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Title: "Narration and welfare building with homeless people housed."

Abstract

Raccontare Bellezza is a project created with people without houses, who have been hosted in a dormitory of Turin. The object of this paper was promoted through digital storytelling, cohabitation and solidarity strategies learning necessary for social and community life. Through shared narrative and collaborative production, people have been sent to a path of social well-being.

Keys words: *narration, well-being, people without houses, digital storytelling.*

Introduction

The ability of the narration to create links between people with a different cultural and social background is now consolidated, bringing out those elements that find a common basis between the different stories. As a privileged method for learning and listening to others, it gives the individual an opportunity to start a deep reflection on themselves, building and rebuilding the organizational structures of meaning. In this way it is possible to discover the latent needs of the person on which the explicit needs are based, which assume a re-signification (creative and not preconceived), for an improvement in the well-being and quality of life on a personal, family and social perspective (Santo Di Nuovo, 2011). The narration is a constitutive part of the individual, definable in terms of a narrative thought (Bruner, 2006). It expresses in a social act that unites and declines itself in different stories (Cambi, 2009) and that fulfils a function of legitimizing existence (Batini, 2007). This depends on the close connection with the identity. In fact, it can be defined as an intertwining of personal and other narratives that contribute to its construction. Analysing the issue through a narratological perspective, the way we build ourselves depends largely on how our narratives become part of those of others. This depends on the general processes of recognition and mirroring that define themselves as a bridge between hetero and self-narratives. In this sense, these psychic processes constitute the link between individual identity, dialogue and relationship, as indispensable elements of the latter (Barbieri, 2015). «*In other words, the individual Self emerges both from the narratives on personal experience that the individual himself proposes (autobiographical narratives, but not only) and from the narratives that others perform on him, both elaborated by the individual himself in new forms of consciousness*»¹. Furthermore, «*The narrative device is therefore particularly effective in the clarification and understanding of events, experiences, human situations characterized by strong intentionality and in the focus of particularly complex units of analysis, in which human subjects play a central role. their stories, the cultural and ethical values that they bring with their intentions, motivations, choices and intersubjective relationships that weave both on a cognitive / cultural level and on an emotional / relational plane*»². As such, the narration opens to the world of personal knowledge, understood in terms of a subjective knowledge that take on value through its capacity to construct meanings. In this sense, knowing the other implies a profound knowledge of its specific features and characteristics that build both the relationship and one's own self. The meeting with some people, but also with objects linked to a certain story, with a particular meaning, defines the individuality of the person (Zannini, 2008). The narrative act is

¹ Micalizzi A., Orsucci V., Risi E., "Io racconto, tu racconti, egli racconta: due esempi di 'percorsi' narrativi dell'identità." *M@gm@*. 01 September 2006, Vol.4(3).2 September 2005

² Striano M., "Pratiche narrative per la formazione." Francesca Pulvirenti (a cura di). *M@gm@*. vol.3 n.3 July-September 2005.

transformed into something tangible, not only to know the emotional experiences but to also create relationships where the bonds may have been broken. Thus, the narration can be understood as a common good, that is a device that everyone can use but also as a resource for an individual to increase their profound knowledge about their own emotional experience and also about others.

1. Well-being and narration.

The concept of well-being is characterized by a multiplicity of elements that make it difficult to define it. This is due to the multitude of disciplines that face the issue, and to the subjective component, constituted by the perception that each individual has that achievement. The concept of happiness is closely related to the latter argument and equally difficult to define.. Since a high level of income it would increase an individual's well-being (Field, 2009). In fact, the economic principle has often been considered as the main cause of it. However, being "happy" is influenced by further factors of economy and individuals. In fact, happiness implies a sense of personal fulfilment that manifests itself within a shared moral framework (Schoffham, 2011). Experimenting this emotion on the part of the individual also affects the community to which they belong. In the acquisition of a positive, experience that increases curiosity in the subject and consequently a willingness to learn. People in a positive emotional state of mind tend to be more predisposed to accepting and overcoming problematic crisis events and also to create some of the most significant relationships (Schoffham, 2011). A further definition of well-being indicates an effort of people, with a high focus on what it is need in reference to a basic aim. In this way, this duty towards an active citizenship is characterized by a higher level of well-being. It includes the possibility of well-thinking within the community and in relation with others to a common goal (Zepke, 2013).

