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## Educational and autoeducational value of autobiographical writings

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### Abstract

Recently, the high educational and autoeducational value, functions and meanings of autobiographical writings, as evidenced by the numerous studies and research about (i.e. Demetrio, Alberici, Merrill, West, etc.), has been increasingly discovered and widespread. The autobiographical writings, in fact, allow you to retrace your life, events, people, places, the most important objects, to discover new meanings to the experiences, to be able to orient themselves in decision-making, interpersonal relationships, to plan efficiently your lives, to produce new knowledge and learning, to feel satisfaction and wellbeing too. This paper will present some results of a research based on an original autobiographical format administered to a group of adults attending a yoga class or yoga trainers, in order to analyze the meanings that they have recognized about some events and choices during their lifetime, in a lifelong and lifewide learning and education perspective.

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### 1. Introduction

In current globalized and complexity societies the human right to education, aimed to social and cultural participation, assumes a central role in pedagogical perspective as well as in institutional policies.

Pedagogical sciences, in fact, just as they have as main purpose and aim the education, growth and training of man, intended primarily as a person and as an active and involved citizen, first of all aware of the rules which shall base, imprint and conduct civil living together in society, solidarity, collaboration and cooperation, are closely

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related with the deep awareness of himself/herself, of his/her experienced realized during his/her life, of the meanings those experiences, facts, people met, events and so on have represented for himself/herself.

So, autobiographical writings allow to recall to memory, to remember and to give sense and meanings, even news, to all lifelong and lifewide experienced.

Through autobiographical writings you can discover the fundamental values and principles have enlightened and guided your choices during your lifelong growing processes. Through autobiographical writings, furthermore, you can argue and understand better which has been your past to plan and build more efficiently your future life, discovering and improving your potentials and interests, in personal, relational as well as vocational perspectives.

The biographical and autobiographical methods, in fact, are now used recurrently in the human sciences, especially in education and adult education, in the perspective of lifelong and lifewide education and training, and thus pertinent in lifelong learning of professionals.

It is crucial, indeed, to be able to create effective awareness and synergy among many environments and contexts of life, such as family, school, extra-school, working place, etc., to reach and widespread an effective culture of lifelong and lifewide learning and education.

## **2. Values and functions of autobiographical writing in a pedagogical perspective of lifelong and lifewide learning**

Autobiography, biography network, taking especially charge of each people, it is able to take the care of a life plan that could lead to a decent quality of life and wellbeing.

Rethink and rebuild our personal history, through autobiographical writing, also allow, in a certain way, to reconstruct the surrounding environment, framework and context.

Sennett (2008), however warns us from the negative consequences of our present society, as it is built on an economic system based on a type of production that separates the operation from thought, creativity and innovation. It does not allow, that is, to ask questions that will broaden the horizon not only problematic, but also the horizon of meaning and the creation of its own ethical vision.

And, then, in our fragmented and piecemeal, glocal (Bauman, 2005) and distracting, risk, hurried and quickly changing society, how to retrieve the dimensions of meaning, identity, history? Just by doing writing and writing about yourself (Aleandri, 2012, 9-10).

Writing, furthermore, differently from speaking, allow words and concepts to remain sculpted over time and that implies a thinking and rethinking work before writing.

Writing also enable you to improve consciousness and awareness about yourself, due to the distance we can keep while we are writing too.

The writing, requiring time for reflection and the drafting of the text, thus it enables to ponder carefully and thoroughly both what you want to communicate with and the modalities and terms chosen.

Such dynamics of writing are also reflected in their turn in cognitive processes, therefore we can say that writing restructures thought. And the writing allows increasingly detailed and in-depth insights, opening up spaces of discovery consisting not only of the outside world but also of the inward and subjective.

Writing enables, therefore, in pedagogically relevant perspective, to free the man through the fulfillment of the basic need of bringing other partakers into their events (which have become experiences through the provision of sense and meaning permitted by the reflection that writing involves): so, that is an adhered need to the nature of the human being, which Aristotle, more than two millennia ago, had already wisely called "social animal".

Current Italian illustrious and distinguished pedagogists as Demetrio (1999, 2002, 2003, 2008, 2011), Alberici (2000, 2002), Laneve (2009), as well as Anglo-Saxon scholars as Merrill and West (2009), have often studied and agreed that autobiographical writing is very efficient and effective to discover always new meanings about your lifespan experiences and to improve your awareness and knowledge of yourself, useful to orienteering, to your

lifelong and lifewide growing processes towards becoming actual, fulfilled and satisfied adult and to plan coherently and congruently your life project.

In this paper we will present some results of a research we have carried out through some surveys, based on an original autobiographical format administered to a group of adults attending a yoga class or yoga trainers, in order to analyze the meanings that they have recognized about some events and choices during their lifetime, in a lifelong and lifewide learning and education perspective.

A project of autobiographical writing for educational and training purposes, and self-educational and self-training ones, through the administration of a format that guides the writing of yourself, “Writing of a lifetime. Writing for ...”.

Through the stimuli presented in the format remember recalling is facilitated through solicitations of memory, not only cognitive, but also perceptive, emotional, affective.

In addition, that format has a very wide range of uses, because it is very flexible and it can be adapted to many aims and objectives: for example, has been recently used also to improve inclusion (Aleandri, Giaconi, 2012).

### 3. Some data analyses

The autobiographical format “Writing of a lifetime. Writing for ...” was administered to 13 adult people attending a yoga course or yoga trainers.

