helped the group of low-

income Hispanic [2] women to express their concerns about the disabling effects of social, cultural, and economic marginalization associated with the low-income Hispanic community in the United States.

The FotoDialogo Method

FotoDialogo is a qualitative research and nonformal education method that I developed based on the principles of *participatory research* [3]. In this process, the researcher develops a set of tools—pictures and storytelling as projective techniques—for helping groups of people identify their own problems and work out options for handling them.

The FotoDialogo method can be used with all kinds of groups. It has been used with women's groups, mixed gender and age groups, and with health and human service professionals. FotoDialogo has the potential of fulfilling several educational and research purposes depending on the audience and the way it is applied, which include evoking self-expression, sharing of life experiences, identifying problems, and helping participants overcome them. The method can also bring attention to cross-cultural issues within diverse communities by using pictures and storytelling to develop a critical consciousness as groups discuss issues brought up in the stories and search for alternative ways of solving problems. It also helps researchers assess people's perception of social reality including their needs, beliefs, and values. Lastly, it helps create social support groups for people who share common life situations bound to their gender, language, ethnicity, and social class (Ramos, *in press*).

The FotoDialogo Method consists of a series of 30 black-and-white drawings, each depicting different facial expressions of men, women, and children; and scenes of life situations familiar to participants. These pictures are left open to interpretation and can be arranged in any sequence. They are often used as a game in which participants are asked to group the pictures into a story sequence and then verbally reflect upon the issues brought up in the storylines. In this sense, the pictures and stories serve as tools to elicit memories and allow participants to revisit their own experiences.

The FotoDialogo pictures were drawn based on recurrent themes identified in interviews with research participants. However, the use of collage or cut-outs from magazines could be applied as well. Two potential methods of engaging people in reflecting upon past and present experiences through the use of pictures and storytelling can be found in the work of Paulo Freire (1971, 1974, 1984, 1985,1997) and Henry Murray (1938, 1943, 1951). Key elements in Freire's *Thematic Investigation* and Murray's *Thematic Apperception Test* provided the guiding methodological framework for the development of the FotoDialogo method.

The *Thematic Investigation* was employed by Freire and his colleagues in Latin America for their literacy campaigns in order to develop a program relevant to

illiterate learners. Freire (1971, 1973 1997) suggests that reflection upon and analysis of people's ways of living must precede any action of critical education. The object of thematic investigation is to examine the language with which people refer to reality, their perception of the reality, and their view of the world. Thematic investigation (Freire, 1997) involves three stages: (1) investigation of thinking, (2) thematization (by means of generative words and other codifications), and (3) problematization of social reality. In the first stage of the investigation of thinking, the researcher organizes informal meetings during which participants can talk about certain moments of their lives. Themes and contradictions identified in these meetings are then selected and developed into codifications to be used in the thematization stage. Codifications are images of some significant aspect of the participants' concrete reality, usually conveyed by some type of media (e.g., theatre, slides, and stories). After preparing the codifications, investigators begin the decoding dialogues, a process of description, interpretation, and analysis of a concrete, existential, "coded" situation. During the decoding process, the facilitator poses as problems both the codified situation as well as participants' own answers.

The *Thematic Apperception Test (*Murray, 1943) is a personality test that consists of a series of black and white drawings commonly used as projective techniques in psychiatric interviews. Projective techniques—using pictures and storytelling as a way to assess individual attitudes, knowledge, and perception—have been long a research tool largely used in clinical psychology, psychiatry, and cultural anthropology. The underlying assumption behind these techniques is that humans tend to project their personal needs and inclinations into verbal responses (Pelto & Pelto, 1978). The basic procedure of these tests consists of asking informants to respond verbally to some kind of media presented to them by the researcher. The interpretation of the TAT is made mostly on a qualitative basis; there is no single standardized scoring procedure for TAT responses.

Combining the dialogical approach of Freire's thematic investigation and the administration of projective techniques in Murray's TAT, the FotoDialogo method uses pictures and storytelling to engage participants in self-examination and analysis of existential situations. With the help of FotoDialogo pictures participants create life-based photo-literature and reflect over their past and present actions. The ultimate goal is to achieve self-awareness as participants fulfill their needs for a sense of self and a sense of personal impact.

