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## **Narration of Self. Warnings for the Pedagogical - Use**

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# Narration of Self. Warnings for the Pedagogical - Use

*Giuseppe Annacontini\**

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*Abstract:* The contribution aims to discuss the pedagogical qualities necessary for the educational use of self-storytelling. In this way, it is necessary to start emphasizing the centrality - in the educational questions - of the relationship between world and self, not only on a conceptual level but also on a methodological way. This applies even more to narrative approaches and, in particular, to self-storytelling, whose quality is measured by the ability to act on the link between theory and practice, past-future, subject-context. If this quality were to fail, the narrative itself could easily end up in order to entrench dangerously alienating visions of the world. So, it is necessary to define the characteristics useful to make the narrative practice vector of an improvement in ones life, taking care, in particular, of the fragility of personal identity as well as collective one. The starting point is the recognition of the historical a-priori of contemporary pedagogy (as a primacy of “generative formativity”), related to which become more evident the risks of a techno-educational educational “drift” and the subjective qualities and skills to be promoted in a reflective and metacognitive key. From here a critical argumentative line is highlighted, aimed at promoting a use of self-narrative that safeguards its capacity to be able to make it an occasion for metacognitively careful and oriented reflexivity.

*Keywords:* critical pedagogy, narratives of self, reflexivity, metacognition

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If we call A all that an individual  
man is, owns and does, this A consists of  $a + x$ ,  
where  $a$  includes everything that comes from  
external circumstances [and] the infinitely small  $x$  is  
his own contribution, the work of his free  
will. For infinitely small that this is  $x$ ,  
it has infinite value.  
J. G. Droysen

### **Narration of the self between emancipation and instructional drift**

The most important and basic lesson that Dewey (remember the author *Logic: theory of investigation* (1973) and *Democracy and Education* (1949), only for the sake of brevity and because these two texts are believed to be the most relevant for an epistemological and political approach) has left as a legacy to the pedagogy of this glimpse of the beginning of the millennium consists in the socio-educational relevance which is the responsibility of all the matters of a pedagogical nature. Starting from this “simple” directive - on the track, we could say, of this principle - the paradigmatic change of the educational sciences and pedagogy has taken shape, introjecting the value that the empirical survey has in issues related to man’s formativity, its continuous form over time, widespread in the spaces of life and total dimensions involved.

This empirical implication works the system with the clarification of philosophical-educational reflection on the centrality of the relationship (the “transaction”) that is established between the subject and the context inhabited. The construction of this dynamic but inseparable nucleus of pedagogical reflection has assumed greater clarity and theoretical and practical evidence, to the point of becoming “principle” apt to describe the transcendental perspective of the formative starting from the thought carried forward in the context of critical rationalism that flows from Banfi into Bertin’s pedagogical problematicism, up to the Urbino school headed by Baldacci, carrying out research and approaches that, over time, have consolidated the role of the empirical-historical reference as an inexhaustible part of any consideration that wants to have formative relevance.

The ability not to disperse and to make functional - with respect to the criterion of effectiveness - the link with the world of facts, of history, of continuously becoming imposes itself as a characteristic that must be proper to the methodologies that are used with intention and formative repercussions. In this sense, for how much they can (and should) be supported by an indispensable theoretical matrix, the training solutions chosen from time to time

cannot be considered valid in themselves but they must demonstrate that they are able to act on the bond which, recursively, links theory and praxis, past and future, subject and world.

Starting from these considerations and from the assumption that the transactive self-world relationship is a narrative relationship, the narration of the self, in particular, has become one of the fundamental reference signs in educational and training planning, it must evidently be in possession of all the characteristics useful to define an active and transformative relationship within the reality in which it is placed.

All this starting from:

- the critical caliber of its reflexivity - thus linking theory and praxis through an analytic praxis that is accompanied by operative thinking that gives nothing to what can be predetermined by cultural, social, imaginal, interpretive frames, etc.;
- the ability to summarize past stories and traditional interpretative frameworks without for this reason enclosing an inert immobility but looking at the principles and values of the non-actual, the demonic, the utopian pedagogical - thus dialectizing past and future beyond any hegemonic temptation of the former on the second and opening to a complex field of ethical-normative considerations;
- the ability to develop an ecology of thought that transgresses the logic of ego- or hetero-centric separations in order to recognize and regroup the sense and the original meaning of inhabiting an in-being and a with-being of man and the world - recomposing, against a logic of disjunction, the reasons of the self with the reasons of the world and evolving, in this sense, a unitary perspective whose awareness is accompanied by the consideration of a quantity of variables whose effects are not determinable but not for this reason are not manageable.

If even one of these axes are not respected, we can seriously consider the risk that the use of the narratives of the self not only turns out to be pedagogically useless (because it would not lead to any gain in critical-pedagogical terms) but, on the contrary, it would result to be dangerous for teleological horizons of pedagogy that look to emancipation beyond socialization, to disalienation beyond education.

If the narration of the self does not prove capable of reconnecting past and future dimensions of human life; if it betrays the critical-reflexive intention of knowledge, imagination, planning, etc.; if it does not effectively articulate the dimensions of the ego and socius, then it can be considered with extreme difficulty among the practices included in the category of pedagogical instruments.

