# Experience of dialogue between adults and young university students on gender issues

# Experiencia de diálogo entre adultos y jóvenes universitarios sobre el género

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## Abstract

The generational difference affects the student-university teacher relationship and has consequences on learning. To promote openness to dialogue among these groups on conflicting issues, a series of workshops were developed for a gender dialogue experience. The approach was multidisciplinary, including elements of philosophy, sociology, com-

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munication, and bioethics. The theoretical lines of approach were Engelhardt's *"moral strangers",* a parallel with intercultural dialogue, and communication at the level of the values at stake. This article reports the methodology of the two-day workshops held at a university in Mexico. The participants were 50 young people (between 18 and 25 years) and 50 adults. Four workshops and two surveys were conducted, interspersed by three conferences. The article presents each activity with the corresponding learning objective and results. In conclusion, some lessons on intergenerational dialogue and on gender dialogue are offered.

## 1. Introduction

The workshops that were carried out and that are summarized in this article, sought to respond to the concern presented by the management team of the Universidad Anáhuac Mayab, located in Mérida Yucatán, Mexico. The teachers had expressed that they often failed to connect with young students. The impression that the educational proposal did not sufficiently challenge the students was due, in their opinion, to the fact that it sometimes made use of language and categories that were far removed from the mentality of young people. The need to establish an intergenerational dialogue and thus overcome the fracture and mistrust that often occurred was evident. The workshop program was designed and implemented to respond to this concern. The workshops were aimed at fostering an effective dialogue between the two groups: adults (teachers and trainers) and young people (students) and as a topic the issue of gender was chosen, as it is one of the most difficult topics to deal with in intergenerational dialogue. We believe that this methodology could be used to address other difficult issues in intergenerational dialogue.

It was not intended to be an exhaustive or even sufficient understanding of gender, but rather the interest was to focus on seeking a

true dialogue and encounter between young people and adults. It was about coming out of this experience of having been able to understand and receive something from the other generation. This would require an attitude of openness and listening on the part of everyone, and this was the real challenge.

## 2. Theoretical lines of approach

### 2.1. From "moral strangers" to subjects capable of dialogue and social collaboration

The American philosopher Hugo Tristram Engelhardt Jr. introduced the expressions *"moral friends"* and *"moral strangers"*. Moral friends are those with whom we share moral contents with their rules of evidence and inference. Moral strangers are those with whom we do not share the ethical premises, and the conflict may be due to their incompatible way of reasoning or to the discrepancy in moral values (Cf. 1). Our postmodern, globalized, and pluralistic society is composed not only of "moral friends" but also of "moral strangers". How can we avoid a confrontation that leads to conflict and destruction, and how can we live in a society composed of "friends" and "moral strangers" without falling into a relativism that ceases to seek the common good?

In addition to plurality, the phenomenon of polarization is becoming evident in many environments, bringing negative consequences for man and life in society (Cf. 2). Some have explained the mechanism of affective polarization (Cf. 3) and its causes, where an important factor to consider is the polarized dialogue in the digital era, however, it has not been proven that social networks are the cause of polarization (Cf. 4). Some have suggested that polarized dialogue is not a consequence of but manifests itself in the digital context (Cf. 5). We argue that it is necessary not only to give the "moral outsider" the benefit of the doubt, but also to attempt to discern the truth in their moral vision as this disposition facilitates the communication necessary for the functioning of life in society (Cf. 6).

## 2.2. *Using the lessons of intercultural dialogue*

We will use Engelhardt's expressions "*moral friends*" and "*moral strangers*" to make an analogy between dialogue between morally diverse groups and dialogue between people of different languages. Intercultural competence refers to the skills, attitudes and behaviors needed to enhance interactions across difference, whether within a society (differences in age, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, political affiliation, ethnicity, etc.) or across borders (Cf. 7).

To dialogue with someone from a different culture, a common language is necessary. First, it is necessary to learn the words, the vocabulary, the expressions of the other language. In this process we realize that there are identical or very similar words that are used with different meanings. There are concepts that have more nuances in one language than in another and some languages have terms that simply do not exist in others and make translation difficult, without this implying that the reality they mean does not exist in another culture.

