

Obituary: Remembering Dra. Violeta Tapia Mendieta, Ph.D (1930-2014)

Obituario: Recordando a la Dra. Violeta Tapia Mendieta (1930-2014)

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Received: 11-03-15

Approved: 22-04-15

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Citar Como:

Caycho, T. (2014). Obituary: Remembering Dra. Violeta Tapia Mendieta, Ph.D (1930-2014). *Propósitos y Representaciones*, 2 (2), 305-316. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.20511/pyr2014.v2n2.65>



Violeta Tapia Mendieta, Ph.D, professor emerita of Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos (UNMSM)/ San Marcos National University in Lima-Peru, died in Lima on June 12, 2014 at the age of 84. She was a Peruvian and Latin American professor of psychology, especially of educational psychology, who has left major scientific and professional lessons to psychologists with outstanding results.

She was born on June 22, 1930, daughter of Mr. Ricardo Tapia Gaviño, an educator, and Mrs. Ricardina Mendieta. From an early age, her parents encouraged and instilled in her an interest for solving problems related to school learning. After finishing high school in 1948 she decided to apply to San Marcos National University to pursue a career in Education. She obtained a Teaching degree in Secondary Education with a specialization in Philosophy and Social Sciences. She obtained her degree with the thesis “Comparación de los rasgos caracterológicos neuróticos de los adolescentes de ambos sexos de Lima, a base de los Inventarios de Personalidad de R.G. Bernteuter y L.L. Thurstone”/”Comparing neurotic character traits of adolescents of both sexes in Lima, based on the Personality Inventory of R.G. Bernreuter and L. L. Thurstone “ (Tapia, 1955), advised by Dr. Walter Blumenfeld. She was a respected disciple of professor Blumenfeld with whom she published four issues of a series of studies called Psycho-pedagogical Studies. These studies were dedicated to collective tests of verbal intelligence (Blumenfeld & Tapia, 1956), tests of language proficiency (Blumenfeld & Tapia, 1957), research on certain character traits (Blumenfeld & Tapia, 1959) and experimental studies on reasoning (Blumenfeld & Tapia, 1960).

During the same year she earned her Teaching Degree in Secondary Education, and encouraged by her friend Luis Estrada de los Ríos, she enrolled in the newly created Section of Psychology at School of Arts of the UNMSM. In 1964 she obtained her academic bachelor’s degree in Psychology with the thesis “Estudios socio-pedagógico de una población escolar, muestra representativa del IV y V año de primaria del área del distrito de Chorrillos”/”Socio-pedagogical studies in elementary school population, with a representative sample from the 4th and 5th grade of an elementary school in the area of Chorrillos district” (Tapia, 1964). In 1970 she obtained her Professional degree in Psychology from the UNMSM, and

four years later her PhD degree in Education from the same university with her thesis “La percepción visual en niños con problemas de aprendizaje en lectura y escritura”/“Visual perception in children with learning disabilities in reading and writing” (Tapia, 1974). She completed her postgraduate studies abroad in Educational Psychology at the Ohio State University, and Evaluative Research at the Teaching Research Program of Florida State University. She also studied Educational Technology at the former Instituto Nacional de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Educación (INIDE)/ National Institute of Research and Development Education of the Ministry of Education of Peru.

Her university teaching experience started at the Department of Psychology at the School of Arts and Human Sciences of the UNMSM, where she worked as the Head of practices of the Psychological Tests class taught by Professor Dr. Reynaldo Alarcón. She was later promoted to Senior Lecturer, where she was responsible for the courses of Psychology of Intelligence, General Psychology, Introduction to Psychological Research, Theory of Measurement, and Psychology of School Learning until 1983, when she concluded her academic work at San Marcos University. In 1987, her alma mater, UNMSM, recognizes her teaching and research career conferring her the title of Professor Emerita at a ceremony in which family, colleagues and friends recognized her important contributions to Peruvian psychology. In mid-1985 she began teaching postgraduate courses at the School of Nursing and Psychology of the UNMSM until 2001. She also worked as a consultant for the Project of Information and Public Education on Drugs conducted by the Ministry of Education and the Center for Information and Education for Prevention of Drug Abuse (CEDRO).

Violeta Tapia, Ph.D, also worked in several administrative positions. She worked as the Head of the Academic Department of Psychology at the “Gran Unidad Escolar Rosa de Santa María” School, member of the steering committee of the Educational Technology Office at UNMSM, Director of the Educational Technology Office at the UNMSM. Later on, she worked as the Head of the Psychological Research Institute at the same university. Between 1985 and 1987, she was the director of the Educational Research of the National Institute of Research and Development.

Specialist in educational psychology and psychometrics, Violeta Tapia, Ph.D, has created and standardized various reading comprehension instruments (Tapia & Silva, 1980), scale of attitudes of mothers towards their child with mental retardation (Tapia & Ugarriza, 1982), thinking skills (Tapia & Luna, 2008; Tapia & Moon, 2010), among others. Her research works aimed to perform an adaptation of the cultural equivalence of the items, evaluate the psychometric properties of the instrument and develop standards or scales for the national population. The study of language comprehension is one of the subjects that has always been present among her academic interests. She did several works on this subject, but with her book “Programa Psicopedagógico de Comprensión Lectora. Aprendo a pensar a través de la lectura”/ “Psychological Education Program of Reading Comprehension. I learn to think through reading”(Tapia, 2003), she systematizes her expertise on the subject. She considers reading as a cognitive, psycholinguistic and sociocultural process that transcends the translation of the graphical symbols to sounds of spoken language and interpretation of its literal meaning.

Applied psychology in Peru made its first impact on the field of education before other branches of knowledge. This is why a large part of the psychological work during the first period corresponds almost exclusively to the pedagogic activity. Thus, one of the greatest academic interests of Violeta Tapia lies in the analysis of educational psychology identity. She developed a conceptual framework as a scientific and professional discipline as the basis for the curriculum of vocational training of psychologists in the area. She developed three dimensions in the definition of educational psychology: 1) the contents of psychological science, 2) the role of research and 3) the educational process (Tapia, 2008). By analyzing these dimensions, she defines educational psychology as the science that studies the relationships between different aspects of the educational environment, and the achievement of goals and objectives of the system in order to create an organization of human potential and society. She applies the concepts, principles and relevant psychological techniques to educational situations and especially to teaching-learning processes.

But, what made her perform this attempt at analysis? Much of what has been considered identity crisis has resulted from an apparent confusion of educational psychologists on the field of discipline, and a diversity of

relationships due to the increasing complexity of psychology on one hand and changes in the conception educational on the other hand. Over the years, educational psychology has shaped its identity as an applied science, aimed at the description, explanation and prediction of learning; as well as the factors that affect teaching-learning situations, or interpreting and understanding them from the actors' perspective. When reviewing the educational psychology history, the name of Violet Tapia must have an outstanding place since she is one of its most representative figures.

All of the above about Violeta Tapia, Ph.D, shows us a professional whose training in psychology was scientific, experimental and quantitative, and it has continued generating valuable and varied results. She performed an exemplary teaching career throughout her work and her life. Her work combined, almost perfectly, her interest in theoretical research and applied dimension of psychology, being the latest an example of her intense psychometric and educational psychology work.

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