In the educational approach, it is necessary to consider the cognitive-reflexive component further. The narrative is an instrument able to stimulate this process. It is closely related to well-being and both are influenced by the link between storytelling and education. The conception of education, from the inside to the outside, involves a work on the expression of oneself and on one's position in the world. Through comparison and verification of what has been discovered by external reality (Nosari, 2013), it's linked to the search for the well-being as a form of knowledge. Moreover that's intended as a reflective process by which to know oneself. As Demetrio outlines in *Educare è narrare*, «Anyone [...] benefits from the powers of education and narration»³. The individual can find him/herself in both dimensions and that is to educate to transmit narrations or narrate to educate. In these terms, the well-being is charged with intentionality and it turns into an instrument capable of transforming the self, which is, directing the individual towards actions aimed at personal self-realization. Furthermore, it implies an educational responsibility towards one's own self and the common good (Falanchi, 2017). «In this sense, well-being training consists in a sensitization to well-being, both individually and collectively, based on the idea that we can all learn to feel better and that wellness is not only a question of quantity of resources but above all sorts of quality choices. , individual lyand socially»⁴.

³ Demetrio D., *Educare è narrare*, Mimesis Edizioni, Milano, 2012, p. 25.

⁴ Falanchi E., "Il benessere come bene comune. Una forte coscienza filosofica e un fondato impegno pedagogico." Studi sulla Formazione. (2017) 20, p. 103.

Learning to feel better takes on value in terms of the realization of the self-efficacy mentioned in Bandura and therefore in a person's perception of having a sort of control over her choices. In addition, what Mortari calls self-care, differentiating the concept from an individualistic cure, promoting the importance of a care of existence that starts and continues within human relationships. From this perspective, the individual has the power to transform difficulties into meaningful learning situations. Well-being is therefore part of the conception of health, promoted by WHO (World Health Organisation), which is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not the mere absence of illness or infirmity. Certain life skills are recognized as fundamental, such as the ability to manage anxiety, stress, and the ability to solve problems, creativity, and the ability to make decisions and all that falls within the care of the emotional and relational sphere. Therefore, the narrative re-proposes itself as the (immaterial) good that offers educational and relational spaces that a person can use to reconstruct those parts of their identity that have been lost and rediscover the meaning of their actions between the possible listeners. In general, stories are able to shape the way of thinking, consisting of the interpretations that the author wants to convey and those of the reader, who immersed in a fictional world, beginning to reflect and interpret new information in relation to previous knowledge (Cometa, 2017), coming to create new forms of knowledge. Moreover, the act of narrating is a process that naturally belongs to man and helps him to live and survive, since it can be considered as a social and cultural glue that unites different minds and creates relationships. The same Gottshall⁵, offers the history of two tribes, their practice and their stories, in which only the last mentioned would survive longer, since the activity of telling increases the personal well-being that through the fiction helps the individual to imagine possible and alternative worlds, in which you can immerse yourself in. If, as I mentioned earlier, the achievement of well-being depends on the type of choices that the individual decides to implement through the narration he is the protagonist of his own future, in an environment of fiction and learning in which to train and find the right space to reflect and decide to act. In the relational space that the narration promotes, the person has the opportunity to learn new strategies of cohabitation, collaboration and participation that encourage the well-being of not only the individual but also of the community in which he/she participates. Therefore, the construction of this construction, from an individual act, it transforms into a social act, since every action of the individual is closely connected to the systems (family, organizational, working, etc...) of which he/she is a part of. For these reasons, the narrative methodology that has been used in the *Raccontare Bellezza* project will be clarified in the following parts.