Secondly, communication with a foreigner is not limited to verbal communication, gestures and body language are also important. They are not said, but which are inviting, pleasing, annoying or offensive, and which one must learn to differentiate. A further step after verbal and body language communication is when you get to know the tastes, traditions, and things that the other culture enjoys. This is also intercultural communication and helps to know and understand the values of the other culture.

Another step, not easily achieved in intercultural dialogue, is to understand the fears that are the source of the rejections expressed by the other culture.

An attitude of openness towards what is different is of utmost importance. To learn words, concepts, and behaviors, to know the history, reasons, values, tastes, and fears of the other, it is necessary to dialogue and share with the other.

The comparison of intercultural dialogue with dialogue between "moral strangers", in this case intergenerational dialogue, shows an important truth: one does not cease to be who one is by knowing how to dialogue with those who are different. Dialogue does not imply forgetting or renouncing one's own, or even changing tastes. Learning a new language does not mean forgetting one's mother tongue; it means learning new ways of communicating and even enriching one's own concepts. In fact, it is possible to become friends with a "moral stranger".

*2.3. Safe space for dialogue to move from concepts to the values at stake*

This type of dialogue requires more than confronting ideas. It involves not only seeking mutual understanding at the level of ideas, but also of values. Our pluralistic society, which is at the same time so threatened by polarization, needs this kind of dialogue to reduce prejudices between groups (Cf. 8,9).

It is crucial to get to the question of why does the "moral outsider" care about a certain issue, a certain statement? When he feels he has the safe space to speak, he will share this why, revealing the values behind his stance. Values are perceived goods that one wants to achieve and fears losing. Therefore, there is a tendency to orient actions towards them, and to protect them with decisions. If the dialogue remains only in confrontations and defenses of one's own ideas, one does not get to know the values at stake. Little or nothing constructive comes out of these "dialogues".

## 3. Method

For these workshops, the university gathered fifty adults and fifty young people. The young people were between 18 and 25 years old. Both young people and adults came from different careers and areas of the university.

The experience took place over two days, interspersed with lectures on gender and workshops aimed at provoking intergenerational dialogue on the subject. The group of 100 people participated in four workshops and two surveys, in addition to three conferences. The workshops were held in intensive mode: from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm, including lunch, for two consecutive days. The break times and socializing favored a climate of trust and encounter. The objective of the conference was to provide perspectives and information on the topic in question, which would help participants to review, clarify and reformulate their positions. The dynamics of the workshops followed a diagnostic approach, followed by the opening of the dialogue by the groups, followed by dialogue exercises, and ending with the balance of the dialogue.

Table 1 shows the explanation of the different activities that were carried out, their modality (whether they were individual or group activities and, in the case of group activities, with what criteria the groups were formed), and the learning results that were achieved at the end of each activity.

**Table 1.** Activities, modality and learning outcomes

| Activity | Modality | Result of learning |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Initial survey. | Individual (anonymous). | Explain the distrust towards the group with a diverse vision. |
| 2. Brainstorming and selection of conditions and commitments for dialogue. | Groups by generations Plenary session: presentation of the work by groups and commitment of all. | To specify the conditions and commitment for dialogue. |
| 3. Guiding questions: concepts and definitions. | Mixed groups (mixed generations). Plenary session: presentation of the work by groups. | Convinced of the possibility of a space in which to freely express diverse opinions. |

| Activity | Modality | Result of learning |
|---|---|---|
| 4. Guide table 1: convergences and divergences. | Mixed groups (mixed generations). | Identify convergence and divergence of ideas. |
| 5. Guide table 2: review and more precise conceptualization of convergences and divergences. | Mixed groups (mixed generations). Plenary session: presentation of the work by groups. | Review convergences and divergences of ideas after the plenary discussion. |
| 6. Balance of the dialogue. | Mixed groups (mixed generations). Plenary session: presentation of group work. | Collect what was learned in the dialogue experience and generate ideas on how to continue the dialogue. |

Source: prepared by authors.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Initial survey

The first activity consisted of all participants filling out an anonymous module. This survey sought to specify how they saw themselves and the other generation in relation to gender. The module was answered by 76 people. Table 2 shows some of the answers to the questions. The selection criterion was to choose the twenty answers that were most repeated in terms of the concept.[1] The original formulation of the answers was respected.