Narrative practices that are not able to give substance to, as Preti (1975) declares, a clear and evident will to transform reality, could easily end up having as their effect the deepest entrenchment of the world's visions dangerously oriented towards their dogmatization for the exclusive benefit of those who promoted and managed those specific representations. That is, we recognize in the narrative a pedagogical value to the extent that it knows how to adopt the characteristics that Gramsci had already described as "concrete action man for its needs historical opera and transforms reality" (Gramsci, 1975, p. 67). Therefore, narrative practice must be the bearer of an innovative, utopian - in a pedagogical way - unactual demand, placed in the history and the finite, having as its specific intent the improvement and the strategically oriented modification of the circumstances of educational action.

This outcome, it was said, is not obvious. In many ways the narrative is not used to explore the emerging margins of new frontiers of experiencing "in" and "regard" the world but because it can be used effectively to promote forms of subjugation to a heterodefinitive desiring vision in terms of that NNO (New Narrative Order), (Salmon, 2008, p. 169), which "presides over the formatting of desires and the propagation of emotions, by means of their narration, indexing and filing, dissemination and standardization, instrumentalization through all the modalities of control."

Here the risks of a technical use of a narrative of the instructive self-inhabit that very much deviate from the idea and the model of a formative and educational narrative.

Narrating oneself to recount according to a standardized protocol, without thinking of contexts and instruments that leave adequate space for the free exercise of the mediation of personal desires with social reality, becomes a threat that attests how - Ricoeur recalled (2005) - the fragility of personal identity, like the collective one, it had nothing illusory, being easy field of conquest by the ideologies of power and their manipulative action by means of symbolic mediations prepared and instructed ad hoc, among which even formally educational institutions can easily occupy a role first class.

The educational institutions are a mediator device which is responsible for the protection of an extremely critical and problematic area, halfway between the double instances of a heterocentric socialization and self-centered self-realization. Here the possibility of affirming or denying humanity (species-specific formativity that can potentially become generativity throughout life) of men and women (Fadda, 2016; Pinto & Gallelli, 2004; Cambi, 2006; Tobia, 2010; Duffy & Jonassen, 1992; Erikson 1950; 1987; Shön, 1979), thus being able to give meaning to the ethical and planning dictates of what today is generally recognized to be the historical a priori of formation, in terms of an enactive characteristic (that is, an enforced and full of world) (Maturana

& Varela, 1985; 1987) of the subject's mind, so that each of his products results from an action of emergence environment-organism-subjectivity-otherness-culture etc.

If the reference to this a-priori is firmly held, the perspective that opens (ie the primacy of generative formativity) will allow us to glimpse the real risks of a pedagogical (techno-instructive) "drift" whose outcome is the promotion of behaviors tendentially integrated and functional to the pressures of the constraints that prejudicially connote the social horizon of life and self-affirmation. Massa (1988; 1997) had identified the problem with great precision as early as the nineties of the last century, outlining the concerns for what Mattei (2016, p. 148) called "institutional drift" to realize "a tacit agreement on the techno-cognitivist configuration of materiality and of the pedagogical form [...] within an order of 'technical' consummation of the question of meaning, thus taking the path of efficient efficiency of the device and of the pedagogical structuring."

This process is neither linear or guaranteed in outcomes: as per today, the rhetoric and governance of a training in line with the absolute duty of production (of comments, of value, of alienation) has not been enough to bring down the primacy of service, responsibility, commitment, love for knowledge, research, connection, dialogue - both for teachers and for learners - (Annacontini, 2012; Baldacci, 2014). In our opinion, there is an undoubted intention based on the primary recognition of economic (neoliberal), psychological (narcissistic) and ideological (consumerist) values/factors that are more able to guide and manipulate a certain formation of today's man and woman.

In this sense, we would live within what Contini (2014) has called "sub-paradigm of efficiency" - within the broader one of "disjunction", so much opposed by Morin - of what we have elsewhere indicated as "Relevance" paradigm, referring to Eleau analysis of what other contemporary interpreters have identified in "short thought" and "response pedagogy" (Dato, 2015). In these paradigmatic spaces, the already mentioned (dis) values - not absolute, to the extent that we hold firmly to the reference to generative formativity - would commonly be imposed, unreflectively and implicitly.

### **The pedagogical relevance of narrative practice**

In our opinion the aforementioned implicit dimension, the space of the hegemonic strength of ideas and philosophies, is the true stake of pedagogical commitment, the battlefield - because this is what it actually is - on which and for which it is worth investing in commitment and narrativity. On it we practice systematic attention and implement specific forms of power that, using the shared categories of Fanon, are characterized by a twist that

leads to prefer to the action on embodied coercion, the action by imposition (in-writing) of political, social, cultural, ethical, moral interpretative orientations (both dogmatic or secular). This is a shift of objective in the practice of power (which from the body is transposed to the imaginary see also Bourdieu's concept of "symbolic violence"), to which correspond new goals definable no longer in terms of obedience but on the formation of "moral reflections".

The mediators are no longer the "gendarmes", the "cops", the "hit squads" between power and subject but the "moral professors, the advisors, the 'dis-orientators' who bring violence into homes and brains" (Fanon, 2007/08, p. 10).

It is common perception - as Zagrebelsky (2013, p. 51) says - that a decisive part of the struggle for man and woman's humanity is played, in a space where "ideas do not become part of the assets of life. They seem to tire, to be waste of time, a pointless digression: at best, something that the 'people of doing' can easily disregard [...], to think about as something boring, heavy, pedantic, superfluous!"

