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Conceiving Heterogeneous Temporalities and Rhythms in Biographical Research and Adult Education (symposium)

Abstract - The three contributions presented in this symposium question how we can access and describe the heterogenous temporalities and rhythms through which adults learn, transform, and develop themselves throughout their lifespan. They focus on the use of life history and biographical approaches, as research and training methods developed and promoted in adult and higher education. Each of these contributions revisit existing practices referring to life history and (auto)biography in adult education, by analysing the temporal and rhythmic dimensions they involve.

OVERVIEW OF SYMPOSIUM – Michel Alhadeff-Jones

This symposium is the third one proposed in a series of three symposia, bringing together ten researchers from seven countries, focusing on time, space, and rhythms in adult education (Alhadeff-Jones, Finnegan, Dakka & Cappa, this volume; Alhadeff-Jones, Maubant, Roquet, Biasin, & Wittorski, this volume). The specific aim of this third symposium is to question how we can access and describe the heterogenous temporalities and rhythms through which adults learn, transform, and develop themselves throughout their lifespan. The particularity of the three contributions presented in this text is to focus on the use of life history and biographical approaches, as research and training methods developed and promoted in adult and higher education (e.g., Alheit, Bron-Wojciechowska, Brugger, & Dominicé, 1995; Delory-Momberger, 2003; Dominicé, 2000; Pineau, 2000; West, Alheit, Andersen, & Merrill, 2007). Following three different paths, each of these contributions revisit existing practices referring to life history and (auto)biography in adult education, by stressing and analysing the temporal and rhythmic dimensions they involve, as they relate to various forms/formats of adult learning. Doing so, they demonstrate the need and the relevance to enrich research and practices, through a more detailed account and understanding of the multiple temporalities, and the relational (re)framing of subjectivity in time identities, as part of modern biography and rhythms that shape people's learning experiences throughout the course of their lives.

THE TEMPORALITIES OF NARRATIVES: KINETIC VARIATIONS BETWEEN LIFE STORY AND MICRO-PHENOMENOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION

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This contribution first focuses on the theoretical aspect of narrative practices in the field of social sciences, then on the methodological aspect, in the field of adult education and narrative research. Secondly, the epistemological impact of the narrative inquiry approach is considered, in particular to clarify the singularity of the first-person perspective to which narrative research belongs. Following the methodological aspect, a discussion will be proposed on the singularity of the knowledge generated by a qualitative research based on time, rhythm, and anchored in an experiential learning paradigm. The aim is to examine the plurality of temporalities during narrative activity in adult education. Different aspects are examined in order to understand the relationship between narrative technique and the effect on comprehension and learning processes. Amongst the elements, particular attention is paid to narrative regimes (Breton, 2022) based on those variations in kinetic regimes that can be observed in autobiographical

texts (Baudouin, 2010), but more broadly, in the variation of procedures between biographical narrative and micro-phenomenological description.

3.1. Narration, temporalisation and kinetic regimes

The field of research concerned by this theme is part of an interdisciplinary perspective, mainly in educational sciences, in the phenomenological theory of experience, but also in narratology (Brémond, 1973; Baroni, 2007) and in cognitive sciences (Depraz, Varela, Vermersch, 2011). This research on the plurality of narratives can also be anchored in hermeneutics. The variation of kinetic regimes during the expression of the first-person point of view can be considered to engage different effects of understanding. If we consider, as Delory-Momberger (2010) does, that human understanding is based on the interpretation of lived experience, and that this interpretation needs narration to become part of memory and anticipation, then research on narration is becoming one of the main themes in adult education. From a theoretical point of view, and according to a first-person approach (Varela & Shear, 2002), temporalities are the operator of the variation of the kinetic regimes of the self-narrative. In order to speed up or slow down narrative activity, it is necessary to go through different types of absorption that transform the perspectives from which experience can be captured. As described in Vermersch's (2011) work, these types of absorption affect access to memory, and then to the materials that can be incorporated into the narrated experience. From this perspective, and this is one of the focuses of this paper, narrative research can focus on the correlation between the speed of the text and the process of configuring or elucidating the lived materials that are captured by the narrator when composing his or her life story. The construction of these methods can be understood as a tool to observe the effect of variation in temporal processes on the materials that can appear in the narrative: aspect of experience (Petitmengin, 2010), rhythms of the everyday life (Alhadeff-Jones, 2020).

3.2. Temporal granularity and methodological perspectives

Research on narrative practices is not only theoretical. It also has pragmatic and concrete perspectives in the field of adult education (Pineau, 1984, 1986). For example, in order to be able to grasp the phenomena that are part of the process of professionalization, it would be necessary to work over a long period of time. This could be the period during which someone engages in a new activity and learns to work in a specific field of activity and a singular profession. Thus, to become confident and relevant in a new professional activity takes time, the combination of various resources, the integration of gestures, the way of working with others, the habits of moving in a physical environment. In order to understand this type of phenomenon through a narrative approach, the time scale from which the narrative can find a ground of origin can extend from three to ten years. It is therefore necessary to focus on a biographical narrative approach, which requires a combination of specific formulation, temporalization, and configuration processes (Ricoeur, 1984). Conversely, if the aim of the work is to describe how specific gestures are carried out in a particular situation, the time scale that it will be useful to grasp in order to examine the experience will be reduced in order to be able to specify micro-processes with a fine granularity through the description. This will require a specific process of description, close to “micro-phenomenology” (Depraz, 2020). Between biographical narration and micro-phenomenological description, the unit that operates the evolution of the modes of expression is time. And, more precisely, it is through the variation of temporal scales that the self-narrative is constructed. Secondly, and this is the main purpose of this contribution, research on temporalities and kinetic regimes makes it possible to question

what can be highlighted, through the narrative, depending on whether the apprehension of the experience privileges the longitudinal dimension or, conversely, whether it focuses on singular moments (Vermersch, 2003).

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