Creating Life-Based Photo-Literature

The Hispanic women in the LWDG were encouraged to create stories using the FotoDialogo pictures and to discuss the themes that emerged from the stories. In one dialogue session, participants were given copies of FotoDialogo pictures and asked to paste them to newsprint paper to illustrate their life-based narratives. We had all the newsprint paper spread on the walls—with their own *fotonovelas*.

As Marta talked about her story, the other women made comments to support her. The issues expressed in Marta's story were not unusual to the other women in the group. I suggested that we talk about the critical issues in the context of women's lives—where women find themselves, what they have learned, and how they are supposed to behave, act, and think. Several women in the group talked about how they were abused, mistreated, and cheated on by their husbands. Some of them recounted how they left their abusive husbands and how they were faced with difficult decisions they had to make regarding their children. Each time the women talked about their memories, they seemed to be more at ease revealing them as if they were in more control of their lives. We observed that the sharing of personal storylines enabled these women to make jumps into new identification and insights.

In the following example, the women created the stories individually and then shared them with the group. When asked about the themes portrayed in these stories, the women mentioned romance, dilemmas between work and relationships, family values, importance of family members, disease, and death.

> Here I am working in this novella and this is my leading man. The title of this story is 'Forbidden Love'. So here we are kind of infatuated . . . but I have to think—because we work together and this could create some kind of a problem at work. We are not very sure about this . . . I would also like to talk with my mother and ask her how she sees this love and work situation. Personally, I think I would like to keep my job because it is part of my life—and if this relationship would cause a scandal then I would have to leave my job—and this would be very pitiful! (Luz)

In Luz's story the cultural values of respect for the elders and the implicit parental authority are reflected in her asking her mother for advice on a personal issue. The story also presented her inner conflict between work and romance and her confusion about the right thing to do. Even though the plot is a product of Luz's imagination, the issues related to the choice she needs to make are related to other choices she had to make in the past when she was forced to leave her children and look for work to support herself and escape from her husband's constant blows.

Consistently, the women in the LWDG do not detach themselves from the plots they create. Even when they start the story by talking about a fictitious character, they wind up talking about their own lives. For instance, Celia introduced her story as if she was looking at a family photo-album: "Here I am very old and lucky because I have my grandchildren and my granddaughter who I love next to me." Family and relationships are the primary fabric of the LWDG women's stories. Family—both nuclear and extended—is a highly valued institution in Latin American cultures. *Familismo* is also a cultural trait and a way in which individuals are connected to the outside world.

In one dialogue session I used the following introduction to initiate the FotoDialogo:

> *Here we have five pictures **(C2, C1, YW1, W1, EW1)**[4]—let's say that these pictures represent the same woman at different stages of her life. Let's create a story together about this woman throughout the stages of her life, using the remaining pictures to illustrate different events in her life from childhood to maturity.*
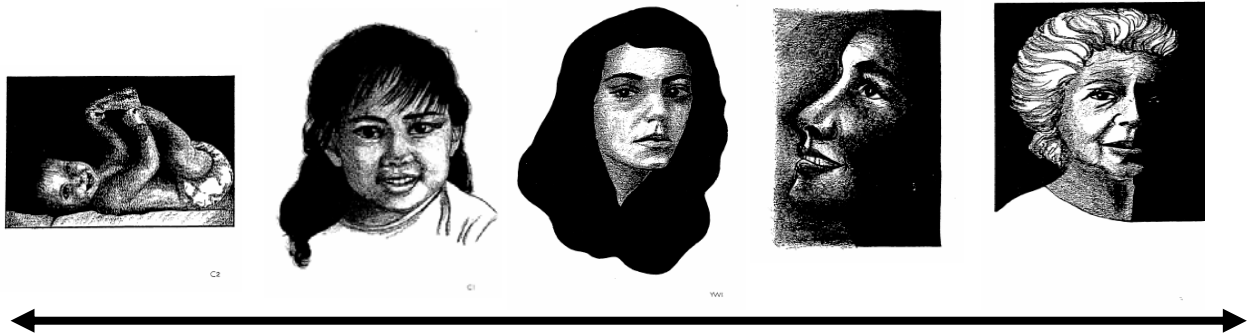
Figure 1: FotoDialogo pictures used to create "A women's lifeline."