2. Digital storytelling

In light of these considerations, among the many narrative practices, digital storytelling (DST) is configured as a process that build up educational paths. That enables to explore emotional experiences and metacognitive processes. These guide the person towards new forms of individual and collective knowledge. This practice has been successful in different fields (scholastic, organizational, professional training and care) (Petrucco, 2009; Hardy, Sumner, 2008). Its depends on the possibility of the narrator to express a thought linked to a specific meaning. Using multicodality and multimedia, it is possible creates several different forms of communication with images, sounds, text, music and voice. «*We can still say that the elements*

⁵ Gottschall, J. (2014). *L'istinto di narrare: Come le storie ci hanno resi umani*. Bollati Boringhieri.

that distinguish it from the trivial practice of combining multimedia materials together to create a video is rather its characteristic of relying on narration, that is, on personal narratives with strong emotional connotations»⁶ that can then be shared through the web, with the creation of a final video story. The process that is activated with the DST differs according to the definition of the educational goal. In any case, the stories are particularly engaging and exciting to them because they are told from a personal point of view. Multimedia from this point of view further encourages the ability to bring attention to those significant moments for the narrator, thanks to the use of images and transitions that visually capture the listener's attention. Furthermore, the presence of multimedia and multicodality makes it possible to overcome certain difficulties related to oral and written expression. The narrating voice gives humanity back to the story, allowing an external audience to recognize and identify with each other. The neuroscientific study of Buccino⁷ and collaborators that demonstrates a lower empathic recognition when the individual observes communicative gestures, distant and different from those belonging to man, while the possibility of recognizing the other as a human being activates mirror neurons, allowing empathic involvement. The latter is the fundamental component for the narration to be understood and transmitted. Mirror neurons would activate each time the individual observes something "passively" by giving them an intentional meaning. It is not about simple logical inference, but of an embodied simulation, such that the person concretely experiments, activating neural motor mechanisms, an action or an event of which he/she simply is the spectator⁸. With reference to the narration and the digital storytelling, it is possible to understand the potential of this practice, as the images, the music, the sounds and the text are not to be considered as an accessory to be included in the narrative. All elements are bearers of meanings and symbols that activate processes of reflection and meta-reflection in people. These are made possible by the continuous communication exchange between the protagonists of the process that promote an interest in listening to the emotional experiences of the person can be expressed and re-elaborated within a safe space. Each phase of the path takes place within a small group, where each participant has the opportunity to confront and share every thought, opinion regarding their own history and that of others. It is the process of sharing the meanings that increases the inclusion of the individual within the group, whose role becomes that of scaffolder and that is a moral support also, thanks to which people feel motivated to want to continue and complete their own path.

3. Homeless people housed: Costruire Bellezza

Researching and achieving individual well-being is not easy and it is a process based on continuous reflection on one's goals. Although, as previously stated, income is not the only element capable of defining its level, however, the lack of a stable job and a monetary income contribute to lower the degree of personal satisfaction, especially in the absence of a social network support.

The framework of homeless people seems rather heterogeneous, but the particularity is given by the fact that the latter do not create a sub-class or subculture, but present difficulties in mutually

⁶ Petrucco, C. "Apprendere con il digital storytelling." *TD Tecnologie Didattiche* 17.1 (2009): pg.4.

