

Professional Profile as Life Reflection Story

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Abstract

According to the theories of Life Design (Savickas 2010; 2005) the making of the professional profile can be interpreted as a "life story", a construction and a narrative reconstruction through which to fix experiences, thoughts, contents, but also give «a personal meaning to past memories, present experiences and future aspirations, combining them in a theme of life that shapes the professional life of the individual» (Savickas, 2005, p. 43). In this sense, the professional profile can be considered a dynamic process supported by reflection as a device through which people learn from their experiences in order to improve themselves through conscious immersion in their own experience.

Keywords: Life Design, reflection, professional profile, narration.

Introduction

The making of the professional profile, according to the theories of Life Design, is to be understood as a holistic process, a life story, a set of relationships and choices that contribute to configuring the professional project as a process as active and creative (Savickas 2010; 2005).

«The professional path represents a subjective development that gives personal meaning to past memories, present experiences, and future aspirations, combining them in a theme of life that shapes the professional life of the individual. Thus, the subjective professional path that guides regulates and supports vocational behavior emerges from an active process of creating meaning and not of discovering pre-existing facts» (Savickas, 2005, p. 43).

In implementing the educational, cultural and social scenario, the making of the professional profile and career path are understood as increasingly directly dependent on the person and the ability to adapt to a changing scenario rather than the organization (Guichard, 2013; Savickas, 2011; Duarte, 2004) and to act entrepreneurial skills in facing continuous changes and transitions (Di Fabio, 2014; Biasin 2012).

In this scenario, it's necessary to give meaning to the different "pieces" of the professional and personal paths, narrating, writing and rewriting personal biographies through a constant action of monitoring, planning and redesigning professional and life trajectories, career counseling and future orientation (Savickas et alii, 2009; Nota, Soresi, 2010) while developing social skills, coping and resilience; adaptability, self-empowerment skills.

In facing these challenges, a narrative device is a tool and a process of elaboration, construction, and management that allows both to fix the contents, experiences, and thoughts.

Narr(action) and reflection in professional profile

The narrative is an essential element of the human being, we could say that life is itself narration and that, therefore, the latter constitutes a need for life and an ontological condition of social life (Somers, 1994, p. 38).

As Bruner reminds us, without narration there would not be identity, since «we create and recreate identity through narrative, that the Self is a product of our narration and not some essence to be discovered by digging into the recesses of subjectivity» (Bruner, 2006, p. 98).

Narrating, in this context, means writing and re-writing one's professional profile, retracing one's professional and/or life experience through written form, in order to (re)-construct one's own story (McAdam, 2006).

Outlining the professional profile through narration, it's not a fantasy operation or simply rethinking of events; it means focusing on the fundamental or problematic aspects and the actions and reflections they have generated, the solutions and/or any new knowledge generated.

Through the narrative process, therefore, it's possible to generate one's own existential and professional perspective direction by connecting the present to the past in a perspective of the future. It's a trans-formative perspective in which the re-definition of meaning moves towards the development of increasingly full awareness of one's own life experiences, monitoring the change and orienting it from a future perspective.

The biographical reflexivity through narration generates and makes real events and thoughts. As theorized by Dewey, reflection is an «active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and further conclusions to which it tends» (Dewey, 1933, p. 9).

We move, therefore, in the training of a "reflective practitioner", as theorized by Schön (1983) who considered reflective practice as a "synonymous" of professional thought, as to be able to reflect in and on action, as well as for action.

According to Schön, reflection-in-action takes place during the action and it's a way to known-in-action at the same time we are acting. During the reflection-on-action, the practitioner makes an action that produces an effect on the current situation and feedback aimed to reaffirm or modify his approach.

Acting in this way the practitioner generates external and internal changes: he changes the situation (external) and the situation changes his approach and/or ideas (internal).

Reflection-on-action happens after an event or experience has occurred and represents an activity of reconstruction.

Through it, the practitioner steps back into the past experiences and explores memory and feelings, tries to re-compose and give a sense of the different fragments in order to learn from experiences and improve practices and approach.

Reflection-for-action is a planning activity for the future. This reflection is linked closely to in- and on-reflection with the purpose of improving or changing practice.

Reflection and narration allows the experience to take shape: by writing, words acquire a material and real consistency, they become permanent objects among which it is possible to identify and build links and connections that in the moment of the speech and of the happening can escape, become less clear, become fleeting (Mortari, 2007).

In order to encourage and support an effective reflecting activity, it's possible to follow a model to guide the writing activities and process. Based on Borton's (1970) developmental model, Rolfe, Freshwater, and Jasper (2001) elaborated a reflective model based upon three questions: "What? So what? Now what?"

What? So what? Now what? Model (figure 1).

