

# **Education and Narration in Intercultural Perspective: Theories and Interventions**

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**Abstract:** The article analyzes the issue of educational practices focusing on narration and autobiography. The theoretical and methodological framework used is that of intercultural education and action research in education. In this perspective, the authors present some approaches to narrative and autobiographical educational interventions and, finally, are presented the data related to a research on immigrant children in Italy.

**Key-Words:** Intercultural Education, Autobiography, Educational Theories, Narrative, Immigration.

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## **1. Introduction: Autobiographies and educational model in complex society**

In contemporary pedagogical research, the more suitable formative models favouring formation which is really “intercultural” seem to be those revealed by the train of thought which considers formation as a project of ones own life and process of meaning, with reference to the autobiography, the method of life history and action research, which in the last decade has assumed an important role as educative methodology as it allows for the achievement of important cognitive and formative objectives beginning with the evaluation of the subjectivity of the individual.

For years previously, the crisis of positive paradigms has conducted scholars of education towards an in-depth critical reflection on the finality of education and the prospect of providing the adult with an objectively valid definite framework with which to confront capability and competence.

In the study of the condition of mankind, the complexity and high number of variables interdependently present among them, have thwarted the

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efforts of the application of a model of scientific investigations in the field of human sciences, founded on the method of experimental science; establishing a different approach, originating in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, based on the hermeneutical method, which privileges the comprehension of a phenomena compared to the explanation (Sirignano, 2002, 2003 and 2012).

The current tendency is to construct a more complex model, in which the two methods of research may complement each other, in the knowledge that it is not possible to explain without understanding neither to understand without explanation. It is understood that adult process education is managed as a dynamic process, which must accompany the evolution of the person favouring the possibility of growth, of knowledge and of self formation.

To comprehend that which an individual is able to apprehend, one should necessarily refer to the earlier stages of his educative biography. Life history allows for the evidencing of the dynamics which have contributed to the instruction of the individual, therefore introducing an illuminating cross-section on the learning paths of the same. The utility of the biographical method is twofold: on one hand it assists the educator to effectively gauge the educative status, adapting the models of learning characteristics which have arisen from the history of the individual in instruction, on the other hand it is useful for an adult in retracing his life history, to be acquainted with his own aspirations and to perhaps decide to attempt to go beyond the cultural borders relating to his position in the social structure.

Biological research has supplied an important contribution to adult instruction, demonstrating learning according to procedures strongly dependent on own life history and previous instruction. (Sirignano & Maddalena, 2012). Biographical stories evidence the intense pressure that a social group of belonging exercises on each individual, aimed at determining a behaviour compliant to unwritten yet binding rules: also evidencing how the paths of individual growth necessarily pass through a conflict rapport with such a system of rules and expectations, the natural outcome of which is the achievement of an autonomy of thought and therefore of development of adult individuality.

The instructor/educator by utilising the biographical procedure may therefore, through the knowledge of the individual's life framework of referral and his *liberating* paths, identify the most effective instruments of intervention complementary to the process of the individual's education.

The educational value of the biographical approach is confirmed by Dominicè, when reflecting on present day society, subject to sudden changes and dominated by the needs of economic globalisation, wonders which could possibly be the adult education guidelines to follow in the near future. The author sees the possible solution in a development of the biographical method which, initiating with the knowledge of the mechanisms of modification of the mental attitude of adults, is utilised to trace a path of education sufficient for

the individual to acquire an autonomous position compared to modernity (Dominicè, 1982 and 1990).

Viewed as such, autobiographical reflection is fully inserted within the educative panorama as a highly motivated value allowing the adult to acquire confidence in his own capabilities, to autonomously begin the process of creating a reflective sense of the events of his own life, retracing choices taken and rediscovering the determining motivations. The reflective and narrative techniques present in autobiography conduct the individual to process new ways of learning and knowledge, to discover the internal structures of processes of learning with strong implications in terms of personal growth.

Autobiographical recognition assists the individual in identifying the dynamic connections existing between the cognitive, affective, moral and emotional dimensions of knowledge. Reconstructing ones own educative history is an occasion of change as it occurs through a constant connection between experience/explanation and between experience/narration, producing processes of the research of sense and construction of theories. In fact, every story narrated involves the construction of a “theory” that is of a particular way of organizing a temporal sequence of events.

## **2. Life stories, narrations and educational interventions**

The possibility of change evidences the epistemological value underlying the practice of autobiography in adult education, which is viewed as persons capable of learning and changing. Autobiography, therefore, may represent a path of transformation of the individual by the recognition of his own life, mindful in the research of the sense of his own actions, of the connection existing between diverse aspects of reality, to the evaluation of the choices taken.

It appears evident how the autobiographical method, designed to garner the uniqueness of the individual and his trajectories of learning, of self expression and the attribution of meaning, may be usefully adopted as a technique in a path of intercultural information, where reciprocal recognition of human qualities is essential.

The autobiographical practice has in fact a deeply embedded emancipatory value as, through self reflection, it brings to light implicit knowledge held by everyone, making visible the intellectual capabilities of each single individual taking the initiative to learn and faithfully drawing from ones own patrimony of consciousness and revitalizing it.

The autobiographical approach, with the overwhelming emergence of the subjectivity of the learner, protagonist in a process of self learning, stands in sharp contrast to classic methodologies of adult education, centred on interventions of the tutorial kind designed at strengthening competences and

knowledge, considered fundamental by the teacher. This operates a reversal of the prospective creating a new situation in which the learner becomes the protagonist of his own instructive path, following the teacher who delegated with set guidelines, attentively yet discreetly guides and assists, no more as an *instructor*. The role of the teacher becomes essentially that of helping the individual to become fully aware of his own capabilities of change, therefore of learning.

Autobiographical recognition assists in localising the fundamental stages in one's own life, to evaluate the changes produced and establish the new acquired identity. Self narration other than leading to an understanding of awareness of one's own changes, is in itself a stimulation towards other changes in that it is a *laboratory* of the construction of significance and opportunities of growth.

According to Bruner (1984), the human mind possesses the capability to process a particular form of reasoning, *narrative thought*, through which it may construct stories finalised towards the interpretation of reality and the processing of the identity of the individual. Proceeding in narration, the mind links together the events which emerge in the memory, through a network of reports, seeking to insert a unified design endowed with meaning. Therefore, in the construction of a story, the facts are immersed in a dense fabric of intentionalism, cause, emotions, in which the warp is the subjectivity of the *Me* narrator.

