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Counseling: The Dialogical Art of Awakening the Autobiographical Subject¹

In the interactive processes of counseling and professional education, biographical approaches using narratives open paths to the consolidation of three epistemological presuppositions. One of them is an ethical presupposition holding that the act of narrating one's own experience provides the narrator with the benefit of potentializing their understanding of the historicity of their life. Another is an epistemic-political presupposition defending the legitimacy of subjective words in scientific discourse. The third one is an autopoietic presupposition stating that narrating and accompanying narratives of life experience potentialize possibilities of reinvention, joint transcription among peers, and between the educator and trainee. The objective of this article is to present how these three presuppositions operate in biographic mediation peer groups with the support of reflexive listening frameworks, during counseling interventions focused on designing life projects for high-school students. Based on the notion of narrative reflexivity, we discuss biographization, autobiographization, and heterobiographization as processes which put the three dimensions of subjectivity into play – the empirical subject or the subject of experience (existential), the epistemic subject (abstract, rational), and the autobiographical subject (a being possessing language) – throughout the production and reception of narratives of life experience as devices of dialogical action-education-research.

Keywords: counseling, narrative reflexivity, autobiographical subject, action-education-research.

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Introduction

“For the world is not humane just because it is made by human beings, [...] We humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be human.” Hannah Arendt²

In what has been termed *la société biographique* (*the biographical society*) (Astier & Duvoux, 2006), people are increasingly encouraged to talk about themselves and speak out in ever more complex spaces – to articulate who they are and what they have learned through their (existential, work-related, intellectual, and other) experiences. Expressions such as “to have an experience,” “to make an experience,” and “to project oneself in new experiences” underlie access to a distinctive place in the world of work, which allows individuals to belong to it and, in the best-case scenario, to grow within it. However, in order for this to happen, one must know how to transform life experience into discourse, which may be mediated through letters of intention, interviews, curriculums vitae, and life projects. This requires time – talking time, writing time, and time to learn to speak and to narrate. Given this, counseling practices that are anchored in narrative reflexivity seek to provide favorable conditions for responsibly reflecting on one’s present and past experiences and transforming them into discourse.

If we take Hanna Arendt’s insight in the epigram to be on the mark, we can ask how much we humanize what we experience in the world and in ourselves when we transform this experience into discourse. Another pertinent question is how we become humane in this act. These are deeply controversial issues regarding subjectivity in the fluid stage of late modernity (Bauman, 2004), because while the socializing institutions (school, family, religion, work, and media) tend to restrain freedoms in order to contain them, they at the same time tend to withdraw into absence, prompting all individuals to personalize and subjectify their journey. Thus, we can ask: Which openings give visibility to what one is without putting the self at risk? What type of learning makes us more humane?

Our argument is underpinned by a range of biographical approaches, including *Biographieforschung* from the German tradition; *biographical research*, developed in England; *investigación biográfico-narrativa*, as known in Spain and Spanish-speaking Latin American countries; *recherche biographique*, practiced in France; *narrative inquiry*, applied in Canada; and *pesquisa (auto)biográfica*, adopted in Brazil (Passeggi, 2020). Biographical approaches in education open pathways to the consolidation of three epistemological presuppositions that govern the use of narratives of experience as a device for human learning in the process of counseling.

One of these presuppositions is an *ethical* presupposition, in the sense that any act of narrating professional, personal, and existential experiences mainly serves

² 2 Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1968), p. 24.

the narrator to potentialize possibilities of becoming aware of their historicity or increase their historical awareness. Another is an *epistemic-political* presupposition, in the sense of recognizing the relevance of subjective articulations to advancing knowledge in scientific discourse. Finally, a *dialogical* and *autopoietic* presupposition is bound up with the idea that interactions between peers and with the counselor-educator are not so much a technical procedure with rules and norms to be followed, as rather a dialogical art of shared experience, anchored in the human disposition to symbolically and historically construct versions of the self and others, from what one has learned and from one's actions in the world, whether through conforming to or resisting instituted and instituting discourses. Insofar as people agree to transform their experience into an object of discourse, they reinvent themselves as historical beings.