The Hispanic women using FotoDialogo pictures to illustrate a woman's life created the following story collectively:

(SIT6) *This is Maria's father—he went to jail.*

(YW1) *Maria feels very sad that her father is still in jail.*

(SIT11) *Maria is at school being prepared to be something in the future--have a diploma, a job, and be able to have a better life.*

(SIT8) *Here Maria is older—asking for advice from her mother about some work she is thinking in doing. She is also comforting her mother who has suffered with her husband in jail. Maria's father went to jail because he was abusing his wife—Maria's mother.*

(YM2) *This is Maria's brother who is smoking marijuana as a consequence of the problems with his father. Maria is already growing up in a broken family and living in pain*

(SIT9) *Maria grew up and got married to a delinquent—a man who steals, uses drugs, and commits crimes.*

(P3) *Maria's husband ended up behind bars, so Maria went back to stay with her mother. It is always like this— women don't marry well and go back to live with their mothers.*

(SIT13) *Maria gets old and her husband, after so many years of being in jail, becomes ill.*

(SIT10). *He has someone who takes care of him and may have tuberculosis.*

(EW1). *Maria is a lonely old woman. When Maria was young she went to high school. After she finished high school she went to college—and I don't know why she got married, she should had gone further. Maria is older and her husband is very sick in jail.*

(P1) *Maria got desperate and started going to church to ask God for her husband's health and her own consolation.*

(SIT1) *Maria is older and has a little granddaughter.*

(SIT2). *…and another grandson. Maria's father got out of jail and is holding the new baby.*

(SIT7) *Maria's son is very sick He is at the hospital because he has AIDS. Maria is older and she is going to take care of her husband who is ill. She already knows she will be a widow.*

(SBI1) *She goes to church to get the strength from the Lord to stay strong until the last moment of her husband's life.*

(P2) *Maria's husband is already in death's arms.*

In this story, the women projected several issues that they faced in their own lives (e.g., domestic abuse, incarceration, broken families, drug addiction, illness, caring for an ailing husband, a son dying from AIDS, and loneliness) as well as other issues that they have observed in their community. Not only were these social issues illustrated in Maria's story, but also the interplay between individual lives and social issues that surfaced in the dialogue. For instance, when Maria's father goes to jail because he abused his wife, this not only breaks up the family but also changes its dynamic. Maria becomes a parentified child, taking care of her mother's emotional needs. Maria's brother becomes a drug addict, escaping from his responsibilities. Maria plays the expected role of the nurturing, spiritual,

self-sacrificing woman—exemplifying the values of *marianismo*, the worship of the Virgin Mary—while her brother and all the male characters in this story play the stereotypical role of the irresponsible, selfish, and immature *anti-macho* or false-hero male. The socialization of males and females in traditional Latino cultures follows strictly defined sex roles that are based on certain traditions and archetypes. Two such traditions are *marianismo*—which is based on the worship of the Virgin Mary, and *machismo*—which is based on the exaltation of masculine and heroic attributes (Stevens, 1973). Maria's story encompasses many of the situations experienced by women themselves and serves as a springboard for their questions: "Why would a woman get married if she had the opportunity to study and get a better life?" The questioning of Maria's choices in life forces the examination of culturally accepted norms and behaviors. For instance, women who had little formal education and viewed marriage as a way out of poverty began to explore other options in life.

If we compare the stories created by the participants, we find several similarities in their structures. In these stories the characters are defined by their relationships to each other and their behaviors seem to be determined by traditional (expected) cultural values. Most of the events are happening within the family realm. Gender roles also seem to follow traditional or stereotypical patterns. Female characters tend to play the roles of care giving mothers, nurturing lovers, and loving grandmothers, while male characters are getting sick, getting in trouble, breaking the law, and leaving their female counterparts to their own fate. One may question the possible reasons for the similarities among several FotoDialogo stories: (1) Are the stories bound by the limitations imposed by the choice of FotoDialogo pictures? (2) Are the stories inspired by stereotypes held by the storytellers? (3) Are the storytellers projecting their own perceptions of social reality onto their stories? Or yet, (4) are the stories reflective of the experiences and occurrences in the everyday life of the inner city's dwellers?