The *Me* narrator already appears precociously in childhood, in the early years a child speaks to himself at length, inventing stories, beginning to construct narrative thought which consents to the acquisition and strengthening of a series of mental abilities.

*Narrative thought* proceeds along a complex path reorganising and inserting events into a pattern in which each memory has a sense of reference to the whole. A unified design appears at the end of the tale which is the interpretation given to their life. The autobiographical tale, is not a tale true to the past, it is instead a reconstruction of the life history filtered through interpretations which the narrator supplies in the telling. The experience of life matured reacts on memories modifying them, therefore in considering the past in the light of the present, the individual effects a process of reinterpretation of past events, occasionally creating, to produce a coherence between past and present, a sort of *prophetic* reading of his own history in which some past events seem to pre-announce facts which subsequently occurred. The autobiographical approach not only allows the collection of the individual's subjectivity in all its' complexity, but also through the activity of telling, consents to a re-elaboration of the personal past within their historic-social contexts. This could therefore represent a formidable instrument of investigation into the institutions of a society seen from within, and also on

the life conditions of individuals who, living on the margins of society, are often ignored by official sources.

There are diverse groups of study in Europe, which for some time have contributed by offering original propositions in processing the theoretical methods of research and concrete proposals of action in the field.

The act of self re-description implies the discovery and beginning of *another story*, or rather a personal secret story which flows in-depth, invisible and parallel to that experienced on the surface.

In the course of writing, the individual slowly sees the outlines of another self of which there was no clear perception emerging, as writing involves unaccustomed activities of introspection and reflection. Once the mechanism of self-reflection is set in motion, it proceeds according to its own course conducting towards diverse results in relation to the capability of the individual to question the grade of authenticity of which he is capable.

Parallely, the autobiographical method has been consolidating a diverse model of educative action, the course of *stories of life*, processed and developed over several years by a research group on the processes of adult learning, namely GRAPA founded in Geneva by Pierre Dominicè, Matthias Finger and Christine Josso, with the intention of unifying research and instruction (Josso, 1991).

The *stories of life* course is divided into four subsequent moments, the informative phase, spoken story phase, writing of the biographical text phase and the interpretative phase. The spoken story phase, that is to *take the floor*, represents the qualifying moment of the *course* as it primes an individual process of change which passes through a strong affirmation of one's own subjectivity, noting one's potentialities and limits, the beginning of a reflection on one's own willingness to actively and knowledgeably participate in the experience in act.

*Taking the floor* could, for the individual under instruction, be a moment of great emotional intensity, the breaching of isolation, the beginning of a course of strongly desired growth, above all if the individual is not in possession of adequate linguistic tools.

The listener has an important task in the construction of a history of life, which of establishing the right atmosphere and stimulating the conversation with questions and interventions aimed at helping the narrator to clarify the significance of the story to himself.

The listener has to have human sensitivity and knowledge of the mechanisms of defence which the individual may activate to be in emotional harmony with the narrator, has to establish a constructive sharing in the told experience. Only through concerned and critical participation on the path of the history of life, does the listener manage to aid the individual in progressively accomplishing an important passage, from speaking to thought, to then reconnect the fragments of the story and identify the plot. Dialogue

initiates a process of change and personal growth which involves both protagonists: the educator and the individual in formation.

An important contribution to the process of method in the history of life, has been offered by the German school, represented by Peter Alheit, by identifying the history of life, as the first basis of adult learning. The author views every course as a gymnasium of the mind, in which the individual exercises ability and competence to continually acquire new knowledge. To be aware of the meaning of the reconsideration of educative functions, aimed at favouring the full explanation of the adult's own potentiality. It actually deals with understanding the individual capabilities of self management, the creative potentiality inherent in each of us. By analysing a life story from within, it can be understood how it is directed and orientated in the dependent choices of the individual, as a *master of ones own destiny*.

Alheit stresses the fact that there does not exist a life story, isolated in the social context in which it takes place but a biography being the *ideal model* of an interlacement of a network of *structure* and *contingent events* of social life that is, it is both “a non-trivial sequence of contingent events of life, yet in some parts essential, it is a determined social structure set in motion by individuals” (Alheit & Bergamini, 1996, p. 26))

The structures which Alheit speaks of are those of any company of individuals and are definitely the substrate on which every person's story unwinds. The specific biographical experiences lived during the course of existence settle, forming latent structures which the individual uses as flexible and if necessary modifiable schemes, into which new knowledge is integrated.

Alheit views each biography as a *meeting point* between an *implicit and tactic* structure of the individual's knowledge and “a live and present emerging experience, which differently illuminates the past and beings the future biography” (Ibidem). The continual dialectical tension between structure, knowledge and events derive different outcomes depending on the choice of the individual. In a biography models of action acquired and latent structures, do not necessarily determine the course, an individual's autonomous choices produces changes of direction, sudden stops and new departures render every life story unique and peculiar.

However, at the same time, a life story is always the produce of a specific life course, strongly oriented by the relative structural conditions and a particular historical and social situation. Several conditions channel and limit the individual's life prospects, although even if within such limitations each individual operating choices, possesses substantial luggage of *life not lived* conserving intuitive latent knowledge.

An educative intervention capable of inducing a guided reflection on life not lived, on choices not taken, allow the individual to discover new meanings of his own life experience, which assist a knowledgeable modification of ones own mental attitude or even transform the structure of

referral. Once this occurs, a process of changes begins, interesting both the individual and the context in which they live. "Life not lived, in fact, possesses an explosive social strength" (Ibidem). The individual commences to be subject to critical analysis of certainties involved in his social surroundings and therefore the existing structures are demolished and substituted by others, thus setting in motion a new form of learning in which information is not incorporated in a pre-existing structure. A sort of *abducting* process of learning begins, capable of connecting together that which "we never dreamt it could have been connected" (Peirce, 1991, p. 181).