These presuppositions are supported by the fact that, in counseling sessions, they are presented in face-to-face interactions with people (children, the youth, and adults) who have experienced successes and, inevitably, failures. As outlined by Boutinet and Dominicé (2009, pp. 12-13), the dilemma pitting the maturity-based model of adulthood against the concept of adulthood as a permanently unfinished state, was replaced in late modernity by the model of "plural adulthood," which seeks unity and coherence, while recognizing its (im)maturity and/or its (un)finished state. It is no coincidence that the production and reception of narratives about the self, a technique applied in an array of counseling interventions, became a pedagogical education device in the early 1980s. In this paper, our interest is in youth-narrators, and we focus on how the aporias of life, its uncertainties, urgencies, and inflections can be confronted and how subjects can forge ahead, seeking inner coherence, encountering themselves, and facing up to their convictions, whether as a signpost or as utopia, and even as an "injunction to live with dignity" (Astier & Duvoux, 2006) in a biographical society.

The question that drives our reflections is: *What is the potential of the processes of autobiographization and of heterobiographization in counseling interventions for youth-narrators in the development of their life projects, in terms of the ethical, epistemic-political, autopoietic and dialogical presuppositions?* To explore this question and discuss the results of the research we have developed with high-school students in Brazil, we adopt an epistemological and theoretical-conceptual framework based on biographical approaches (Delory-Momberger, 2019). Our focus is on the interactive process in biographical mediation peer groups and in the reflexive listening framework (Passeggi, 2011, 2016, 2020; Passeggi; Cunha, 2020).

Our argument in this paper is divided into three parts. We begin by examining theoretical-conceptual issues that guide reflection on lived experience and narrated experience (Larrosa, 2002; Jay, 2009; Gadamer, 1979), highlighting the use of narratives as dialogical action-education-research (Pineau, 2005; Dominicé, 2000; Josso, 2010; Passeggi, 2016). Subsequently, we present peer group counseling interventions and the importance of the listening framework in finding out about

autobiographization, *biographization*, and *heterobiographization*, in the mutual peer counseling sessions. Based on the notion of narrative reflexivity, we discuss how these processes activate three dimensions of subjectivity – the empirical or experiential (existential) subject, the epistemic (abstract, rational) subject, and the autobiographical subject (a being that possesses language) – through the production and reception of life experience narratives as dialogical action-education-research, with the focus on the recognition of the discourse of youth-narrator-authors, which moves between lived and narrated experience in the life projects they propose.

To narrate is human, to speak is necessary!

“No longer in a merely physical universe, man lives in a symbolic universe. Language, myth, art, and religion are parts of this universe.” Ernst Cassirer³

Human beings are known to learn to narrate about themselves, about others, and about the world from their earliest childhood on. If narrating is a human action whose origin goes back to time immemorial, seizing speech in order to be included in a certain universe of discourse is, above all, a civilizing adventure. It is so, firstly, because there are innumerable discourses – from everyday and personal (with relatives, colloquial, gregarious, etc.) to the most hermeneutic and universal (mythical, biblical, legal, scientific, political, media, etc.) – that feature narratives of the self, the other, and the world; and, secondly, because the legitimacy of the narrator’s word entails the right or responsibility of speaking and then of being legitimately included into a discourse. It is in this sense that this adventure is a civilizing and, consequently, political act. It is through the seizing of speech that people make their voices resound in these discourses, and subjects are constituted and acquire a place in the polity. As Cassirer suggests, humans do not confront immediate “reality,” but rather symbolic representations woven from the tangled threads of language in the narratives they hear and themselves produce. If narrating is human, speaking is necessary!

One of the central concerns of bibliographical approaches is to understand the human being as an interpretive being, prone to fashioning provisional versions of what happens and of themselves. In the 1980s, the practice of life stories in adult education (Pineau, 2006) and educational biographies (Dominicé, 2000) emerged as a device for action-education-research, coinciding with the “discovery” of the narrative by the human and social sciences. Since then, as Brockmeier and Harré (2001, p. 40) recount, narrative has become “a fundamental linguistic, psychological, cultural, and philosophical framework for our attempts to come to terms with

³ Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1962), p. 43.

the nature and conditions of our existence.”⁴ Starting in the 1990s, practices involving narrative experiences were incorporated into initial and continuing teacher training in Brazil, taking inspiration from life stories studies (Nóvoa & Finger, 1988/2010) and accompanying Schön’s (1990) seminal works on the “reflexive professional” (Passeggi & Souza, 2017). In 2017, the latest Law on national guidelines for education in Brazil introduced the “life project” as the “backbone” of the implementation of newly reformed high-school education.

