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Autobiographical questionnaire and semi-structured interview: comparing two instruments for educational research in difficult contexts

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Abstract

Autobiographical method is spreading a lot among Italian and foreign research and studies, about adult education in lifelong learning view. In fact, above all in adulthood, it is possible to think about themselves in a more critical and conscious way, reworking mentally their own life and past experiences. Promoting the mobilization of introspective thought from childhood it is very useful to make gradually acquire the ability to learn by themselves, to learn from relationships with the others and from the experiences in lifetime. In fact, self-learning is one of the pedagogical objectives underlying the biographical survey. The moment when we feel the need to tell about ourselves is a sign of a new stage of our lifelong and life-wide growth process. During autobiographical narrative, pleasant and unpleasant memories are evoked. In this context, the research has focused on the analysis of two survey instruments: a format / autobiographical questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. Both the main events of the analyzed autobiographical subjects, the emotional-affective and relational areas as well as the reasons that led teachers and educators of the sample to carry out this profession were collected through both instruments. The choice of those instruments has been ensued by a particular interest in people who are induced to communicate and share attitudes, feelings, perceptions and expectations, being solicited by open-ended questions. The author / actor of autobiographical writing, thanks to the help of the format, is guided, supported and facilitated not only to bring out the recollections to the memory but also in giving sense and meaning to their own experiences. He/she is sustained as well as in identifying and managing a range of emotions and mixed feelings, being in a situation of intimacy and with relaxed and subjectively adjusted time. One of the most characterizing elements of the semi-structured interview was the inter-subjective relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee due to an intimate environment, peculiar emotions and feelings which have been proved to be beneficial for both performers involved. In this segment of the research will be analyzed and compared elements proceeded through the two instruments used.

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As regards the methodology, quantitative and qualitative analyses derived from an original grounded theory model had been used.

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1. Autobiographical method

Autobiography is ever more used as scientific method in human sciences research; it is based on own life-story-telling and/or writing to better understand own lived experiences as well as own growth never-ending process, in order to better and more in depth support and promote own process of identity construction which will go on lifelong and lifewide. Furthermore, through autobiography we can learn and focus on social, economic or cultural events which occurred within, close or around the story-teller or writer.

“Autobiographical research is part of a more general biographical turn within the social sciences, characterized by an emphasis on personal narratives and the life history method. Autobiographical and life history work has a long genealogy, both generally and within the social sciences” (Coffey, 2004, 46-47).

Therefore, autobiographical method allows researchers to collect several personal as well as social data which could be analyzed through qualitative methodology, very useful especially in social and pedagogical scientific research, in order to allow deep analyses.

“A variety of particular approaches come under the heading of auto/biographical research. Therefore are analyzed life, self, experience, epiphany, case, autobiography, ethnography, auto-ethnography, biography, ethnography story, discourse, narrative, etc. To that list might also be added performance ethnography, participatory action research, confessional tales, collective autobiography, diary research – and there are more, each with its own distinctive characteristics, intentions and rationale” (Sikes, 1996, 37).

Therefore, the researcher, analyzing the autobiographies, manages to reconstruct not only the individual stories but also the stories (and the cultures) of the social context.

“Essentially though, and as we are using the term here, auto/biographical research is research that starts from and focuses on the personal and subjective perceptions and experiences of individual people. The life history is the life story located within its historical context. The fundamental assumption that underlies life history is that lives are not, cannot be, lived in isolation either from other people or from social, cultural, historical and natural events, movements, trends, and values in the world at large” (Idem).

Autobiographical method offers other double valence: it can be considered both in educational and/or self-educational and in therapeutic way. In fact, writing is both a source of new knowledge and learning and beneficent satisfactory thing. Autobiography is conceived as a “proper mirror” of a mental and consciousness process.

It has been increasingly recognized as an education and training methodology, especially in adult education. Furthermore, it arouses self-reflection, imagination, creativity, which are strategic elements, as recognized by most current national and international educational policies.