It is precisely in this place between - as Gramsci said - common sense and folklore that the pedagogical value of narrative practices is played as an opportunity to promote a formation that can deal with the central question of the specific disalienation of contemporaneity, that issue that from an ethical point of view and in its most recent evolutions, it has been effectively described by Bauman when he sought to represent the process of social conservation and reproduction, starting from the realization that the "secret of any lasting social system [...] lies in the transformation of 'functional prerequisites' in behavioral motivations for the actors. This can be done surreptitiously, through explicit or implicit imposition or by inculcating appropriate behavioral patterns, also by resorting to problem-solving models that, if they are followed (and they inevitably are, considering that the alternative choices and the skills necessary to practice them fall back and vanish), keep the system in place" (Bauman, 2010, p. 121).

The pedagogical relevance of the self narrative practice arises precisely from this kind of analysis: where there is the chance and intention to practice that particular declination of the formative action expressed in the term "inculcate" - proper term of the vocabulary of eminent voices of our politics -, there the narrative has more reason to be experienced. In this turmoil it is necessary to aim at maximizing the ability to autonomously train cognitive habitus (like Dewey) *formae mentis* (like Gardner) cognitive styles (such as Sternberg) etc. strategically oriented at learning to train faster and learn how to best use the species-specific cognitive flexibility. In the age of social metachange - the one where not only society changes but the changing ways of society itself change - we can outline (Beck, 2000; Bauman, 2002) - for

didactic purposes knowing well that in reality nuances are many and very important in describing how things really are in training contexts - two main trends:

- the first, which we could call “conservative”, opposes the increasingly rapid obsolescence/innovation forms of relationship, socialization, formalization of knowledge, the long-term creation of permanent mental habitus;
- the second, which we could call “progressist”, seeks to address this situation by focusing on the value of subjectivity, equipping it with thinking skills designed to face the continuous rise of new cognitive environments.

The idea of promoting practices of so-called third-level learning - a learning that does not focus mainly on the contents of knowledge, or on the development of mental habitus, but that thinks about the role that these two “level 1 and 2” formations play in order to “learn to get rid of their mental habitus quickly” and acquire new ones just as quickly - proceeds in this direction. It is no longer a matter of moving from a “well-furnished” head to a well-structured mental architecture, but rather to a mind [...] capable of assuming different forms and, therefore, intrinsically flexible [...]. Level 3 learning refers precisely to the process of replacing mental habitus, and [...] in the regime of continuous revolution generated by capitalist development, this process becomes constant, so that permanent level 3 learning becomes necessary” (Baldacci, 2014, pp. 18-19).

The development of these “meta” skills seems to be the best opportunity for the younger generations (future adults) not to end up being “raped in their homes and brains”, that is, they do not end up developing mental habitus for which the evaluation criterion of how much they will learn (and be) is given almost exclusively by the potential to reuse the training content for the sole use of employability (responding to the logic of “I’m going to find work ...”) and, in fact, of consumption (“... and have purchasing power”), especially if the latter is hidden and privatized, or even denied what was once its specific power, both ceremonial and institutional (Baudrillard, 1976).

### **Télos, skopós, éschaton and courage**

Taking “different forms of mind”, getting rid of violence “in homes and brains”, rewriting the “behavioral motivations” means being able to narrate and be able to narrate oneself, then mediate and go beyond the temporal perspectives (which are also existential and political-social) that, using the analysis of Natoli (2003), can be traced back to the télos and the skopós, trying to focus on the temporality involved in the éschaton. Therefore, it means going further:

- télos, because the self-narration, although apparently being a mostly self-reported practice, describing a self-winding movement, never really de-



scribes a simple return to a repeating past - the original meaning that belongs to the *télos* as temporal principle of the “repetition of the sky cycle” and the return of what is itself -. In the narration while there is a winding and unwinding that does not allow, there is no preservation of a form that is simply contextualised through further subjectivity in time but there must be - there must be - discovery, research, progress, overcoming of that eternal static, from which the concept - temporality - of *telos*;

-*skopós*, as it is not the primary goal of self-narration pedagogically understood chasing what in the next immediate promises a material improvement. Our idea of narration is not focused on the transformation and modification of the surrounding environment in relation to “already fixed” principles in the head of the narrating subject, because in this way we would end up reducing the narrative action to a “simple” intervention that seeks to modify the world around the subject, assuming that it can maintain the existential configuration of the latter (hypothesis incompatible with the current interpretations of the formative experience as a transactive and recursive self-world process).

It is necessary to go beyond these two dimensions, instead, if we want to realize the *éschaton*. If we wish, in other words, to envisage the overcoming and progress that can only be achieved to the extent that we pass the extremities of a “territorial boundary” to enter “into a new one”, unknown, to be explored and whose exploration will bring presumably to new representations and knowledge, new maps and geographies, new mentalities and cognitive clothes.

In this form of self narrative time-space “there is an absolute end, but this embodies a discontinuity, we move on to do something else” (Natoli, 2003, p. 19), without this meaning abandoning or diminishing everything that precedes the realization of the *éschaton*.

On the contrary, in order to understand and to deal with what “comes after”, it is necessary to be clear what “there is before” and the narrative manages to hold together these two temporal dimensions because it returns to valorize “what has been”.