Even though tainted by my own interpretation of living situations reported by the women in the LWDG, the pictures were sketched based on data collected from interviews with Latinos living in the community, and on observations of the research site. Nevertheless, the fact that participants created their stories using the same set of FotoDialogo pictures may explain the tendency to evoke similar plots. The characters in the LWDG women's stories tend to narrate events that the women have witnessed or lived, and the stories appear to come from their own memories rather than from their imagination. In addition, the participants in the LWDG seemed to treat their characters with compassion and leniency. In the stories created by the Latino women in the LWDG, the drug-addicts and drug dealers are portrayed as victims of the social system, and the criminalization of their deeds is sometimes considered an "abuse" of the law. Although the stories created by different groups of people seem to portray similar spheres of action, the ways in which the storytellers construe the reality depicted by these plots vary according to their points of view and function in society. For instance, the Latinas in the LWDG narrated their stories from an *insider's perspective*, whereas the adult educators who pilot-tested this method narrated their stories

as *outsiders* looking inward to their communities. Despite the differences in perspective, people who participated in the creation of photo-literature agreed that the stories reflect their own understanding of life in the community, their personal experiences, stereotypes, and perceptions of living situations. The women in the LWDG were emphatic in asserting that their stories, as well as the FotoDialogo pictures, represented a close description of the people and events surrounding them.

The aim of creating storylines and engaging in dialogue or large group "socio-therapy" (De Maré, 1991; Isaacs, 1994) was to raise awareness of the circumstances affecting participants' lives to enable them to understand and alter the cultural meanings. In conjunction with creating storylines based on the FotoDialogo pictures, the LWDG participants were required to engage in self-examination—critical examination of oneself and one's tradition (Nussbaum, 1997)—to reflect on their life experiences, and to critically examine their values and beliefs.

In several occasions, participants in the LWDG were asked to create a story using sets of FotoDialogo pictures. When they finished their stories, they were brought together to reflect upon the following questions: What are the main themes portrayed in the stories? Are there any common issues among the different stories? How do the stories and their characters relate to the stories of real people in your community? How are race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and age depicted in these stories? How do the issues in the stories relate to the larger social context? The Hispanic women in the dialogue group examined the conditions in which they have found themselves in the past and in the present. Forged in a patriarchal society, the roles that they have played in life have been largely affected by their primary social identities—poor, female, and Hispanic. We realized that reflecting upon both life-based and imagined narratives through the use of the FotoDialogo method helped the participants to question the validity of previously held assumptions, to reveal their perceptions of social reality, and consequently to broaden their view of the world.

The Meaning Making Process

In the FotoDialogo method, researcher and participants grapple with issues associated with the interpretation of text and images, as well as the negotiated role of storytellers and researcher in the meaning making process. Here the researcher helps participants to examine their life-based narratives as a product of their autobiographical knowledge, which, according to Jefferson A. Singer (2004), "is expressed through narrative memories that give accounts of the individual's goal pursuits, obstacles, and outcomes" (p. 441).

The analysis of narrative and images in photo-literature and the way people interpret them raises complex methodological and theoretical issues. One of the difficulties in working with images is the range of theoretical traditions available.

Semiotics is one tradition that has been used in the analysis of sign systems, as well as in the analysis of texts, or systems of narration. From a semiotic point of view we can say that most narratives, as fairytales, are structured not by the nature of the characters that appear in it, but by the *function* they play in the plot (Propp, 1968; Greimas, 1966). The Russian folklore morphologist, Vladimir Propp (1968), was among the first to point out that "parts" of a story are *functions* of the story rather than autonomous "themes" or "elements." An ordered set of functions is a semiotic system of interdependent concepts and terms. Propp describes function as "an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of action" (p. 21). Vladimir Propp's approach to interpreting narratives also permits "an analysis of reader's shifting interpretations of the consequences of events in the continually expanding context of the other events that the process of reading a narrative reveals" (Kafalenos, 1997, p. 469). Furthermore, as Kafalenos suggests, "the act of reading a narrative includes, in addition to identifying events as they are revealed, a process of creating hypotheses about the causal relations among the revealed events and other events that may be revealed as one continues to read" (1997, p. 470). In the case of the FotoDialogo stories, the storytellers' interpretation of their narratives is also discussed and analyzed collectively during the dialogue sessions.