According to Alheit this process of *learning within changes* may only be primed by *biographical knowledge*. Knowledge which originating from a personal reflection on ones own life history, may conduct the individual to modify his own latent structures and re-design the contours of his own life in the contexts in which it unwinds, in a mental activity which Alheit calls *biographity*. The individual activating *biographity* manages to acquire knowledge of the potentialities of life not lived and decipher new meanings of his own biography.

In listening to a life story, the educative intervention could have emancipatory values, if successful in managing a self reflection, capable of priming a process of learning of the described type. However, the educative intervention cannot be limited to listening; this must be followed by the writing of the story recounted. Writing is fundamental, being the support which allows for the re-elaboration of memories and thoughts, the recuperation of important moments of ones own past, reflection on certain events, sentiments, emotions felt and choices made, following the long unravelled thread of ones own growth path.

When life history is transcribed, even if only by the listener, the marks made on paper remain, a palpating witness of experience, soliciting the mind's course in the sea of memories, in researching the attributions of meaning, of choices made, selecting events, operating connections, in an activity of construction of a unitary fabric, which is extremely self formative? The task of the educator is therefore that of stimulating spontaneous writing, or at least the transcription of the story of life, assisting the narrator in the process of self reflection and personal growth.

The educative biography, conceived as an instrument useful in identifying the processes of acquisition of knowledge by adults, is in reality a new way of considering adult education, an argument which offers multiple points of reflection. The autobiographical approach has, furthermore, contributed to revalue the epistemological experience point of view, confined to scholars of human sciences in a field of application, viewed solely as an instrument useful to facilitate the acquisition of theoretic knowledge. In fact autobiographical tales evidence the manner in which situations actually experienced are sources of knowledge, at times more precious than that

acquired in the classroom or from books. The multiplicity of learning experiences which mark a course of life and the amount of time necessary for the creation of an adult identity, emerge from stories. It is fundamental, for those dealing with adult formation, to bear in mind the role which experience plays in the pupils' patrimony of knowledge, to empathize with their needs and expectations, therefore effectively interacting with them.

In the field of human sciences, experience is not recognised as an epistemological status, even if in reality, it is often the key element to attain the solution of a problem; instead in the field of a formation programme, regardless of knowledge linked to that experience and where the approach to instruction is autobiographical, experience assumes a fundamental approach of support to reflections and analysis of the process of individual growth.

At present in the field of formation and business activities, experience is not recognised if separated from the acknowledgement of formal knowledge which in turn, acquires consideration and value only "if coupled with experience" (Dominicè, 2000, pp. 148-149). To attribute experience to the position it deserves in the field of knowledge signifies recognizing the active role of the individual in constructing his own wisdom.

The autobiographical approach, without exceptions to one form or another of knowledge, seeks to identify the knowledge of referral of the individual assisting in the reflection of experiential courses, through which he has learned what he knows, making him aware of having actively participated in constructing his own wisdom, his own view of life, his own personality. Through the revisiting of qualifying moments of his existence, the individual may reflect on his models of learning, on the difficulties met and the personal capabilities which emerged.

As the tale proceeds, the narrator can recognise, better still, observe himself from an absolutely new angle, allowing for the discovery of a detail of himself otherwise denied. In fact, the autobiographical tale consents, beyond the events told, to the launch of an illuminating glimpse on the personality of the narrator, his way of being, and his attitude in the face of the hardships of life, of his weaknesses, qualities and humanity.

Every autobiography is a text on a life (Alheit & Bergamini, 1996) and as such maintains the traces of a story of formation of a *bildung* and therefore its decoding is a task specific to pedagogy as it possesses the appropriate investigative instruments to effect an interpretative *formation* reading.

The pedagogical approach to the study of the story of life, tends to select and analysis the qualifying events from an *educational* point of view by moving on three levels. The first level regards the individualisation of events which have significantly determined the quantity and quality of the knowledge learnt and therefore the reconstruction of the *educational* experience of the individual. The second level of analysis aims at evaluating the grade of re-elaboration that the individual has achieved with respect to

knowledge acquired and the contribution supplied by such achievements of appropriation of the personal patrimony of competence, skills and the consolidation of self esteem.

Finally the third level concerns the recognition of what the individual considers to have managed to transmit to others from his personal achievements in terms of knowledge, capabilities and values.

Josso in collaboration with Dominicè has drawn up a formative biographical approach (Josso, 1991, pp. 75-99), to the research of mechanisms according to which the processes of learning and knowledge take form. Emerging strongly from her experiences is the dialectical existing in all educative activities between a level of collective will and a level of individual will, namely between the needs of the organisation of a second course determining formative objectives and the needs, difficulties and individual questions which follow. According to Josso, generally those dealing in formation tend to resolve such a contrast by measuring the effects of collective needs on individual behaviour which reveal the efforts made by the individual to adapt to the course to acquire determined conceptual mechanisms.

Altogether lacking however is any form of attention to the levels of the innermost mental mechanisms which the individual sets in motion to learn, and the difficulties encountered within the group of which he forms part. Many aspects of individual and collective behaviour and on the effects produced by learning, have been brought to light by human sciences, although these do not allow access to the mechanisms of learning, to the manner in which each person registers and connects knowledge. It is important then to speculate on which processes contribute to the formation of each single individual, irreducible by others and in what way a collective action of formation reacts on an individual inducing self reflection. It is perhaps necessary to inverse the perspectives, to consider formation as a relation between one part and the whole, dialectically organised in the contrast autonomy-conformity, where evolution together with the permanence of the collective level are based on the existence of the individual level within which coexist the creativity of individuals (tendency towards autonomy) and homogenizing forces (tendency towards conformity). In such a manner the collective level appears as a system open to change by virtue of the individual taking part, seen as a self poietic system.

Such a dialectic is the engine of every educative activity which has to join the need to refer to a system of knowledge acquired with the need to open to change, innovation and exploration of new means. At the same time, the individualities in formation have needed to comply with given social and cultural structures and to seek courses of autonomy which emerge clearly from each life history.

In fact through course of life stories, this dialectic game, which opposes not only the individual of the group, but also the individual himself, results as being an essential component of each learning process and of the construction of any subjectivity.

For some time educative sciences have been aware of the cultural differences detected in pedagogical situations of migration phenomenon's, which nowadays involve the movement of large masses from one country to another for political or economical reasons, rendering current approaches mindful of already existing social and cultural differences, aiming at the realisation of integration between diverse cultures while respecting the characteristics of each one.