As part of a training or education course, even before content begins to work, the autobiographical path itself is formative as it immerses the person in his/her maturity as self-growth in relation to personal history.

In this perspective, the autobiographical method is an invitation to reconstruct the learning processes in order to discover the growth as actors and directors of their own learning and work.

The deepest meaning of the autobiographical training is that it allows knowing oneself and one's own learning. Life stories are used in multiple ways and so there cannot be standard methodology for collecting narrations or stories. It is a characteristic of the narrative approach that many different methodologies can be adopted.

This methodological pluralism is important for theory building and for empirical research.

“The narration of a life history provides a special intersect where two richly elaborated psychological systems meet. The first involves the processes used in recounting or interpreting narrative itself; the second concerns processes involving in retrieving memories. To understand how a life history is told or how it is being interpreting is virtually impossible without a grasp of narrative structure. In autobiography, as in all narrative, the product is highly constructed one. Narrative patterning does not ‘get in the way’ of accurate autobiographic reporting or interpreting

but rather provides a framework for both telling and understanding” (Bruner & Feldman, 1996, 294).

That is why it is necessary to organize the data analysis and the interpretation in some stages and with the cooperation by a team of researchers, in order to have the opportunity to meet and discuss about collected data and their interpretations.

On the basis of the above mentioned scientific assumptions, in this research project, we decided to use two different tools: an autobiographical writing format and a semi-structured interview, in order to analyse and highlight their peculiarities, strengths and weaknesses.

2. Analysis context

The research we present in this article analysed, having considered the sample used, the construct of biography, also from the professional point of view. One of the aims of the research is indeed to analyse the “adult writing” and the “adult narrating”, in and out of school context. Teacher’s personal experiences are analysed by the biographical interpretation process in order to seek especially emotional and affective relationships that exist between teacher and pupil.

In this context, lifelong and life-wide learning and education perspective involving teachers lays the foundations of an education concept aimed at global growth of the person, in a continuous process of construction of identity and personality.

According to UNESCO medium-term strategy 2014-2021, “lifelong learning is emerging as the key principle for educational reform and as a strategic response to emerging national, regional and global socio-economic challenges (...) Values-led lifelong learning plays a vital role in securing lasting peace and tighter social cohesion by supporting the continuing acquisition and practice of active democratic and responsible citizenship. This increasingly takes place in formal education curricular provision, but non-formal youth, community and adult education also have crucial roles to play” (UNESCO, 2014, 10, 3).

In such policies context, autobiography could be progressively widespread as an effective and sustainable tool in order to promote a full awareness about both the self and the others, knowledge, skills in lifelong and lifewide learning and education way.

“In recent years, systems of education and training have improved progressively. The spread and impact of new information technologies, the accelerated liberalization of trade, the growing cultural and ethnic diversity and the change of the production system, have created new possibilities in the field of training and education.

It is necessary to give a new orientation to social policies in order to develop new skills. Knowledge, skills and qualifications of individuals are the basis of the new system of education. Moreover, education is a tool for personal development and building of relationships among individuals” (Aleandri, 2011, 157).

Autobiographical genre, furthermore, is also a resource of learning, knowledge and towards wellbeing too. Autobiographical method of research, then, is applied in the context of adult education with the “self-care” value of autobiography as training method.

Ever more, “educators, social workers and researchers are making increasing use of life histories method as significant evidence of life because the autobiography is the most important self-training method” (Benelli, 2005, 97).

Autobiography, furthermore, is very useful in difficult contexts, because of its flexible, adaptable and effective characteristics. In fact, using the autobiographical method in prison helps us to understand that self-writing is an effective tool for the non-verbal communication that allow us to receive the different emotional states, to take own time to reflect about oneself and about past (good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant, educational or black or even criminal experiences). “Writing in prison means to be creative and it helps us to survive and search an area of freedom” (Idem, 97).

It is a vehicle for the discovery of new worlds, new ways of thinking and new skills to express oneself.

