

LEARNING IN EVERYDAY LIFE: TOWARDS A NEW METHOD OF RESEARCHING THE FIELD

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Abstract. *The text focuses on certain theoretical and methodological issues of using the biographical method to research the learning of adults in everyday life. It presents the development of the biographical method in andragogy and the characteristics of its use in the research of learning. By studying various biographical studies, the authors establish that varied denominations of biographical methods were created, which they link to various professional environments and ways of researching. Some problems in collecting data, taking notes and interpreting narration as well as characteristics of the relationship between the researcher and narrator are presented. Since getting to know the selected phenomena takes place in a reciprocal relationship between the researcher and the narrator, non-verbal communication and pre-linguistic experience, bringing additional challenges to note taking and interpreting, are all important in addition to verbal communication.*

Key words: *life story, narration, interpretation, research method, learning in everyday life.*

LEARNING IN EVERYDAY LIFE AND PERSONAL NARRATIONS

In the 1980s, various authors, among them Certeau (2007, 1980), established that social and humanistic sciences had developed a method of researching traditions, language, symbols, art, but without developing formal instruments to observe learning, i.e. the ways how people assimilate culture in everyday life and how they change culture.

Learning is understood as a process of change, which implies that individuals not only accept, i.e. they are not only "consumers" of ready-made patterns, but they also change rituals, representations, knowledge and values. People individualize mass culture and introduce changes on the way (that can affect anything from objects to values) and learn continuously. J. Bruner (1996) defined learning as a cultural process and this is the way it

is treated in biographical approaches. Varied denominations for learning can be found in everyday life. Dominice (2006), Alheit (1995), West and Merrill (2009) designate it as biographical learning; we have often come across the term informal learning during the last decade, and also primal learning. This learning constantly goes on; it continues all the time and builds the life narrative, so designation narrative learning is also found. All cases involve learning as a way of adapting, assimilating culture and changing, forming knowledge and identity throughout the entire life cycle. It is linked to the notion of the constantly emerging subjectivity and biography related to it.

In recent years, personal narratives have become increasingly interesting for the field of research, either as a reflection on important psychic processes – one of which is learning – or as a part of memories and oral history. Personal narratives are used as a research method in various expert areas. The research method is named according to various environments and thus we encounter names such as the biographical method, autobiographical method, the life story method, the biographical-narrative interpretive method, life history, oral history, the narrative method, narrative. Biographical methods, life narrative methods and narrative methods are the three syntactic strings most often detected in andragogy.

Various names indicate that there are different research practices used in varied research areas in varied disciplines (such as history, ethnology, anthropology, educational sciences, migration studies, family studies, literature) which have different names in different areas. Methods develop fast and new variants and models keep emerging.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE BIOGRAPHICAL METHOD

We can look for the origin of the biographical method in oral history. During the development of biographical methods, both the Chicago school and symbolic interactionism played an important role, while in educational sciences, the definition of learning as a cultural phenomenon was also significant. Works by J. Bruner are among the most prominent.

Biographies were mostly a means of researching selected phenomena. Through this method development and under the influence of phenomenology and feminist studies, biography became the object of research. The main purpose of narrative studies is to understand an individual's identity, life flow and identity formation, and to accept and interpret experiences and their wording. In the so-called area of "biographical recognition", mostly subjectivity appears and we are faced with the complexity of subjectivity, as it can be worded and communicated.

The development of the biographical method was also influenced by gender studies, feminist studies, hermeneutics and post-structuralism. Feminist studies had their impact through interest for various aspects of private life, particularly the experience of maternity, as shown in studies of various female authors (cf. Gabb 2010, Stanley 1996, Oakley, 1981). The development of the biographical method was also influenced by various trends of constructivism, phenomenology and cultural studies. Interest in using the biographical method increased in the 1990s, which can be linked to the growing popularity of ethnomethodology with its interest in everyday routines and the production of these routines. Influences can also be detected in the works of Goffman and Backer. The influence of technological progress should probably also not be neglected, as new

ways of recording and storing notes enable taking narrations, repeated observation and listening, and last but not least, offer a different way of taking notes and processing them with computer tools.