Larrosa (2002) defines *experience* as that which occurs in the world of life and in our inner world. It is worth remembering, as Jay (2009) insists, that the common root – *per* – which is found in *expereri* (*experimar* [experiment or try]) and in *periculum* (*perigo* [danger]) produces an associative link between “experience” and “danger.” The *ex-* in *experiential* means “getting out of” “*perigo*” (danger) or of a provocation. For its part, *narrative reflexivity* speaks to the human capacity of understanding, judging, and evaluating what occurs, what could have occurred, or what is going to occur, both in the outer world and in our inner world. Without this examination, experience is lost. German has two terms which make it possible to differentiate between two moments of experience with greater precision. Specifically, *Erlebnis* refers to active experience, immediate experience, or pre-reflective experience, in other words, to lived experience; and *Erfahrung* integrates lived experiences in one narrative, or rather transforms lived experience into narrated experience, such that “to have experience” means to have lived and survived dangerous situations and learned from them.

Bruner (2014) claims that narrative reflexivity is developed from the earliest childhood on and in all circumstances of life. It is only interrupted when the subject loses the possibility of narrating lived experience. It would be, therefore, almost tautological to state that all *learning is autobiographical*, since thinking beings learn *with* the stories, they tell about themselves (*autobiographization*), *with* the stories that they, or anyone else, tell about another person (*biographization*), and *with* the stories told by the other (*heterobiographization*). According to Delory-Momberger (2019, p. 89), the term *heterobiographization* was coined “to account for the processes that are carried out in listening to and reading biographical texts and the effects of comprehension and education that occur through them.” Thus, humans are educated both through the production and reception of *autobiographical* and *biographical* texts, and through the reception of (listening to or reading) others’ experiences in *heterobiographical* processes. They deal with a set of potent notions which emerge from the biographical paradigm and are relevant to the investigation of counseling and educational processes. The narratives that we tell or hear open up universes in which we engage with attitudes of empathy, adhesion, or resistance

⁴ Jens Brockmeier and Rom Harré, “Narrative Problems and Promises of an Alternative Paradigm,” in *Narrative and Identity Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture. Volume 1*, edited by Jens Brockmeier and Donal Carbaugh (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001), p. 40.

throughout our lives. It is through these narratives that the myths and rites of socializing institutions (family, school, church, associations, media, etc.) are created, imposed, and perpetuated, or die, along with representations of the self, the other, and the culture of a group or the globe.

In short, it is through *narrative reflexivity* that humans are granted a possibility of reinventing themselves as objects of reflection and as reflexive beings, as viewers and the viewed, as thinkers and objects thought about. This interrelatedness of the interpretations of the self and the rewriting of the being mediated by natural, graphic, gestural, or mediatic language(s) confers a unique mode of existence on humans, marked by the capacity to turn toward oneself “as another” (Ricœur, 1990). The links between experience and memory make it possible to talk about *autobiographical memory*, understood here as the human disposition to preserve words, gestures, sounds, flavors, smells, etc., which form archives of projected and lived experience, dreams, and impressions, and induce the belief that the accumulated, interpreted, and examined experience constitutes the *biographical capital* of the individual (Delory-Momberger, 2011, p. 343). This repository of remembrances, impressions, and likes-dislikes, which is accessed, deliberately or inadvertently, by means of the human capacity to narratively reflect and make sense of what is told, described, and explicated and, available for use, tends to enrich life in an “endless spiral” (Ricœur, 1983, p. 138). As such, experience teaches us to respect the distance between immediate existence and the interpretative, hermeneutic capacity of humans.

In the literature, the notion of *the practice of intervention* based on life narratives demands a process of education⁵-research or education-action-research (Dominicé, 2000; Pineau, 2005; Josso, 2010; Passeggi, 2016, 2020). This venture symbolically relinks what has been observed in scholarship and, independently, signaled in education as the shift from an atemporal and non-biographical paradigm to a reflexive biographical paradigm. It is from this perspective that counseling research has been developed (Paul, 2004; 2016; Pineau, 2002; Josso, 2010; Passeggi, 2011, 2016) in which narrative reflexivity is promoted to the central place in consciousness to foster autonomy and emancipation. It is fitting for educational research to make the capacity for reflection, which emerges in childhood and is a “human feature,” its object of study and to address its implications in pondering human and social development.