It is a journey to self-revisit and “to give voice” to good and bad times, to imagine a perspective for the future.

On other hand, as regard the school, the autobiography is a valuable tool too, because it provides an opportunity for teachers to give free rein to their emotions and imaginations, in a world where the digitization rules.

In that case too, therefore, the autobiography becomes an instrument of growth and training.

In the context of prison, writing about themselves means to better discover but also to continue to build personal

identity, starting from educators ones. It starts from stimulating educators to recall past experiences to memory, especially in order to make them remember forgotten professional and personal events, and then it will take place the analysis of the educators' stories.

That is why analyzing adult writing, investigating both the emotionality and the relationships between educator and prisoners.

“Narratives are event-centered and historically particular, located in a particular time and place. Stories concern action, more specifically human action, and particularly social interaction. Stories have plots. They have a beginning, middle and end, so that while they unfold in time, the order is more than more sequence but reveal a ‘sense of a whole’. Autobiography shows how human actors do things in the world, how their actions shape events and instigate responses in other actors changing the world (and often the actors themselves) in some way. Stories also reveal the way events and other actors act upon someone, shaping her/his possibilities, the way she/he views herself and her world (Spreizer, 2009, 15).

Autobiographical writing/narrative, then, helps the person to take care of him/her-self.

3. Pedagogical objectives of biographical survey

One of the several pedagogical objectives achievable through using the autobiography writing within the framework of autobiographical methods, is to contribute to an efficient and effective training, education and self-education. Indeed, when we think/talk/write about ourselves, or we tell the others some of the most important stages or experiences of our lives, we reach deeper and deeper levels of self-reflection, of self-awareness and of self-orientation. They are, moreover, strategic in order to: a) live in a positive and fruitful way; b) improve the lifelong and lifewide process of growth and acquisition of knowledge and skills; and c) to have available wide-ranging and useful tools to be able to plan one's own future.

Otherwise, if we do not write our memories on a paper, or if we do not tell the others our memories and share them, our life would be empty and evanescent, also because of the physiological process of memories' obsolescence. The written text, as well as the oral one, allow us to fix our life story and the most significant events that had contributed to “shape” ourselves in a more or less permanent way, at least the most important ones (the most marking and hitting emotions).

Therefore, in the perspective outlined above, one of the priorities of the research is to find instruments that let us to give meaning and unity to the events of personal and professional lives. In that context, the autobiographical writing/narrative explicitly highlights its curative power, as it represents an effective tool, even therapeutic, as well as an education and training instrument facing different types of users.

We can achieve all those aims through dialoguing and listening or through writing and reading, as the autobiographical format helps and facilitates in them. Narration helps the narrator to evoke memories, through the support and facilitation from and through the autobiographical format and the interaction between interviewed and interviewer, in order to bring out in an authentic way his/her personality and the size and complexity of events. Autobiographical writing allows the writer to look inside himself/herself, as remembering and, above, writing need long time. Time is needed not only to think about past experiences, but also to be able to choose carefully the words in the most suitable and appropriate way in order to give a correct idea about his/her personality and of the scope and the size of the various experiences.

“According to recent sociological and pedagogical literature, autobiography has several aims. The first aim concerns knowledge about one's own identity, autobiography allows us not only to investigate more profoundly our personal identity, but also to revisit the present moment analysing the past. Analysing the past and going through the past in order to find some ‘hints to explain present actions, to discover the continuity and discontinuity with the past, to find what has been definitively finished and what questions are still not yet solved in one's life. Autobiographical narration helps the author give sense to his/her life course thanks to the chronological reconstruction of the events” (Mariotti, 2002, 105).

Therefore, the biographical approach allows us to give answers to unsolved or suspended questions.

Talking about oneself allows not only to come back to live but also a highly practical training. The adults re-learn the reasons for their existence by telling their own stories, talking about the time when life was lived intensely between joy and pain.

The autobiography focuses on different aspects of a person's life such as his/her family, education, work etc. and different moments during the life-course.