⁷ Buccino, G., Lui, F., Canessa, N., Patteri, I., Lagravinese, G., Benuzzi, F., Rizzolatti, G. (2004). Neural circuits involved in the recognition of actions performed by nonconpecifics: An fMRI study. *Journal of cognitive neuroscience*, 16(1), 114-126

⁸ Gallese, V. (2007). Dai neuroni specchio alla consonanza intenzionale. *“Rivista di psicoanalisi”*, 53(1), 197-208.

cooperating, denying any kind of solidarity (Rossetti, 2016). The phenomenon is complex and constantly changing and «*the lack of a home or work or health are a contributory cause of the difficulty or, in the most serious cases, the loss of ability to provide adequate responses to their needs, especially in times of crisis*»⁹. The spaces frequented by these people thus take on different meanings and in the same way, the relationships between the various subjects are different (Porcellana, 2013). Moreover, in relation to what has been previously explained, achieving individual well-being implies its acceptance on a collective level, within a shared moral framework. Therefore, elements closely linked to individual and collective identity come into play, since every individual needs to be accepted and to feel an active member of his own community of belonging. In light of these considerations, the digital storytelling activity has been included in the project *Raccontare Bellezza*, within *Costruire Bellezza*, a permanent interdisciplinary laboratory oriented towards social inclusion through participatory processes and creative languages. It is part of the Snodi project in Turin and is the result of collaboration between the University of Turin, the Turin Polytechnic and the Adult in Difficulty service in the Barriera district of Milano¹⁰. The project starts from the consideration of returning new positive meanings, within the spaces occupied by homeless people. People who lives without home leaves in many several places, often building temporary relationships. It also means base one's existence with unknown individuals with whom there is no connection. The goal was to restore and rebuild the concept of care and beauty that often leave places like dormitories. These spaces have been transformed into places, rich in symbols and occasions for weaving social relationships with others. The homeless people who take part in the workshop carry out an internship, inside the Ghedini dormitory¹¹, where various workshop activities are presented, linked to the concepts of care and beauty. Participants meet twice a week, to create and re-invent objects to which a new identity is returned. This not only allows people to improve the quality of their lives, but also gives back to social workers the opportunity to rethink their role. Beauty is therefore no longer considered well for the few, but as a common good that all human beings can enjoy. "In these terms, the reception areas can give back a new way to relive the spaces, coming into harmony with the biographies of the people". The collaboration on the same level between operators, educators, designers, students and volunteers has given way to these people to feel again, protagonists of their existence and their future. Using the DST we tried to help the participants to elaborate and rethink their experience within the multidisciplinary laboratory, promoting the processes of empowerment and social inclusion and restoring humanity to these places through the stories of the people who live them.

4. The workshop *Raccontare Bellezza*

The digital storytelling activity has been included in this laboratory to further emphasize the reflection on the experience that the trainees play within *Costruire Bellezza*. The participants¹² (a total of four) were chosen based on the assessments previously made by the work team and the organization team. The motivation to start the activity was one of the main requirements to be able to start. Two meetings have been defined each week lasting four hours each. This time

⁹ Campagnaro, Cristian, and Valentina Porcellana. "[Il bello che cura] Benessere e spazi di accoglienza notturna per persone senza dimora." *Cambio 3.5* (2013) p. 35.

¹⁰ <http://www.adidesignindex.com/it/design-per-il-sociale/2015/costruire-bellezza>

¹¹ The dormitory's name is Ghedini because it is located in Ghedini street number 9 at Turin.

¹² Three women and one man, aged between 40 and 56, took part in the activity.

was included within the days dedicated to the tutoring with a view to restore the continuation of the project. In this was the participants could focus them-selves on the task with particular attention. Each meeting has been structured to encourage comparison and sharing between storytellers and facilitators¹³. For this reason, since the choice of the dramatic question (DQ)¹⁴, until the end of the creation of the final product, each moment was characterized by a generative negotiation of meanings, characterized by sharing a description of the motivations underlying each choice. First, the narrative themes were identified. There are incentives that encourage the subject to reflect and think in a generative perspective of meanings. Each storyteller had to choose a single theme among the ten proposed. Therefore, the definition and the construction of the story was made explicit in an individual and at the same time collective act in the perspective of a co-construction of the meanings. The group played the role of scaffolder, so that which to reflect formulated as constructive criticism and not as evaluative judgment, everyone's opinions and recommendations. The role of facilitators has made it possible to mediate for the construction of a peaceful and safe work environment. However, the storyboard¹⁵, allowed the transition from the classical, textual narratological dimension to one that includes further linguistic codes as images, sounds, music and the voice.

