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## Liaison with the community for the Dialogue of Knowledge

### Articulación de vinculación con la comunidad al Dialogo de Saberes

Oswaldo Martillo Mieles\*  
Johnny Edison Morales Roela\*  
Vladimir Alexander Guerrero Cortez \*  
Oswaldo Raúl Martillo Revelo \*

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#### Abstract

Higher education contributes to the comprehensive development of young professionals, but as an educational model, it requires the joint participation of all academic and community stakeholders. This paper draws on the experiences of integrating the dialogue of knowledge with the community engagement process, as described by students in the Taxation and Finance program at the University of Guayaquil. The objective is to analyze the community engagement practices carried out by students in a community in the Central Inner Estuary of the Gulf of Guayaquil, in order to provide feedback on the engagement process conducted by the University. It is concluded that students participating in community engagement processes must facilitate a dialogue of knowledge based on cognitive respect that allows them to break down the dominant structures that characterize the relationship between academic and community knowledge.

**Keywords:** Dialogue of knowledge, community engagement, Central Inner Estuary of the Gulf of Guayaquil.

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\* Doctor en Ciencias Sociales Mención Gerencia

Afiliación: Universidad de Guayaquil

Oswaldo.martillom@ug.edu.ec

Orcid: 0000-0002-2784-8939

\* Magister en Pedagogía de la Historia y las Ciencias Sociales

Afiliación: Universidad de Guayaquil

johnny.moralesr@ug.edu.ec

Orcid: 0000-0001-6031-0594

\* Doctor en Ciencias Sociales Mención Gerencia

Afiliación: Universidad de Guayaquil.

vladimir.guerrerov@ug.edu.ec.

Orcid. 0000-0002-4196-7301

\* Estudiante de Licenciatura en Administración de Empresas.

Universidad Politécnica Salesiana

omartillor@est.ups.edu.ec

Orcid: 0009-0005-2644-4958

## Resumen

La educación superior contribuye a la formación integral de los jóvenes profesionales, pero como modelo educativo requiere de la participación conjunta de todos los actores académicos y comunitarios. El presente escrito parte de las experiencias de la integración del diálogo de saberes y el proceso de vinculación con la comunidad, descritas por estudiantes de la carrera de Tributación y Finanzas de la Universidad de Guayaquil. El objetivo es analizar las prácticas de vinculación con la comunidad, realizadas por los estudiantes en una comunidad del Estuario Interior Central del Golfo de Guayaquil., para retroalimentar el proceso de vinculación que lleva a cabo la Universidad. Se concluye que los estudiantes que participan en los procesos de vinculación con la comunidad deben posibilitar un diálogo de saberes basado en el respeto cognitivo que les permita romper las estructuras dominantes que caracterizan a la relación del conocimiento académico y el comunitario.

**Palabras clave:** Diálogo de saberes, vinculación con la comunidad, Estuario Interior Central del Golfo de Guayaquil.

## Introduction

In recent years, institutions of higher education (HEIs) have turned to community engagement to advance research and promote academic knowledge, making it a cornerstone of the intercultural educational model that connects the university with the community:

Through this process of community engagement, we contribute to the recognition of the community's non-formal education and the strengthening of formal university education—that is, the convergence of organized and systematized education in the classroom with the knowledge that the population possesses and generates within their communities. Thus, through community engagement, the student strengthens their research capabilities and develops skills to establish social relationships with various actors, identifies local knowledge, values, and attitudes, and acquires various skills for community action by putting into practice the methodological and theoretical resources available through their training. (Peña, 2017, p. 271)

This explains the relationship between the university and society, since the more students are connected to the community, the greater their chances of entering the labor market. From this perspective, the university-community relationship is direct and reciprocal, and it contributes to the core mission of higher education institutions: to educate competent citizens and professionals who are socially responsible.

Identifying local knowledge, values, and attitudes should be part of the objectives of research projects arising from community engagement processes. Communities are home to people with sufficient cognitive resources that must be taken into account when generating knowledge. The reality is that there is a need for "empirical research documenting how this dialogue between the academic and the community, between

the classroom-conceptual and the experiential, takes place in university practice” (Mateos & Dietz, 2013, p. 367).

