

The Narration to Take Care of Oneself in the Development of Educational Professions

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Abstract

This work aims to highlight the importance of narration and autobiographic practice in looking after oneself. The narration represents a technology of taking care of oneself (Foucault, 1992) and at the same time, facilitates the person in oneself recognition and self-training. The merit of narrating is extremely educational and formative for whoever is preparing to operate a practical training in the field of caring professions, including the educational ones (Zannini, 2003). An active methodology to work through the narration is the autobiographic practice which offers to the pedagogy and the educational research the opportunity to place subjects at the hearth, adding depth to the educational professions which have the crucial responsibility of training function. The educational autobiography represents an innovative way of training, an efficient narrative writing exercise because it includes a reflection process which proves the experience of a narrative process of the self-awareness achievement (Mortari, 2011).

Keywords: narration, reflexivity, care, training, professional identity.

1. Introduction

The narration is an instrument which allows our emotions, our memories, our attitudes to have a history. Narrating is an extraordinary ability of human thought thanks to which it is possible to understand reality, yourself and its daily actions. This communication ability allows the narrator to be a part of a specific culture and through this, to redefine yourself compared with contexts, events and situations.

In this sense, a way of linking and restructuring our thought is that of thinking stories, “meaning the mind needs to build schemes or cognitive and brain structures such as to give rise to an evolving thinking activity because of neuronal connections increasingly complex” (Demetrio, 2012, p. 29). The narration meant as telling stories is essential both to provide an organisation to one’s inner world and to attribute value to human experience (Pontecorvo, 1991).

Bruner (1992) describes narration such as “a form of organisation necessary to build the world, to define the flow, to divide the internal events” (p. 64). Thinking on the way to build the knowledge, Bruner tried to highlight how *lògos*, meant as rational thinking, and myth, the narration, described by Socrates and Plato, contribute to the creation of knowledge.

The narration allows aiming the critical thinking on the world and the self. In every culture, several have been ways to narrate for educating. Education without narration is a paradox. Look at *Emilio* by Jean Jacques Rousseau, who used the narrative expedient to theorise his desirable educational pattern narrating a path whose protagonist is Emilio. In this way, the pedagogical knowledge corresponds to the narrative knowledge which needs to be told to make itself visible (Biffi, 2012).

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According to Demetrio (2012), the narration takes a tridimensional value: ontological (we are active and passive narrators), gnosiological (we mutually learn by sharing stories), aesthetic (we confer on stories linguistic, iconic, dramaturgic, spectacular forms to attract the interlocutor). Through the oral stories, cultures handed down for centuries and created communities, designed units (Poggio, 2004).

The pedagogical proposal of narration of self aims to train a practice which, starting from the narration of themselves and own story, allows opening the necessary thought to enlighten the practice and the profession, learning continuously from itself (Mortari, 2003).

2. Narrating to know oneself and to know others

Both narration and education are social and mental functions learnt naturally. In the first evidence of man's presence on earth and his creations, we have the cosmogonic myths, narrations created by human thought to know and give meaning to what happened in world and life. In the second half of the 20th century, it will take place that epistemological revolution because of which narration and narrative thinking will be useful and revalued for the education and the knowledge development of human nature.

Demetrio defines the ability to communicate such as an "instinct" (Demetrio, 2012, p. 45) for human and its knowledge provided that "stories structure, organise and order our more prosaic and daily behaviours" (Demetrio, 2012, p. 45).

The narration takes a personal and particular epistemological logic, as it generates forms of knowledge which respond to clarification requests and comprehension of events, experiences seen as phenomena on which hermeneutical process is practised (Striano, 2005).

Socrates claims "Know thyself" (Plato, Alcibiades I, 124a-b) because only knowing oneself it is possible caring for themselves (Plato, Alcibiades I, 129a).

It is significant that knowing themselves is not by the self-care but is a condition when he declares: <<if you know yourself, you can care of yourself, but if not, you cannot know either that one>> (Platone, Alcibiade Primo, 129a). The educator is called primarily to care of one's inner self, to know and understand each other

Hence, narrating is to know and to interpret themselves and the reality: psychological studies highlight how the narration is peculiar of human thought, considering the story such as "a flexible linguistic aim to better appreciate and talk about the reality (self and world)" (Smorti, 2007, p. 78).