"Indeed, everyone has significant moments which suddenly lead to a change in the life course, remembering their family, the school they attended, their classmates, their work and career, their friends and loves, moments of great change and so on. In order to be able to write about oneself, a person has to distance him/herself from everyday life in order to re-discover the different parts of oneself, in order to become more aware about the different Selves of which a person is composed" (Spreizer 2009, 15).

Written or narrated autobiography generates forms of recognition and self-learning. Moreover, the autobiography tells and let to know not only the protagonist's life, but, through his/her experiences and relationships, it also relates the micro and macro context, where he/she lived, where he/she lives and where he/she will live.

Through analysing the different memories about lifelong and lifewide experiences, nevertheless, we can note that they are, often, more or less similar the other's ones.

"The re-discovery process is constituted both by an initial process of de-construction of the Self and then a re-composition (re-construction) of the Self" (Demetrio, 1995, 71).

Reconstructing the "plot" of one's own existence, it allows to define one's own and neighbours' personalities.

Retracing the reasons for professional choice, retracing the entering in the school organization and some important carrier experiences, is a highly formative moment for a teacher: it allows to discover the motivations for teaching, learning by successes and failures, finding the links between personality teaching style. This can help to define teacher and adult's identity. The personal experiences, the reasons that led them to devote themselves to teaching, the affective and emotional relationships between teacher and pupil have been analysed along the autobiographical paths through the two instruments used.

Moreover, the same can be said for prison educators, who have chosen their professional life in a difficult and complex environment like jai and prisoners.

People's need to tell their story occurs above all in adulthood. "The key aspect of this topic is 'the time'". Time changes people. People can talk about the same thing or the same event but differently from each other. "This means that the past is shaped by people's consciousness. People change over time, and experiences are considered from new angles. Events and experiences are 're-ordered', and new aspects and details come to stand out. The relationship with the past also depends on the present-day situation in which people find themselves. [...] This is the interactivity of the biographical method, when the process of memory as dialogue is built up, in which the narrator and the listener, the past and the present, the event and a dynamic relationship to it, all play equally active roles. Such an approach is in essence an internal task, requiring people to be honest and open with themselves, and willing to enter into dialogue" (Agapova, 2007, 45, 52).

Therefore, two autobiographical methods were used: the first one is based on writing through the intake and the facilitation offered by an original format processed in order to act as a stimulator of memories and activator of not only cognitive channels, but also affective, emotional, sensory, imaginative, iconic-holistic and meta-cognitive channels. The second one through using a narration based on a semi-structured interview it allows the interviewer to guide the interviewee through a communicative verbal and nonverbal relationship. It requires interviewer's high capacities and skills in order to configure, sometimes, a real counselling that takes place in "real time" "right here and right now" (*hic et nunc*), established during the interview, within, but not exclusively, those spaces and those times.

4. Survey instruments

As regards the instruments of investigation, the research team utilized two quantitative/qualitative tools which consists of a writing autobiographical format and a semi-structured interview.

A format structured in five frameworks (birth/childhood, adolescence, first working experiences, present-time, how I may imagine myself in the future) was firstly handed. This format allows "autobiographer" to do flash-back into the past, but even into the present and, finally, in the future too. The authors of autobiographical writing are guided and stimulated through the items designed into the format. They will be able, in such way, to easier and better remember and attribute meanings and significances to their own experiences.

The choice of the semi-structured interview, instead, was due to the need to have a conversation, whose purpose

and structure have been well defined in the course of the interaction. That tool makes it mouldable and adaptable to different empirical contexts and different personalities of respondents. In addition, the semi-structured interview investigates aspects of affective-emotional nature. The wording of the questions is aimed at allowing the memory to open up and telling in order to accept and not judge.

The personal experiences, the reasons that led them to devote themselves to teaching or to educational profession, the affective and emotional relationship between teacher and pupil have been analysed along the autobiographical path.

