

## Autobiographical research: Memory, time and narratives in the first person

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### Abstract

*This text is about life narratives, memory and time as basic elements in autobiographical research. Aspects of these have seemed important to me whilst I have been conducting and coordinating a research project involving a team of researchers from Brazil and other countries. In this article I take the memory of the individual narrator as the focus, despite the fact that the memories of narrator and researcher are intertwined and co-defined through social and cultural relations and that the narrators' memory and the analysis and the interpretation of the narrator and researcher are intertwined and complementary to each other. I deal with time since the narrator's perspective on the past reality is involved in any narration.*

*The article has four parts. The first is focused on the research approach in general. Among other concepts I distinguish between autobiographical research, life stories and life narratives. The second part is focused on a specific research project that studied peoples' memories about distinguished educators and education development in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. This project offers the backdrop for understanding representations of memory and time. The third part draws on examples from this project to clarify the dimensions of memory and time as I understood them. Finally, in the last part, but not aiming to conclude, I relate these findings to some concepts from the literature.*

**Keywords:** autobiographical research; life stories; life narratives; memory; time

## I - A general note on autobiographical research

To begin I should clarify that I understand life history as a methodology in autobiographical research. Autobiographical research uses various empirical sources (life narratives, oral stories, documents - both official and personal -, diaries, memorials, epistles, videos, photos) and techniques (triangulation of information and in-depth analysis of the sources) (Abrahão, 2008a). This understanding can also be found in Pineau (2010)<sup>1</sup>.

Life history is, in my view, a (re) construction made by the researcher, through the research as he or she analyses empirical sources (above mentioned), in a critical dialogue with research findings from elsewhere, and with a global view of a social-economic and cultural environment where the studied lives take place (Abrahão, 2008a). Life history is a product, not a process.

I want to clarify how I work with the dimensions time and memory in my efforts to develop life histories in autobiographical research. To deal with autobiographical research means to make use of the practice of memory as a *sine qua non* condition. Individual memory is the focus in this article despite the fact that the memories of both the narrator and researcher are intertwined with and co-defined by social and cultural relations (Abrahão, 2008b; Josso, 1991, 2010).

Memory is the key-element of autobiographical research. It is an essential characteristic of the narrator and component for narration. It is a component with which the researcher works in order to (re)construct elements of analysis that may help in understanding the object of study.

Memory is an active process of the creation of meanings. Life narrative study is therefore a process of collecting different facts in various narrative contexts and also of participating in the elaboration of a memory which constructs meaning, thanks to the request of an investigator (Abrahão, 2004b). Costa (2001, p. 73) has called attention to the fact that the narrative must be understood ‘as a construction of the narrator and of the hearer and, still, as a peculiar expression of the moment of its production [...] (since) in the construction of the narrative, both narrator and hearer share memories, which allow the past to appear as present [...]’.

Thus, it is in this act of constant reinterpretation of the facts of the past into the present that the narrator and hearer ‘weave the threads of the narrative as a shared memory’ (Costa, 2001, p. 82). A narrative is therefore a construction in which the investigator also participates, due to the peculiarity of its mode of production. This characterizes the process of research that consists in making memorials, life stories, autobiographies, diaries, in other words writings about oneself, in histories that are rich in meaning and in which particularly subjective aspects appear. So, in this kind of study the researcher does not want to know what or how facts “really” happened, but how the narrator thought about it at the time and how he or she remembers it in the present (Abrahão, 2003).

The act of giving a new meaning to a narrated fact indicates that the researcher consciously tries to capture that fact and is aware that it is being reconstructed by a selective memory, intentional or not.

Thus, according to Santamarina and Marinas (1994), autobiographical research has an ethical and political dimension to the extent that it ‘bets in the capacity of retrieving memory and narrating by the social actors themselves’ (p. 259). It breaks with the crystallized forms of investigation that have given more value to the finished data, and moves on in order to capture those meanings of ‘social life that are not easily discovered [...] (in search of) the meaning of the historical time and the meaning of the stories of

the various processes of construction, re-elaboration, of individual identities, of group, of gender, of class in our social context' (p. 259).