Some authors, such as Campos and Sánchez, assert that in Latin America, the relationship between HEIs and their productive environment is an area where much remains to be done (2006, p. 18).

In Ecuador specifically, progress has been made in this regard over the past ten years; the Secretariat of Higher Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (SENACYT) promotes the “National Project for the Dialogue of Knowledge,” which manages its powers and responsibilities through three cross-cutting pillars: These pillars are: managing the dialogue of knowledge in higher education, managing the dialogue of knowledge in science, technology, and innovation, and managing the dialogue of knowledge in intellectual property and knowledge management (SENACYT, 2017). However, there are still no relevant results or studies demonstrating progress regarding the relationship between Ecuadorian universities and their productive environment.

The foregoing serves as the basis for presenting this study, which, in addition to addressing concepts related to community engagement, contextualizes them within the “dialogue of knowledge” research, from the perspective of students in the Taxation and Finance Engineering program at the University of Guayaquil who participated in the project “Teaching Basic General Accounting, Ecuadorian Tax Law, and Their Application in the Preparation of Financial Statements for Residents of the Cerrito de los Morreños Community, 2015.” Furthermore, the study identifies internal and external factors that influence the strengthening of the university’s ties with the community.

On the other hand, the dialogue of knowledge facilitates the identification of the social representations and practices of the residents of the Cerrito de los Morreños community within their context; knowledge that may be of a conventional or popular nature. The objective is to analyze the community engagement practices carried out by the students in the Cerrito de los Morreños community to provide feedback on the engagement process conducted by the University of Guayaquil

This research is considered very important because, in the university’s engagement with the community, the knowledge of the participating parties is interconnected in a way that facilitates the construction of new intercultural knowledge.

As highlighted above, it is essential to consider the communities’ own knowledge for the construction of new knowledge; therefore, the dialogue of knowledge is considered an appropriate methodology for this purpose.

Dialogue of knowledge is part of qualitative research: “its purpose is to generate knowledge about customs, experiences, and lessons learned, seeking to understand phenomena and allowing the involved actors to participate from a closer approach that facilitates the understanding and appropriation of shared knowledge” (Hernández, Carratalá, Lamus, and Orozco, (2017, pp. 242–251). As part of qualitative research design, action research provides information that informs decision-making regarding programs, techniques, and structural transformation.

Leff frames the dialogue of knowledge as follows:

It is the deconstruction of the globalized world trapped in the forms of representation of reality produced by logocentrism and single-minded thinking, which questions the totalizing project of objective knowledge and the fixation of knowledge in the present, of history based on “facts,” of a future limited to the extrapolation of trends in reality, without change, without creativity, without possibility. (p. 18). The author begins by acknowledging the importance of knowing, learning, and perceiving both one’s own and others’ perspectives, without becoming a mere translator of foreign knowledge.

To refine the concept of the dialogue of knowledges, it is necessary to consider Santos’s contribution in his work *\*Epistemology of the South\**, in which he opens a space to explore other forms of knowledge—marginalized, abolished, and discredited by formal knowledge—in order to appreciate them in their true magnitude (2010, p. 45). He emphasizes that one can acquire other forms of knowledge without having to forget one’s own (p. 59).

Dialogue arises when people knowledgeable about a particular topic create a suitable setting to deepen their understanding. Participants initiate a discussion that transcends any power dynamic between the interlocutor who supposedly has in-depth knowledge of the subject and the one who does not. When participants feel that their opinions will be considered—even if they are superficial—a dialogue emerges where mutual respect prevails, knowledge is validated, and differences are accepted with respect without necessarily adopting them as one’s own. The friendly atmosphere generated in the dialogue allows participants, even when they hold differing viewpoints, to be willing to learn from one another. The mutual aspiration to learn becomes the catalyst for the dialogue of knowledge. The purpose of the dialogue is not to convince one of the parties, nor to homogenize knowledge, but rather to contribute insights regarding the issue at hand, while acknowledging the diversity of ideas. In summary, through the dialogue of knowledge, the experiences and social representations of each participant are acknowledged—knowledge pertaining to a community issue, as well as the process of individual, family, and group decision-making—to make room for community-based thinking. For the approach to be effective, both the educator and the learner must move beyond their preconceived notions about the topic that prevent them from engaging with reality.

