

SELF-TELLING TO ORIENTATE ONESELF

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ABSTRACT: The guidance experience, pedagogically considered, is above all the process of identification, recognition and consolidation of individual resources of which the person is the bearer (attitudes, capabilities, inclinations, expectations, desires, projects), is the conquest of one's own identity, the research of constituent elements of personality, the awareness of 'being-different-from-everyone-else'. Within this theoretical assumption, the narration is a suitable placement as estimable and relevant device for self-guidance and transformation of the self. In the guidance actions the use of narrative, reflective and autobiographical paradigms can represent an effective aid in the direction of the redefinition of identity, empowerment and self-empowerment. Narration is the search for the truth about the self, or even more the process of re-thinking and re-design the self. It means to discover and achieve a deep knowledge about the self, to reconstruct one's own life plan, is to de-form to re-emerge, to re-form it. In a broad sense, it is in some way to 'die' to be reborn regenerated.

KEYWORDS: narration, identity, project, skills assessment.

If the watchword of the culture of orientation has generally been 'aptitude', it is now possible to affirm that the real keyword is 'identity'. Every valid guidance experience allows people to meet their inimitable typicality and define the ideal of a Self that is generative of the intent to circumscribe its role within the social fabric accompanied by a readiness to bring meaning to subjective existence.

Conquering self-oriented competence is an educational goal of no small account, thinking particularly of the fact that the health of any personality is identified by an image of itself that is both complete and unified, including not only the concept of what it is, but also of what it wishes to be and should be. Self-awareness is equivalent to reconstituting the identity of a subject seeking the achievement of essential goals, through constructions and reconstructions, structuring and deconstructing, learning and unlearning.

Being conscious of one's own worth and need, perceiving oneself as different, contributes in no small measure to eliminating any sense of insignificance and existential banality, and brings the necessary strength to respond responsibly to the appeals of life. Suffice to recall the concept of *psychological education* to refer to the fundamental educational task of fostering the 'I'. This is a task which is very different from nurturing escapism and solipsism, individualism, and selfishness. What is at stake is the

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emancipative undertaking to make people master their psychic life and thus help to defend them against prejudices and conditioning, mortification, and manipulation, and to conquer a force of expansion and a generation of humanity that nurtures their personal, social, and cultural lives.

The concept of the *development task* may serve to indicate programming indispensable for psychosocial education, for a positive and rewarding growth, and for the conferral of direction, unity, and consistency in one's evolutionary journey. In this sense, the various development tasks are arranged as educational commitments, which, as such, demand the possession of principles and rules, and ideals and values, that can bring order to the many decisions a human being is required to make.

This concept leads us to focus on the commitment and effort, courage and creativity, the availability of renewable energy and the drive towards perfection that a subject must express in taking shape, thereby emphasizing the fact that the various evolutionary achievements have nothing to do with the occasional and contingent nor axiological neutrality and intimism. An authentic personal development, while it bears the beauty of adventure and constant discovery, can also be appreciated for its strong passion for regulative principles that are beneficial for the human being to grow and improve.

1. Self-knowledge and the self-project

These are considerations which help to underline that orientation, even sooner than being scholastic and professional, is something personal. We are in the presence of a dynamic maturation process that requires the use and operation of all the dimensions and forces of the person understood in a realistic way, and that, in its realization, activates the affective, cognitive, volitional, moral, and relational spheres. In this way, orientation is equivalent to the integral formation of the personality since achieving full possession of their aptitudes and exploitation of their potential allow people to implement and practise subjective, free, and intelligent tasks that are therefore truly creative, in virtue of a continuous transcendence of their existential situation and an intentional projection towards others and reality itself.

In saying this, we are sustained by the conviction that the guiding experiences are the detection, recognition and consolidation of the resources people possess (aptitudes, capacity, enthusiasm, inclinations, desires, plans), is the conquest of their own identity, is the search for the constituent elements of their personality and awareness of their own 'being-different-from-everyone-else'.

Through a continuous analysis of their motivations, aspirations, interests, and expertise, people come to build their own image of themselves

(what they actually are, are worth, possess, what they know, can and want to create), they valorize themselves, measuring their value against external reality, produce their own existential project, exercise a capacity of personal initiative, inventiveness and creativeness capable of producing high rewards for themselves and the community.