The narration helps to reveal and know themselves, listen to and question and look themselves. To know and to be able to think themselves is essential for the human educational path (Musaio, 2015) which cannot ignore the world (Demetrio, 1996; 1998; 2000) and remain active and competent (Loiodice, 2008) builder of their existential project (Polenta, 2015).

According to Demetrio (2012), this ability may and should address any subject to form an "inner education" (p. 59), aimed to turn on introspective processes and reminiscent and inherent the cognitive and feelings predispositions as not to be assailed, distorted and abused da exteriority, exhibitionism, superficiality and egotism" (p. 60).

As Mancino denotes (2012) "what happens or happened revives when you narrate, and it reproduces and creates time and sense links. The latter, for the narration, constitute the possibility to become an educational and sense experience, generating knowledge and epistemological moments but also questions and interpretations or heuristic interests" (p. 122). Indeed, as Cunti claims (2014) "the narration with the hermeneutic and constructive function represents an irreplaceable instrument to create the professional identity and a privileged mean to observe, reorganise and reinvent oneself, according to changes and internal and external circumstances" (p. 121). Paul Ricoeur (1990) defines the subject such as a narrative identity which takes shape through stories. Martini (1998) talks about narrative identity, such as a narrative comprehension of oneself formed by a synthesis between what the subject is now and in the past. Identity is the collection of narrations chronologically linked to each other, and the story is nothing more than a description of life events and their possible solutions (Bruner, 2002).

Bergenner (2016) make us attentive to the fact that, so that stories may let to enrich your identity positively, they should help you not only to create meaning around experience but also foster a sense of openness and hope.

3. Training for reflexivity

The educational dimension of oneself narrative practice takes place in the educational value of reflexion. Narration and reflexion are fundamental processes to build knowledge. A phenomenological approach to knowledge supported the value of reflexivity and to the meanings assigned to its own experience in building the knowledge. The phenomenological method is scientifically founded on the return to the same things, or to the path which allows discovering from discourses and pre-formulated theories to the essence of real (Husserl, 2002).

As noted by Mortari (2003), <<the individuals who reflect are those who aim to the same experiences and listen to themselves while thinking. Only through the reflection, the mind may become aware of the quality of the cognitive acts, and so themselves have the same quality of the subject matter>>.

The reflection appears to be an adequate way to train individuals to lifelong learning, which led them to develop critical thinking to analyse the different experiences and to learn from these. Thus, “the reflection is a process with which you evaluate the content, the process or the assumptions of effort aimed to interpret experience and foist meaning” (Mezirov, 1991/2003, p. 106).

The reflection is seen as “a narration which is the high road to presence, identity, awareness, intersubjectivity and capability of ethic discernment” (Charon & Hermann, 2012, p. 6).

Montagna et al. (2013) consider reflection such as “a powerful instrument to learn from experience”. Reflecting involves a path through which you come back to an experience, analyse its different components, convert in the past and finally transform it in learning by creating meaning. The authors themselves identify different methods which may be used to facilitate the reflective practice, among which we can mention (Montagna et al., 2013):

Diary: it is a method of reflective writing continuous in time. It consists of a daily report or at least weekly, a caring experience from which arise thoughts, feeling, ideas, reactions.

Log: it is also continuous in time. It consists of a combination of objective data of the experience and their personal and creative interpretation. Unlike the diary, it may be recursive and interactive.

Critical incidents/remarkable situations: it is a one-off methodology in specific educational events (a training, a course, etc.). In this case, you write on a critical incident (something has gone wrong) or on an event (a situation which you may live both positive or negative).

‘Themed’ autobiographical memoir: it is another methodology used in specific training events.

Free writing: it is a destructured type of writing, rather close to brainstorming.

Brief essays: it consists of writing 5-8 pages where it is asked to formulate a report, support an argument, ask questions, process data, develop research hypothesis, etc.

Through reflective practice, professionals may become aware of themselves, both from a knowledge point of view and emotions. As Mortari says (2011), the reflection on the experience “opens up the dimension of oneself” (p. 147), because, with it, you may observe what happens to yourself. The essential aim of the reflective act is: to lead the mind to itself and not to something external, such as happens simply thinking the experience (Cunti, 2014).