Action-education-research involves the exploration of historical consciousness as a study of critical questioning of the self and perceptions of the world (*research*) in order to go beyond naïve understandings of “reality,” transcend the representations that circulate as unchangeable “truths” (*education*), and, finally, seize speech to transform experience through discourse (*action*). As Gadamer (1979, p. 109) points out, historical consciousness as a current human characteristic is perhaps “a privilege, perhaps even a burden, the like of which has never been imposed on

⁵ In this context, education to an extent means training as well (TN).

any other previous generation.” Consequently, the reflexive imperative in a biographical society, whose aim is to live with dignity, opposes the alienating processes of depersonalization and unaccountability. In other words, remembering the teachings of Freire (1980), it is necessary to go through *consciousness-raising*, which is premised on the mental process of *making consciousness*, demanding conscious effort in real life. Thus, completing this as an act of education requires concretization in the act of enunciation and in interactive situations. For this reason, narratives can be regarded as *performative* acts – in the sense that “to say is to do” – that is, as actions in the world (Austin, 1990), whether worthwhile or not, but with texts that have never before existed.

Counseling methodology: Peer group biographical mediation and reflexive listening frameworks

“Intellectual growth involves an increasing capacity to say to oneself and others, by means of words or symbols, what one has done or what one will do.” Jerome J. Bruner⁶

According to Solar (2001), the literature predominantly concerns adult education as carried out mainly in group settings. Several studies have addressed the interpersonal dynamics of these initiatives; however, only few investigate how these learning processes are accomplished in a world where the complexity of knowledge and inexhaustible sources of information require studies in interdisciplinary, multiethnic, and plurilingual teams. It does not come as a surprise that expressions such as “cooperative learning,” “collective intelligence,” and “collective competence” are developed in the sphere of education. It is along these lines that we make the case for *biographical peer group mediation*.

To define biographical peer group mediation, we rely on the stipulations of the Charter of the International Association of Life Stories in Education (ASIHVIF),⁷ which was drawn up and adopted in the 1990s. The Charter states: “The perspective that guides, mediates and supports the practices of life narratives is one of the personal and social emancipation of the subject. What is understood as emancipation is the action that institutes the relationship of equality in place of the relationship of de-subjectification.” According to the Charter, in *intervention practices*, or counseling, “life narratives enable subjects, based on the explicitness of their life trajectories, to make use of the necessary means of *raising reflexive and critical consciousness*, with a view to positioning them as social actors in the project of a more pertinent and rational action.” From this perspective, *education logic* defies a *logic*

⁶ Jerome Bruner, *Toward a Theory of Instruction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 6.

⁷ The ASIHVIF charter is available at: www.asihvif.com

that relies on “submission” to institutional practices (scholastic, family, professional, etc.), which is purportedly required for the “common good,” but which can distort possibilities of individual choice. It is from this perspective that the concept of *historical consciousness* makes total sense. For Gadamer (2004, p. 228), “historical consciousness is not the immediate expression of a living reality [...] Rather, it adopts a reflective posture toward both itself and the tradition in which it is situated. It understands itself in terms of its own history. *Historical consciousness is a mode of self-knowledge*” (emphasis mine).

Given this, the *reflexive listening framework* (Passeggi & Cunha, 2020) was conceived with the objective of grasping the processes of *heterobiographization*. The tool comprises four columns to be filled in when peers listen to each other’s narratives. The first column contains names, or pseudonyms, of those reading their narratives, and the other three are designed for answers to the following questions: “What captured my attention in your experiences?”; “Which of them are similar to or different from mine?”; “What changes did they trigger in my interpretations of my life, my projects, others and myself?” These frameworks initiate a deeper dialogue among the participants and introduce mutual service interactions among peers. For each of the themes addressed, including scholastic education, university education, daily life, and life projects, a new framework is filled in. At the end of the procedure, most participants recognize the benefits of sensitive and reflexive listening in changing their attitudes. In institutional settings, peer groups provide autobiographization, first-person narratives (I), biographization, and third-person writings (he or she), which is largely prompted and monitored by the researcher-educator. The procedure is capped with heterobiographization processes, which, with the listening frameworks, generate new narratives that account for learning with the other.