In addition, the semi-structured interview gives full freedom to express themselves and to deepen the conversation about some different or all the covered topics. This is important for a good relationship between interviewer and interviewee.

The experiences narrated by teachers through the interview are the results of a strong emotional impact. Furthermore, more is the trust the interviewee feels towards the interviewer more the interviewee will be able to deepen his/her emotions, feelings and memories. To narrate means getting rid: during interviewing, teachers and educators have sometimes touched or cried and they have not hesitated to tell unpleasant episodes. In a time characterized by insecurity and fragmentation of identity, one the ever most important aspect has become the emotional and affective relationships.

“The semi-structured interview is meant to be a personal and intimate encounter in which open, direct, verbal questions are used to elicit detailed narratives and stories. The interviewer’s task is to obtain information while listening and encouraging another person to speak” (Di Cicco, Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, 318-319).

The most important interviewer’s skill during the interview is to know how to listen to the other person. Emotions. Indeed, play a role in all dimensions of life and they influence the way in which we make sense of the world and our interactions with others, including throughout the research process.

The decision to interview implies a value on personal language as data. Face-to-face interviewing may be appropriate where depth of meaning is important and the research has been primarily focused on gaining insight and understanding.

Semi-structured interviews allow individuals to disclose thoughts and feelings which are clearly private. This method relies on the inter-personal skills of the interviewer, the ability to establish relationship and rapport.

With regard to data analyses, they were used both quantitative and qualitative ones.

The several experiences narrated by the authors bring out memories and feelings, that sometimes, during the narration and the writing, are perceived as if they were re-living them personally. The author of self-writing, reading it, creates a his/her own space, trying to give a logical order to his/her experiences. This is a very important aspect that needs to be emphasized in the context of the training. During the communicative-relational interaction established through the interview, the communication allows the researcher to understand more facets that help to rebuild and form the identity and personality of the interviewee. Instead, through the interview, the writing gives way to time, to the stillness and to the silence, indispensable assumptions to rebuild one’s own plot in a more composite and organic way than the smaller time of the oral interaction.

5. Emotional-affective and relational areas analysis

For the purposes of this research, the emotional and affective aspect of one’s own life is of fundamental importance. In fact it is a necessary tool for helping relationships aimed also to the psychological wellbeing of all stake-holders. To narrate one’s own emotions, it stimulates the process of recovering of one’s own memories. The more that are fixed in the memory, the more they have been associated to emotions in the moment in which they have happened. Moreover, to express emotions during the narration it allows to evaluate the intellectual and affection resources and, at the same time, arousing interest in the listener/s.

All that allows us to reach a greater awareness of one’s own existence. Writing or narrating one’s own experiences and emotions, strengthens and reassures the subject not to be afraid of one’s own feelings, but to acquire awareness of their value and meaning, also discovering new ones.

This practice makes the author recall the spiritual and existential dimension as well as relational, cognitive and affective one.

It is appropriate that this method should be applied from an early age, in different contexts, in such a way that

the educators and teachers solicit the authors of autobiographical writing in a constant storytelling exercise.

To communicate one's own memories, as well as to listen to the other people's experiences, is a very delicate task because, as we have just said above, emotional sphere is involved and invested on.

The interpersonal relationship is enhanced through the semi-structured interview and the autobiographical format, even or especially on an emotional level. It becomes, in that way, more intense, so all that is communicated during the interview or questionnaire becomes full of feelings, meaningful and deep experiences.

The positive and negative experiences narrated by the interviewer arrive with no filters. So there is an immediate emotional impact on both persons involved. In order to continue and complete the interview profitably, the interviewer needs to flow well and manage his/her emotions in a short time and with professionalism.

On the other hand, the autobiographical format allows the researcher and the author of the writing to immerse themselves in a wide temporal space, in order to perceive and settle the different emotions, and to have all the necessary time to react and cope.