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[1] Albeit with slightly different words such as, for example, "labeling and labeling". In the case of similar answers, those that expressed the idea more completely were chosen. For example, between the answers "do not understand", "do not understand and remain closed", the second answer was preferred.

**Table 2.** Most representative responses to question 1

| **1. Regarding the gender issue, the other generation does not understand that...** |
|---|
| • Our generation is open-minded. |
| • The danger of their approach and medium-term repercussions. |
| • Older people find it hard to accept changes in roles and sexuality. |
| • My life is different from what they lived. |
| • There can be different genders and each person is what they decide to be based on their history and experiences. |
| • The fullness of happiness lies in following the natural law that we have inscribed in our hearts. |
| • Labels do not matter. |
| • My life has been shaped by them, but I have the privilege of deciding my own path. |
| • That we don't look for crazy things. |
| • That there are more than two, that it is a matter of a person's identity. |
| • That there are objective realities, which do not depend on opinions or times. |
| • We have different opinions that must be listened to. |
| • That there are only two genders. |
| • That it is an identity that should not be subject to social norms. |
| • That some people do not identify with what had been established as a "gender". |
| • Recognizing myself as a man or a woman is a very full way to be happy. |
| • Yes, we have gone through the same worries and tribulations as they have. |
| • Above all, respect and empathy for each person must come first. |
| • The world is constantly changing. |
| • There are many things that have changed with respect to gender. |

Source: prepared by authors.

The answers to this first question go in two directions: some point more to the question of gender itself, and how it is understood: whether there are two or more genders, the role of roles and sexuality, and whether there is a natural law. Most stress the difference in attitudes of the two generations: whether they are open to change, tolerance, or labels.

Table 3 presents the answers to the second question where the distrust of both generations about the possible openness of the other and their readiness to engage in a real dialogue clearly emerges. Almost all the answers confirm the difficulty of expressing themselves and dialoguing frankly and point to the other generation as the one responsible for the closed-mindedness. They are "light years apart", and this may lead to the fact that they have never expressed their ideas freely.

**Table 3.** Most representative answers to question 2

| **2. When I express my opinion on a gender-related topic to a person from the other generation.... They don't respect genders they consider different.** |
|---|
| • They don't understand me, they are closed in their idea, and they are not open to listening to how things are now. |
| • Sometimes they understand. |
| • Generally, I notice them closed. |
| • With respect I try to express my ideas, but when I see that there may be a clash I prefer not to speak. |
| • They reject it, generally. |
| • I feel afraid of being labeled and not being heard. |
| • I feel obliged to answer how they see things. |
| • They consider that I want to teach them or that I don't know anything. |
| • I feel a little afraid of how they will react. |
| • They are a bit closed, with archaic ideas. |
| • It is difficult to make a link. |
| • They oppose each other. |
| • I prefer to avoid confrontation. |
| • That I am in another world. |
| • Do not try to understand what I am expressing. |
| • I expect a radical position not open to respectful dialogue. |
| • I fear the emotional damage and backlash of not thinking like them. |
| • I don't think I have ever been open about it with the other generation. |
| • I feel light years away from what they experience or envision. |

Source: prepared by authors.

The third question confirms this mutual distrust, as shown in Table 4. The two generations feel that they discredit each other and consider that this prejudice makes true understanding very difficult. It is interesting to highlight the suffering that this entails and that can be perceived in some answers.