Therefore, the past is valued not as an ideal time in which an authentic self was manifested to which to return and immutable beyond appearances (*télos*) and not even as if from this already given self, one had to evaluate and measure the value and the goodness of what constitutes the surrounding environment (*skopós*). The past of the *éschaton* is an important and fundamental dimension because it helps to sustain and offer resources for an inaugurated existential project that values what has been. It is a necessary temporality to be invincible - as interpretative subjects - in realizing the on-going narration of the self.

The narrative, in this sense, is pedagogically the experience of the continuous formation of man and woman, experience of the end of an identity that is an unavoidable resource (even if it is negatively experienced) starting from the new future planning, from access to what the individual is not (yet), from the perspective of a transformativity that promises generativity - and there is much Heidegger of "Being and time" in this ecstatic overthrow of temporalities -.

In the narrative event as a declension of the *éschaton*, a discontinuity is therefore proposed with respect to the linear interpretation that unites axially past and present, a break that, even if incomprehensible "for others" because beyond the current narrative, becomes the story of the transformation of a "maybe being" into a new way of "being present". In a way "that, in some transitions, men and women decide to bet on the possibility of placing themselves at the helm of their existence, supporting the discontent of the sea that they must cross, but confident of the feasibility of their needs or, would be the same thing, in the humanity of their human being" (Annacontini, 2011, p. 157) inhabiting a world, a society and a culture that, as Weber says, is "a finite section of the meaningless infinity of the becoming of the world, which is given sense and meaning from the point of view of man" (Weber, 1958, p. 96).

Self-narration, when practiced with pedagogical radicalness, is always an act without courage, it is never a conservative choice, it is always a bet and a just claim of possibility of being otherwise - in the Freirian sense (Freire, 2011; 2014). Thus, the values of personal, cultural and social expansion of the subject become the interpretative keys of the various fields of life.

Not only the practices of work and the sense of production, but also the space-times of play, friendship, family and love etc. are necessarily redefined starting from the new lenses that the narrating subject mounts in the moment in which he chooses to tell the story of himself in a future perspective, abandoning and deviating from the dangerous habit (pedagogically speaking) to think according to a logic whereby personal exceptionality - which does not maximize the success dreamed and pre-packaged by a public, unifying and all-encompassing mythology of neoliberal matrix - turns out to be bankrupt to the point that it pushes to "curve" its own interests into egoic direction, looking for caring ways for the frustrations experienced mostly by alternative (deviant?) or compensatory (artificial?) ways of gratification, substituting for the ideals of recognition of a social role, active and responsible or, at least, and more modestly, integrable or assimilable. And from here to necrophilia the road is not particularly long to follow (Laborit, 1994, p. 82).

These considerations tell us the most marginalizing outcomes of a self that renounces its own narration, which is instead contaminated by unre-

flected adherence to publicized and often publicly exalted values, but which can nevertheless be extraneous and end up being accepted by inertia.

The most important and obvious result remains the de facto renunciation of one's own natural politeness in favor of literally implosive socializing and communicative practices, where the overdose of communication is, and must be, as much as possible without a story (it is impressive in this regard the diffusion and the communicative production of platforms such as TikTok that, among other things, are placed on the same path marked by SMS, Tweet, Instagram or Facebook posts etc.). Moreover the real problems of asociality such as the emergence of youth currents such as emo or Hikikomori; the precociousness of drug/alcohol-related problems; the growing emergence of dysfunctional behaviours, sometimes up to violence (such as bullying, vandalism, discrimination, racism in the "real" and "cyber" versions) also, to the spreading of forms of heavy dispersion of minds resulting from the growing affirmation of monolingualism, monological thought, weak literacy, and relapse into illiteracy.

### **Narration of the self and metacognition. Principles for a critical evaluation**

There is an important responsibility in the use that educators and pedagogists can make of the narration of themselves, within any institution they operate. It can be the cause of differences, of potentials, of awareness, of intelligence as well as of identity, of worlds, of opportunities for the future. If the difference between these two outcomes is enormous in theory, it turns out to be extremely difficult to recognize in reference to practice. Since the eye of the pedagogist hardly reaches beyond what he has learned to recognize, it becomes of primary importance, before the methodological-didactic training of educators and pedagogists, to take care of a specific formation to take into account the main constituent dimensions, at present, the representation of how the reflexivity of man and woman works, so that they can recognize the use that is made of the narration of the self the potential discursive risks with respect to the purposes stated so far.

In order to protect subjective differences and potentials as presuppositions of generative formativity to which we have referred, the self-narration must have as its objective the recognition of personal belonging and the consequent "translation" of them in the common public organization. Self-narration requires inclusion and integration, but these, in turn, claim personal abilities and intelligence as a complex reflexive competence metacognitively felt.

There is a wide and articulated work on what are the skills and competences necessary to achieve these objectives and, in principle, the OECD

research remains as an important reference to date, starting from the identification of macro domains of the cognitive and metacognitive, social and emotional, physical and practical and values and behavioural skills which articulate the six main constructs, in turn defined through numerous skills.