Therefore, the emotional and affective relationship between interviewee and interviewer assumes, through the mentioned two different instruments, a double value. In the first case, the interviewee recounts his experiences in a very direct way and in "real-time", while the interviewer listens actively, so the reported emotions are perceived and canalised instantly; in the second case it goes down in a different space-time dimension, made of silence and concentration, allowing for space and individualized freedom.

"The use of emotional expressions in autobiographical accounts seems to fulfill many different purposes. They add to the understanding of unique experiences for individual narrators; they convey the collective subjectivity of groups of individuals; they reveal cultural canons, and they touch upon issues that characterize humans in general is explored the life lived, and also life as experienced and narrated, and how these interact in the construction of a life story" (Magai & McFadden 1996, 177).

During the autobiographical story, the emotions felt in the experiences strengthen the relationship between interviewer and interviewee. Happy and unhappy episodes of life are evoked. Each of these episodes arouses sensations, feelings, emotions, allowing to awake past memories, strong scents that rekindle the imagination. The interview becomes intense when the memories are perceived as fragments of life that need to be arranged and to have a sense.

"Emotional remembering in the autobiographical interview context can be experienced by narrators as process that is potentially transformative" (Svasek & Domecka 2012, 1).

Autobiographical narrations or writings allow "reflection about alternative interpretations of one's life course tendencies, self-critical attempts of understanding one's own misconceptions of oneself and self-chosen or self-erected impediments, assessment of the impediments superimposed by others and by structural conditions, (and) imaging future courses of life that support the overall gestalt of the unfolding biographical identity" (Schutze 2008, 6).

Every memory is transformed into something valuable, especially if linked to moments of affection. Moreover, the narrative becomes therapeutic, because listening means taking care of the others, establishing a climate of mutual trust.

6. Autobiographical writing format

One basic purpose was to verify if the autobiography, through autobiographical writings guided by a specifically designed format, leads the subject who completed it to redefine, learn more and expand her/his own identity.

So, with regard to the research design, from a methodological point of view, as we have already written above, it has been firstly utilized a qualitative tool which consists of an autobiographical questionnaire.

The choice of that tool was motivated by arguing that self-writing, in a time when the society requires man to be quick, it becomes an important pedagogical objective to reflect and "take time out for themselves".

Moreover, the self-writing allows the writer to immerse in a world whose temporal dimension expands and in which, therefore, the identity can be discovered or rediscovered. Through forms of writing, the author tries to find or restore meaning to the past experiences, finding the thread that leads back to the plot of his existence. The autobiographical writing, therefore, enhances the identity and self-awareness.

It was in this context that it has been designed an autobiographical format in order to guide and stimulate not

only the cognitive level, but also the emotional, relational one, etc.

The format was been structured in five frameworks to deepen about childhood, adolescence, first work-experiences, the present and how s/he imagine her/his future. Such format allowed the teachers and educators to do flashback into the past, into the present time and in the future. The authors of autobiographical writing are guided and stimulated to remember, attributing meaning to their experiences by the multiple stimuli of the format.

From the methodological point of view, the analysis of data collected from the autobiographical format has been divided into several phases.

After reading the collected material, a coding was made with the aim of researching units of meaning. Subsequently short captions were created until reaching the identification of central categories consisting of meanings and essential concepts. Finally the reports were drafted.

The sample consists of 22 units, including 16 females and 6 males among schools and prisons: fourteen teachers of elementary, middle and high schools and eight prison educators. Age range: 30 - 65 years old.

About the “self-portrait” it was asked to be described, especially with regard to the first tab, the emerging categories are focused on “character”.

About emotions: the most felt ones have been: happiness for the birth of children and grief over the loss of loved people (54 %); about desire: almost all of the participants responded “serenity” and “good health; instead, about fear: 13% people feel fear of the death, 31% people feel fear of the illness.

The responses of teachers and educators in the format are multiform; they describe significant moments lived in the school or in jail contexts and brief reflections about their experiences.