**Table 4.** Most representative responses to question 3

| 3. I consider that adults/young people think that we.... |
| --- |
| • We do not understand them.<br>• We are incapable of thinking right and wrong.<br>• We seek to do violence to them when it is not so.<br>• We are not on their side.<br>• We are wrong to do things differently.<br>• We are not tolerant.<br>• We want to curtail their freedom, to violate them.<br>• That we know nothing, that we are ignorant.<br>• We just want to live a relaxed life.<br>• We label.<br>• That we are not open to change.<br>• We want to forbid them things.<br>• We don't have gender conflicts.<br>• We are screwed by the way we think and want to do things.<br>• We are fragile, a "glass" generation.<br>• We can't understand them, and that their problems are different from ours.<br>• We're cramped and cramped, old-fashioned.<br>• They cast us in the mold of rebellious, irresponsible. That we are lost to technology and other things.<br>• We live in unbridled debauchery.<br>• We want to oppress them. |

Source: prepared by authors.

As shown in Table 5, the consequences of distrust emerge: both generations are convinced that, if decisions depended on the other, things would "objectively" go wrong. Both point out that there would be injustices and harm to people.

**Table 5.** Most representative answers to question 4

| 4. If gender policies depended entirely on the other generation.... |
| --- |
| • There would be no freedom of expression. |
| • We would be a divided generation. |
| • The other generation would be nonconformist. |
| • Chaos. |
| • We would be freer, but the concept of limit would be blurred. |
| • We would be limited in our choice to question ourselves. |
| • There would be more oppression and discrimination. |
| • Disorder and confusion. |
| • Complicated. |
| • Everything would be approved without sufficient reflection, and with negative consequences in the future. |
| • We would not progress. We must evolve. |
| • The left-wing lobbies would manipulate them and do even more damage than now. |
| • Libertinism. |
| • We would be freer. |
| • Everything would be allowed, without principles or universal values. |
| • There would be a shortage of freedom of speech and identity. |
| • We would have thousands of differentiated bathrooms. |
| • There would be no growth or development. |
| • They would not have a gender vision and would end up violating the human rights of others. |
| • Many people would feel frustrated and misunderstood. |

Source: prepared by authors.

Table 6 shows the judgment of the two generations towards each other. Only three responses suggest adjectives with a nuance that could be considered positive: "free, diverse, inclusive", and later "sensitive, empathetic". The third response that would enter here is "right ideas", although it is associated with "closed".

**Table 6.** Most representative answers to question 5

| **5. Three adjectives that according to you characterize the attitude of the other generation with respect to gender.** |
|---|
| • Ignorant, disrespectful, foolish. |
| • Defensive, closed, imposed. |
| • Uncertainty, fear, confusion. |
| • Free, diverse, inclusive. |
| • Closed to dialogue. Uninformed. No data. |
| • Relativism, radicalization, confusion. |
| • Libertinism, unbounded, capricious. |
| • Ugly, weird, limited. |
| • Intolerance, lack of empathy, apathy. |
| • Distant, harmful, preoccupied. |
| • Free, fluid, without labels. |
| • Closed, although with right ideas. |
| • Rebelliousness, intolerance. |
| • Extreme generalization and polarization. Intolerance. Lack of openness. |
| • Incomprehensive, obsolete, old-fashioned. |
| • Sensitive, victimize, empathetic. |
| • Misogynistic, homophobic, stagnant attitude. |
| • Radical, confrontational, selfish. |
| • Closed-minded, imposing, non-dialogue attitude. |
| • Ignorant, impulsive, fearful. |
| • Overbearing, haughty, disrespectful. |
| • Challenging, unstable and intolerant (for not accepting the truth). |

Source: prepared by authors.

This last question and the one that follows, represented in Table 7 and 8, highlight the frustration of all, adults, and young people, in the face of the other generation. In the answers we can guess the values that each generation defends, and again the suffering for considering that the other is not open to understanding and dialogue.