The OECD proposal (2017), summarized in table 1, is presented in this way:

Table 1 – OECD proposal 2017

Student agency	Creating new value	Reconciling tensions and dilemmas	Taking responsibility	Anticipation-Action-Reflection competency development cycle	Values orientation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gratitude</li> <li>- Growth mind-set</li> <li>- Hope</li> <li>- Identity, Spiritual identity</li> <li>- Motivation</li> <li>- Purposefulness</li> <li>- Self-efficacy, positive self-orientation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Agility, Adaptability, Flexibility, Adjustment</li> <li>- Creativity, Creative thinking, Inventive thinking</li> <li>- Curiosity</li> <li>- Global mind-set</li> <li>- Manual Skills for ICT</li> <li>- Manual skills related to the Arts and Craft, Music, Physical Education needed for 2030</li> <li>- Open mind-set</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conflict resolution</li> <li>- Empathy</li> <li>- Engagement, Communication skills, Collaboration skills</li> <li>- Perspective taking and cognitive flexibility</li> <li>- Resilience, stress resistance</li> <li>- Trust (in self, others, institutions)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Critical thinking skills</li> <li>- Meta-learning skills</li> <li>- Mindfulness</li> <li>- Problem solving skills</li> <li>- Responsibility</li> <li>- Risk management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Compassion</li> <li>- Global mind-set</li> <li>- Goal orientation and completion</li> <li>- Pro-activeness</li> <li>- Reflective thinking, evaluating, monitoring</li> <li>- Self-awareness, self-regulation, self-control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Equality, Equity</li> <li>- Gratitude</li> <li>- Integrity</li> <li>- Justice</li> <li>- Respect</li> </ul>

The OECD's works remain useful for us as they offer a non-definitive framework of reference to rethink the characteristics of a narrative praxis that responds to pedagogical intentions.

We will take into consideration some of the OECD research items and, for purely exploratory and non-exhaustive purposes, we will try to make a pedagogical synthesis useful to indicate three main areas of reflective competence that can and must be involved and activated in self narrative practices. We will refer to the area:

- of the subject, with reference to the personal abilities to recognize and manage one's own thoughts, emotions and actions;
- of the relationship, with reference to the ability to recognize and manage others' thoughts, emotions and actions;
- of planning, linked to the ability to prefigure scenarios and possible identities and related action plans.

The choice to focus primarily on areas and not on domains is motivated by the fact that we find it more interesting and useful, from a pedagogical point of view, not to start from the prior consideration of the domains on which the practice can intervene but rather the consideration of the areas (in fact personal self, of the interaction with the other and of the project of life) on which it can affect because, as already mentioned, pedagogy, starting from the twentieth century and still today, maintains the primary reference to the issues and socio-educational emergencies to which, we believe that an organization by areas remains more faithful and useful than an organization by domains.

We decided to trace the three areas mentioned and consider the different domains for each of them and then indicate constructs that are populated with skills of a clear hermeneutic matrix and which allow us to “stay inside the situations” and then exercise that “cognitive and emotional bilocation” which makes it possible to question and reinterpret daily life, “to become aware of the why and how to act, to problematize the environment, norms and values of reference, to converse with the problematic” (Rossi, 2011, p. 20).

These are skills and expertises useful to narrate the personal self but also to move from this first result to achieve other results as “intercept production of meaning, sharing of emotions, creation of languages, codification and diffusion of knowledge, reference cultures, values in part declared and partly inscribed in artefacts and tacit and widespread assumptions, which require the care of processes related to organizing contexts and practices of reflective action to learn from their experience in a transformational perspective” (Scaratti, Stoppini & Zuccheromaglio, 2009, pp. 28-29).

In the proposed vision, the self-narration is “context and practice of reflective action” and aimed at a future designed of particular importance, almost preparatory, are the skills of recognition of cognitive abilities aimed at managing emotional tonalities that at each stage of such experience bind. It is about applying on the field the ability to understand the nature, the causes and the possibilities of control and expression of emotions (Pons & Harris, 2000; Pons & Doudin, 2000; Pons, Harris & Doudin, 2002) recognizing, at the same time, how this knowledge is eminently historical, linked to the ability to evolve according to the possibilities that everyday experiences (including narrative itself) offer us (Harris, 1991; 1983) to gradually acquire a clearer awareness and reflexive ability in coping with frustrating and anxious obstacles.

So, if in the narration of the self this emotional quality (and relative competence) were missing, it would probably be unable to activate the process of self-reconstruction that accompanies the idea of a reflective and metacognitive action to support, as Saarni says (1999), the experiences of self-efficacy of the individual in social transactions - briefly mentioning that Dewey put the suggestion (which strictly speaking is an emotional tonality) at the head of every reflexive action -.

Therefore, the emotional quality of the narratives of the self goes hand in hand with a wider self-awareness that can help to verify the progress of one's thinking, not only to observe it, of course, but to achieve optimizing it.

In this sense, in the reconstruction of one's history lies the possibility of developing self-awareness as "understanding through the interpretation" of a represented self, charged with the past and now turned to a planning future that can be explicitly thematized. In the narration we can rediscover the "dialogue that we are" between past and future, between the self and the world (Gadamer, 2001) even when, above all, everyday life leads us to a "different" life, to dissonant existential passages and turns. compared to constructed identities - and often slipped into the implicit - but not necessarily because they are simply undesirable or incomprehensible. These can be, instead, opportunities to weave a new existential plot. In other words, it is a matter of welcoming, in the act of narrating oneself, the same narrative nature of the identity that we have been - we are - we will be, and thus embody the sense of being and becoming historical identity, intramed, complex. An identity that autopoietically combines constancy-organizational closure and structural flexibility-opening that is an identity that, at Savikas (2014, p. 31) "supports uniformity and takes into account change, placing itself again within the social space."