Narratives can be also understood as connected to the way people learn about and explain experience (Bruner, 1990). Researchers analyze narratives by interpreting layers of meaning in interview talk, and the connections between those layers. *Narrative analysis* "is a form of interpreting a conversation or story in which attention is paid to the embedded meanings and evaluations of the speaker and their context" (Wiles et al., 2005, p. 90). In general, narratives are composed by a unique sequence of events, mental states, and happenings involving people as characters or actors. Jerome Bruner (1990) points out the fact that "these constituents [events, mental states, and happenings] do not, as it were, have a life or meaning of their own. Their meaning is given by their place in the overall configuration of the sequence as a whole—its plot or *fabula*" (p.43). Bruner suggests that human beings have "a readiness or predisposition to organize experience into a narrative form and into plot structures" (1990, p.45). Another feature of narrative is that it can be "real" or "imaginary" without loss of its power as a story.

We can see the underlying structures in the FotoDialogo stories repeated in different ways, because each element in these stories has a certain *function*. Functions are actions like prohibition or violation, establishing or breaking contracts, and leaving or arriving. These functions are played out in "spheres of action" as the villain, the provider, the helper, the hero, and the false hero. If we deconstruct the FotoDialogo stories in terms of their elements or subjects, functions, spheres of action, and structure of narratives, we can observe the way in which storytellers arrange their sets of images (picture-cards) into a structured narrative**.**

Researchers can also examine these structured narratives from the standpoint of *personality psychology,* which is rooted in the personological perspective of Henry Murray (1938). Singer (2004), in his article "Narrative Identity and Meaning Making Across the Adult Lifespan," underlies the basic tenets of this emerging subdiscipline. Personality psychology deals with narrative identity research and it is concerned with "how individuals employ narratives to develop and sustain a sense of personal unity and purpose from diverse experiences across the lifespan" (Singer, 2004, p. 437). Researchers applying the narrative identity research approach tend to examine stories from the perspective of multiple influences based in specific cultural and historical matrices (Bruner, 1990), without the need to consider all stories as depicting particular conflicts or themes. Singer (2004) raises relevant questions related to the analysis of life-based narratives, such as "how individuals seek to make meaning of their lives, both how they understand themselves as unique individuals and as social beings who are multiply [sic] defined by life stage, gender, ethnicity, class, and culture" (p. 438). He further suggests that Dan P. McAdams' framework of personality (1987, 1990, 1995, 2001) and research centered on the role of narrative memory and life-story construction can provide a useful foundation from which individuals are able to extract meaning from life-based narratives. Singer says that "to understand the identity formation process is to understand how individuals craft narratives from experiences, tell these stories internally and to others, and ultimately apply these stories to knowledge of self, other and the world in general" (2004:438).

According to Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps (1996), "narratives transform life's journeys into sequences of events and evoke shifting and enduring perspectives" (p. 20). In the case of life-based narratives, the personal narrative is born out of experience and gives shape to experience, making narrative and self inseparable. In the words of Ochs and Capps, "Self is broadly understood to be an unfolding reflective awareness of being-in-the-world, including a sense of one's past and future" (p. 21).

The FotoDialogo Method and its use of pictures and storytelling illustrate the power of life-based narratives and meaning making in adult development and in women's empowerment and education. The opportunity a women of color has to narrate her life and then draw insight from these narratives can also contribute to her heightened sense of self (identity) and awareness of the impact she has (agency) on her social environment and vice-versa.

Reflecting on Life-Based Narratives

Hispanic women's self-conceptions are rooted in a sense of connection to others. Not surprisingly, the most visited themes in our dialogue sessions were those related to the gender-bound experiences these women have had. In the FotoDialogo stories, the storytellers portray the female characters as caregivers,

as self-sacrificing women who are struggling for survival, as giving and forgiving companions, and as victims of varied forms of oppression.