Each participant thus had the opportunity to use this grid, not only to organize their own story but to place an interconnection between the different elements and the story. This part was fundamental for the next moment concerning the research of multimedia materials. We asked them to take pictures or create drawings to encourage a participative and active process in each one. Each element was inserted into the Movie Maker program, which allowed the creation of the final video story. This phase of socialization has been carried out also with the homeless people not participating in the activity but present in the dormitory participating in the project. The moment of return both internal and external was fundamental to give a sense of what they created and organized during the months.

5. Results

The activity was an opportunity for all the participants to exercise a monitoring and consequently a responsibility for their choices. Each was in fact an active actor of his own path, such that the stories created are the result of a metacognitive process that took place from the beginning. In reference to the goals of both *Costruire Bellezza* and digital storytelling, the participants were re-protagonists, they were able to tell the story from a personal point of view, choosing and defining, with the support of the facilitators and the group, each part of their own story. Where expressive difficulties have occurred, the use of drawings, images and sounds has allowed people to overcome the obstacle of writing the text.

Furthermore, improvements have been found from the sense of self-efficiency and self-esteem point of view. Through the digital storytelling, personal passions and skills have been

¹³ The facilitators were a total of four, two educators and a trainee in the design course at the Politecnico di Torino, coordinated by Professor Barbara Bruschi, professor at the Department of Philosophy and Educational Sciences at the University of Turin.

¹⁴ Dramatic question choices: "Ghedini in the present and in the future", "I wake up in my dream, "If you were a brush what you would paint", "Until you have passions, you will not stop discovering the world" (cit. by Cesare Pavese).

¹⁵ The storyboard is a grid made up of several panels in which the words of the elements that will be added later are inserted.

rediscovered. This allowed first of all to restore a deeper meaning to the construction activities of *Costruire Bellezza*, with a view to build together for oneself and for others. Therefore, the search for one's own skills, thanks to the story, was made explicit in the search for one's own and the other's well-being. Although slight progress was noted from a social and social inclusion point of view not only with the group of the activity but also with the dormitory inhabitants. The path generated primarily curiosity from other guests, promoting spaces for reflection and informal dialogue between the other trainees and the operators.

Digital storytelling has made some explicit needs and parts of emotional experience, inherent in the training, which before the activity had remained hidden, in terms of personal and professional aspirations. In this way, the service operators have had the opportunity to deepen the knowledge of the four participants through their stories, becoming useful tools to improve their practices and educational strategies to be applied on the person.

During the meetings, was observed an improvement in mood and participation by storytellers within the Ghedini community. In particular, a participant with significant difficulties in integrating has shown an improvement in the management and resolution of problems with a constant participation in the activity and social life during the collective lunch with the other members of *Costruire Bellezza*.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it was possible to detect improvements from a social and emotional point of view. Stories have thus become goods available to the entire structure through which it was possible to know and recognize each other. The stories have made explicit the needs related to the dimension of well-being, beauty and care. The narration, in addition to encouraging actions aimed at restoring the sense of planning, has created a space for attentive and interested listening that can put constructive contact between one's own self and that of others. Specifically, it promoted a process of individual identity reconstruction that took place within the working group, in reference to a cohesive and supportive group identity. No technical skills were acquired, but relational skills, given that the chosen subjects had demonstrated difficulties in integrating into the community and in managing and solving problems. Moreover, the use of digital storytelling allowed exploring parts of the training that would probably have remained hidden with the traditional narrative approach, with a view to improving their future living conditions. The narration as a common good has been transformed from immaterial to material allowing the creation of knowledge and its diffusion, as a fundamental part of the process to promote individual and collective well-being.

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