All this said, and in a completely temporary and exploratory way, in order to lay the foundations for a critical evaluation of the use of self-narrative practices in contexts and training and educational processes, we can consider a limited number of skills useful to support the thoughtful thinking that tackle the field of metacognitive training. It is a matter of presenting a first list that can always be integrated but which, at the moment, allows us to think about the development of tools aimed at evaluating the formative quality of narrative experiences (Table 2).

Table 2 - Skills

	<b>Subject area</b>	<b>Relation area</b>	<b>Planning area</b>
Self awareness	X		
Recognition of emotions	X	X	
Handling of emotions	X	X	
Locus of control	X	X	
Stability	X	X	
Forecasting skills		X	X
Intellectualization			X
Self-efficacy			X
Neoteny			X
Fail management			X

Please read this scheme in advance and the proposed breakdown as a simplification, so to speak, for educational purposes. We can try to identify area dominance for certain skills, but we must always be aware of the necessary cross-cutting implications for each of them. If we were to carry out a more in-depth analysis, the implications that each of them has with all the areas indicated would necessarily be highlighted.

Not differently, each competence maintains close correlations with the others listed, sometimes of dependency, others of correlation or inclusion. In this case, the pattern that is reported has the meaning of a simplification related to the specific purpose of indicating principles of critical analysis with the aim of structuring an assessment of the practices of self-narration for educational purposes.

### ***Self Awareness***

Self-awareness, as distinct from consciousness, finds its classic definition in the work of Mead (1972), for which the fundamental difference was linked to the ability to focus the attention of the latter, as opposed to the internal address of self-awareness. Thanks to Duval and Wicklund (1972) the term has taken on the further purpose of indicating the active operators, by a subject, of the ability to identify, process and store information about the self. This is the ability to reflect not so much on experience as on the ability to do and process experience and how much it derives from it.

The complexity that transpires from this synthetic definition of self-awareness makes the list of the dimensions of the self that can be involved in the process of self-awareness, extremely long (Bem-Artzi, Mikulincer & Glaubman, 1995) from the emotional to the cognitive, from the relational to temperamental, from psychological to ethics etc. Self-awareness can be thought of in reference to numerous “corollaries” such as agency, Theory-of-Mind, self-description, self-evaluation, self-esteem, self-regulation, awareness of death and other. In these processes and in these practices the ego has the opportunity to develop a sense of continuity, of permanence, which is configured as a sense of self, also historically consistent, which flows, in the highest degree, into the “meta-self-awareness”, ie being aware of being self-aware (Morin, 2011).

### ***Recognition of emotions***

The construction of a personal narrative is an experience that is accompanied by different forms of emotional transport that go easily from identification to denial, from involvement to distance, from almost playful fun to the sense of deep annoyance and discomfort. The narration is a technical act (the structured construction of the story) cognitive (which obliges to organize the thought) that necessarily consists of a continuous and ineludible emotional soundtrack. The problem is to be aware of this important presence and, in

particular, to make this capacity of recognition one of the essential skills in defining the self as, knowing oneself better is the basis for a better relationship with others starting from knowledge to recognize the emotional states of others. Knowing how to recognize one's own emotions and that of others, beyond the personal talent one can have, means having great potential to enter into connection with others (Gardner, 1983; Gardner & Hatch, 1989) cultivating the art of relationship. Narrative action must also be considered starting from this dimension, because the ability to recognize one's own and others' emotions becomes the competence of developing intimacy and relationships with others. Goleman (1997) referred to awareness as a basic skill on which he could then control the evolution of his life. Likewise, Shapiro (1998) identifies in this capacity a preparatory variable for the development of emotional control. Personal narration responds to these characteristics if it puts its author in a position to look at his own thoughts and feelings connected to the past narrated event and to the experience that in the "hic et nunc" is being made of the same event.

### ***Handling of emotions***

The recognition of emotions is a preamble to a more detailed management of the same. Goleman defines the art of emotional self-control as the "ability to motivate oneself and to persist in pursuing a goal in spite of frustrations; to control impulses and gratifications" (1996, p. 54). The handling of emotions starts from the analysis of one's own limits and possibilities, from the competences in reading people and contexts to anticipate events and orient them, "stabilizing" awareness on our immediate experience (Bennet-Goleman, 2001). The careful and conscious handling of emotions, therefore, becomes for Dato (2004, p. 35) a cognitive catalyst, since we learn to put the emotions in system with the reason and to develop a careful and sensitive mind to seek alternative solutions, controlling "the sensory data, thoughts related to emotions and related behaviors." Narrating one's own story is an action that is pedagogically evaluated with reference to the ability to develop "mastery of the self", or to develop the ability to control "the impulses and the disturbance, to be honest with oneself and others, to take responsibility about their obligations, being flexible to change and open to new ideas and projects" (*ibidem*, p. 36). It is evident then, as Richburg and Fletcher (2002) recall, how there is an essential relationship between social management skills and emotional awareness of oneself.

### ***Locus of control***

With locus of control, we refer to an emotional-motivational variable of training and learning processes able to directly influence the motivation of the subject in formation. Its definition is possible starting from Weiner's attribution theory formulation (1985) which hypothesizes a direct correla-



tion between the attitude that each subject will hold in front of a task and the type of attributional analysis that the same operates with respect to the causes of success or failure of the singular actions undertaken. Their attribution styles refer to the habit of recognizing a direct responsibility referred to the action (whether successful or unsuccessful) of internal factors - related, for example, to the energy invested or to the effort made in the task - or external factors - related to the risk or indications offered by subsidiaries or support figures - (Herrmann, Raybeck & Gruneberg, 2002; Flammer, 1995). It becomes particularly crucial to understand if when using certain teaching tools, or in accessing certain situations/training environments, there is an opportune push to recognize, on the part of the acting subject, how to undertake an action part of the potential for success depends on personal commitment. In order to correctly attribute the causes of the outcomes of their actions, it is necessary to have adequate knowledge and understanding of the contextual variables involved in it, as well as the ability to operate adequate control over them. This means the greater the knowledge of the self and of the inhabited world, the more precise will be the attributions made and, respectively, the effects of these attributions.