In line with what was previously stated, the dialogue of knowledge facilitates the recognition of the social representations and practices of the residents of the Cerrito de los Morreños community; this knowledge may be of a conventional or folk nature. It can also be viewed as a point of convergence between folk and academic knowledge.

## Materials and methods

As a qualitative design that does not seek statistical representation of an issue, but rather aims to understand, synthesize, theorize, and contextualize (Souza M. 2010, p. 252).

According to Taylor and Bogdan (1986), qualitative research consists of ten defining characteristics: 1. It is inductive: it allows for the understanding and development of concepts based on data; 2. It is holistic: it investigates people by considering their past and the situation in which they find themselves; 3. It is sensitive: due to this characteristic, when interacting with the people who are the subjects of the study, the researcher tries to control their interference and reduce it to a minimum; 4. It seeks to understand: the researcher studies to understand how people experience reality and behaves as an impartial observer; 5. It sets aside the researcher's beliefs: things are observed as if for the first time; no cause or consequence should be taken for granted. 6. Does not seek only moral perspectives: seeks to understand in detail the viewpoints of all people, 7. Is humanistic: studies the personal aspect, their beliefs, their inner life, successes, failures, their endeavors, moral aspects..., 8. Emphasizes the validity of the study: aligns the data with what people say and do, avoids standardizing and controlling the data recorded. 9. People and contexts are both similar and unique: similar, because general social processes are found in every setting or group of people, and unique because through individual study, generalizations are reached regarding a particular aspect. 10. It is an art: it does not follow rules, procedures, or techniques, but rather flexible guiding principles when conducting research.

These characteristics of qualitative research are consistent with the "dialogue of knowledge" approach, which seeks to gather information through conversations with each of the stakeholders, in order to subsequently identify common patterns or practices.

The application of the qualitative "dialogue of knowledge" method necessarily begins with the ancestral reconstruction of knowledge, recognizing the intimacy of social representations and practices, starting with the individual, their family, and the community to which they belong. It distinguishes between conventional and popular knowledge (Espinoza and Ysunza, 2009, pp. 293–301). Popular knowledge of the issue must be considered alongside academic or professional knowledge; the essence of the dialogue of knowledge lies in the integration of academic knowledge with community representations (Hernández, Carratalá, Lamus, and Orozco, 2017, pp. 242–251).

To analyze the dialogue of knowledge in the process of community engagement, this study draws on the reflections of six former students (who have now completed their degrees in Taxation and Finance Engineering) from the Faculty of Administrative Sciences, University of Guayaquil who participated in the project "Teaching Basic General Accounting, Ecuadorian Tax Law, and Their Application in the Preparation of Financial Statements for Residents of the Cerrito de los Morreños Community, 2015," carried out between October 5 and December 13, 2015.

A focus group was held in which the former students actively participated in exploring and discussing the knowledge of the community involved. The participants shared comments, opinions, knowledge, and their perspectives on the dialogue of knowledge in the Cerrito de los Morreños community.

The participants' names were obtained from the Community Outreach Department's database. Twenty participants were invited, but only six chose to take part in the study.

The researcher served as the moderator. A session was held, and it was necessary to develop a discussion guide containing the key questions to be discussed. Finally, the report was prepared, separating quantitative and qualitative information he school used administrations of the instrument.

## Results

Dialogue between people consists of the exchange of information, which can be verbal or written; it is one of the most common forms of communication. It requires that participants share common knowledge or experiences; when only one participant possesses the necessary knowledge, it becomes a monologue.

In this sense, dialogue occurs when each participant empathizes with the other, recognizing that every member of the group has something worth hearing. The atmosphere of dialogue is characterized by symmetry, freedom, candor, and respect for others' opinions.