**Table 7.** Most representative responses to question 6

| **6. It hurts me when adults/young people...** |
| --- |
| • Believe that you are always right. <br> • See my actions as wrong. <br> • Label me without listening. <br> • Don't listen. <br> • Assume I don't know. <br> • Reject what is valuable to me. <br> • Do not consider our ideas as valid. <br> • Believe that we are the enemy. <br> • Make us feel judged and afraid, so that sometimes we cannot approach them and express our concerns. <br> • Don't think about the future and the importance of family. <br> • See me as a fool, think I don't understand, that we can't talk. <br> • Be self-centered. <br> • Underestimate us because we are minors. <br> • Don't understand new views of life. <br> • Discredit my principles. Think we only want to judge and point fingers. <br> • Don't realize that their words sometimes convey hate speech. <br> • Believe they can control us and make decisions for us. <br> • I find it sad that adults not only discredit issues, but attack people. <br> • They don't want to work together to build something together, and just expect us to fit their mold. |

Source: prepared by authors.

**Table 8.** Most representative responses to question 7

| 7. I am afraid that adults/young people... |
|---|
| • Do not accept me. |
| • Have wrong answers. |
| • Become polarized without listening. |
| • Lose yourselves in an empty and purposeless existence. |
| • Be exalted and look for a big fight, let there be retaliation. |
| • Find no truth. |
| • Label and defame me. |
| • Hurt and limit young people for not having the same ideas. |
| • Continue to believe that our generation is bad and that we do wrong things. |
| • Reach the age of old age without understanding your children, nephews, nieces, grandchildren. |
| • Be radical or extremist in your positions. |
| • Make aggressive comments about the position of young people. |
| • Do not follow the advice of your elders. |
| • Destroy themselves. |
| • Never find trustworthy interlocutors in us. |
| • Do not show openness and are intolerant. |
| • Continue to make decisions without being open to the way things are today. |
| • Lose principles such as respect for life. |
| • For lack of understanding of the good, do horrible things. |
| • Continue to make decisions based on archaic beliefs and let this affect our future. |

Source: prepared by authors.

A summary of the first survey has been presented to highlight the starting point of the second workshop: the mutual distrust between the two generations and disbelief about the need for or the possibility of a real dialogue.

## 4.2. Brainstorming and selection of conditions and commitments for the dialogue

After this first exercise, teams were formed by generations: five teams of young people and five teams of adults. They were asked to specify four things:

– What did they want to ask for?
– What were they willing to give?
– What could block the dialogue?
– What would be the advantages of making this dialogue work?

Table 9 lists the teams' contributions. In the presentation of the results, no distinction is made between the contributions from the youth and adult teams, although as in the anonymous module, in some cases it is easy to deduce their origin.

**Table 9.** Identification of conditions and commitments for dialogue

| We want to ASK | We want to GIVE | Our BLOCKS | ADVANTAGES |
|---|---|---|---|
| - Affective responsibility<br>- Openness<br>- Empathy<br>- Respect<br>- Non-defensive<br>- Genuine respect<br>- Openness<br>- Possibility to build<br>- together<br>- The freedom to make mistakes and the empathy to correct/accompany each other. | - Affective responsibility<br>- New perspectives<br>- Active listening<br>- Respect<br>- A reason to wonder<br>- Testimony<br>- Flexibility<br>- Encounter<br>- Empathy<br>- Experience<br>- Welcoming<br>- Patience<br>- Knowledge<br>- Culture | - Imposition of ideas<br>- Clash of contexts<br>- Lack of patience<br>- Becoming a debate (win/lose)<br>- Language<br>- Intellectual arrogance<br>- Prejudice<br>- Intellectual arrogance<br>- Not listening<br>- Ideologies | - Knowing the counterpart's points of view<br>- Generate agreements<br>- Defines us and gives us identity.<br>- New perspectives<br>- Dialogue is converted into actions.<br>- Empathy<br>- Listening<br>- Understanding<br>- Resilience |

| We want to ASK | We want to GIVE | Our BLOCKS | ADVANTAGES |
|---|---|---|---|
| - Understanding<br>- Patience<br>- Charity | - Hope based on experience | - Not finding common<br>- Rigid mentality<br>- Labeling<br>- Ignorance<br>- Lack of patience<br>- Different language | - Creating safe spaces<br>- Development of thinking<br>- Possibility of understanding the other<br>- A first step in the search for encounter<br>- A sign of goodwill |

Source: prepared by authors.

