

L'IMPORTANZA DELLA NARRAZIONE CORPOREA NEL PROCESSO DI APPRENDIMENTO
DEGLI ADULTI

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary society, increasingly permeated by technology, social networks and virtual worlds driven by artificial intelligence, the processes of interaction and learning are transforming. These changes, as shown by studies on embodied cognition, knowledge is rooted in physical experience and, consequently, the body takes a prominent role in learning pathways.

Starting from a series of considerations on the relationship between the body and learning in an interdisciplinary perspective, this article aims to investigate the importance of body narrative in the context of adult education.

Nella società odierna, sempre più permeata dalla tecnologia, dai social network e dai mondi virtuali guidati dall'intelligenza artificiale, i processi di interazione e apprendimento si stanno trasformando. Tali cambiamenti, come dimostrano gli studi sull'*embodied cognition*, la conoscenza è radicata nell'esperienza fisica e, di conseguenza il corpo va assumendo un ruolo preminente nei percorsi di apprendimento.

Partendo da una serie di considerazioni sul rapporto tra corpo e apprendimento in una prospettiva interdisciplinare, questo articolo si propone di indagare l'importanza della narrazione corporea nel contesto dell'educazione degli adulti.

KEYWORDS

Inglese adult education, bodily autobiographies, *embodied cognition*
Italiano educazione degli adulti, autobiografia corporea, *embodied cognition*

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Introduction

In the contemporary society, which is increasingly complex and permeated by technology, social networks, chatbots, robots with artificial intelligence and virtual worlds populated by avatars are radically transforming our interaction and learning processes. Education increasingly takes place in digital and hybrid environments, where the boundaries between reality and representation become blurred, and our experience is divided between what is physical and what is digital. The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic has further accelerated this transition, pushing many sectors - from education to work - towards virtual and remote solutions. In this context, reality is fragmented and perceived as a sum of digital information: physical presence is replaced by 'telepresence' and a person's identity is fragmented into avatars and digital profiles.

Technological revolution raises fundamental questions about the role of the body and corporeality in learning. If once the bodily dimension could be taken for granted, now, with the increasing physical distance in the processes of learning and socialization, it takes on critical importance. The body is no longer just a tool for carrying out motor activities, but becomes a means through which we understand and interact with the world, a "node of all knowledge", as Gamelli (2001) states.

Recent studies and research, especially in the field of Embodied Cognition, emphasize the interconnection between movement, emotion, and cognition, suggesting that knowledge and learning are rooted in physical and sensory experience.

In this perspective, attention to corporeality in education is not limited to the development of physical abilities, but becomes an essential component of the overall education of the individual, contributing to the formation of an integrated self-awareness, allowing the development not only of cognitive and relational skills, but also of strengthening self-awareness, empathy and the ability to manage emotions. Learning, therefore, takes place through the involvement of the entire body, which becomes a "tool" of exploration, expression and connection with others and with the surrounding context.

Starting from a series of considerations on the relationship between the body and learning in an interdisciplinary perspective, the article aims to investigate the importance of body narration in the context of adult education pathways.

1. Reflexivity, formation and self-identity construction

Biographical research has made an important contribution to adult education by showing that they learn in ways that are highly dependent on their life history and previous education (Sirignano, 2019, p.90).

To identify what an individual is capable of learning, it is necessary to have recourse to the previous stages of his educational biography. The life story allows us to highlight the dynamics that contributed to individual training, thus opening an enlightening cross-section of the subject's learning paths (Dominicè, 1996). The usefulness of the biographical method is twofold: on the one hand, it helps the trainer to effectively calibrate the educational intervention, adapting its modalities to the learning characteristics that emerged from the history of the subject in training; on the other hand, it is useful to the adult who, retracing the history of his life, can become aware of his aspirations and can decide to try to go beyond the cultural boundaries linked to his position in the social structure. The biographical accounts highlight the strong pressure that the social group to which they belong exerts on each individual, aimed at determining behavior that conforms to unwritten but binding rules; they also highlight how the paths of individual growth necessarily pass through a conflictual relationship with such a system of rules and expectations, the natural outcome of which is the conquest of an autonomy of thought and therefore the development of an adult individuality.

The reflexivity, typical of the autobiographical practice, leads the subject to elaborate new ways of learning and knowing, to discover the internal structures of learning processes with strong repercussions in terms of personal growth. Autobiographical recognition helps the subject to identify the dynamic connections existing between the cognitive, affective, moral, and emotional dimensions of knowledge. Reconstructing one's own training story is an opportunity for change because it takes place through a constant connection between experience and explanation, between experience and narration, producing processes of search for meaning, and construction of theories 4 . In fact, every story narrated involves the construction of a "theory", that is, a particular way of organizing a temporal succession of events. The possibility of change highlights the epistemological value underlying autobiographical practice in adult education, seen as people who can learn and change. The autobiography, therefore, can represent a path of transformation of the subject that takes place through a recognition of one's own experience attentive to the search for the meaning of one's actions, to the connections between different aspects of reality, to the evaluation of the choices made.