This reconstructive memory ("innocent" or not) is talked about by Soares (2001), in her habilitation lecture for Head Professor at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil (in Brazil, a professor in a Federal University has to take an examination to achieve the top position):

This is exactly how I feel: with my hands tied by what I am today, conditioned by my present when I try to narrate a past in which I re-do, re-build, re-think with the images and ideas of today. The selection of what I include in the narration obeys the criteria of the present: I choose what bears relations with the system of references that direct myself today. The (re)construction of my past is selective: I do it from the present, because this is what tells me what is important and what is not; I do not describe; I interpret. (Soares, 2001, p. 40)

So I can say that 'By means of the narrative, people remember what has happened, place experience in a sequence, find possible implications for this and play with the chain of events that build individual and social lives' (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2002, p. 102).

Using a methodology and sources of this nature, the researcher consciously recognizes that the social reality is multifaceted, complex and socially constructed by human beings who experience their lives in a holistic and interrelated way, and that people are in a constant process of self-knowing.

I remember Moita's stand (1995) when she considered autobiographical research as a method that bears potential for addressing questions of the individual and the socio-cultural environment, since it 'puts into evidence the way in which each person mobilizes his knowledge, his values, his energies in order to gain his own identity in a dialog with his own contexts' (p. 113). This understanding clarifies why autobiographical research may be understood as referring to a system in which a plurality of expectations and memories is a corollary of the existence of a plurality of worlds and a plurality of social times (Abrahão, 2008c).

The temporal character of personal/social experience is articulated by the narrative, in particular when it clarifies the duality of "chronological time/ phenomenological time". The correlation between time and narrative pointed out by Paul Ricoeur causes the researchers to inquire about the origin of a historical narration of a historical consciousness, in which the present, the past and the expectation of future mix in a three-dimensional perspective (Ricoeur, 1983, 1995).

This three-dimensional temporal characteristic of narrated time may be detected in different autobiographical narratives, whether they are found in literature or in the field of historiography – at least as long as the latter respects the reconstruction and re-signification of history that the subject who remembers makes; narratives are linked both to the moment of the experience and to the moment of the utterance.

In academic and literary works there are a great number of examples that show the occurrence of this three-dimensional characteristic of narrated time. For example, Soares (2001, p. 41) in her habilitation lecture said: 'I tell about the past – a past in which I was a contemporary of the one I had been – knowing the future; therefore in fact, I rebuild it based on this future, which is my present today'.

To situate the reader with these conceptual remarks in mind, I will now describe some aspects of the autobiographical research that I and my team developed in the field of teacher education. What I intend with this text is to emphasize some aspects of the

data that appear within the data, but are beyond anything of interest in relation to the research objectives.

## II - The research: “Identity and teacher education: narratives in the first person”

### *1 - general information*

The research entitled “Identity and Teacher Education: narratives in the first person” has been ongoing since 1998. It is an investigation conducted by a national and international research team coordinated by me at Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul – PUCRS (Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul), Brazil.

I would like to start by commenting on the theoretical framework and research methodology.

The current relevance of life story research was emphasized by Nóvoa (1995), who considered the life of teachers as having long been a “lost paradigm” in Education - ‘today, we know that we cannot separate the personal from the professional self, mostly in a profession that is impregnated with values and ideals and that is very demanding from the standpoint of commitment to human relations’ (Nóvoa, 2005, p. 7). Thus, I believe in the ‘growing importance that life stories have gained in the case of teachers, their profession and practice’ (Nóvoa, 2005, p. 7).

With this point of view, the non-detachable character of the personal from the professional self takes us back to the identity building problem between feeling like being a teacher and actually being one. Professional teacher identity is made up throughout professional life in different and successive stages; beginning from the choice for the profession, through initial education and onwards over the teachers’ whole professional career trajectory (Abrahão, 2006).

The aim is that the research methodology allows the building of knowledge of the process whereby teachers become professional. In this process I explore the contribution of contextual stories told by teachers, not only in the personal dimension, but also in other dimensions and at professional and sociopolitical levels.