It should be noted that what everyone asked for most often was openness (five times), followed by empathy (three times). As for what they were willing to contribute, the most frequent response was "new perspectives" (four times), followed by respect and empathy (two times each). As for possible blocks, prejudices (five times), lack of listening (four times) or lack of patience (three times) were mentioned. Finally, the advantages that were envisaged were along the lines of understanding, encounter, and the possibility of building together.

### 4.3. Guiding questions: concepts and definitions

Once the commitment that each one was willing to assume to make the dialogue possible had been defined, the actual work began. There were ten mixed teams: adults and young people together. The dynamics consisted of group work, followed by a plenary session and a conference. The guiding questions for the first work were the following:

 – What is gender?
 – Who invented the term "gender"?
 – What does the Church think about gender?
 – What does this word arouse in me?

In this first exercise, they were not asked to reach any kind of consensus. Each member of the group had to express his or her answer to the question freely, and all the answers were recorded in the minutes without corrections or comments. In the plenary session, each team presented the results of their work. The diversity of opinions on these questions was remarkable. Some pointed out very precisely who had invented the term and when (most referred to John Money in the late 1960s), while others said that it had always existed. As far as the Church's opinion of gender was concerned, most of the responses emphasized the negative judgment: that it did not agree, that it considered it dangerous, an ideology, and so on. The heterogeneity of the responses was particularly notable in the feelings aroused by the word gender: from fear to confidence, freedom or dictatorship, relief, or fear.

To illuminate these answers, the genesis of the term was presented in a lecture: how did it enter the realm of psychology, feminism and politics, the initial reaction of the Church and its evolution? The lecture was not intended to give definitive answers but to illuminate the question from a broader perspective and to provide a framework to help understand some of the reasons for the polarizations. It helped to understand that part of the confusion stemmed from the failure to distinguish between the levels at which dialogue is usually approached, mixing the existential realm (the lives of concrete persons), the anthropological realm (what gender is) and the political realm. Visualizing the genesis of equivocation in each area helped everyone have a clearer picture.

*4.4. Guide Table 1: convergences and divergences*

In the second teamwork,[2] the guiding questions were the following:

– What is sex?
– How are sex and gender related?
– Is being male and female natural or cultural?

Teams had to collect their answers and organize them into:

– Main answers.
– Points to be found.
– Points to illuminate.

The added element in this exercise was the need to identify the points of agreement in the different positions and the aspects to be illuminated. This required not only the aseptic collection of the opinions of each member of the group, but a greater understanding of the different ideas, their convergences, and divergences. Table 10 below serves as a guideline for collecting the results of this exercise:

**Table 10.** Convergence and divergence format

|  | **Main answers** | **Meeting points** | **Points for illumination** |
|---|---|---|---|
| What is sex? |  |  |  |
| How are sex and gender related? |  |  |  |
| Is being male and female natural or cultural? |  |  |  |

Source: prepared by authors.

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2  From this moment on, the teams were maintained. As we have pointed out, they were mixed teams between young people and adults since the idea of maintaining them was to favor the increase of trust and dialogue.

Again, in the plenary session, the result of the work of all the teams was presented, followed by a conference that sought to shed light on the points made by them. The definition of sex did not present difficulties, while the answer to the other two questions was not so clear. On the relationship between sex and gender, some said they were the same, others said they were independent realities, and others said they did not know. On the question of being male or female, some said it was natural, others said it was cultural, and still others said both. After this exposition of the groups, different gender theories were presented and some of the advantages and weaknesses of their way of conceiving the relationship between sex and gender were made evident. The aim of the theoretical presentation was to provide elements that would help in a more complete understanding of the issue, showing the inadequacy of approaches that reduced its complexity by absolutizing a single element. It became clear that it was not necessary to speak of "the" theory or "the" gender ideology, and that it is rather necessary to consider the heterogeneity of theories and the impossibility of referring to them as if they were a monolithic block.