THE BIOGRAPHICAL METHOD IN ANDRAGOGY

In this paper we shall focus on some theoretical and methodological questions stemming from the use of the biographical method in the area of adult learning. This area boasts some important studies based on the biographical method. Among them, for example, in Great Britain, Ivor Goodson researched the subjective experiencing of the roles of the teacher and the career. This vast study, which included various university departments in Great Britain, can be found on the www.learninglives.com website. L. West and K. Olesen researched the workplace learning, M. Milana researched the learning of those migrating, while biographical methods were also used to research notes on prison life and old age learning.

Agnieszka Bron was the first to start using the life story in andragogy, when she – under the influence of the Polish tradition – studied the biographies of migrants. The model of the biographical method, which was later used in the Chicago school, was formed by the Polish researcher Florian Znaniecki at the beginning of the previous century.

Biographical research in andragogy is oriented towards observing complexity, the "multiple voice" in adulthood. It is linked with the concept of multilayer identity and with problems of identity formation in adulthood and old age. The work of P. Alheit represents an important contribution. Authors include also some other European researchers: Dominicé, West, Bron, Merrill, Dausien, Demetrio, Formenti, Horsdal, Goodson, Biesta, Agapova and Stojanov.

Research of the life story and learning in everyday life is classified among post-positivist approaches. Researching learning in so-called positivist studies avoided everyday life. Along with studies of learning in everyday life and the spreading of the conceptualization of learning, as influenced by social theories, learning processes in various groups of people and in various environments has become clearly expressed. To paraphrase Robert Darnton, such studies could be referred to as "andragogy with ethnologic granulation". Darnton (1991, in Highmore 2007) coined the term "history with ethnologic granulation" for a type of anthropologic historiography that developed in the 1970s and was interested in how people formed their view of the world.

THE BIOGRAPHICAL PARADIGM

Research of the biographical paradigm is rooted in hermeneutics and phenomenology. In modern times, this has been influenced by psychoanalysis, clinical patterns and ethnomethodology. These impacts are evident in the characteristics of empirical studies, which are summed up in groups explained further below.

The biographical paradigm acknowledges the complexity of truth and meanings. Life stories are not "fixed" once and for all; rather it is the meaning of life that constantly forms in relation to the context in which a person lives. A meaning emerges in dialogue

with others. In biographical research, complexity is approached without reduced descriptions and cause-and-effect linear interpretations.

Since the researcher approaches the research system to get to know its perspectives and contrasts as seen by the system itself, it can be said that the biographical research method provides access to the 'insider' view. This is possible through reciprocity of observation, meaning that the researcher and the narrator sometimes exchange their roles. Researchers reject the sharp dichotomy between the researcher and the research object. They also reject the dichotomy between me-others, subjective-objective, and immediate-memory, as described by Stanley (1996) and Milharčič Hladnik (2007, p. 34). Stanley uses the expressions auto/biography and "auto/biographical self". The latter is a research and analysis agent participating in construction and not in discovering' social reality, meaning that realizations form in relation to the context or situation.

Acceptance of intersubjectivity and rejection of dichotomies was of key importance for the development of biographical research. In reference to complexity of any biography, a biographical researcher faces multiple, changing meanings, with modalities of thinking and feeling that are reflected in the narrative.

In terms of the direction of studies and the types of data they collect, two fields of attention can be discerned. The first focuses on representations and attributed meanings as formed, constructed and reconstructed by agents in relation to situations and experiences in a biography. The other focuses on meanings attributed to options for relational reorientations. Researchers pay attention to changed thought forms that can modify old connections and enable consideration of the ways of interpreting experiences. The emphasis is on acquiring the following types of data: to identify the reflective and argumentative conceptualization of important events in construction of personal representations; a critical examination of learning, knowledge and systems of attributing meanings used by individuals in their experiences; data on interpretative processing of the narrated experiences which they recognized as formative.