In the State of Rio Grande do Sul there are educators who have written the history of education through their achievements. Their life stories are, however, likely to vanish as a result of lack of patrimony. The life story and career of each educator is a potential database to be explored and rich source for students, educators, and particularly researchers of Teacher Education and Teaching History.<sup>2</sup>

### *2 - objectives*

To guide our research study I have kept the following aims in mind:

- To give visibility to the life stories of teachers’ who contributed to the history of education in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, by understanding the educational relations and identities built through the education of and the working practices of these teachers, and, to construct a patrimony to be used by students in the field.
- To better understand the history of education in the State of Rio Grande do Sul, through the history of its ways of thinking and pedagogical practices.

### *3 - characters*

The teachers selected were intentionally selected as research subjects. They were those who contributed significantly in Rio Grande do Sul, applying their talents, knowledge and effort so as to transform those conditions that inhibited teachers more broadly from being education professionals<sup>3</sup>.

The thirty-six educators, whose life stories I studied were chosen on the basis of indication by their peers, principals and students that they were committed to education, having, thus, a high profile within the communities in which they act/acted. The participants who were selected all live in different cities in the interior of the country and in the state capital. The study is therefore of teachers who come from different inland places.

The narration of the life stories of these highly recognized teachers allows for the emergence of knowledge of their education, which then provides a framework for understanding the education of professional teachers. This thought is based on Shulman and Colbert (1989), who consider the narratives of the teachers' practices as catalyzing elements for the reflection of teachers about their own profession.

In this respect, the research has not been intended to be a reflection mirroring the past, rather, it is aimed at the reconstruction of teachers' work as reflexive-transformational professionals, whereby professionals constantly re-think and balance their social practices at the limit of the concrete possibilities of the work of the educator. I understand the life stories of these outstanding teachers in Rio Grande do Sul for their potential in the construction of meaningful and current day proposals for the education of teachers.

In identifying such characteristics, I have not forgotten that these great teachers are not above ordinary human beings and thus are not "super-man" or "super-woman". Although these life-stories highlight the positive rather than negative features of these teachers, they are consistent. What I mean is that the teachers have been chosen primarily because they have special characteristics which people remember positively. Our research object was the reconstructive memory of these teachers and other sources.

The teachers lived or still live their professional lives either in the capital or the interior of the state. They were selected for their outstanding status as people who really had an influence on communities and generations, "writing" the history of education in Rio Grande do Sul by their achievements. Most of these teachers lived on a time-line starting in the beginning of the last century and continuing to the present day. Some died whilst others retired or are still active at work. Bearing in mind the different historical events that took place over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I may, through an horizontal analysis, perceive points within these diverse life stories that are common or convergent - this both on an individual basis or in terms of the social, economical, political and cultural environment through which these stories are built, and the implications of this environment for education.

### *4 - method*

International and national research explicates practical experiences through research using life story methodology brings us a rich theoretical and practical contribution. Other research specifically develops a critical analysis in France, England, Spain, Italy, Portugal and Brazil. However the specific theoretical contributions that sustain our own study are those of Santamarina and Marinas (1994), and Pujadas (1992). Their approaches, in particular, helped in the establishment of the specific theoretical base of our method of research.

So, in the present study I worked with participants' who were or are outstanding teachers of this perspective, as taught by Santamarina and Marinas (1994, p. 282). I was not concerned with their representative potential for sampling purposes, since I did not aim at uncovering the way opinions and answers were distributed over the entire investigated population, but to explore the meanings these teachers assigned or assign their experience and practice.

*a) - data and information production*

In a positivist point of view, life histories are understood as positive documents, to the detriment of any understanding of their genesis as life histories. Life stories are seen as a clue to a given moment in a past time, and not as a theme of the present moment of enunciation. In an interactionist view what really matters is the construction of situations in the process of the production of accounts. These are considered quite apart from any reflection of the context of the utterances themselves - therefore ignoring the emergence of the macro-context (socio-political, cultural and economic) of interaction, by which a life story acquires meaning.

There is a third methodology, beyond these first two approaches, employed in the research team I coordinate. This is a methodology presented by Santamarina and Marinas (1994, pp. 268- 269). Here life stories are understood as dialectically inserted in a system. Without being disconnected from the moment of enunciation or utterance, they are treated as stories of people (individual or group) that are constructed from within the micro and macrostructures of the social reality to which they refer.