Biographing lived experience and projecting oneself into tomorrow: Autobiographical subject transcreation

In our recent studies with adolescents’ life projects (Passeggi & Cunha, 2020), our interest has reached beyond first-person narratives, toward heterobiographization, which Delory-Momber (2019) defines as the human capacity to (re)interpret one’s own experiences on hearing the experience of the other. The aim of the research was to invite biographical mediation peer groups, made up of six male and female students of a federal institute of learning, aged between 17 and 19. All those who accepted the challenge to participate in the study were of African descent and beneficiaries of affirmative action policies. They called their group “The Divergents” and chose as their pseudonyms the names of characters in the *Divergent* movie series by Neil Burger and Robert Schwentke (2014, 2015, 2016), feeling themselves “strange” among their other classmates. To summarize our findings concerning

heterobiographization, we selected one of the listening frameworks of a young narrator who appeared a good representative of the group. On this basis, we discuss the three dimensions of subjectivity that emerge from our analysis.

The answers provided in the three columns show that, having listened to her peers, the young narrator perceives, in the act of biographization and through narrative reflexivity, that she has learned with them in heterobiographical processes. For her, it was an awakening to the need to “reorganize her life” “now” and to appreciate what she calls “informal life.” It is important to observe that she appears to perceive an institutional effort, clearly centered on her formal education, certification, and preparation for the world of work. What stands out in her framework is that listening to others prompts her to “urgently” make an effort to improve her “capacity to have dreams in her life,” “to take better care of her parents,” “satisfy her desire to see a soccer match,” and to value the people that inspire her in her life – issues that have been “made inviable” by the educating institution, which takes away this other side of the self, of the empirical, existential, bodily subject, characterized by emotions. For example, she views the inclusion of marriage in the life projects of her peers as “shots in the dark.” Three of them do not want to “start a family,” as they prefer “living the single life,” “living alone,” and “having flexible relationships.” The single-parent model, which is a dominant one today, apparently frightens her. The search for a logical coherence in her horizons of expectations points to another dimension of subjectivity, specifically, the rational epistemic subject guided by a certain logic in her search for coherence. In short, for these adolescent narrator-authors, the future is “here” and “now.” Though provisional, this understanding arises from a possibility to weave ties between reason and emotion in the move to narrate their stories. It is an effort that results in the third dimension of subjectivity, that is, the autobiographical subject, which is made of language, is born with language, lives in language, and constructs itself, permanently, with language. The youth understand that they are laying the ground for missing out on things by procrastination with regard to tasks in their lives, and that these should be fulfilled “urgently.”

Temporality becomes an apparent issue, as it impedes or encourages narrative reflexivity with regard to experience lived and experience narrated. Adults, teacher-educators are not always conscious of the difference between their own perception of time and that of the youth. When the young participants were asked to develop a life project for the following ten years, their first reaction was that such a long project seemed impractical to them: “It’s impossible for me to imagine a 10-year project. I’m only 17 years old, 10 years is more than half of my life.” In their narratives, as well as in their listening frameworks, it is clear that the young participants in the group live in unfavorable social conditions, which can be the reason why they highlight feelings characterized by the “urgency of life.” In this sense, the implementation of any educational policy, as Pais (2005, p. 64) suggests, must be rooted in the reality in which people live, linked to “well founded policies,” and

grounded in theories which capture the objective, the subjective, the trajectories, and the life projects of those for whom it is devised. Thus, the operationalization of the life project, which is traditionally geared toward “the years ahead,” is opposed to the immediacy of their reflections, which focus on the direct, on the vital consciousness of “urgency” and on the “transitory” nature of life. The use of the reflexive listening framework, which elicits heterobiographization processes, has proven methodologically relevant to counseling work with adolescent narrator-authors and shown the importance of mutual support in the awakening of the consciousness of their historicity. What is supposed is that the heavy burden of survival in situations of social inequality makes them live with their gaze fixed on tomorrow and does not allow the young “divergents” to stray to the immediacy of the present.

According to Delory-Momberger (2014, p. 331), Schulze considers biographization on three levels: biography as *lived reality* (*bios*), biography as *text* (*graphics*), and biography as *self-educational process* (*auto*). He presents the notion of the *biographical subject* as constituted at the intersection of “biography as life and biography as text.” I propose that the three dimensions of subjectivity are highlighted on these three respective levels each. In biography as life (*bios*), there is the *experiencing subject*, or the empirical subject (in flesh and blood); in biography as education, there is the *epistemic subject* (knowing, rational, universal); and in biography as text (*graphics*), there is the *autobiographical subject* (self-knowledgeable, singular), which is constituted in the act of narrating and in a direct relationship with the epistemic subject and the experiencing subject.