Yet in the moment of dealing with adult education Dominicè (1995) queries the meaning of the idea of adulthood in the epoch of post modernity; questioning whether evoking eternal principles and values in a society without certainty, traversed by rapid change, is not an expression of an immature attachment to a bygone system of referral curbing future development, and whether the official state of adulthood is not a useful guise providing an appearance of respectability in the social comedy. The author retains that is a specific task of the sciences of education to begin an in-depth reflection on the ideas of adulthood to be able to process effective educative strategies with the aim of actualizing a project of permanent formation.

An age limit could be established to define adulthood although it would be extremely variable in relation to social and cultural situations. It could then be attempted to associate such a state by determining the level of maturity and stability, although psycho analysis warns of the possibility of adult regressing and fluctuating wildly when faced with the difficulties of life. The adult, from a social point of view, has a well defined role qualified role, however during life continues to wander, searching for destinations dreamt of and not implemented, in a continual mental process of re-discussion of choices taken, mental paths are determined in equal measures by past schooling and concrete experiences, sources of unforeseen developments, of changes of direction, of sudden stops and starts in new directions. It is in the unravelling of daily life that each adult reaches his own knowledge of which an integral part is experiential and formal. Therefore recounting life history is also an itinerary of a course of appropriation of knowledge, so life history assumes the connotations of an educative biography and allows for the observance of how, for the adult, the activity of formation represents the occasion to acquire knowledge which goes beyond that transmitted by programmes, by virtue of strong interaction which is established between the contents of formation and pre-existing luggage of experience and personal paths of learning.

It is important, according to Dominicè (1990) to reflect on the significance the expression *formation of adults* has in today's social reality, which originates an increasing number of courses directed at an adult public,

aimed at adequately covering the needs for new knowledge requested in a world in continual evolution. In a reality as described below, there is a tendency to assign pedagogy with the task of providing useful instruments to guarantee the proper functioning of the formation activities offered.

Yet in such a way the same objective of pedagogy is lost, that of being able to elicit a critical reflection which allows the construction of an individual educative project, aimed on the real needs of adults being formed. In such a perspective the biographical approach presents the advantage of connecting the question of formation in the context of a personal story, rather than juxtapose to an educative offer already available. Formation thus understood is able to activate a process of self-formation which, as affirmed by Pineau (1983), occupies a central position in adult existence as is able to modify and enrich the transmitted contents through educative formation. When formation is activated through the telling of the individual's story of life, it reaches a particularly high level of self-formation. As put by Pineau: "Personal effort to explain educational life history is extremely conscientious and involving. This exercise participates at creating self-formation and at the same time discloses" (Pineau, 1980).

Dominicè (1990) considers it appropriate to revisit the stages of emerging courses in life history from the shadow in which contemporary empirical sociology had confined it, accusing it of scant reliability as it relates to the field of qualitative research. In 1976 Bertaux was the first to vision the course of life history already laid out by the School of Chicago as a possibility for pedagogical research to evade the quantitative type of logic and process a methodology more adequate for specific objectives (Bertaux, 1980).

In line with such a position, Catani & Mazé (1982) evidenced the methodological peculiarities of life history which requires a new kind of rapport between researchers and research objects. Furthermore, Ferrarotti (1981) addressed the methodological question demonstrating the epistemological implications thus providing a fundamental contribution to the theoretic debate produced in the field of social sciences by the recovery of this approach. Pineau (1980) conducted a systematic study of the use of biography in human sciences finding that with exception to the work of *awareness* inspired by Freire in Latin America, autobiography has never been utilised as an instrument of research in the science of education.

Nevertheless, autobiographical reflection may be a fundamental means in a fragmented society such as the present, to assist the adult in re-composing the broken fragments of personal identity in a unified framework in which every piece makes sense in relation to the whole.

This is necessary in our society as each of us at work, in the family and socially, even in the span of the same day, covers diverse roles, assuming in turn attitudes, behaviour, ways of expression requested by social convention often unknowingly. Quantitative methodology of contemporary empirical

sociology of the studies inherent to the formation of adults, utilises categories of inappropriate analysis to decode the concrete experiences of people. Conversely autobiographical practice places subjectivity at the base of its own processes, that is, the personal contribution of the individual being thus object and also subject to the educative intervention, subjectivity therefore, long a negative value, is a qualifying element of the educative intervention as it is a bearer of meaning.

Life history, being founded on the principles of subjectivity, is always original, expressions of a particular way of telling by the author who freely selects, connects and organises memories according to an absolutely personal order, expressing itself in its own language, not bound by rules externally imposed. The order used for the story consents to clearly reading the individual dynamics of the process of formation providing elements of awareness which surprise first and foremost the speaking individual, who, while remembering, discovers new aspects in himself and better understands his own conception of formation.

The passage from oral history to the drafting of a written text is fundamental in the process of adult formation as the effort to translate emotions and strong sentiments into written words is a source of ulterior reflection and could create frustration in those not in possession of the lexical instruments and adequate syntactic. It is a specific task of the educator to support the adult in this difficult task and elicit the representation using own words, in the most liberal way possible, the moments of life which elicit him, to still remember the excitement. Dominicè (1995) claims that the language of the biography associates to reasoning and affection and that the traditional dichotomy between the logic of speech is the irrationality of sentiments, here falls into defect.

### **3. Action Research in education**

Narrative and autobiographical methodologies are connected to the courses of action research which provide essential instruments and indications. Action Research (hereafter A-R) represents, in fact, the privileged model through which to consider and realise the educative practice and relative courses of formation mainly aimed at an adult audience, but may also be utilised for investigation into infancy and adolescence.

In the European pedagogical debate A-R-has been introduced thanks to the circulation of Deweyan pragmatism and the original formulation of this type of investigation proposed by Lewin (2005) in the psychological social field.

The “field theories” expressed by Lewin, based on the application of the theory of Gestalt, refuses fact finding approaches of a dichotomous type, focusing attention on groups and the individual's working environments and

the problematical situations demonstrated. It derives that the priorities of A-R are those of comprehending the power to do something.

