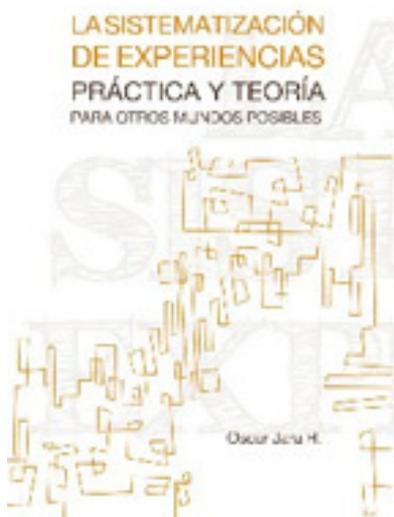

La Sistematización de Experiencias. Práctica y Teoría para otros mundos posibles². Jara, O. (2012) San José: CEP Alforja.



The book that is presented below is, in our opinion, invaluable for understanding and accurately gauging the evolution, characteristics and conceptualisation of the systemisation of experiences in the field of popular education.

It is an essential book for a number of very different reasons. The following sections present some of the reasons that we feel are most important:

a) Firstly, because this book, in a certain respect, is a resounding (surely provisional) milestone in the author's many years of research and practice in the field of Systematisation. After many previous papers, articles and reports on this topic, extensive practice in a whole range of contexts with different social agents and after extensive interconnected training experience, this book offers a mature contribution, from a personal, academic and professional point of view.

In this respect, we thoroughly recommend reading the introduction to this book, written by the author himself, which includes details about his personal and professional background. This is a very appealing text that rapidly and concisely, yet with a strong sense of humanity, takes the reader through a historical overview in the first person of the evolution and meaning of the systemisation of experiences, from 1972 to present day.

b) Secondly, it stands out for its marked interest in exploring conceptual precision, especially in the first four chapters. The author takes great care to not only analyse but also to clarify the theoretical conceptualisation of the systematisation of experiences.

- From the clarification of the genuine Latin American roots of systemisation provided in Chapter 1, where the parallel evolution of this practice is presented from the fields

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² "Systematization of Experiences. Practice and Theory for other possible worlds".

LA SISTEMATIZACIÓN DE EXPERIENCIAS. PRÁCTICA Y TEORÍA PARA OTROS MUNDOS POSIBLES.
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of social work, popular education, adult education and the encounter with participatory research-action.

- Moving on to a proposed definition of the systemisation of experiences in Chapter 2, based on an analysis of other definitions and seeking to define the fundamental elements that form the essence of this concept. In this chapter, the author presents the definition that was developed and proposed on the ALFORJA network³: "Systemisation is a kind of critical interpretation of one or more experiences that, being rearranged and reconstructed, reveals or highlights the logic and meaning of the process that occurs in each experience: the diverse intervening factors, how they interact with one another and why they interact in a certain way. The systematisation of experiences produces significant learning and knowledge that make it possible to critically take control of our own experiences (their tastes, senses), theoretically understand them and guide them towards the future with a transformational perspective" (p. 71).

This definition contains the key ideas that characterise the systemisation of experiences: critical interpretation of the experience; explanation of the process that occurs and the way it develops; the production of significant learning and knowledge; critical appropriation of the meaning of the experience; theoretical understanding and recognition of the experience as a transformational force.

- To arrive, in Chapter 3, at the coherent link between this definition and the basic characteristics that define systemisation, along with an in-depth review of its uses and the conditions required for it to be properly developed. The author stresses that systemisation should be used to understand experiences and to improve them, to apply the lessons learnt in other experiences, to encourage theoretical reflection based on knowledge of actual practice, to guide large institutional programmes using the knowledge gained from specific experiences and to strengthen collective identity.

- Finishing off this more conceptual section with the very interesting Chapter 4, the author performs a fruitful analysis of the connections, differences and convergences between what he calls "three sisters from the same family": systematisation of experiences, evaluation and social research. Although the author does clearly mark the limits of each one and the differences between them, he ultimately maintains that "they mutually feed into one another and that no single one replaces the others, which is why they must all be put into practice" (p. 139), concluding that "...instead of

³ The ALFORJA network was created in 1981 as a new expression of support from the Regional Support Group for the literacy campaign coordinated at the time by P. Fernando Cardenal in Nicaragua. It is made up of civil organisations from Guatemala (SERJUS), Costa Rica (CEP), Nicaragua (CANTERA), El Salvador (FUNPROCOOP), Honduras (CENCOP), Panama (CEASPA) and Mexico (IMDEC). In its early stages, ALFORJA played a fundamental supporting role in building up the trend of Popular Education in Latin America. Through analysis of the regional Mesoamerican context, the network currently develops training processes that are mainly designed for social movements and it promotes reflection on the role and strategies of Popular Education organisations within the Mesoamerican context.

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worrying about the general differences between research, evaluation and systemisation, we should focus on how to create, in the specific context of our projects and processes, the conditions for a productive and complementary encounter between these three exercises. This ideal encounter enables these exercises to be transformed into educational facts and factors of critical learning which can be used to strengthen our strategic projection skills and to improve our practices". (p. 158).

c) A third factor that confirms the vital importance of this book is the constant transition of more conceptual content towards fundamental methodological approaches for the proper development of the systemisation of experiences. The information that is explained and analysed in the previous chapters is clearly reflected in a methodological proposal based on five key steps. It is also exemplified in the description of a range of specific experiences of systemisation and clearly presented and explained through the presentation of various proven tools and techniques used to develop these processes.

Any group looking to explore the practice of systemisation as a strategy for personal or group empowerment and as a tool for promoting knowledge-building processes based on experience and the critical transformation of the world around them will find in this book everything they need to embark on this exciting journey. ☺