In the field of adult education, the goal is to activate interventions that support and facilitate learning and transformation processes. Therefore, in this context, it is necessary to focus attention on the subject who tells his or her own life, and on the close connection between the story and its author, the one who gives it shape through connections, contents, meanings, and plots. As the story progresses, the narrator can recognize himself, better he can observe himself from an absolutely new angle, which allows him to discover a part of himself otherwise denied. In fact, the autobiographical story allows, beyond the events recounted, to open an illuminating glimpse of the narrator's personality, his way of being and of behaving in the face of the roughness of life, his weaknesses, his qualities, his humanity.

"Corporeity, as well as in all aspects of contemporary culture, has established itself as a seductive place of multiple discourses also in pedagogy" (Massa, 1996, p. 559) to the point that the corporeal dimension is configured as the "fundamental dimension that comes into play with regard to any formative process" (*Ibid.*). In fact, the importance that corporeality assumes in the processes of construction of knowledge and in the development of personal identity is extremely well known and, in particular, the role that the "body in motion" plays in the interaction with other bodies and with the environment in which they are located. In this regard, the Embodied Cognition paradigm mentioned above has acquired particular relevance in recent years which, challenging the consolidated dualistic conceptions, has reiterated that cognition is rooted in bodily and sensory experiences, inaugurating a promising line of research aimed at exploring the potential of "bodies in action" in teaching-learning processes. Specifically, starting from the assumptions of the EC, in the pedagogical field the focus shifted, in addition to the varied meanings that the body assumes in the educational event, also on the environment – an active protagonist of cognitive and socio-relational processes – on the emotional dimension of learning and on the influence exerted by the latter with respect to a series of issues related to memory, attention and motivation. Through the body – understood phenomenologically as the subject body – each person experiences the world and his or her own self, acts, knows, feels, enters into relationships, communicates, expresses, narrates. By means of the body, which is not an object detached from the self but the person himself, everyone moves in space, explores the surrounding environment, manipulating and modifying its objects and assets and interpreting reality.

The growing attention paid to the conformation of educational spaces, which has sparked a lively interdisciplinary debate between pedagogy and architecture, is based on the awareness that the transformative action of bodies with respect to the environment is anything but unidirectional. It is, in fact, a dynamic and

reciprocal process, in which bodies self-shape and are shaped, "act on" and "react to" various and changing contextual, social, cultural and political conditions. Precisely for this reason it is necessary to bring the body back to the center of the training-educational process by creating the conditions so that movement is the vector of knowledge and every learning experience is rooted in the body-sensory dimension. In this regard, the words of Gamelli are interesting, who writes:

Today more than ever, this knowledge must be *incorporated*, that is, brought back to a *story*, intertwined with the *biography* of the person who intends to make it his or her own. If obsolete now appears to us to be a way of understanding and doing education that is solely concerned with classifying, ordering, analyzing, planning, solving without considering what at the same time is imagined, felt, moves in us, an attitude that is limited to seeing in the professional of body education someone who abdicates the task of holding together the multiple levels risks being obsolete of the learning experience. *Educating beyond words* means committing oneself to *giving substance to thoughts and to mobilizing discourses* (Gamelli, *Pedagogia del corpo*, 2001, p. 11).

Educational action is mainly concretized in the inextricable intertwining between self-care and care for the other, and therefore in taking care that the other learns to take care of himself. It is therefore necessary that training courses are structured starting from the specific needs and peculiarities of the subjects involved in them. From this point of view, education must not be understood exclusively with reference to *educere*, but rather to care, relationship, dialogue. It is a global growth that involves the subject both from a cognitive point of view and from a bodily and affective-emotional point of view. In the context of training processes, in fact, the body and emotions represent a support scaffolding for an adequate and complete development of cognitive processes. The non-separation of the heart from the mind and body is a guarantee of effective and lasting learning that allows the subject to achieve an integral development. The mind and the body must not be kept separate, but must be considered in a relationship of dynamic influence, as otherwise there would be a risk of falling into a one-sided vision, while instead, it is always necessary to tend to the realization of a global, integral and complex formation of the man-subject-person who lives and acts, is formed and transformed in a conscious way, responsible and resilient thanks to the development of a "bodily-rational affectivity" In particular, in adult education paths , bodily autobiography then becomes a tool for sharing one's experience in a social context, promoting empathic listening and mutual understanding. According to

Mariani, reflecting on one's own body through self-narration allows individuals to recognize similarities and differences in bodily experiences, stimulating learning that feeds on the diversity of others and the sharing of common experiences. In this way, body biography can become a means of building bonds and learning through relationship.