8 are women and 5 men, mostly in their forties, 8 of 13 participants have between the ages of 40 and 50 years, 3 are in their thirties, only two distance themselves more from the mean age of the participants (43.9), one is 28 and the other is 71 years old. The most common degree is baccalaureate higher (8 of 13), then there are 4 graduates and one achieved only a low secondary level. At the group level professions are quite diversified: there is a doctor, a biologist and nutritionist, a banking, two employees, a musician and sound engineer, an herbalist, a sale attendant, a workman and a yoga teacher. Three people are not pursuing any work: a housewife, a retired and an unemployed.

All participants had at their disposal a week of time for completing and returning the format to the group of researchers.

During and after the administering of the format we could have a direct feedback on the perception and satisfaction of the same by surveyed, and they answered they had found that it very interesting and it was really appreciated by the vast majority of the participants.

Data analyses have been realized through the research method based on the grounded theory by Glaser and Strauss (2009).

First of all, subjects had to complete the title of the format “Writing of a lifetime. Writing for ...”, by thinking and choosing the word they would have preferred to explain their most relevant significance they have attributed to their writing work through the format guide.

Only one forgot to fill the word. Only one, again, gave a sensitive and fragile expression to make we aware, just from the beginning, about her difficult and negatively perceived life and experiences. 75%, instead, have indicated a dynamic concept, in a process perspective, to open to the hope, to the future, or to look deeper inside themselves.

After filling in the autobiographical format participants were asked to complete a questionnaire on cognitive assessment of the utility of the format and his/her participation in yoga classes, with the aim of detecting the response from participants on the ability of the format to construct meanings for understand the previous life, raise awareness and self-knowledge, stimulate the planning and the ability to project themselves into the future, exploring the use of self-knowledge for professional purposes. A second part of the questionnaire was devoted to the assessment of the effects of yoga practice, the questions included in this case the evaluation by the subject, based on personal experience, the usefulness of yoga as a path of growth of awareness and knowledge self, was asked to assess how self-knowledge is functional to a proper practice of the profession and the construction of meaning of their previous experience and their own lives.

We can report that just from a quick reading revealed a diffusely positive evaluation of all the questions that implied a value judgment on a scale of 4: for nothing, little, pretty, very much. Were in total 10 questions with this type of response, well 8 have received responses on the two highest steps of the scale of values (very much and enough) with percentages around and greater than 90%. Let us analyze more specifically.

Eleven of 13 participants declare that the compilation of the autobiographical format, through the stimulation of memory, memories and past experiences, contributed very much or somewhat increase the level of awareness and self-knowledge in terms of feelings, emotions, reactions. We must highlight that in addition, in a subsequent application, as many as 11 out of 13 state that a greater self-awareness is useful for professional purposes, 1 the subject declares quite useful, only one believes that awareness is not at all useful for professional purposes, but it must be said that this person plays the craft worker.

On the request if the writing was helpful to rebuild and give meanings or better understand their way of life and the experience gained, 5 participants answer that was very useful, enough 4, 4 others believe that it was of little use and no from a completely negative response choosing the answer for nothing. The situation is more or less similar with regard to their evaluation of the format on the ability to stimulate the projection in the future: 6 indeed state that has been quite useful and 2 that it was very.

For the part of the questionnaire dedicated to yoga, what emerges is a high appreciation and evaluation of the utility of the path of the already recognized as good for the format. The number of years of practice in the sample is quite high: 5 participants on total practicing yoga for 15 years, 5 others practice it by a period of time ranging between 5 and 10 years, only 3 practice for only a year. The methods of approach to this discipline is evenly distributed between: curiosity generated by flyers or advertising in their own neighborhood, readings of personal interest in the topic, relatives, friends or acquaintances who have spoken of the thing. It has been asked to provide a concise definition of yoga and its interpretation of all definitions emerge 3 basic concepts: 1) to self-awareness and self-knowledge invoked by as many as 8 people, 2) the union and integration between different aspects of 'being (body, mind, soul), 3) that of being understood as a psycho-physical balance, pursuit of happiness, etc.. All participants, without exception, said they would recommend yoga to their loved ones, a very large majority for reasons related to health and wellbeing.

To the question "through yoga believe that there have been improvements in terms of self-awareness and knowledge of yourself" in 12 respond that it is very or fairly useful, one person described him as not very useful but it should be noted that this is a subject a format that has emerged from the deep self-knowledge since childhood. As to yoga and its impact and usefulness in their work are 9 to state that it is very useful, 3 state that it is not enough and even here only one says that it is not at all but it is the same person who had declared the limited use of self-knowledge in the professional field as he works as a laborer. He was then asked participants if they felt that a spiritual approach to existence had given back, or could give back, meaning to their life experience, even here 12 people chose the answer "very" and the thirteenth stated that his life is always been rich in meaning.

Another question posed to the participants in the questionnaire was their assessment of yoga as a path of growth in personal, professional and social. It appears that 100% declare very useful yoga as a path of personal growth, the 92.3% considers it very useful or somewhat useful in professional terms and 84.6% considers it very or quite useful in social terms.

A final figure that emerges from the results of the questionnaire is the definition that the participants give their identity according to the professional role, family, according to competences and according to spiritual practice. What we found is that only 3 define themselves primarily according to the profession and are exactly a musician, a doctor and a biologist / nutritionist; 8 put between the first and second place in the familiar role as an element of perception of their identity but insofar as the self-perception based on the skills possessed there was a widespread distribution in the intermediate values (between the 3rd and 4th place in a scale of 5), the particularly significant finding is that as many as 5 out of 13 subjects define themselves primarily in terms of their being yoga practitioners.

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