The women's voices sometimes came out as powerless and depersonalized as they tried to describe situations of extreme oppression. The women's voices grew stronger as they unmasked the myths of their own inherited powerlessness and began renaming their experiences of struggle as a fight for self-assertion. The stories created during the dialogue sessions usually portray a sense of continuity and connection with the past when they describe the women's experiences as daughters—as observers of their mothers' lives—and as actors in their own lives as mothers and wives. In some cases, women's self-conceptions are rooted in stereotypical images of women as objects who are expected to please and take care of their men's needs and desires on demand. In these circumstances women fail to develop their *selves* and tend to see themselves as powerless and dependent on others for survival. We have observed that when these women are able to break the cycle of violence and speak their minds, their self-conceptions also change.

According to the women in the LWDG, being members of a group and sharing their experiences with other women had been for most participants an empowering experience. The dialogue sessions became a safe haven for the women to set their voices and their secrets free; as one woman said, "*Here we get to talk about things that we don't talk about in other places. We talk about our children, our marriage, things that we have kept for ourselves. We talk about intimate things. We have been able to talk from the heart because we trust the group.*"

Several women refer to the FotoDialogo pictures as *"portraits of our daily living;"* others mention that "these pictures make us re-live the past and brings us closer to our families—it brings more union and caring, more love in our relationships." By the end of the project, the women showed more confidence in their own ways of knowing and less dependency on the group facilitator. They also seemed aware of their self-transformation as they became increasingly outspoken in and outside the group situation. One participant said, "*This is like making history, portraying our stories. We feel safe to express our feelings here and we are no longer afraid of expressing them anywhere else.*" The idea that "we are making history," not just telling stories, reveals the women's consciousness of the historical relevance of their lives and shared knowledge.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that the FotoDialogo Method can be a powerful strategy for low-literacy level Hispanic women to break the silence about their experiences of oppression and to begin a process of self-discovery that enables them to see their experiences and memories through a new set of lenses. The use of pictures and storytelling not only entices the unveiling of personal histories, but also provides an appropriate atmosphere for the sharing of

collective experiences. At the end, self-acceptance, self-transformation, and the empowerment to break silence were the key outcomes achieved by the women in the LWDG.

Although the FotoDialogo method involves some challenges and risks to learners and educators, most of adult educators who have tried this method agree that they could service their Latino communities much better if they could use a tool like this one. The main challenge adult educators need to face in applying the FotoDialogo Method is the issue of *intimacy* and *emotional disclosure* it foments. Dialogue brings us closer to understanding one another, but it also puts us at risk of becoming *too* involved in the lives of people in the community. This is a risk some educators are willing to take in order to engage in a process of transformation and healing. As a community-based adult educator said, *"I do think there is still a lot of pain in our communities, a lot of trauma, and I think our work should be about some healing."* Dialogue and storytelling can actually bring people together and help to understand the issues affecting the community. The use of FotoDialogo also enables adult educators and learners to work together towards change. As one CBO adult educator put it, "*Sharing our lives gives us a very different perspective and probably a more effective way of participating in the solutions."*

Endnotes

1. Throughout this paper pseudonyms for actual persons are used to protect participants' identities. Accounts are based on transcriptions of interviews and dialogue sessions. The author took a leadership role in all phases of the research study. She conducted the weekly group dialogue sessions in Spanish and translated transcripts of these sessions into English.

 2. Latino and Hispanic are terms used interchangeably in this article to refer to people from Latin America and the Caribbean. The Puerto Rican participants in this study identified themselves as either Hispanics or Puerto Ricans. Hispanic is also a term used by the United States Bureau of Census, and commonly used in statistical research to refer to people of Central and South American, Mexican, and Caribbean origin.

3. Participatory research is a method of social investigation involving community participation to help communities and groups tackle their problems. It was first used in developing countries in the late 1960s. Since then, it has been used all over the world, in both rural and urban areas, to help people work on issues related to education, literacy, community health, gender, agriculture, conflict and many others.

4. Letters and numbers refer to codes assigned to each FotoDialogo picture.

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