Orientation is essentially a way to manage their own life according to vocationally significant decisions from an independent and free being engaged in the choices of planning life in which and with which they foster the full development of their personality. For this reason, orientation cannot mean one technique or some improvised advice that reduces it to a point of view or opinion in a process prompted by specialized staff or an operation carried out from the outside by experts, nor in an event of the aptitudinal-measuring-diagnostic-informative type, but in a process that finds its beginning and evolution in a person's ontological substantiality and ethics, while necessarily noting the importance of social factors, so that, not infrequently, the dynamics of decision-making are the product of a compromise.

In this sense, self-orientation follows on directly from introspection and self-assessment, i.e. from a critical and objective analysis of one's desires and aspirations, capacities, and interests, both hidden and obvious from the precise assumption of 'being-in-the-world', in other words, from the consideration of one's own self interrelated with the experiential reality that has significance for the self.

In short, the roots of self-knowledge lie in self-exploration and self-objectification, thanks to which human beings can precisely trace their destiny, establish their own existential project, and take the decisions for their own life independently, developing appropriate forms of original assertiveness to defend themselves from pseudo-vocations and external pressures, while taking note of adaptations and pseudo-participative dynamics.

Within this theoretical framework, narrative can find a suitable location as an estimable relevant pedagogical instrument of self-orientation and self-transformation. In guiding actions, the use of reflexive autobiographical narrative paradigms can be the guarantor of an effective aid in redefining the identity of the existential design of *empowerment* and *self-empowerment*, i.e. gaining a set of facts, skills, and relational modalities that can facilitate independent research strategies to achieve the goals of innovation, constructiveness, and social and professional protagonism.

There is a close bond between an ideographic conception of orientation and narrative methodology: orientation cannot be substantiated by the narration itself. Life stories told in the first person bolster the guidance process, and ultimately establish identity processes. The legacy of stories possessed by people is the source of their stability and transformations, their compass, an instrument to interpret their own world and

contribute to building it. In this way, the orientation shifts its centre of gravity from 'orienter' to orienting, acknowledging that these competencies and powers, abilities, and resources, have a potential for self-conduction and self-direction.

2. *The story, hermeneutics, rewriting*

Self-telling is the search for a truth about oneself, taking care of, re-thinking, replanning oneself, being reborn. The history of a life possessed may become a valid navigation chart, thanks to which we can orient and guide ourselves, undertake a journey towards and tend to ourselves, expand and gain mastery over ourselves. Self-telling is a chance to rewrite what can no longer be relived, to interpret the past in the light of the present in the prospect of a future which is a promise of regenerating possibilities, of new investments and new forms of action, re-motivation, and learning.

Self-telling is rekindling the memory. This is relevant to estimate the contribution it can offer regarding the processes of self-description and self-reflection, investigation and discovery of re-evocation and introspection, of self-seeking and biographical awareness, self-acknowledgement, and self-assessment, of a reconstruction that becomes interpretation and edification.

When people re-read and re-interpret themselves, reconsidering their existential journey and understanding themselves over again, it becomes possible to rewrite their own 'individual novel', the re-construction of identity and therefore a change and a growth, managing to experience things with greater awareness and therefore discovering that they are more a protagonist of their own story.

Through the hermeneutics of the autobiographical road and an understanding of the motivations and dynamics of things that have happened as well as their many meanings, people can identify their own roads and evolutionary and transformational seasons through which they developed.

Through this hermeneutics, it is possible to give an explanation to one's own past by giving meaning to the various experiences, decisions, and choices, and to impart a sense of one's own future, to become aware of one's own affective, social, cognitive, and moral history, and to exert a planning impetus, to explain and critically review learning and cognitive processes occurring during actions that produce particular epistemic postures, to orient motivations, targets, and formative itineraries, to discover unexplored values and interests to be transformed into objectives that can allow us to make best use of our subjective potentialities, to gain an inner coherence and continuity in space and time, and to formulate realistic assumptions about our future.