We know that much has been written about the epistemic subject, and there are increasing attempts to discuss the empirical subject; however, our objective is to present the autobiographical subject, precisely because its entry into the world of academia is a timid one. What I would like to emphasize, in the first place, is that inseparable entities which are made manifest through the language of the autobiographical subject are being dealt with here, and that narrative reflexivity makes it possible to reunite the epistemic subject and the empirical subject, which modern science has separated. The metaphysical, non-biographical paradigm separates reason from emotion and the body from the intellect, while the biographical paradigm integrates the narrating subject, the enunciation, the interlocution, the temporality, and the existentiality of the narrator, and articulates their here and now.

For Souza Santos (2002, p. 81), “modern science has consecrated man as an epistemic subject but expelled him as an empirical subject.” This rift brought about the universalization of the rational subject, to the detriment of the empirical subject, the concrete, flesh-and-blood one; and the privileging of the rational subject through scientific preconceptions delegitimized the speech of children, women, people of color, the poor, etc., because of the “linearity” of their thought and the “insufficiency” of their means of expression, perceived as emotional rather than reason-based. It is my understanding, however, that these three instantiations are inseparable: the subject of experience (the empirical subject) acts and suffers in the

experiential world, including the very experience biographed from the logic or coherence of its actions. The autobiographical subject transforms this experience into self-knowledge in a narrative that promotes action and interaction in the world, with others and oneself. What results from this philosophical exercise involving the three dimensions of incarnated subjectivity is that, through the processes of *autobiographization*, *biographization* and *heterobiographization*, the autobiographical subject brings together the epistemic subject and the experience, by prioritizing one of the three dimensions at different times in an oscillating manner. Thus, through the use of oral, written, digital, gestural, iconic, and mediatic language, the autobiographical subject transforms into narrative, poetry, history, treatise, etc., becoming more poetic or more rational, with varying degrees of formality. Its essence is then not life (bios) but the narrative (graphic) in which and through which it becomes another self (reinvented, transgressed, trans-created): “I am not worse, or better. For now, I am historically who I propose myself to be, living in dignity.”

I do not invent what has already been historically asserted in the Western world. “Know thyself and you will know the gods and the universe!” This pronouncement of the Delphic Oracle merges the *subject of autobiographical experience* (of self-knowledge in “Know thyself!”) and the *subject of epistemic experience* (of knowledge). Thus, on recognizing one’s own humanity, one recognizes who one is and achieves the capacity to know the gods (in the form of power expressed in the norms, laws, and beliefs that direct one’s life) and everything that surrounds one (the material and immaterial universe). However, in order to exist, one must narrate and speak. Language produces the *subject of empirical experience* (flesh and blood), whose singularity rests on the temporality of its existence, which stretches from its birth to its death. In this interval, it acts and suffers the impact of biological, cultural, and historical laws, continually recomposing itself and self-(trans)forming in the (re)interpretive processes of autobiographical, biographical, and heterobiographical mediation.

Conclusion: Promises and uncertainties

“The subject is not the consciousness of the Ego, and still less is it the recognition of the social Self. On the contrary, it means freedom from this image of the individual created by the roles, norms and values of the social order. The individual is released from that image through a struggle for the freedom of the subject.” Alain Touraine⁸

Throughout my argument, I have argued for the legitimacy of biographization, autobiographization, and heterobiographization, carried out among peers in counseling, as well as for the three dimensions of subjectivity, regarding adhesion or

⁸ Alain Touraine, *Critique of Modernity*, trans. David Macey (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995), p. 292.

resistance to discourses entrenched in everyday life. Despite the complexity and multiplicity of the issues involved in the construction of educational structures, it is important to be mindful of the thorny issue: opting for the abstract, for generalization, for addressing human development, and studying its circumstances. The underlying proposal is to look into the difficult question of what can help us bring subjectivity into educational sciences. I agree that an individualist, intimist concept of the subject can be reductionist and that may justify focusing on the objective. Still, from the viewpoint of research, I agree with Ferrarotti (2005, p. 59), who states that “the *subjectivity* inherent in any autobiographical account or document [...] escapes a hermeneutics of biography which only uses its objective aspects.” It is in favor of this immanent subjectivity that we discuss these reflections here.