From this point of view, Pourtois (1986) for example, holds that studying a problem means to be interested and therefore refer to a specific expectation which determines the object of study. It is therefore to develop a form of participatory research which, as noted by Trincherro is “accomplished by people directly engaged in the action within the structure or institution, in order to resolve a specific difficulty” (Trincherro, 2004, p. 142).

A-R is a compound verb which reinstates the real sense of the action of education, an action which is “trans-active” (Dewey, 1938; Dewey and Bentley 1974 -[1949]) focusing on the measure which is “action thought” and “thought in action”, combining the cognitive moment, finalised to produce knowledge on a given reality, with the active moment of the action, aimed at realising an adequate plan of formative intervention, the A-R is configured as a strategy of educative action and therefore as empirical research of a qualitative kind, proceeding by reinforcing diagnosis developed from a constant investigation giving “an efficient practical capability” (Baldacci 2001, p. 141) to thought and the action of the educator.

This form of research adopts qualitative models of investigation and action by the educator according to precise coordinates of the methodological rigours.

Adopting the constructs of the “linguistic game” (Wittgenstein, 1983 [1953]) inviting the reading of research as a social practice governed by rules, it can be stated that it is rules which guarantee the rigours of research in this sense, at least three meanings of the concept of methodological rigour of the A-R could be identified.

1. 'Scrupulosity' in following rules;
- 2 'Severity' of the rules of procedure;
- 3 'Adequacy' of the method of the problem.

In education there is a loss of scrupulosity when the rules of one scheme are used in another scheme. In the contest of the educative practice, the response to these criteria is fundamental, precisely in terms of comprehension of problematical situations and in the adequacy of the rules of the problematical situations identified. An educator who studies the “field” has to act, has to have clear rules of the defined scheme, of the method of investigation chosen to adopt and construct a design of research coherent with the problem, utilising, in the course of the research the investigative rules foreseen by the chosen method.

It is not enough to scrupulously follow rules, it is necessary that these rules are reliable to achieve results. It is on this point that the *controversy* between supporters of quantitative research and those of qualitative research

still seem to be unable to find a solution, at least until oppositional logic does make way for those which are authentically democratic, to critical comparison and dialogue. The question requires diffused investigation and argumentation which this seat does not allow us to address. It is evident however that in our case, severity invites the educator to adopt a method of the qualitative type which allows empirical research to be carried out in a severe manner as the procedures followed are founded on devices of destination-investigation functional for the constant realisation of a process of internal self correction, guaranteed by the exercise of reflection.

In order to be valid a method has to be adequate for the problem. The method of A-R is particularly adequate in the nature of educative problems. If a confused manner is given at the beginning of the problem, it is unthinkable to adopt any method whatsoever; the choice of the method depends on the definition of the problem. The educator who has defined the problem clearly and thoroughly, is able to have a compass which allows the choice of an adequate method or methods of investigation.

It is therefore the adequacy of the method which guides the choice of same. And it will be the adequacy to justify the hypothesis of action by means of a process of negotiation which accompanies all the course of the A-R: the hypothesis that the research group processes are appraised not certainly on the number of consents received (according to a *ratio* of a statistical type) but from the consistency of the congruency of ideas considered more valid in operative terms.

These methodological criteria are immediately attributable to a model of processed educative planning beginning from no education-action-research. A project of educative intervention by historic and psycho-social comprehension of the educative situation and the relative definition of the characterising problems: A-R is situated partly in real educative situations and in 'field research' for which the definition of the problem cannot prescind from intellectual analysis of the situation. Once the problem is defined it is rationally repositioned and "placed in the light of certain antinomy allowing a rational comprehension" (Baldacci, 2012, p. 293) aimed at the processing of a model of referral. There follows the moment of "justice and the choice of the educative solution (...) according to the criteria of the adhesion to reason (...) and to the continuity of growth, on one hand and to the adherence to the reality of the educative situation on the other" (Ibidem).

In this way the educator succeeds in the formulation of a plan, that is to say to the rigorous construction of a design intended for educative action which will be evaluated *ongoing*, based on its capabilities to significantly influence problematical situations in terms of production of change.

Thus achieving the following sequence in the process of educative A-R of the transactional type:

- Identification of the problematical situation;
- Development of the research group;
- Planning of the intervention;
- Action for implementation of the intervention;
- Detection of the effects of the intervention;
- Reflection on the effects and the eventual re-planning of the intervention.

As noted by Orefice “dismantling the conceptual barriers of modern philosophical traditions, Dewey paves the way for inter disciplinary methodologies of social research: these adopt the investigative process of the mind to explore the components of the problematical situation with inter communicating knowledge to realise changes of the action” (Orefice, 1913, p. 45). Moreover interdiscipline represents the “matrix” (Striano, 2013, p. 63) of Dewey an epistemology.

For Dewey the end of the investigation is not the attainment of truth, i.e. correspondence between and idea and reality, but the solution of a problematical situation. In this sense, educative action has the practical purpose of a trans-formative type, in that it is aimed to modify the existing conditions relying on human learning. Transactional A-R in the “logics” of its own inspirational model, finds a model which has the advantage of allowing the educator to mitigate the risk of transcendence, relativism and hermeneutic subjectivity inherent in some anarchist tendencies of the A-R risking distortion, as happens, according to Baldacci, in some research oriented to an exclusively hermeneutic sense: “The risks are those of falling into an anarchist methodology which can determine the relativistic tendency of the action -research, and consequently a loss of the anchorage of educative reality (as there would not be facts only interpretation), and is of an authentic cognitive value of such a form of research (it would also be improper to define as such: as it would be mere action)” (Baldacci, 2013, p. 84).

The Dewey kind of logic is a form of reflection on the investigation and the experimental method suitable to identify the actions which the researcher performs in the actual course of research, a course which obviously, cannot be given in the terms of concreteness in that logical forms originate from research workings. This proposal, according to Dewey: “1) educative practices provide data and contents which form the problems of the investigation. Being the only source of the problems which must be explored and 2) that educative practices are also the last sounding board of the conclusions of all research” (Dewey, cit in Striano, 2013, p. 75).

Every educative practice is also cognitive investigation and this type of investigation assumes an important trans-formative function: transforming the initial situation is the main interest of the educator which, for this reason, cannot renounce compromise with reality. Therefore the use of the reflexive

procedure of research, set in motion by the educator through the representation and the interpretation of the situations in the course of the intervention realised on it, allow the thinking of the reality of the situation (Perillo, 2010).