Descriptive level of reflection	Theory and knowledge - building level of reflection	Action-orientated level of reflection (reflexive)
What ...	So what	Now what ...
... is the problem/difficulty/ reason for being stuck/reason for feeling bad/reason we don't get on/etc., etc.?	...does this tell me/teach me/imply/mean about me/others/our relationship/ <u>my</u> attitudes/others' attitudes, etc.?	... do I need to do in order to make things better/stop being stuck/resolve the situation/feel better/get on better/etc., etc.?
... was my role in the situation?	...was going through my mind as I acted?	... broader issues need to be considered if this action is to be successful?
... was I trying to achieve?	...did I base my actions on?	... might be the consequences of this action?
... actions did I take?	...other knowledge can I bring to the situation? - experiential - personal - scientific	
... was the response of others?	...could/should I have done to make it better?	
... were the consequences for myself? for others?	... is my new understanding of the situation?	
... feelings did it evoke in myself? in others?	... broader issues arise from the situation?	
... was good/bad about the experience?		

These questions "What? So what? Now, what?" are related to three different levels of reflection, in details (figure n. 1):

- "What?" level is a descriptive level and it requires to describe the situation using descriptive language. We can find in the model several questions to support the reflection such as: what was my role in the situation? What was I trying to achieve? What actions did I take?....;

- "So what" level happens once the event's description has been completed and it helps to analyze and clarify the deep meaning of the experiences. The language and the writing are, at this level, analytical and critical. The model supports this reflecting level using the following questions: so what was going through my mind as I acted? So what did I base my actions on? So what could/should I have done to make it better? ...;

- "Now what?" level represents the final step of the model and it supports the definition of the development paths according to an action plan aimed to improve practices and learn from experiences. In order to manage the action plan, the model suggests as key questions: now what broader issues need to be considered if this action is to be successful? Now, what might be the consequences of this action?

The professional profile: a personal and community journey

The making of a professional profile could be understood as a personal and community journey. It's dynamic and in progress "journey", defined continuously both according to results, activities, aspirations, visions, contexts and through meetings, experiences, and activities, constant reflection, and monitoring of development paths.

We could say that the making of the professional profile is configured as a lifelong common journey (Magolda Baxter, 2001) in which play a key role the generation of new shared knowledge, the sharing of resources and skills, a continuity between individual learning and organizational learning (Nonaka, 1994).

According to Magolda Baxter, we are direct to "self-authorship": a path of development that happens throughout four phases:

«The first phase involves following formulas – where what you believe, how you define yourself, and what is important in the relationships you have – is determined by an "authority" (e.g. parent). [...] At this phase, the emphasis is on seeking approval in a relationship or doing things to make the other person happy, even if that may not be in your best interests.

The second phase is called the crossroads, and as the title suggests, this is the point where the person might start to wonder if the things they "believe" are the things they really believe. In this phase, the person starts to see the problems associated with letting other people define who they are – in a sense, they start to feel "fake". At this point, we start to realize that we might believe things that the people we look up to might not, and we begin to realize that it's okay for that to happen [...] we see that we don't want to seek approval, but respect and caring.

The third phase is where a person becomes the author of one's life when we start to choose beliefs, values, and identity that feel "real" to us. In relationships, we look to negotiate ways that both individual's needs can be met. Finally, a person develops an internal foundation, where s/he feels comfortable and grounded in their identity [...].

It's important to know that this is a life-long journey and that it is not a steady climb. We all "slip" back to previous phases at different points in our lives [...]. But wherever the journey takes you, it will be worth it, as long as you remember that you are here, now» (Baxter Magolda, 2001 p. 186).

Therefore, the key node is the generation of habitus for reflection and self-evaluation, starting from the first stage of the education, through the realization of activities supporting the development of critical, reflective and metacognition skills.

In this sense, the traineeship could be an important self-training opportunity: it certainly refers to the concept of practice, but moreover to the reflection in and on the practice.

After having carried out the internship activities, students could analyze activities, reflections, and ideas in an academic contest at two different levels: personal and community.

At a personal level students could analyze their own internship experiences, for example, writing reports, reflective diary, personal portfolio,... At the community level, it's possible to share internship experiences with the supervisor and /or internship tutor, and with other students during the "indirect internship" moments.

At this stage the activity of reflection is aimed at enhancing the cyclicity of the relationship between practice and reflection: after the immersion in context with the "testing" of the theoretical aspects learned, there is the moment of distance and reflection aimed at identifying small routines, possibilities of connection and expression of the theory in practice, or to hypothesize transformative actions that, after reflection on practice, identify new opportunities, further ways of intervention. The transformative action is placed in a recursive dimension between being in a situation and reflecting on the situation.

These processes could constitute an important formative function when they are supported by documentation actions, through a narrative-biographical approach, which allows us to retrace and reread the process, to reconstruct it, to relive it and reinterpret it.

In this sense, we can say that the making of the professional profile begins before entering the professional community and the working world.

Certainly, the development, and therefore the adoption, of reflective practices aimed at the constant monitoring of one's own educational and professional development processes, starting from the university course, can constitute an effective basis and an opportunity for students to continue with these practices during all the working life.

Conclusion

Through reflection, narrative writing and biographic reconstruction could be possible to start a path and /or process that, through conscious immersion in one's own experience, supports the generation of learning from experiences, the monitoring and the making of paths of development and the managing of the professional profile.

The narrative practice, supported by reflection, represents the process and the tool to become sense makers of their own stories, re-interpreting retrospectively and/or prospectively facts, events, relationships, and emotions.

It also allows the development of entrepreneurship skills in order to make people "authors" of their own personal and professional paths.

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