Being able to tell of oneself means making discoveries within ourselves and about ourselves, means being able to reconstruct our own life plan, means de-forming in order to re-form, to gain a new form, in some ways means a 'dying', to be reborn regenerated. Self-telling does not mean making a mere chronicle of one's own past, since the affective, ethical, aesthetic, and cognitive dimensions are all involved. Self-telling is to give meaning to experience, renaming it, re-evoking it, commenting on it, with the conviction that this is not to be understood merely as a practice in itself, but also as an understanding of the meaning of what was and is being experienced, as a process of questioning the past and the present.

Self-telling becomes precious reflective practice for the processing of one's own biography, the interpretation of one's own formative biography, for the reconstruction of the meaning of personal existence and personal life choices, for the meaning of events, for conferring meaning on expectations and projects, desires and duties, as well as for the understanding and connection of happenings and events intended otherwise to separation, fragmentation and desemantization, as well as for (new) awareness-raising of one's power and sense of self-efficacy.

Commemorating oneself is offered to people not so much as a mechanical repetition of the past but as an itinerary in and for itself in order to give shape, as an activation of existentially significant experiences to draw on, *inter alia*, in order to gain awareness, assume responsibility, and clarify, deepen and bring meaning to one's life. The past can be considered a burden that slows and hinders change, or a container of events and experiences that can be used to tackle the problems of the present and to give meaning to life, to stem the suffocating arrogance of the present, to eliminate constraints and obstacles that hinder the process of self-emancipation and self-idolization, to gain the tools and resources to make subsequent experience formatively more solid and productive.

Historical memory can help people become aware of hopes, dreams and utopias, projects which, if interrupted or reabsorbed over time, still maintain the concrete potential of germinating the new and never-before-seen. Being human also means remembering what we were. In virtue of a recall, of a selective, critical, and interpretative recall, sympathetic rather than explanatory, processes of self-knowledge and self-awareness are triggered, dynamics of re-evocation and self-probing are activated, investigations of self and biographical awarenesses are prompted, learning and relearning occur, a self-identity profile is gained that is simultaneously diachronic and synchronic.

At stake is the progressive development of a dynamic self-portrait through the multiplicity of identity that dwells within the subject, through the different identities that have oriented and continue to orient one's actions, the choices imposed or desired, personal representations and projections.

Thus, starting from oneself permits the emergence of that subjectivity that is so strongly demanded by current scenarios. Starting from oneself also permits hermeneutics, self-recognition, re-appropriation and redefinition of one's self, actions and one's own context, re-interpreting and re-weaving one's own story, self-consciousness as a subject that learns, (re)discovery of one's own learning style, refinements of one's skills as an aware learner, the achievement of new learning mode.

Using the narrative experience, it is possible to help learners gain an idea of themselves as a subjectivity that can decide, choose, and act. For this reason, a valid activity of empowerment is outlined, favouring the gaining of agentivity and self-directionality.

Thinking in particular of the work experience, what is in question is the ability to promote in subjects the design of a professional self, starting from their life story, in order to emphasize the most significant elements, to help them recover and express the personal dimension of their formative experiences, to prompt a critical dialogue with the motivational situations and decision-making processes encountered, to think about the problems tackled on a daily basis, to display their theoretical and practical knowledge, to learn, with the goal of self-transformation, from their personal biography, as well as facilitating the identification of a professional act deemed promising and significant, and therefore the solicitor of professional guidelines and plans so as to provide a greater capacity for an intelligent and autonomous location within the working processes.

Of note is the close connection between professional development and the attribution of meaning to the formative or professional conduct and experiences, as well as the related maturation of the concept of the formative and professional selves. It is important to accompany subjects to define not only their professional interests but also their goals (remuneration, autonomy, responsibility, relational quality, recognition, pride, self-esteem and self-confidence, learning, and professional development) that they seek to achieve by means of their work, and the importance that this plays in their life.

In question is the opportunity to help them gain guidance skills (self-planning, awareness of their own resources, decision-making practices, self-assessment) capable of sustaining the quality and efficacy of personal actions geared to check and direct noteworthy events characterizing the development of their careers.

There may be a feeling of impossibility both to understand human conduct ignoring their intentions, and to understand these, ignoring the contexts in which they have meaning. We find it essential to emphasize the need for the formative experience to help people reflect on the singularity of their character and knowledge, to develop a realistic idea of themselves, an appropriate vision of personal potential, inclinations and basic skills, whether technical-professional or transverse (professional in-

terests, beliefs of effectiveness, professional styles, motivation to work, professional values), without failing to observe that knowledge of employment possibilities, professionalizing activities, the gaining of skills and technical-specialist capacities alone cannot bring completeness to professional identity.