Mann and colleagues (2009) report that reflective practices showed the ability to produce significant positive effects especially in educational contexts: reflection improves educational relations, sharpens comprehension of deep characteristics of a context and supports motivation. For all these reasons, reflection is also strongly promoted in training and socio-educational contexts in Italy (de Mennato, 2012; de Mennato, Orefice & Branchi, 2011; Iori, 2009).

“Training healthcare professionals to reflective thinking (self-assessment, regulation and reflection) requests to guide them firstly to comprehend the constructive value of their thought on reality (epistemic dimension), to recognise matrices and even very small variations of their thinking (metacognitive dimension), to understand positions roles of health care characters (rationale dimension), to contextualise care models (pragmatic dimension)” (de Mennato, 2012, p. 30).

Through the narration, it is necessary to learn to reflect on yourself and on others to become aware of choices to make and actions to do.

Reflectivity is an essential instrument to querying and comprehend difficult situations and learn from experience. It is fundamental to develop reflective practices as self-care, for each other and the world (Boffo, 2008). Narration and reflection on experience may help the future operators to join the other's perspective soon and at the same time to start to create their own professional identity.

4. Narration as care practice

Telling about themselves, their worries, personal vicissitudes is efficient care of the self because through the diverse life moments, it allows a constant construction and reconstruction of their identity image.

Generally speaking, the Italian language defines the concept of care in a unique word; in English, you find two different terms. 'To care' means 'taking care' and 'to cure' indicates therapy and recovery. The care offered by autobiographic writing focuses on minding oneself (Formenti, 2009, p. 50) and oneself's identity.

Caring is a pedagogical pillar which has been taking a distinct shape in the last year of XX century thanks to a range of researches led in an international context by Milton Mayeroff (1971), Micheal Foucault (1984), Neil Noddings (1984), Pierre Hadot (2002), Jean Tronto (1991) and in Italy by Rita Fadda (1997) Lugina Mortari (2002) e Franco Cambi (2002).

Human beings <<are naturally prone to caring, live their existence with attention, focusing on many things and loving them>> (Mortari, 2002 p. 3).

Bruner (2002) especially claims that the story, the narration may shape the daily experience. Culture and mind are interconnected and ponder the predisposition to perceive the world in sharable narrative ways such as a common heritage from generation to generation.

The ability to tell stories is thought's practice whose is necessary for taking care. Luigina Mortari in her work "La pratica dell'aver cura" (2006), claims that caring is a relational phenomenon and used in educational fields carries to good practice.

Franco Cambi in his "La pratica dell'aver cura" (2006) claims that space is a possible place which experience, research and assimilation evolve knowledge of itself and the world around it". (Cambi, 2010, pp. 99-108).

The author states that the individuals who take care of themselves could grow up and train through spaces and places thinking on them as learning moments, custodians of experience and knowledge. He invites to transfer them actively to learn (p. 108) participating in conversations, or brainstorming where exchanges and sharing of experience and reflections, or meditating through inner reflection.

Formenti considers autobiography as "space itself" and instrument of "care of itself", (Formenti, 1998 p. 78), as personal cut out from life chaos, to facilitate the confrontation with themselves, to activate self-understanding and reflective capacity to provide well-being.

According to Cambi, the narration is an occasion to return the subject density, desire and identity (Cambi F., (curated by), 2005). To confirm what said earlier, Demetrio claims that writing about yourself is a mind action "to reorder what is a source of emotion, sorrow, desire, oblivion [...] the autobiographic care of yourself and others consists in it" (Demetrio 2008, p. 224).

Caring is the gift of thought which educators offer to the others. In this sense, caring the others is first caring of themselves, *cura sui*. We must give credit to Foucault who shared the *cura sui* as the art of existence intended as the necessary attention for themselves. The second archetype of "the wounded healer" is the constant care of oneself, which allows mutual caring in a well-balanced and authentic way (Bruzzone, Zannini, 2014). Behaving and caring oneself means acting towards a specific situation (Noddings, 1991). Educators should care for others but to do this, should break free from prejudices, influences, dogmas originating from their own experience. The autobiography may bring back stiles, models, principles which influence the training act towards the trainer awareness, capable to awake the caring in the subject in training (Cambi, 2005).

Franco Cambi (2002), caring for themselves consists of <<safeguard one's existence, moods, nature and destiny, imposing as own's theoretical and practical guide>>. In this sense, caring on itself is present in the actual cultural debate not in archaeological or marginal", but as an essential practice for the contemporary human being as a key concept to set the educational process (Cambi, 2006).