### ***Stability***

The stability of causes in relation to actions that may result in success or failure is another particularly important dimension to take into consideration. This is because depending on whether a case is considered stable or not - depending on whether it considers it dependent or independent not only from its internal/external nature but also from the amount of investment each individually can be responsible for - it creates possibilities for action to considerably improve the performance outcome (Weiner, 1985). It is different to identify the causes of a failure in a stable factor, on which the individual can have no impact as an invariant, or an unstable one, that can be influenced by the subject. This leads to the further "corollary" of control, or recognition of how the decision on "how much effort to devote to a task" is ultimately individual responsibility and, therefore, is a variable on which to intervene. Regarding the relationship with the environment, the same considerations made for the locus of control apply to these two dimensions. It remains to underline how, of course, the design perspective is a fundamental activator of control skills and, therefore, of investing in an action in order to reach its fulfillment or, in other words, a motivation behind a behaviour (Anolli & Legrenzi, 2001; Guay et al., 2010; Broussard & Garrison, 2004).

### ***Forecasting competence***

The narrative work, effectively combining mastery, management and reflexivity, opens up a competence in recognizing opportunities and expanding alternatives. It is a competence with clear planning intent, that is, the

possibility and ability to exercise not only a vigilant attention to one's own present but also an anticipatory opening for the future. The task entrusted to the subject is to learn how to mediate the sense of reality with the sense of possibility, where the design competence pertains to the "decision theory" (Zonca, 2004). All this helps to investigate the complexity of the situations to take the most effective measures possible. The personal narration must be able to allow its author to think differently and thus develop a "positive thinkability" that "occurs when the subject manages to think (with positive foreshadowing) himself in a different situation from the current one (new possibility) [...]. Positive prefiguration is not an object of simple fantasy but of construction" (Bruscaglioni, 1994, p. 138). In this way the quality of the narrative action is commensurate with the development of the ability to narrate the probable (Batini & Del Sarto, 2007) to think the unthought, to deny one's present as a given and to be able to face the unique events that transgress the rules of daily, cultivating the sense of possible and desire, imagining future worlds and activating resources to be able to build them with others, or accurately mediating sense of possibility and sense of reality.

### ***Intellectualisation***

We believe that the intellectualization is one of the qualities that a reflexive narrative action cannot fail to have. The characteristic in question consists - as Dewey declares - in the "definition of the problem". Specifically, a training action must be able to put the subject, who previously lived in a state of generalized and indistinct discomfort, in position to identify, locate and define the problem. In this sense, it is a matter of promoting analytical and descriptive skills (construction and reconfiguration) of experience, through the practice of objectification and distancing, which, for example, can be used to interpret a "fresco" as a whole (Rodgers, 2002). In this way, as Dewey says, the emotional condition linked to the previously experienced discomfort can now become an articulated idea and an object of thought: "There is a process of intellectualization of what at first is simply an emotional quality of the whole situation. This transformation is carried out by observing more closely the conditions that constitute the difficulty" (Dewey, 1965, p. 182). The reflective quality of a narrative action is linked to its ability to become a promoter of thought through the action of mirroring the perturbed emotional state that has led to the search for training in a problem that, once defined, can at least be recognized and therefore dealt with as a settlement self-world relationship. This is the question of promoting a rereading that has nothing casual or accidental but is a specific analytical arrangement of knowing how to think and represent concrete situations and emotions regardless of the beliefs possessed by the individual subject. The narrative must return the completeness and complexity of the lived situation, thanks to which it is

possible to correctly formulate a problem, and the relative questions useful to solve it in the planning and self-realization direction.

### ***Self-efficacy***

Self-efficacy has been defined promptly within the current study known as Socio-cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986a; 1986b) as a mechanism of primary importance in allowing to act effectively in front of relevant issues, putting together in the best possible way the personal potential and contextual opportunities. This means that it is a fundamental vector to allow the individual to act actively in order to propitiate the occurrence of desired events in relation to certain objectives that can be established individually (Bandura, 2001). For Bandura the levels, the strength and the generalization of self-efficacy are not given once and for all but they are structured according to four variables linked to the possibilities of direct experience of one's ability to master situations (mastery experiences); from the ability of others to deal with these situations so that they can evolve to model new skills (vicarious experiences); the presence of acts of persuasion/encouragement that may lead one to believe that they can face certain situations; to the personal ability to interpret one's emotional and physiological states (Bandura, 1986a). The self-efficacy of a subject tells us a lot about his agentive and transformative competence and, for this same reason, about how it can arrange itself for a project that requires the activation of specific potentials not necessarily previously possessed by the subject. This future-planning horizon becomes the specific context outside of which the very concept of self-efficacy cannot be considered (or rather loses much of its interest). By its very definition, self-efficacy is, in fact, specifically related to the context and linked to the desire to achieve important results.