The students acknowledged that, during their dialogue with the community members, there were always differing points of view, even among the community members themselves—in other words, there was multidimensional thinking. Given such a wide range of knowledge, the knowledge and skills related to practical activities prevailed. These knowledge and skills may have been logical, but they were highly significant for mutual learning between students and community members.

The dialogue of knowledge is rooted in multidimensionality and diversity of thought, and for information to emerge spontaneously and in one's own language, it is necessary to build relationships of friendship and trust. One student states that to achieve this relationship, one must prioritize acting as a person rather than as a college student.

The relationship of friendship and trust built with the locals contributes to the development of citizens who are environmentally conscious, in addition to their professional training. Principle of the form.

The practice of the dialogue of knowledge allows students to change their personal ideas and those of their environment, enabling them to learn from community members. There is an asymmetry of knowledge between the student and the community members, which the former could exploit to assert dominance; however, they speak of collaborative research. Through this approach, they do not impose their knowledge or social model, but rather accompany the community members in their search for solutions to their problems. When discussing local issues that are not part of the community engagement process, students draw on their own knowledge or knowledge

generated independently to support problem-solving. Every effort is made to ensure that the knowledge gap is not apparent during meetings; on the contrary, an atmosphere of peer-to-peer interaction is fostered. It is worth noting that communities also include people with sufficient cognitive resources—though different from those of academics—who contribute significantly to the reflective documentation of experiences. Based on these considerations, the students concluded that during the community engagement process, they learned techniques practiced by community members that helped them facilitate knowledge exchanges.

Another point on which the students agreed was the lack of support from their tutors. The tutors initially failed to provide guidance on knowledge dialogue as a method for understanding and engaging with the community, as well as on respecting the beliefs, techniques, and knowledge of the community members; they also failed to minimize the knowledge gap as much as possible and to view community members as people with similar circumstances. Distributed among the different social actors that make up the community, as well as in the various community spaces.” The authors argue that in communities there are diverse ways of thinking among both community members and within the community organization itself. This is consistent with the findings of the study.

Another finding of the research is that the methodology of the dialogue of knowledge emphasizes empathy among participants, recognizing that every member of the group has something worth listening to. The atmosphere of the dialogue is steeped in symmetry, freedom, candor, and respect for others’ opinions. The result aligns with Archila’s (2017) observation that “This is why we are witnessing new forms of knowledge exchange that affirm difference—no longer between those who know and those who do not, but between different forms of knowledge, none of which is inherently superior to the other.” The dialogue of knowledge refers to the encounter between the academic world and that of social actors, who seek a sustainable future based on the relevance of nature and the coexistence of diverse forms of knowledge.

Another accepted premise relates to students’ limited knowledge of the “Dialogue of Knowledge” methodology and its application in the community setting—a finding already anticipated by Campos and Sánchez, who assert that in Latin America, the link between HEIs and their productive environment is an area where much remains to be done (2006, p. 18). The students unanimously state that they received little information about the aforementioned methodology to guide them in the research activities to be carried out; they are only instructed on the knowledge to be imparted

Based on the findings, the premise is accepted that communities also include people with sufficient cognitive resources—albeit different from those of academics—who contribute significantly to the reflective recording of experiences. This result is consistent with the argument put forward by Casillas and Santini (2006), who note that “the connection with the community is established by recognizing that there are ways of thinking that, on the one hand, are distributed among the different social actors that make up the community, as well as in the various community spaces.” The authors argue that in communities there are diverse ways of thinking among both community members

and within the community organization itself. This is consistent with the findings of the study.

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## Conclusions

The dialogue of knowledge is the path toward fostering horizontal and synergistic relationships between cultures, thereby reducing the asymmetry of knowledge and academic power. New forms of social organization demand that they be stripped of the label of mere informants and instead be recognized as co-researchers of their own realities. This highlights the importance of implementing new collaborative methods that, moving away from colonial forms of knowledge, contribute to a dialogue of everyday practices such as those identified in the process of community engagement.

Students who participate in community engagement processes not only put the knowledge acquired in the classroom at the service of society but also facilitate a dialogue of knowledge grounded in respect for community knowledge, breaking the dominant relationship that characterizes academic knowledge over popular knowledge

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