Beginning with the consideration that in education the solution of the problem is part of a more ample experiment in the positioning of the problem, the action of the situation implemented by the educator is an integral part of the decision and in this sense, the use of A-R in the management of the educative practice is a real instrument of action which produces, in time, transformation of the problematical situation and the possibility of reconsideration of ones own professional action. This second option allows the educator to revise their own professional practice in its fundamental theoretical – practical and ideological, constantly focusing on knowledge and *workers*, to retrograde, interconnecting, rethinking the articulation, ordering, co-ordering and re-ordering.

In A-R the individual, while operative and self assessing, is engaged in resolving the problem, is not an individual having the self delusion of mirroring reality, and representing it an ideal manner as a spectator. According to de Mennato, this is the reason knowledge is considered as “the history of an individual – of every individual – and his being in the world” (de Mennato, 2003, p. 19).

Therefore A-R is never neutral and the educator reacting according to this methodological definition cannot self-assume as a learning individual transforming while acting. Regarding this proposal Mariani warns that in education “it is important to be careful of reflexivity as even when we believe that our research is useful or even emancipated, we are 'objectifying', speaking for others. We are tempted to shape subjectivity in a modern mode, attempting to bring around changes in the name of 'progress', individual, social, cultural, political, economical, etc.” (Mariani, 2008, p. 72).

On the basis of reflective knowledge, the educator manages his own educative practice in the terms of A-R during constant reflective employment passing through the following interpretative plans.

1. *Con-text* (the connection [of the educator], personification, immersion as genre, ethnicity, class, biography);
2. *Pre-text* (or rather that which is 'first' in the text, as textual strategies, culture and interpretative traditions.
3. *Sub-text* (or that which is 'beneath' the text, such as professional paradigms and influential) knowledge” (Ibidem)

This heuristic and transformative operation is fruit of the adoption of a research *habitus* which refuses every possibility of repeatability and replicability of the achieved results of ones own 'professional career', that

does not limit to the ascertainment of the unvarying elements of processes which from time to time are analysed but which, instead investigates the contests to identify real, social, and therefore formative needs, of individuals which these contests contribute to construct.

A problematical situation lends itself to diverse possible interpretations: it is enough to think at how many interpretations may be given to the same phenomena according to the *framework* and the research methodology adopted by each educator. It is not only this which invites the reflection on the fragility of the concept of scientific knowledge, but above all requires us to completely review the courses of formation of educators and to review in an A-R perspective.

The formative courses on offer are strongly focused on experience and on the comparison with the Professions' answer to the adoption of a pedagogical formulation aimed at the evaluation of dialogue between academic knowledge and knowledge expressed by the practical world and is concrete in the proposal of a varied panorama of experience organised in collaboration with professionalism distributed over diverse contests.

In the case of educator's formation for example, it is fundamental to set, as a formative goal, the adoption of a systemic perusal, allowing the educator to approach the reality in which the profession practices, reasoning as a network of events and phenomena constantly (and amicably) interconnected. Learning, therefore, to "think as educators" (Perillo, 2012), and assume every description and interpretation of reality as partial and never definitive, yet not for this without significance, avoiding that the processes of elaboration of experience crystallize in units of rigid knowledge, as the complexity of the field of action which refers to educative action requires knowledge of experience and contingency.

Conducting ones own profession from the A-R point of view signifies the adoption of a reflective *mindset* suitable for considering agitated daily educative practice in heuristic terms: an educator encountering a new problematical situation (every educative situation is unique and unrepeatable) for which it is not possible to depend on procedure, techniques and standard, ordinary and useful model actions, has to perforce initiate a course of investigation.

A-R intervenes offering a model of execution of the investigation which is not predetermined but is given in the recursive progression of reflection in construction and in cyclic evolution: the educator, in this case, does not assume the knowledge as already given; it is considered a predefined normative action. This characteristic case renders the heuristic procedure of A-R open to modifications in the course of application and appropriate functional revision of the transformative teleology of educative action. It is therefore an empirical ideographic research (Trincherò 2004, p. 151) which

has action as its own object and is validated by experience in which it circumstances.

Professional educative practices could not be managed responsibly unless in terms of constant research of the best possible solutions. An educator omitting to set the problem, deludes to change the situation before having rigorously interpreted it, concentrating on the work in hand and not using devices which would allow an intentional control and constant evaluation, is destined to failure. Where the finality of an A-R consists in the improvement of the educative reality, the effectiveness and efficiency of the same are directly proportional to the acquisition of knowledge by the educator, with respect to the risk of working according to procedure dictated by “implicit theories” (Polanyi, 1967), consequence of mental models underlying its vision of the world or that which Mezirow defines “meaning perspectives” and “meaning schemes” (Mezirow, 2003 [1991]).

It is therefore evident, that in education the speculative moment cannot be given without the practical, therefore quality formation cannot prescind from a clear epistemology of professional practice (Schön, 1993 [1983]; 2006 [1987] which animates courses of adult formation with reflective and transformative competences. Only in this way such courses may result responding to the real demand for formation and education emerging from the territory.

#### **4. Educational interventions in intercultural perspective**

Attention for spoken sources begins in different investigative contexts although it particularly develops in some moments of common reflection and of collaboration between historical and anthropological investigations. Currently their importance is also widely recognised in the field of pedagogy, in fact listening and dialogue represent two moments unavoidable for the construction of identity, development of numerous cognitive skills as well as for the comprehension and integration of diverse cultures.

Provided below are the results of a quantitative investigation realised through a narrative workshop of action-research conducted with a group of ten foreign children, originating from Romania, Albania, Latin America and Central America, aged between seven and eleven years old, immigrated in Italy mainly due to their parents' employment.

The life history of these immigrant children has been collected on the island of Elba during a project begun by the group of research of Pedagogy in the Faculty of Science of Formation of the University of Studies of Suor Orsola Benincasa of Naples, Italy.