The format analysis, allowed the research team to find that self-writing represents a highly educational moment, especially in adulthood. Immersing the researchers in the authors’ memories, allowed to retrace their life paths and to carry away by the past emotions, due to the many experiences narrated in the format. From the memories of childhood, adolescence, and young age, we rediscover the historical fragments, as if to represent real relics, kept in the heart of the authors. Solitude, silence and concentration are valuable tools that allowed me to step into the interviewees’ shoes, in order to discover that their emotional states are intertwined with my own ones. So we can remember a significant past trip, the scent of a flower, the perception of a colour, the pleasure in listening to an old song, or feelings such as the joy for the birth of a child or the sorrow for the death of a loved one. All those had resulted useful in stimulating the curiosity of the autobiography writer as well as that of the researcher and, particularly, the desire to discover things that perhaps lie “in the eyes of our authors”.

Finally, the autobiographical format can also represent for the author a real help to “heal the wounds” caused by negative, sometimes traumatic, events lived in the far o recent past. Although reminding unpleasant and painful memories it could lead us to relive those moments and we can get rid of those burdens in order to “make peace” with the past. So the writing, in that way, becomes therapeutic. In fact through writing we manage to externalize our suffering and our pain. In this way, we look “with new eyes or new lens” both the past and the present, and, above all, the future.

The researcher managed to enter the educational, training experiences by the collection of autobiographical writing. The researcher managed to recognize the main events that have contributed to each interviewee’s process of growth and development, so he realized the way in which educational, social and cultural processes are learnt.

7. Semi-structured interview

Emotional remembering within the autobiographical interview context can be experiencing by narrators as a process that is potentially transformative. The method includes a close analysis of interview transcriptions, distinguish in a particular textual, performative and affective dimensions of self-narration.

The research design, from a methodological point of view, is focused, in a second phase, on the semi-structured interview consist of sixteen pre-determined questions, considered important for the purpose of the narrative. The choice of instrument resulted by a particular interest in those who being questioned, are induced to transmit attitudes, feelings, perceptions and expectations.

The personal experiences, the reasons that led them to devote themselves to teaching or educating, the affective and emotional relationship between teacher and pupil have been analysed along the semi-structured interview.

Personal and professional own experiences were narrated by the teachers as a storytelling. The semi-structured

interview consists of eight questions investigating mainly the different emotional-affective and motivational-relational areas.

The sample's interviewed people are graduated, mainly teachers of humanities.

During the interview, the participants were very cooperative, not only because they are well trained and willing to have a dialogue and a new experience, but also because they have actually demonstrated curiosity about the research project and the tools used, the greater was the curiosity the older and wiser were the components of the sample.

The active collaboration of teachers and educators allowed the researchers to observe and recognize the interest and the passion lavished by teachers on the profession.

The "face to face" interview allows to perceive the sensations in real time through the communicative interaction with the researcher/interviewer. The emotional impact is much more intense than the approach of the autobiographical questionnaire, just as it contemplates the direct relationship between interviewer and interviewee. Emotions arrive immediately to the recipient with no filters. During the interviews, participants recounted happy and unhappy episodes of life. In fact, the interview allows people to give free rein to the various feelings. The recounted experiences appear to have a strong emotional impact, especially as regards the relationship between teacher and student and between educator and prisoner. The reasons that led the participants to carry out this kind of work, arise mainly from the desire to disseminate knowledge in classroom settings and prison.

Motivation to teach comes from educational approach that aims to help each other and improve one's person and one's life (20%).

The answers provided by penitentiary educators show that the motivation to teach in prison came from the willingness to disclose knowledge and culture in difficult context (20%).

Emotions reported by teachers in relation to the memories of the early years of teaching consist embarrassment of facing a class (30%).

Emotions reported by penitentiary educators in relation to the memories of the early years of teaching are fear and sadness (30%).

The answers provided by respondents show that the relationship between educator and pupil is based on ability to listen to the others (20%).

Penitentiary educators reported that the relationships between educators and prisoners are essentially based on dialogue because, especially in such difficult context as the jail is, the prisoners as well as the educators need to talk about their problems and hardships (30%).