In *The Apology*, Socrates clarify that it is a matter of learning to care of existence, to learn the art of living (Plato, *The Apology of Socrates*, 20d) and in *Alcibiades* claims that the sense of caring of itself consists of learning the art of <<becoming better as close as possible>>.

In *Phaedo* is written that since the soul is immortal, it deserves dedication and care (Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 132c). This principle is clear in *Alcibiades*, caring for oneself means <<caring for its soul>> (Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 132c)

Heidegger, Foucault, Fadda, Canevaro hypothesise that care takes roots in existence from which takes shape the education.

There can be no education, training, learning without caring, which, accompanying and supporting who works within educational fields in any time and space (Boffo, 2008).

According to Winnicott (1996) and Bowlby (1969, 1972), before getting together with others, it is fundamental getting together with itself.

Educating is always to interact with others. Educating means to ensure that others learn and care as Socrates claims in *The Apology* (31a-31c), to provide the self-training process (Foucault 2003).

It also means to offer those significant experiences, specific for anyone, which put them in the position to be responsible for their education. Specifically, the role of educators is to urge others to take responsibility to achieve the self-training process (Mortari 2008).

Taking care of others, themselves, the environment, of the profession it is not an action but an ethic tract which makes people human beings (Boffo, 2008).

5. Dissemination of autobiographic methodologies

In the last decades, making cross-cutting, many disciplines and knowledge fields adopt written and oral autobiographic narrations: from a therapeutic context to social sciences, to qualitative research to the extent that it can be talked of the autobiographic narrative method. During the last two decades of the century, the autobiographic narration becomes a pedagogical instrument in education and training and also useful support for social working and caring, thanks to some significant experiences.

Danilo Dolci, poet and educator, promoted in Italy a sort of maieutic pedagogy which proposes to educate new generations by listening, questioning, reflecting and practising the autobiography. In Brasil Paolo Freire in the 1970s through a street educational approach collected life stories of people who live in the Brazilian favelas, describing their life conditions significantly different from the official's ones. In the 1980s, self-writing and narrating are successfully inserted in educational and pedagogical fields to offer to each one the opportunity to reflect on their life paths and encourage growth and development of human competences from childhood to adulthood (La Rosa L., De Pasquale C., pp. 105-118).

Autobiographic methodologies are today applied in many fields: adult training (lifelong learning, professional new motivation, supervision in educational fields); caring (reconstruction of the one's history, help relationships, treatments pathways); research (reconstruction paths of histories of places); self-analysis (self in-depth knowledge based on autobiography) (Rossetti, 2010; Portis, 2015).

In Italy, the narrative autobiographic approach is widely applied in the adult education field since Duccio Demetrio's studies.

In the latter field, telling experienced histories allows the adult to realise self-directed learning by going over own's life and by learning from what it is necessary <<to know or be able to do to deal with real life events>> (Knowles, 1996, pag.77).

Laura Formenti, in her "La formazione autobiografica", comparing different models of education autobiographic approach placed in different cultural contexts, explored the main models of research in Europe carefully. Francophone area, thanks to the studies of the French-Canadian Gaston Pineau (Pineau, & Michèle, 1983; Pineau & Jobert, 1989; Pineau & Le Grand, 1993) was the first to recognise the educational value of histories life. Starting from the ecosystemic perspective, Pineau underlined how autobiography qualifies itself as a reflective action beyond its describing aspect.

In this perspective emerges one of the most classical themes of autobiographical approach in education: speaking about matters (Formenti, 1998) highlights clearly how *histoire de vie* directly told by whoever lived before us, has an emancipator effect by allowing the narrator to choose “how and what to say” (Formenti, 1998, pp.130-131).

In addition to the emancipator one, there are two biographical dimensions which favour learning and education: the hermeneutical component and the experiential one.

Hermeneutical component, provided in every cognitive activity, gives an existential meaning to the biography allowing the individual <<to recreate and describe the past again attributing meaning>> (Bruner, 2002, pag.16). This element leads the subjects to define their identity. Experiential component, widely described by Malcom Knowles, is closely linked to the learning, it cannot be learning without experience but a global one, seen as a resource (previous knowledge) and an experimental field (building knowledge) (Knowles, 1996).

6. Autobiography and professional educational training

Autobiographical perspective has conquered all areas of intervention projects and assumed prominence in pedagogical and educational fields.