In the biographical paradigm, the relationship between the researcher and the narrator holds a special position. Researchers are neither passively taking nor copying notes nor "objectively" observing; rather, they become part of the context of the observed matter, so it is indispensable for researchers to reflect on their own roles. A story is created in the dialogue between the researcher and narrator. Narration is an action (not anonymous, not like a written document or a questionnaire). Narration is a performance and it typically takes place in certain circumstances (context of the performance) realized in relation to others. As early as 1981, Ann Oakley wrote that a biographical interview is a two-way narration in which the interviewer also answers the interviewee's questions. Even if an interview is prearranged, the narration is still realized as an interaction. The relationship (with trust as the main ingredient) between the interviewer and the interviewee is very important for the research process. In practice, usually extended interviews develop, i.e. a series of interviews, where the interviewer and the interviewee meet to "verify sentences" and reflect on given statements. Interactivity is a part of note taking and interpretation.

Life stories emphasize subjectivity; however, this does not mean that they are limited to distorted memories. Any narration is often supplemented with other documents (personal documents, publicly available documents, other people's testimonies, etc.) The researcher and narrator interact and experience the research with different concepts and knowledge. Biographical research takes this into account and encourages the agent's self-

observation and the establishing of a relationship with the story, using auto-reflection, recollection, interpretation and explication, which in the school of autobiography, led by D. Demetrio, is called 'mental work' (Libera Università dell'Autobiografia).

COLLECTING DATA, COLLECTING STORIES

Small samples are used in qualitative research. The sample usually includes institutions or individuals who could be selected as a source of data. Only one or two research units can be selected. It is important that they are rich with information in order to provide material that will serve to develop an understanding of the problem (Flick, 2009). For his study of medical doctors, L. West selected 25 units, thus ensuring representation in terms of age, gender, ethnical belonging, and location. When researching the learning of migrants in Italy, M. Milana selected 20 units.

The problem of sampling (dimensions, sample characteristics) is always present. Namely, some authors consider the concept of sampling as being in opposition to the biographical approach, while others recommend following the principles of quality methodology (cf. Merrill, West 2009). According to Ferrarotti (1986), sampling is irrelevant in heuristic biographical research, since a single story may suffice. Most often, it is recommended that the sample should be sufficiently representative. In biographical research, it is not obligatory for the entire sample to be selected at the beginning of the research – on the contrary, the sample can be supplemented, particularly when the "snowball" technique is used to choose units.

The researcher collecting stories also organizes narration sessions. This means that the researcher arranges the time and location. Organizing the narration environment is particularly important, as it should evoke feelings of comfort. The session is dialogic, the interview a space of creativity. Even if the researcher uses various techniques and various communication skills, the ability to listen to others is the most important. Self-observation, and the ability to detect their own prejudices that guide the dialogue, are also needed. Interaction with the narrator is a complex social situation, forming roles and expectations as well as implicitly exerting the prejudices and values of all involved. Narrators do not narrate their lives to a recording device but to another person. When a person narrates his or her own story a special atmosphere forms, bringing people together.

The biography researcher encourages narration, witnesses it and follows the reactivation of knowledge and realizations, which might not be in the correct order. When asking questions, certain principles should be followed. The principle of narrativity means that it encourages the free narration of events in which the narrator was involved. The principle of attribution implies that narrators explain the meanings they attribute to the events. The principle of meta-reflection means that they pay attention to the possibility of transformative learning.

A special approach, the co-called emancipatory interview, was developed through interviews. In addition to collecting data, its purpose is to encourage the narrator to develop. This characteristic is particularly stressed by feminist studies with their research principle – the requirement that the interviewer or researcher should not take advantage of narrators but should rather empower them. The narrator has power over his or her story,

participates in all phases of the research and in the end the researcher "returns" the story to the narrator (story restitution).

Biographical research usually starts with an unstructured interview; later, when studying the first notes, a structure begins to form. Questions emerge in reference to the focus on particular themes. As a rule, structure is left open as long as possible, so as not to prevent, through premature structuring, important themes from emerging. It depends on the interviewee and the situation when this happens. First we want to hear life stories without much intervention. Questions based on the first interview are formed in subsequent interviews. If the researcher uses other sources (documents, other testimonies), this becomes not only a life story, but a life history. In everyday life, learning is observed as a social practice, thus understanding the context in which learning takes place is also necessary. This means that stories will be equipped with information on historical and social activities. Together with narrators, historical and social context is added to the narrated stories.