The choice of the territory in which the research was conducted was purely casual: the island of Elba has always been a land of encounter and (confrontation) of peoples and culture, first the Phocaeans (VI century BC)

followed by the Etruscans, Greeks, Romans, Ligurians, Pisans and finally the English, Spanish and French. In the course of centuries all these populations were attracted to this area both for its' strategic geographical position, and also for its' immense subsoil mineral wealth. Recently, with the development of tourism, it continues to be a chosen destination for those wanting to enjoy natural beauty, and also by those finding in the tourist market a new inexhaustible and ecological mine.

The research aimed at investigating emotional, cognitive and motivating experiences of the foreign pupils interviewed and the modality of perception and construction of their identity.

Contrarily to rationalistic traditions which considered the individual as an autonomous and rational centre founded on immediate self knowledge prior to any social or cultural rapport, we are at present aware of the fact that it establishes within inter subjectivity communication, through the intercession of cultural forms available, from time to time, in determined social contests (Crespi, 1997).

Hence the methodology of life history, the narrative self, results to be the more adequate mode to pursue the finalization of our investigation, which configures not just as a simple collection of information but as an in-depth analysis of the dynamics existing in the cognitive and emotional evolution of the foreign children interviewed, at the moment of comparison with a historical-social reality completely different to their own.

During the course of research two models of interviewing were utilised, the first was easier to apply and aimed at the reconstruction of a life history on "the surface", the second was more complex and structured to reconstruct some life histories aiming to analyse "in-depth" the individual in question, referring above all to *time* and the *contest* of origin, also seeking to bring to the surface their emotions, sentiments and ideas.

The life history of these migrant children, identified following the same investigative methodology but utilising two diverse protocols of interview, other than provide useful information to pick up the threads of the existential novel of the individual in question, offering an interesting insight on the social situations of the various countries of origin, leading us to reflect on the fact that educative intervention inter-culturally cannot be efficient if not supported by knowledge of the historical -social contests origin of recipient of the same intervention.

Autobiography is a process of writing about ones self and ones own life, giving the story not only something modifiable or interpretable but a real tale and subjectivity true, inconvertible and un changeable for anyone. The "truth" regarding the individual is either placed in the active autobiography, an expression direct by author/individual, or the passive autobiography, written by a second individual, extraneous, taken out of context for the exclusive prerogative of the individual. The autobiography is a valid method of

recognizant didactics which poses the individual in a dual position with respect to “me present” and “me past”, developing an amnesia which allows self removal without however losing sight with respect to the “me past” which instead is detailed and better known through memories and influenced by lived experiences, nor with respect to the “me present” which is the meter of comparison with past experiences and represents the certainty of the present: both contribute to the formation of the personality which is strengthened by their encounter with the autobiographical individual.

The autobiography is therefore configured as an important instrument of evaluation and personal emancipation by the speaking individual and through the same narration establishing an active contact and participation with the surrounding social reality.

#### *Nathan's Story*

My name is Nathan and I was born in Romania, I'm seven and a half years old and attend the second year of elementary school, I know that many of my schoolmates coming from other countries are put into different classes from those that they should attend, but I attended the first year as I should have, because I learnt Italian when I was still in Romania. My mother had already moved to Italy three years ago leaving me with my grandmother and my father but he had another wife and did not want me to come to Italy to be with my mum.

When I was in Romania I went to the kindergarten then stayed a lot of time with my grandmother and we watched Italian programmes (with Sky) so I felt a little closer to my mum and that's how I learnt Italian. Then one day after my father had shouted on the telephone with my mum they told me that the next day we would have to go to the office to get the documents, so my mum could come and get me. It took two months, then one night my mum phoned me and told me that she would come and get me the next day.

We left early in the morning in the van of my mother's new husband, I slept for almost all the journey, I didn't see anything when we passed through Romania, I woke up when we were in Italy. When we arrived at the port of Piombino and I saw the sea close by for the first time I was very frightened, my mum told me not to be afraid.

I like living here, I made friends quickly with my classmates and I also play with many of them after school, the people in the country are a little different from the Italians that I watched on TV, not as elegant and speak a type of Italian a little different but they are kind to me and my mum.

I miss my grandmother a little but don't think that I want to live in Romania, I would like to be a lawyer and got to one of those Italian cities with skyscrapers and buildings that I see on television, but not to Romania.

Table 1. Example of a collected “life history” below

### **5. Autobiographies of immigrant children in Italy. Data analysis**

From the analysis of the contents of the stories told by foreign children involved in the investigation it could be inferred that it deals with children

tending to be well integrated in the scholastic and social network. This very probably, also depends on the fact that the inhabitants of the island of Elba are used to the presence of foreigners (those who choose it as a holiday destination and those who have chosen it for reasons of employment), beginning with the antique Romans and Etruscans settlers due to the immense wealth of its mines, up to times more or less recent, attracting a colony of fishermen originating from the islands of Ponza and Sicily. All the above has taught the inhabitants of Elba, to accept “the foreigners” and consider diversity an actual resource, so much so that it was them “the others” to decree the tourist and productive development of their island. Hence explaining the fact that our foreign pupils did not find it hard to be accepted by friends as they often in turn had parents and grandparents emigrated from other Italian regions.

In order to have objective evidence and a clearer and more complete framework of what emerges from the listening and lexical analysis of the textual corpus of the ten stories of life told in the context of research, a brief questionnaire has been added, not based on significant features.

Hereunder are pie charts of the more significant answers provided by the children.

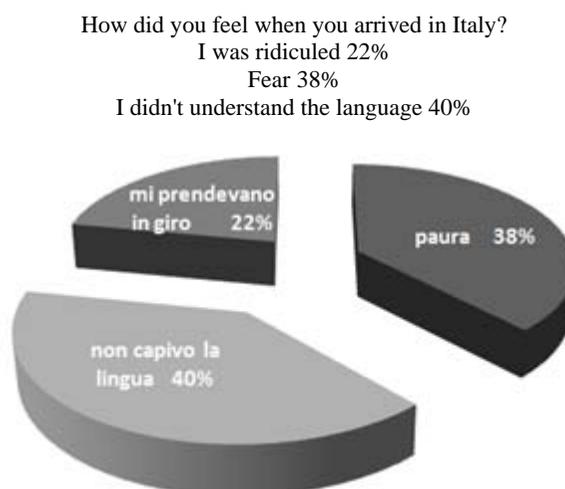


Figure 1. Question A

The meeting between the “new” the “unknown” and the “others”, always raises huge concerns exceeding which is not always painless.