*4.5. Guide box 2: review and more precise conceptualization of convergences and divergences*

The next team exercise consisted of going back to the table already completed in the previous work and revising or clarifying some points, because of the exchange in the plenary session and the theoretical conference. Almost all the teams reformulated some of their ideas and pointed out more precisely the points of convergence or points to be clarified. In particular, it became clearer to all that being male, and female was both natural and cultural at the same time. There was also a greater convergence, which showed that everyone was changing their position or conceptualizing it more clearly.

A final lecture developed the role of the different ingredients that come into play in identity: body, psyche, culture, freedom. In

this way, it was shown which elements were privileged by each gender theory, proposing keys from which to discern the greater or lesser validity of the different positions. As has been pointed out, the aim was not to provide a definitive solution to the questions surrounding the gender issue, but simply to broaden the view on the subject. The participants confirmed that the conferences had helped them to review their own ideas and to change their position in some respects.

### 4.6. Balance of the dialogue

At the end of each team dialogue exercise, participants were asked to take a few minutes to take stock of how the dialogue itself had worked, using the following questions:

- What helped me during the dialogue?
- What did not help me during the dialogue?
- What did I learn?
- Do I have anything to be grateful for?

They were invited to have a moment of personal reflection, followed by a few minutes of brief sharing, if they wished. This helped everyone to keep in mind not only the evolution in understanding of the ideas they were facing, but also the dialogue exercise itself: its conditions, blocks and demands.

In a final work by teams, they were asked to express what they had learned from the dialogue. Table 11 shows a synthesis of the contributions of the different teams in relation to the three guiding questions they were asked:

**Table 11.** Dialogue balance

| **What have we learned about dialogue these days?** |
|---|
| • That it can be done!<br>• That safe spaces are needed to be able to trust and talk about these issues. |
| • That it is not entirely true that young people always think like other young people and that adults always think like other adults.<br>• That we share many ideas and values.<br>• That it has been possible because there is respect and openness.<br>• A safe, trusting environment was established.<br>• That was possible because of the way the whole meeting was conducted.<br>• It has been possible because we have tried to overcome polarizations.<br>• That we came up with ideas about the other generation that were wrong.<br>• That it is possible to dialogue without arguing, thanks to the fact that we have faced controversial issues without a polemic tone.<br>• That it has been possible because of respect, active listening, making us vulnerable.<br>• It has broken the schemes or preconceptions that we brought with us.<br>• The importance of building bridges through empathy, connection, respect, and humility.<br>• Openness to learning.<br>• That it is possible that we are afraid as a barrier and that we must lose the filter and not be afraid of being judged.<br>• That everyone, regardless of age, has something valuable to contribute.<br>• That we need the experience and knowledge of both generations.<br>• It was possible because we all had the attitude of learning, assertive listening and willingness.<br>• That it is possible, indispensable.<br>• That we do not understand each other because we have lived through different things, but that there is a great will to understand each other.<br>• That it is normal that we are different.<br>• That we are complementary, not opposites.<br>• That it is fundamental to establish a pact of goodwill from the beginning. |

| How could we create more spaces like this? |
|---|
| • Losing fear, fostering respect and responsibility.<br>• Working tables as safe spaces.<br>• Dialogue groups to foster spaces like this.<br>• Establishing bonds of trust. It must be a proposal from both parties.<br>• It is necessary to pause and provide spaces for dialogue.<br>• Replicate this event and extend it to the rest of the community.<br>• Give the certainty that in the university it is possible to talk about everything, and that no one is judged. |
| **What would we propose to the university?** |
| • Training for all teachers.<br>• Expand workshops like these on other topics.<br>• Do it outside the university.<br>• Open spaces for dialogue on these and related topics.<br>• Offer tools to be able to heal the wounds we see in trainers and adults.<br>• Change of methodology in some classes, to favor intergenerational dialogue.<br>• Incorporate what we have learned in classes and work environments. |

Source: prepared by authors.