We can conclude that research on subjectivity in autobiographical approaches is carried out along four major axes (Passeggi, 2010). The first axis concerns first-person narratives as *anthropological phenomena*: “Narrating is human.” Such research intends to answer the following question: *How does every human being become who they are?* The second axis uses the narratives as a *method of qualitative investigation*, probing into social practices and actions to find out how individuals make sense of their actions in the world, which urges: “Listen in order to understand!” It answers the following question: *How can autobiographical sources be collected and analyzed, and what do we do with them?* The third axis makes use of these narratives as devices for action-education-research, validating the legitimacy of knowledge (re)developed by a person who self-(trans)forms through narrative reflexivity. It answers the question: *How does the narrator self-(trans)form by narrating?* Finally, the fourth axis pertains to the discursive nature and diversity of self-writing. Here, studies delve into languages in which humans lend themselves to reading as texts produced in natural languages (Portuguese, French, Tupi, Yoruba, Mandarin, etc.) and in other semiotic media: photobiography, videobiography, autobiographicalism, ludobiography etc., as ways of narrating. This axis answers the question: *How do people understand and let themselves read narratives with different semiotic support?* The fourth axis conveys the idea that “Narrating is necessary,” and “Narrating is political.”

In principle, no paradigm is superior or inferior to any previous one, though it may just temporarily offer a better answer than the possibilities that have been exhausted by prior answers. The awareness of the relativity and fluidity of time, experience, and knowledge stems from the good use of narrative reflexivity and nurtures the critical capacity for achieving historical consciousness, which can be seen as positive and as a human privilege in contemporary society. When discussing the direct relationship between time and narrative, Ricœur (1983) proposes a “hermeneutics of historical consciousness” and locates it between the permanence of the past in the present and the horizon of expectation, concerned about the task, including fear and hope. These are the promises of critical and reflexive

autobiographical work and the challenges of the epistemological gamble on the auto-biographical-narrative paradigm.

In education, the diversity of the disciplines, the multiplicity of methods, and the confluence of theories call for an alliance of paradigms, the way they coexist with quantitative and qualitative research, in order to answer questions regarding human beings, organizations, and governmental policies. A considerable part of this construction erected for the younger population has been founded on the norms for their age groups, developmental stages, and models of transmission of scholastic content (technical teaching, professional education, university education) with the aim of preparing them for life and, above all, for engagement in the work force. Dominic's research (2010, p. 200), has shown that "the majority of pedagogical questions examined tended to be organizational rather than theoretical, and that the application of pedagogical models often not only disregarded the contexts of intervention, but also ignored the people whom it targeted." The beliefs, standards, and propositions that guide the construction of the educational apparatus also have the power to imprison life, restrict life experience and curb its connections with the subjectivity of the living being eager to use the lessons of dissidences, successes, failures, fears, pressures, and conflicts.

To conclude, *narrative reflexivity*, which underlies the biographical paradigm in the human and social sciences, is one of the key concepts in research that draws on the various models of narratives of self, capable of accounting for the vitality of the subject and the subject's power to understand and interpret. As such, narrative reflexivity boasts a significant potential for the study of memory, learning processes, identity formation, and human education/development. In this sense, Arendt (1994, p. ix) states: "What is important for me is to understand. For me, writing is a matter of seeking this understanding, part of the process of understanding." As a result, *we do not pick up* a needle and thread to stitch our story; rather, *we become the needle and thread and the stitching* that we embroider on the fabric of our lives.

It is very true that these heuristic and hermeneutic activities can provoke "the shakes," but the sentiments they convey are recognizable in familiar phrases: "Let bygones be bygones," "The future is uncertain," and "I prefer living in the moment." However, it is "Narrating is a necessity! Narrating is political" that enables us to let go of the present, to unveil the past, and to construct ourselves in the doing. These are the cornerstones of our biographical condition, where the human is conceived as an agent capable of transforming his/her lived experience into knowledge, of learning lessons that are requisite for living a good life, of perceiving good, enjoying beauty and recognizing what is just, of combining reason and emotion, life and lived experience, art and science.

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