The development of a life story into a life history can be outlined in the following phases:

1. Narration: the initial life story – obtained through narration, a description of life.
2. Cooperation: subsequent interviews – formed on the basis of themes from the first interview in cooperation between the researcher and the narrator.
3. Contextualization: the story is positioned in the context, the story is now equipped with other data and partly also with interpretations that are in line with the chosen theory. Through contextualization, the researcher shows that stories and subjectivity are more complex than it seems at first when reading or listening to a narration.

To enable the above series of phases, succession is also used in data collection.

The following scheme is the most frequent:

- We begin with a set of objective data: life periods, experiences, employment, education, etc.
- Contextual data (material) is also collected. During the interview, we pay attention to the narrator's stories of others and circumstances.
- Through additional questions, we organize stories about themes that point at key events for learning in everyday life.
- We investigate the meaning of these events.
- We look for wider structures, in which an individual is included. These may be interactions within a group, the cultural frame, ideologies, historical context, aiming to explain meanings and interpret experiences.

Various data collection techniques can be used. The prevalent technique is the interview, which can be done with a single person or a group. In practice, the so-called thematic biographical interview that focuses on selected themes in a life story is most often used. Most interviews are recorded. Occasionally, some narrators are not in favor of recording, so the form of discussion should be agreed upon early on – either a talk or a partly structured interview. The genre sheds light on the way the story is told and also on how the form of narration influences the contents.

It should also be agreed how many connections to the past will be made. In practice, people generally narrate in connection to the past (they include experiences) and the future (wishes).

The next form is keeping a diary. A diary can be kept by the researcher, the narrator, or by both. Another form is the participatory ethnographic approach to observing. This technique includes observation of events and practices, with the participant/the observed co-deciding at all stages of the research. It differs from the ethnographic approach where the researcher observes, "dives" into the culture or environment, witnesses events, but where the observed persons are not involved in decisions relating to the course of the research.

Moreover, the researcher may use secondary sources, such as already recorded stories or stories from literature (expert, scientific, popular) belonging to the researched field.

The author's anecdotal notes presenting personal experiences are used. If narrators themselves described their achievements and considerations, the researcher also analyzes their original works, such as books and articles. Moreover, the researcher uses other documents and objects (products, notes, films, photographs) made by people whose story is being researched. Another data source may be stories circulating in a group or an environment, which the researcher is drafting.

HOW TO WRITE A STORY?

Once the discussions, observations, and document analysis are completed, narrations are copied, vignettes are written, and all the material is collected, the report is written. Its text is structured in reference to the research questions.

Ethical issues arise when stories are written, especially in situations where the story protagonist and the creator of the story are not the same person, or where stories were formed on the grounds of observations without including the observed. When writing stories, anonymity and confidentiality of the data are to be preserved, so names and family details are changed. A story that might cause damage to any person is published only with the author's consent. When writing stories consisting of parts of other stories, people should not be able to recognize themselves in the new biography.

The form of the story has to be defined. Various ways of collecting data raise various questions. For example, during observation without participation, the observer is faced with the question of how to include various small fragments, whether to include other people as well, whether to write down a story/narration of one person to which stories and records from other sources (on a selected theme) are linked. Most often there is a central story of a single person, with other information added.

The story is written in a different way if the information is collected through interviews. Here, the research takes place jointly, especially if the emancipatory interview technique is used. Story writing starts with getting to know the interviewed person, and depends on the agreed topic of discussion. In such cases, the narrator receives notes of the interview and can add remarks discussed with the researcher. When writing the story, we look for the basic theme that serves as the core of the story and learning: such as moral commandments, sexuality, work ethics, conflicts, emotions, father, or religion. Then the story is edited. The narrator states what is crucial and can also decide what should be left out.

In eclectic data collection (observation, discussions, and memories) of one person, that person's words, sentences, experiences are collected. In the absence of recordings, notes are taken immediately after the meeting. Observations are also written down immediately after the events they relate to.