8. Conclusions

The format and the semi-structured interview, as it was resulted by the survey project, are revealed to be effective tools for research. The first one has revealed the importance of writing in and outside school contexts from which emerged the rediscovery of their identity and professionalism through the telling of life stories. Moreover, there was the stress at different emotional situations.

The semi-structured interview, however, is an investigative tool capable of carrying out, through dialogue, the reasons which led the teachers or the educators to carry out their profession and the intense relationships between teaching and pupil or prisoners.

The active collaboration of teachers and educators allowed the researchers to observe the interest and the passion lavished by teachers on the profession through both the research tools chosen.

Autobiographical writing has proved a means of catharsis and relief from the burdens of the soul.

In a climate and environment of solitude, quiet and silence, the form enabled teachers to give free rein to their thoughts and emotion.

It is useful therefore in the range of adult education, engaged in the processes of formal and non-formal training, in the sphere of educational contexts.

Writing about themselves enables the adults to discover past history, learning reasons of personal and professional paths. Retracing the reasons for professional choice, retracing the entering in the school or jail organization and some important carrier experiences, they highly formative and self-educational moments for a teacher or an educator: they allow to discover the motivations for teaching or educating, learning by successes and failures, finding the links between personality teaching style. This can help to define teacher/educator and adult's

identity.

The autobiographical format has, then, the vantage to let the person “free” to manage the timing and content for himself/herself and at the same time to be highly therapeutic and cathartic.

On the other hand, the semi-structured interview allows establishing an interpersonal relationship between interviewer and interviewee that may constitute real helping relationship. It is characterized, moreover, by a predetermined but not rigid time management. The interview is likely to have therapeutic effects as well.

The semi-structured interview, therefore, proved to be effective and appropriate tool in establishing interaction and communicative relationship, primarily based on respect and trust, but also on empathy, sincerity and transparency, thus acting as a stimulus to open and let memories and emotions (that make the memories meaningful) flow freely. At the end of the narrative, the respondents (but this was also detected after the completion of the autobiographical format) found to have reached a higher level of self-esteem.

The various stories and personal experiences narrated by educators allow to become conscious that the main motivation of this profession lies primarily in the willingness to disseminate the knowledge. Willingness, determination and formative relationship between educators and prisoners are valuable tools to accompany educators in this difficult task. Fear and sadness are the main emotions reported by educators, although during the interviews most of them reported that media tell of a world made of violence, neglecting the human aspect.

The relationships between educators and prisoners are essentially based on dialogue, because in this context the prisoners want to tell their stories and express their hardships and needs. Sincerity is one of the most important components of that relationship. The different experiences narrated by educators are fragments of life that remain in the hearts of the people who listened to them. Telling personal stories means taking a moment for themselves, to recharge and give free rein to the emotions.

In light of the data obtained, it can be seen that the two instruments, where possible, may be considered integrated, because their specific features allow to detect different sizes and characteristics that let us to extract some-different data and, therefore, a more complex and articulate picture or framework of the process of building the personal, social and cultural identity.

The autobiographical writing format allows the research team to spend adequate time to collect autobiographical data and less than though semi-structured interview.

The semi-structured interview, instead, allows to deepen narrations through the relationship and trust climate between interviewer/interviewee.

On the other hand, autobiographical writing format give full freedom to the autobiographical writer, who will be able to more or less deepen each format item; during the semi-structured interview, instead, discomfort or shame or other emotions could overcome and spoil or compromise the narration itself.

Nevertheless, moreover, both the research tools have been resulted useful because they had given the research team the opportunity to discover differences and particularities but, even, similarities that characterize many life-stories. So, it has been clearly resulted the mainly values and topics about human beings, as persons and as very relational kind individuals.

Both the autobiographical writing format and the semi-structured interview, furthermore, have been proved very helpful in the lifelong and lifewide personal and professional growth processes.

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