Pedagogy occurs in autobiography a new educational method which encourages individuals to reveal their personal history and supports by transforming life into a permanent search for meaning getting them used to the future (Demetrio, 2003).

As care lifelong learning process, autobiography invites to look back and ahead: the relationship of time dimensions of the present, past and future gains new meaning by greater awareness (Demetrio, 1995).

Autobiography induces the subjects to redesign their life history both of comprehension of the past and constant design reformulation (Demetrio, 1999). The same autobiography is a resource which allows an introspective redesign what Demetrio describes in his work as ‘a personal journey’.

This sort of narration becomes a powerful pedagogical instrument to build identity and belonging by doing significantly, with intelligence, being creative, training, attentive to self-care, social research and self-analysis (Demetrio, 2003).

According to Franco Cambi “it was the adult education to reaffirm the value of autobiography as training method giving a crucial role in the creation of personal adulthood” (Cambi, 2005).

According to Formenti, the definition of adult involves multiple identities: age, social, psychological, emotional, cultural. Today’s society requests the individual a continue redefinition of roles, duties and identities. “Adulthood as a state, condition or age requests a pluralistic vision” (Formenti 1998, p. 13-14). That defined by Demetrio (Bassa Poropat, Chicco, Amione, p. 42) is not the end of a journey but an open system which includes small changes, a condition which is the expression of multiple identities. The sense of achievement, to be equilibrated with themselves and others are the result of an intertwine vital continuum (pp. 42-43) which the author considers constants in an individual growing: self-identification, playful element, adventure, teaching role, decision-making ability, ability to relate with others, “think outside the box”. The autobiographical proposal fits within this complex vision of adulthood, which with its maieutical and pedagogical methods manages to bring self-knowledge, learning, planning. Formenti and Demetrio define autobiography as a tool to enhance growth and personal empowerment.

The educational core towards adulthood is self-education (Formenti, 2009 p. 77), claims Demetrio: reflecting on and with themselves to promote and develop their abilities and become fully autonomous. In this sense of self-education, training to self-writing is an efficient method to stimulate listening and reflecting; learning to listen to respect, interact and accept the differences.

Writing about themselves may represent a place where you feel free to find a sense, without checking the truth and hindering the nature of biographical experience. Writing about themselves is a way to be responsible for their life without worrying about others (Demetrio, 1996, p. 221). You never write for an aesthetic reason but to understand something about themselves, which otherwise would be difficult to learn. It is important to remember not the facts but the significant experiences and reflections (Demetrio, 1996 p.72). In doing so, it is possible to attribute a significance to the past experiences to build their future starting from history and who you are (Demetrio, 1996).

By writing, individuals may simulate a second birth, claims Demetrio citing Aldo Giorgio Gargani (Demetrio, *raccontarsi*, p. 84), telling their history, redefining it with a style with which you are today and ask to be understood.

According to Montagna et al. (2013), writing seems more efficient than narration as for allowing seeing in black and white, what you think. Demetrio (2008), identifies deeper meanings and aspects of writing and highlights the self-caring, where “writing about themselves and their life calls for an inner maturity. It means to meet challenges, to be seen by others. [...] The oral means to listen to each other again and to analyse themselves, to maintain a re-check of the narration.”

You are writing teaches to connect events and to research deeper meanings (not only clinical but also psychological, sociological, ethical, etc.). This process helps to develop a greater ability to face critical issues and doubts to which you are exposed continually in your professional practice, facilitating resilience and coping strategies.

Autobiography represents an innovative way of training which triggers powerful processes of personal reflection, analysis, challenge and maturity.

Thanks to its epistemological value, this narrative tool is now central, both in traditional educational places and where subjects are involved in dealing with a new dimension of self. It means to reread your education and to activate a new training process.

It runs to a constitutive part of training for trainers (Cambi, 2002). The latter should start to build their professional identity not only from scientific contents but also personal experiences (Artioli & Artioli, 2016), which are a wealth to be recognised and promoted in those who will work in the field (Iori, 2009).

Thus, writing and narration become an educational instrument to train any subject to “a way to live” (Demetrio, 2011, p. 37) able to reflect critically, learning from experience and existence.

Autobiography may help education professionals to know themselves, to practice and reflect on their way to act and think, to face disappointment and failure, to develop critical thinking and self-expression.

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