As a final activity, participants were asked to summarize in one word how they would summarize their own experience and share it in plenary session. The most repeated words were joy, encounter, hope, "yes we can", bridge, conversion, empathy, dialogue, surprise, new path. The joy of all was the most characteristic note of this concluding moment, which expressed everyone's satisfaction with the exercise carried out.

Up to this point, the description of the two workshops. In the following section we will share some conclusions from this experience.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

The conclusions are along two lines: on the one hand, the dialogue experience itself and the methodology used; on the other hand, the

specific issue of gender. As far as dialogue is concerned, it is considered that it was favored thanks to some elements of the method, in particular:

- The creation of a safe space, where there was explicit commitment that one could express one's opinions freely and respectfully.
- The commitment assumed by all to make this possible, having first identified fears and possible blockages.
- The awareness that the aim was not to win a debate, but for everyone to come out of it enriched. The approach of the workshops was not dialectical, but dialogical.
- The smooth conduct of the plenary sessions, which sought to offer elements for reflection and not to give closed answers. This allowed everyone to feel welcomed and respected, and at the same time stimulated to think from other points of view.
- A precise methodology of teamwork, which channeled and organized reflection and reciprocal listening. Experience showed that the initial mistrust was based on prejudices, which led to closed-mindedness and fear. The method helped to overcome this mistrust and to bring about a real dialogue.
- The workshops also showed that it is possible to carry out a critical and learning exercise with young people and adults at the same time, and that this exercise leads to initial ideas being nuanced or significantly changed.

Regarding gender, the experience confirmed that the polarization from which the debate is normally approached requires a patient distinction of levels, concepts and nuances. Without these distinctions, it is inevitable to fall into reductive positions, which are easily ideologized. Although this has already been alluded to in the description of the workshops themselves, these distinctions are now more precisely reflected.[3]

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3   The research at the root of these distinctions is published in (10).

- The importance of distinguishing the levels from which dialogue is approached. It is striking that the debate is usually approached only from the ethical or political level (whether same-sex couples should be able to adopt, equal marriage and others). People's experiences are often an interference at this level because it is difficult to separate ideas from the faces of known people who live or suffer certain situations. Rarely is it possible to illuminate this dialogue from a deeper level: the anthropological (what is gender, sex, how are they related). The anthropological level is in turn supported by a gnoseological level (whether there is a truth, whether it is possible to know it, etc.) and a metaphysical level (relationship between universal and, essence and existence, identity and difference), which are rarely made explicit and confronted. Without a clarification of the basic assumptions from which the question is approached, it is very difficult to reach consensus at the ethical or political level.
- The need to distinguish and adequately define the concepts. The term gender is not univocal, and herein lies the great difficulty. There are very different ways of understanding gender. If the dialogue starts from the idea that there is a single definition, it is not possible to go down to nuances and illuminate the critical aspects of each definition. The lectures and a precise methodology of teamwork confirmed that both young people and adults approach this topic from simplistic ideas, which reduce the complexity of the real thing. Without a more precise knowledge and a more complete panorama of the question at the anthropological, political, and pastoral level, it is very difficult to really illuminate the conflicts and misunderstandings.
- The question of gender is an important issue, with obvious social consequences depending on how it is conceived. The cultural and intergenerational polarization that often occurs on this issue imposes the need for a paradigm shift in the way

it is dealt with. It is considered that these workshops, in their limitation and smallness, can shed light on the perspectives and paths to follow.

The workshops proposed in this article are not a perfect model, but it was found that the intergenerational dialogue on gender was indeed favored and positively valued by the participating groups. The workshops led the two groups to put aside the fear of hurting each other, mutual distrust, and disbelief that dialogue was possible. The participants ended up expressing surprise and joy that this dialogue had been possible and generated ideas on how to continue and reproduce these spaces between professors and young university students. It could be considered that they moved from the paradigm of culture war to the paradigm of dialogue.

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M. Rodríguez, L. Santos

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