### ***Neoteny***

The term neoteny indicates that process of phylogenetic development that causes the juvenile states from subjects of previous generations to become the adult states of successive generations (Gould, 2013). This entails, especially in the case of man, the affirmation of that species-specific predisposition to always learn "as if" being always young. However, both the phylogenetic affirmation of this quality and its ontogenetic manifestation does not take place in the void. On the contrary Morin (2001), for example, has proposed a model (called "anti-model") that binds cerebralization-youth and development of cultural and social complexity. This makes clear the recursions between the self-development organization levels and the self-reproduction of the socio-cultural system. It remains that to optimize human neotenic skills it may be necessary to structure opportunities to experiment as much as possible the specific "juveniles" of species in the forms of leisure activity, of the feeling of wonder, of the experience of disorientation, etc. This

for the simple reason that the quality of these experiences opens naturally to the possible, the demonic, the protean (Bertin, 1987). Therefore, neoteny, as the quality of the human being and of his continuous planning, must be cultivated by offering opportunities to formulate theories about one's being and becoming; to experience the crisis and the throwback of perceptual habits, to have and experience the harmonic polyphony of knowledge, media, content (Baldacci, 2014) that characterize the personal and planning of each subject.

### ***Fail Management***

In many cases personal storytelling can be an opportunity to refine and to expand the singular skills in managing failure and, in this way, to become an opportunity for the widening of subjective potential. A term that describes with good approximation the competence that we intend to suggest is the coping, that is the "adaptation strategy" that implies the activation of cognitive processes aimed at orienting the singular conduct focused at solving a problem. Folkman and Lazarus have defined coping as the attempt to handle problematic situations caused by stressful events experienced as threatening or harmful, regardless of the personal resources available at that time to cope (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus, 2006; 2007). If among the past experiences there were times when one was not able to cope with stressful situations, the personal narration of the same situations or experiences can focus attention on how to implement to change the approach we have towards the world starting from the review of personal, relational and environmental resources available to realize our personal life project. The narrative must increase the subjective potential in terms of resilience strategies, in terms of positive adaptation, or the ability to maintain or regain mental health, despite experiencing adversity (Wald et al., 2006). This is possible insofar as personal narration helps to focus on the conditions of change/crisis that give shape to the problem and that, therefore, are supposed to be addressed in order to allow a general reconfiguration of the situation. So it will be useful to manage the problematic situation, but it also helps to recalibrate the emotional response in relation to the desired results in terms of well-being. The narrative work, as a process and as a product that the subject performs, becomes an opportunity not to incur in gross errors related to the momentary inability to deal with unexpectedly stressful situations, putting in the conditions to more effectively regulate the resources and responses of the individual to the problematic situation.

### **Final Notes**

The aforementioned are starting points from which to develop useful tools to evaluate and self-evaluate the effectiveness of educational processes

that resort to practices of self-narration (Annacontini & Paiano, in press). These are long-established concepts in the tradition of the human sciences and education that can be recovered using pedagogical attention to focus the “process” more than the training product and useful for the development of cognitive, emotional-motivational and metacognitive skills which, as strategic, do not look at the self-world relationship as something stable and definitively given, but at the exact opposite as a dynamic dimension. As Nisbet (1981) said and quoting his words to the field of pedagogy, it is a matter of “joining together the static and the dynamic, that is to reach, through a systematic series of principles, an explanation of the structure or order on one side, and of change or development, on the other” (ibidem, p. 95), although we know today that even the stability of the principles that appear more rooted and incontrovertible in reality is always only for a fixed period of time. Starting from what has been identified as reflective competences, the narratives of self can be made the subject of an evaluation (and of a self-assessment) that assumes real educational value, or indicative of how to continue to proceed (on the same line or changing or reversing the route) in the design of the intervention, keeping the activity coherent in itself and integral to the needs both self-centered and heterocentric, with this prospect of a development of the subject in the direction of an increasing ability to regulate their personal learning with this having greater possibilities to not let slip the best training opportunities offered by a “society of metachange”. A narrative of the self that is pedagogically evaluated as effective will produce a return in terms of increased relational and projectual awareness starting from the greater focus of personal and social needs, of the instances operating at the contextual and cultural level, of implicit expectations in family and personal histories. The use of self-narratives in a pedagogical way will also change the context of life and experience, no longer passively experienced but lived but actively participated and inhabited, as a constitutive part of the possibility of experimenting as a subject that practices on it (and with it) strategic skills, thoughtful thinking, creative and divergent action. In this way of understanding the narration of the self, the central role of the learner function is evident, and a critical approach to the evaluation of narrative performances will necessarily go in the direction of promoting a conscious and felt dialogue between the functions involved in the training process.

The myth of an evaluation as an extrinsic action towards the subject that produces the narration of oneself falls, while a logic of evaluation is rooted as the result of a dialogue made as critical and metacognitive as possible - this is the sense of the use of tools that recover the skills scheme previously reported -.

A coevaluation which is at the same time a dialogue (as a method), negotiated (as an intent), an orientation (as a final goal) and for educators who can

better individualize and personalize the training proposal for the subjects they have taken charge both for subjects in training that will have more conceptual and reflexive tools to understand in which project direction and with which strategy to activate the resources that derive from a history of the self that, now methodologically made the object of narration, becomes a promise of invincibility for the future because, in narrating one can come to discover, suddenly, even “a subjective sense that life has improved in a fundamental way despite the unfortunate event” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995, p. 40).

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