2. Lifelong learning and body autobiographies

Body narration is a very powerful tool in adult education because it allows you to explore, express and learn concepts in a way that is different from the purely verbal one. Especially in adulthood, most people have developed communication habits based mainly on the use of spoken or written language, often neglecting the body as an expressive vehicle, which, instead, as emerges from numerous studies and research, allows us to connect with experiences and experiences in a more authentic way, stimulating physical awareness and communication that involves the whole person.

Following the perspective of thought outlined by Demetrio, that of and for adults can be considered starting from the "primacy of education over training" (Demetrio, 1997, p. 40) since, as the author himself writes:

- a) lifelong learning has fallen to indicate today, without the problematic breath that should cross it, only the activities of updating and retraining on or for work;
- b) adult education, far from expressing the synthesis referred to between instructing and educating, is in reality used almost exclusively to designate, in the various contexts (from professional, business or socio-cultural contexts, as well as aimed at recovering basic skills not acquired in time, at school), the activities intentionally planned and managed by third parties for the increase of learning and changes that separate education from education, instead of supplementing them;
- c) training in adulthood, when it is evoked, expunges any reference to the specific dimension of learning and takes on a connotation in some cases only value-based, in others decidedly generic and abstract (pp. 40-41).

The bodily dimension, although not explicitly central to Duccio Demetrios' thought, finds space in this process, since the body is often the place where lived experiences are deposited, influencing the narrative. It recognizes the dynamic interaction between three intertwined levels that define the pedagogical theme in relation to adults: lifelong education as a speculative theoretical as well as a strategic political dimension, adult education as a pragmatic declination deriving

largely from historical and social factors, and adult education as an existential path of individuals, as a history of formation (p. 16). Between the three aspects there is a recursive relationship that holds together the fields of metareferentiality, heteroreferentiality and self-referentiality, reflecting the unity of the process, albeit in the distinction and in which a relevant contribution can be found in all those educational approaches that enhance reflexivity operated through "immersive" experiences that fully involve the subjects in training.

In this regard, Zedda (2010), suggests considering autobiography as a process that allows us to express the complexity of the person, including not only the narrative dimension but also the bodily, social and symbolic one. Bodily autobiography, according to this vision, is a tool for exploring the contradictions, ambivalences and nuances of identity. The body, in fact, is the bearer of multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings, which can be explored to better understand the tensions that characterize the path of personal growth. Reflecting on the body and its memories therefore becomes a way to welcome the complexity of existence and to cultivate a more articulated and authentic vision of the self, as illustrated in the image below.

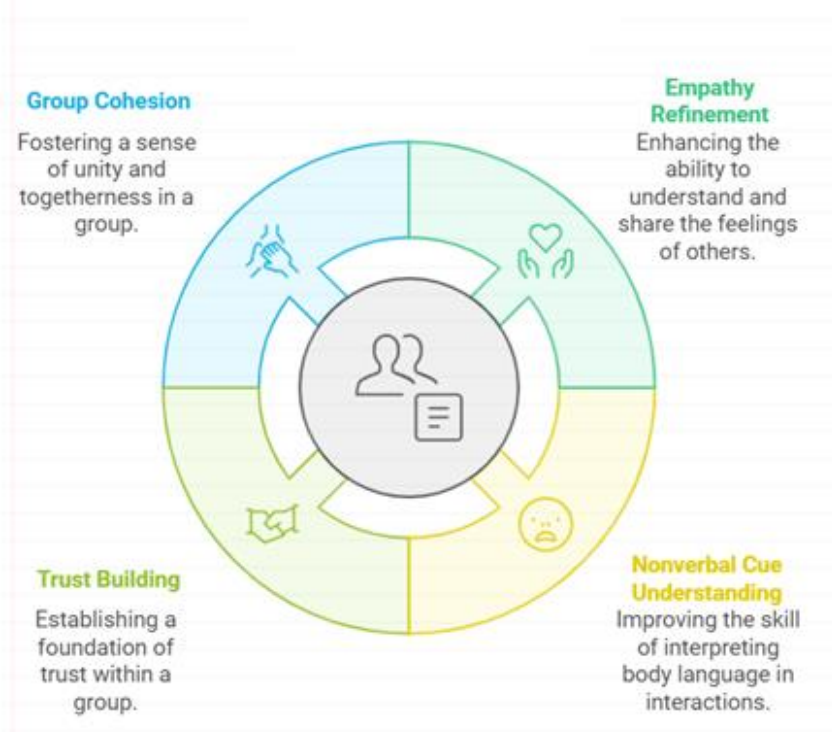


Figure 1. Benefits of Body Autobiography

The main educational objectives that can be pursued through the implementation of training courses that make use of body autobiography in adult education courses are summarised in the image below:

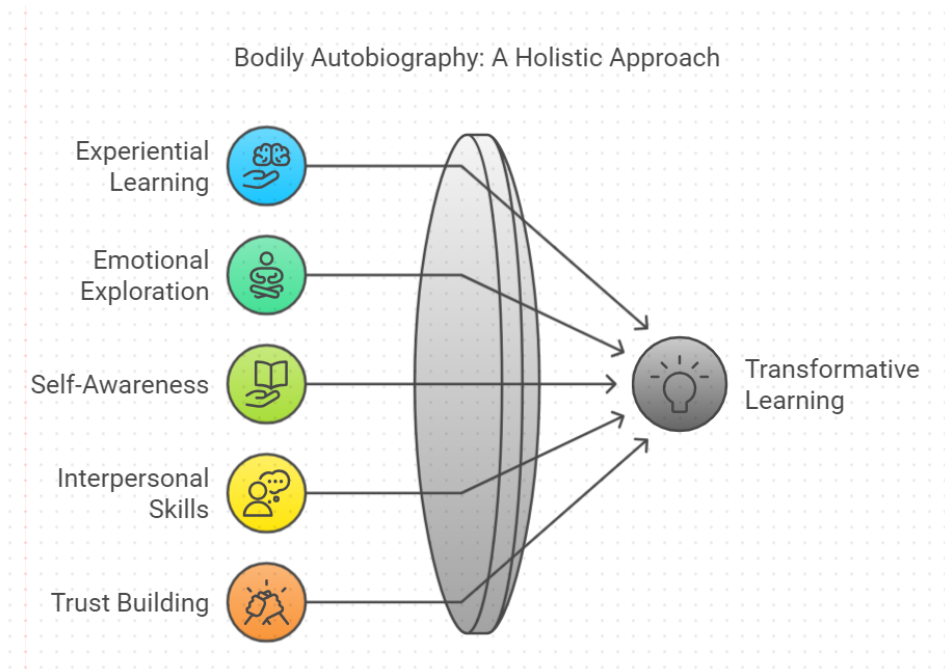


Figure 2 Main educational objectives of body autobiography

Through the full achievement of these objectives, trainees can acquire a better self-perception and an increase in self-esteem.

This positively influences the way in which everyday and work situations are dealt with, contributing both to individual growth and as citizens who actively and consciously act in the contexts in which the people live.

To confirm this, it is interesting to recall experiences of some important companies such as Google and SAP, which have integrated embodied narration practices into their team-building and leadership programs. The Embodied Leadership Program, for instance, uses movement techniques and body awareness to improve communication, collaboration, and stress management. Participants are encouraged to explore their personal stories through movement, understanding the role of emotions and unconscious behaviors in group dynamics. Case studies show that these practices help develop greater empathy and connection among colleagues, positively impacting productivity and well-being (Palmer & Crawford, 2013)

Conclusions

From what has been said so far, bodily autobiography emerges as a complex and multidimensional educational practice, which allows the individual to regain possession of his or her own history through the body, in a transformative perspective, allowing him to break his or her mental patterns, overcome limited visions of the self, exploring and questioning aspects that are not limited to the cognitive sphere, but also include the sensory and emotional sphere. It is an act that requires courage and awareness, as it implies comparison with past experiences and offers the opportunity to integrate them into one's own path of individual and relational emancipation, as an individual and as a member of a community. In fact, it is not only an approach to knowing oneself, but also a means of learning with others and from others. In the educational field, in fact, this practice paves the way for new forms of collaborative relationship and learning, in which authenticity and reciprocity become key elements. In the final analysis, the bodily autobiography invites us to explore our history and to recognize the body as an ally in the search for meaning, connection and personal growth and as a design tool (Demetrio, 1996, 1997; Formenti, 2001, 2018; Mariani, 2008, 2011; Zedda, 2010). The bodily dimension therefore becomes a space in which new perspectives can be discovered and open up to profound changes, making learning more complete. In this way, as Laura Formenti (2018) points out, this practice is configured as a transformative act that allows one to rewrite one's identity, integrating past and present awareness, abandoning one-sided and reductive conceptions to hypothesize future paths

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