The question is how to preserve the participants' voice without it being overridden by researchers. The latter should reflect their own beliefs and the conceptualizations (how they create concepts, ideas, thoughts) they use. They should pay attention to their reference framework and their reference points through which they observe the story, as well as perceive and interpret phenomena. Sometimes, the story becomes the writer's/researcher's product, for example, presenting something as a radical fight, although it is not. The epistemology of life story research deals with how researchers' theoretical frameworks influence the stories they write. This "epistemological baggage", as Goodley (2004) refers to structures of knowledge or "prejudices" on which a theory is built, defines entering into a research and orientation that leads us to form interpretations.

Story construction (the way of telling a story) can be similar to the modern novel. Such a text is created as introspection or confession, is full of inserts, and is sometimes allegory-like. Those who take notes sometimes use so-called non-participatory fiction, where all collected material serves to form a hero as a fictive person, to reflect all complex relations and events. This is a way of joining ethnographic and literary approaches to produce a meta-story. The writer depicts characters/persons based on the characteristics of people met without using explicit data.

First, when writing life stories, it is important to know the author's purpose and the target public. In view of this, story writing for a (research) report will also differ.

NARRATION ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Once stories are collected, analysis of the material can begin. The description that follows is based on the most frequent research situations where interviews are used. Analysis and comparison of the interview contents is a less intense phase than the previous communication phase. Narratives are observed from several perspectives, so a one-day break is usually taken between collecting data (listening to the story) and copying (transcription and analysis of notes). Thus researchers approach data with a break of a few hours, which facilitates the perception of the complexity of the narration (cf. Atkinson, 1998; Kazmierska, 2004).

Individual researchers use different approaches to analyzing life stories and they develop their own techniques. We often meet the following four approaches: discourse analysis, grounded theory, hermeneutical analysis and literary analysis. Each has its own specific characteristics.

A general concept is to listen to stories and read notes several times. When listening, the researcher detects transitions, stresses, intonation, silence, all of which emerge with different topics. During this phase, the researcher looks for topics central to the narration. He or she observes how themes are introduced and developed, language forms used, the emotions expressed.

In various readings we look for various connections. The first reading is used to observe the plot: What is the plot of the story? Who are the protagonists? Key images, words, metaphors? The first reading is for the researcher to reflect on and recognize his or her "pre-judices", pre-suppositions and how they influence our interpretation. During the second reading, the researcher observes the narrator's perceptions and experiences. The researcher observes how interviewees speak of themselves. The third reading is to ob-

serve how the interviewees speak of others, of mutual relations; the researcher looks for connections, autonomy or dependence. The fourth reading researches the narration from the point of view of culture, policy, social relations.

A set of elements that will guide the search of characteristics is then prepared. Different emphasis will be found with different authors. In our opinion, Demetrio (1999) defined some general elements researchers look for in a story and may be useful in any analysis. He lists the following:

- Biographemes (basic life events)
- Biosemantemes (meanings attributed to the narrated matter)
- Bioemes (general reflections on experiences)
- Biomyths (personal myths; unrealistic conceptions on events, phenomena, people)
- Biothemes (themes found in narratives).

All of them are mutually interlaced. Biographical research abandons the principles of linearity and simple causality, which dictate observation of events and interpretation "from outside", as an objective observer would. Biographical research transfers us to the paradigm of cyclic narrative. It is oriented towards understanding and interpreting the mutual connectedness of components that constitute an experience that has been lived through and narrated. The researcher is interested in the connection of various components that define an experience.

In this perspective, the interpretation of stories (collected by the researcher) can be understood as a situational revelation of sense, of subjectivity, of the local and intimate. A revelation of what individuals attribute to the truth they live in. At the same time, this reveals meanings created and formed in the communicational relationship of the researchers and other participants of the research.

It thus becomes important that criteria for narration analysis (to which we refer) are not used to transform materials in a narration through selected interpretative schemes and categories that are used for classification purposes by the researcher. On the contrary: criteria should "return" the story, retain the coherent, subjective truth, which is formed in the research interaction. This is the origin of the potential to think in terms of the story's meaning from the point of view of the narrator, rather than from the point of view of verisimilitude (subjective meanings). This is possible if researchers adopt certain criteria to reading the narration, which enable them to "dive" into the story, to be sensitive to aspects and dimensions of a particular case in using the analysis procedure. Usually researchers assume a reflective approach that enables them to form insights along with narrators.