As foreseen, the first sensations on the children's arrival in Italy were not very positive. It is clearly noted the strongest figure of emotion felt by the children was fear generalised against the unknown who they were confronting, mainly due to the fact of not understanding the language well and the

frustrations resulting from fear, not always founded, of being ridiculed for being different.

Very probably it is a sensation of inadequacy caused by the fact of “not feeling at home any more”. The people, places, habits and sensations which have been part of their existence until that moment representing key points for them are suddenly missing. Although having been advised of their parents' decision regarding the desire to go and live in a place far away, in order to have a better lifestyle, and to have had the possibility of 'metabolising' such a decision (it emerges from the stories that on average at least two or three months pass prior to departure), however once the project is materialized and revealed by their parents, they discover that not everything is as promising as they had been told. In addition there are reasons, which are not always thoroughly understood given the young age.

The second question shows (see pie chart below) that the children are nostalgic above all for established affections which have been left in their country, grandparents and friends, rather than places. This type of type of answer was also rather predictable: given the young age sentiments of roots in their country of origin were not yet felt very strongly, while it was unable to assert the same regarding the emotional and affections -relations components. This, in our opinion, probably depends on the fact that almost all of them came from villages and/or rural villages and therefore the network of relations and neighbours has not suffered the breakdown of a more advanced urban society characterised by mechanical and impersonal rapports.

Are you homesick for your country and your relations?  
Friends 32%  
Country 20%  
Grandparents 48%

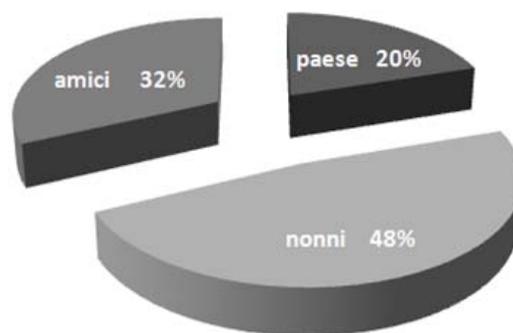


Figure 2. Question B

Would you like to return to your Country?  
Only on holiday 50%  
Yes I want to return 15%  
No I don't want to return 35%

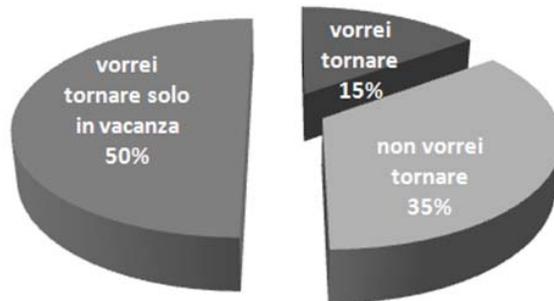


Figure 3. Question C

Almost all the children interviewed would not like to return to live in their country of origin or rather would like to go on holiday, as they are still a little homesick for what they left behind however perhaps they realise, more or less knowingly, that Italy can offer the prospect of a better life.

How do you find living in Italy now?  
I speak Italian well 25%  
I have many friends 21%  
They don't ridicule me any more 28%  
I'm fine 26%

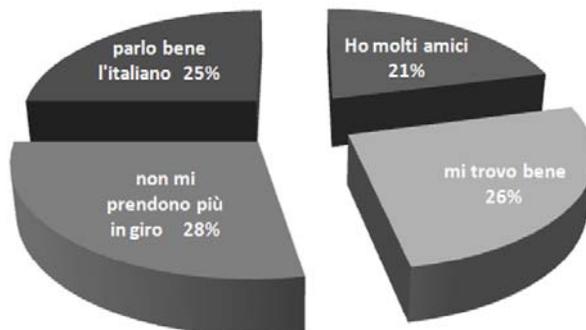


Figure 4. Question D

Regarding integration, figures show that in respect to the initial sensation of disorientation shown on arrival, the current appraisal is very positive.

The young immigrants state to be well, to have made many friends and above all their confidence arises from the fact that they have now learnt the language well and are able to have better relationships, particularly with their peers and in general with adults of their host country.

It is clear, at this point, that the confrontation and interaction with *the other*, the new, formed a fundamental moment for these children, for their self development and self esteem. Through dialogue and listening they have had the chance of reflecting on their experiences and to begin a sort of self reconstruction and self evaluation which in conditions of isolation would remain “unknown” and incomplete.

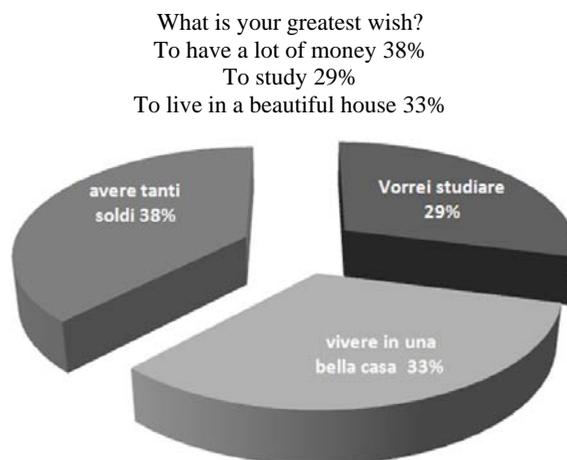


Figure 5. Question E

The desires of the young foreigners, as shown in the pie chart, are not dis-similar to those of their Italian peers: the majority of them would like a lot of money and live in a beautiful house. Many of them declared the wish of working as a doctor, teacher, engineer; for analysis convenience same answers have been recoded and incorporated in the definition “To study” which is then the simplest underlying variable response provided by the children.

Such answers, apparently easy and superficial, really hide a deeper way of feeling: in the meanwhile it is clear that regardless of their youth they have understood the formative value of school and the importance of instruction to be able to aspire to the conditions of a better lifestyle from all points of view and also the professions which the children declare to follow when they are adult (doctor, teacher, engineer) are those which in a certain way positions them in a privileged position and close contact with the social community in which they are inserted. Therefore the type of answer provided reveals other than a strong feeling of social liberation (to have a lot of money and live in a

beautiful house) is also the desire of integration in a definite and complete manner in the social-cultural composition of the host country.

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