3. Skills assessment, guidance technology

In this regard, we should learn to appreciate skills assessment, thinking especially of its contribution not so much in identifying the degree of mastery of one's skills based on abstract taxonomies, nor so much in terms of roles, but as recognition of real work and therefore of located knowledge, knowledge in action, local and contingent knowhow, concrete action abilities, personal capacity expressed and acted out 'locally', in contexts of organized action, of the possibility of responding successfully to a typical question, therefore far from idealized and generic models of theory and practice in the workplace.

The application of skills assessment seems particularly proper and effective in those professional places characterized by dynamic variables and subject to multiple and continuous changes that determine a demand for new goals and new skills, different tasks and roles, different professionalism and responsibilities, of intuitive interiorized and refined capacities in virtue of which to deal creatively and effectively with problematic situations.

Through recourse to skills assessment, at stake is the aid offered to organizational subjects to become (re)builders of their own employment history (choice, initial work, training, vocational development) and interpreters of a professional assessment, and therefore to examine and valorize their potential and personal psychosocial resources (representations, aptitudes, values, interests and motivations related to work) and professional ones; to recognize and verify the knowledge and knowhow acquired, their experiences and unspoken aspirations, the intelligence and skills built inside the workplace (in different working situations), the learning-by-doing gained, and to facilitate the identification of the most suitable training for personal needs, to draw up a project for professional development and manage a repositioning as regards work, employment transition, mobility and re-insertion into the job market, along with any ongoing adjustment and occupational redesign.

By means of a re-enactment of the experiential, subjects can be made aware of their potential, can acquire a reflexive gaze at themselves and the way in which they have organized and structured their personal experiences, and can think in terms of skills and therefore think of themselves as a subject-in-a-situation, can re-describe themselves placing themselves

within specific binding places, can reflect on what they are able to do, even in terms of applicability in the world of work, on what should be improved in relation to the demands of the world of work, as well as on what they could do to more easily enter or re-enter the job market through greater responsibility with respect to their future work, and thus catch a glimpse of the brand new, the not-given, the not-yet, resources and personal riches that have remained unknown, unexplored, and unused.

At stake is the aid offered for the reconstruction and analysis of personal, educational, and vocational history, of recognition, of the ownership and integration of the abilities and skills acquired, identifying strengths and areas of increase in personal skills, evaluation of the applicability and transferability of the skills possessed to other working environments, other geographical locations, and professional roles. In this sense, it may be considered formatively significant to accompany subjects in gaining the ability to update, enhance, and modify their skills, boosting basic ones as well as expressing their critical capacity to operatively translate them, both in specific learning environments and in an instrumental way.

Favouring the methodological path of self-exploration and self-assessment rather than that of diagnosis and self-assessment, skills assessment is not to be seen solely as a repertoire of technical skills acquired by subjects during their educational and professional life, but also as an instrument to allow the investigation, deconstructing and rebuilding of some of the components of their subjective identity, together with the reconstruction of that set of skills and resources of different kinds which enable them to manage their own tasks at a given moment of professional development and organizational life.

Far from identifying it as a diagnostic or evaluative instrument, or as a mode for selecting personnel, we can look at skills assessment as a formative experience that allows people to redefine their own patterns of thought and action, and therefore as an experience that can bring substantial lifeblood to the planning self, to facilitate a disposition to reflective planning, and therefore to contribute to the maturation of self-reliance and an ability to take charge of their own future by measuring themselves against the world of work and educational opportunities.

In this sense, it seems legitimate to argue that the skills assessment, not stopping at the present and looking to the future, is configured as a training instrument characterized not so much by 'measuring' tasks as 'predictive' ones, featuring not only an 'overall' significance but also a 'preventive' one, therefore able to make subjects aware not only of their being and doing, of their knowledge/knowing how to be/knowing how to do, but also of their being able to be/being able to do/being able to become, not only of their 'abstract' knowledge and abilities, but also of concrete knowledge and abilities and therefore, professionally speaking, their 'specifications'.

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