Once stories are written down, common reflection is important. Open discussion, which was part of communication when stories were collected, is also integrated into story interpretation: first in textualization (when it is written and given to the narrator for the first reading) and then in the interpretation.

The procedure, which stipulates that the narrator also participates in its interpretation, has another important purpose. It is the symbolic restitution of the story to its "owner" (the narrator).

Observers or listeners of the narration first create their own representations of what the narrator has stated. Then these representations are forwarded to the narrator who reacts and re-interprets, supplements descriptions. The result is a story that reflects the process of modifications and highlights learning as well. The final story is formed in the commu-

nication (and relationship) between the researcher and the narrator. The final result is a story that reflects their relationship, dialogue and inter-subjective construction of meanings as well.

CONCLUSION

Biographical research is slowly gaining ground in the scientific environment of educational sciences. This may be attributed to the fact that biographical research is part of the interpretative research paradigm, which according to various authors, such as Gabb (2010) and Gojkov (2006), actually emphasizes profound insight into the researched phenomenon. We derive from the referential framework of the subject information to enable a more comprehensive interpretation of the phenomenon. But we move away from the classical concept of the so-called objective role of a researcher who observes the researched object similarly to natural sciences, where the researcher wants to control the situation of data collection according to the purpose of exact measuring. In the interpretative paradigm, the phenomenological approach is stressed. In data collection, the emphasis is on "non-violent" and "nonintrusive" methods - the researcher carries on a dialogue with the narrator. When collecting data, the researcher has no control of the situation.

Biographical research acknowledges subjectivity and the meaning of the subjective story. Passerini (2008, p. 224) is one of the female authors who point out the subjectivation of research "objects". The individual is not only a part (unit) in a certain study, where categories set by researchers are important. In reference to formal knowledge and formal education, the use of biographical methods in studying learning can be subversive and unpleasant, but at the same time important for some groups. Such a study of learning is particularly important in groups that are formally less educated, but have a lot of silent knowledge which the "official" knowledge system fails to value out of ignorance, inability or a lack of willingness.

A strong formative charge in biographical research evident in both the researcher and the narrator is also worth mentioning. The educational value is evident from the moment when during narration the narrator discovers the connection between the introduced topics and subjective representations, until the moment the narrator becomes aware of forming new meanings. Learning takes place together with all efforts invested in the reflective form of his or her story.

In biographical research, individuals are not mere objects of scientific practice, neither in reference to the research procedures (participative research) nor in reference to the course of research and when preparing interpretations of its findings, they are agents in the formation of insights. People are not only informers, but also collaborators in data collection and interpretation. In this way, intersubjectivity is evident at various levels of research. Consequently, biographical methods are generally used by those who like to listen to others' stories, pay attention to narrations and respect their interpretations of life events. The pronounced characteristics are respect, empathy and acceptance of the complexity of stories.

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UČENJE U SVAKODNEVNOM ŽIVOTU: NOVI PRISTUP ISTRAŽIVAČKIM METODAMA

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Ovaj tekst se bavi određenim teorijskim i metodološkim pitanjima upotrebe biografske metode u istraživanju odraslih u svakodnevnom životu. Predstavlja razvoj biografskog metoda u andragogiji i odlike njegove upotrebe prilikom istraživanja procesa učenja. Razmatranjem različitih biografskih studija, autori su utvrdili da formirane različite denominacije biografskog metoda, što oni dovode u vezu sa različitim profesionalnim okruženjima i istraživačkim metodama. Neki od problema prikupljanja podataka, uzimanja beleški i interpretiranja naracija kao i karakteristike odnosa između istraživača i ispitanika su predstavljeni. S obzirom na to da se upoznavanje sa izbranim fenomenima odvija u uzajamnom odnosu između istraživača i naratora, neverbalna komunikacije i prelingvističko iskustvo, to dovodi do dodatnih izazova prilikom vođenja beleški i interpretacije, sve je to bitno pored verbalne komunikacije.

Ključne reči: životna priča, naracija, interpretacija, istraživačke metode, učenje u svakodnevnom životu.