The materials used in the production of data and information for our life narratives, follow the specification by Pujadas (1992, p. 14), of: a) personal documents (diaries, mails, photos, videos, cds, published materials, etc.), and b) biographical records (cross report life stories, preferably contemporary/on-time reports).

*b) analysis of data and information*

Coherent with the theoretical line adopted, I have used procedures of analysis for the process of interpretation that are different from those adopted through positivist or interactionist model. In the positivist approach analysis favors a model essentially operating as a documentary, determinist source, analyzed to exhaustion, or saturation, without bothering about the biographical peculiarities that a field research may have. In the interactionist model, analysis presupposes text (in this case a narrative) as given and finished, and is concerned just with discovering, by means of a detailed and deep analysis, the hidden meanings in the text. Life story is reduced to the text as the producer of meanings.

Opposed to these interpretations, the conception and approach I use views the category of subject as a space of enunciation. The pertinent elements are being designed, similarly is the relation between the narratives and their contexts. Santamarina and Marinas (1994, p. 270) call this mode 'comprensión escénica', which I translate as 'context comprehension'. In a more recent publication Marinas (2007) describes this construct in detail.

This understanding highlights that the origin and the deep meaning of texts is something that I build *pari passu*, on a daily basis. The method I use means going beyond a single structure of a story according to the original meaning of texts or of the deep elements of its hidden meanings. The authors aforementioned suggest what I consider a two-stage type of comprehension: the context of the past, which encompasses the totality of the biographical and social references of the interviewed people, and the context of the present of the subjects. This understanding presupposes the research

subjects' present network of social relations and those that emerge in the concrete situation of the interview. It also presupposes the forms of agreement and cooperation that make the interview effective, as the relation between listening and transmitting in reciprocity is a condition for reflection.

The understanding of context implies a process in which the subjects '(re)update, (re)elaborate the meaning, the collective ideological positions of the vital processes' of the stories' (Santamarina & Marinas, 1994, p. 272). Considering both the moment of enunciation and the moment of utterance, the research has to interpret 'not only the stories in the games and dimensions of its weaving (context is what it is woven with), but also in the dimension of the construction of self [...] so as to place the stories of life in their plural processes and subjects' (1994, p. 272).

Nevertheless, recognizing the risks of using memory that I consider selective and reconstructed by definition as the main source of analysis, I deal with triangulations of other sources and with several life stories of crossed reference.

The material collected has been triangulated with the narratives (documents, videos, photographs, crossings of reports of life stories). The analysis employed has allowed me an organic understanding, not only of the individualities under study but of the educational context of Rio Grande do Sul through which these individuals were produced and as they produce it. Thus, the memory of the narrators, although respected in its reconstructed rationality, had modes of verification by means of the triangulations that have been referred to (Abrahão, 2010, 2004a, 2004c, 2004d, 2004e, 2002).

In the first section of this article, I talked of discussion and examples from the literature on memory and the three-dimensional nature of the narrated time. In the second section, I made a brief description of the research as the backdrop, just in order to make the reader aware of how the concepts about memory and time were being understood. In the next section, I would like to bring examples of these elements, as well as of the reconstructive and also selective nature of memory in the subjects' life narratives.

### III - Capturing traces in our research

The research conducted with outstanding educators from the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil<sup>4</sup> has allowed various analytical generalizations, especially regarding dimensions of the educational background, professional education and identity construction of the educator, as subject and professional. These analytical generalizations have allowed, among other aspects, the comparison of the professional lives of thirty-six educators who have made history in the area of education in Rio Grande do Sul, and the cycles of the professional life of educators as studied by Huberman (1995)<sup>5</sup>. The research made it possible for me to show that the teacher profession and of teaching practice present analytical dimensions that are similar to universal elements introduced by Nóvoa (2001), These elements are a result of research the author has conducted with educators from several countries<sup>6</sup>.

So, depending on the way they are told, narratives of lives allow us to understand the experiences lived by the subjects of research projects as universal.

Thanks to our transversal readings of the experiences of professional and personal lives in our research, I have been able to understand their theories and practices about: their education, their teaching, their interpersonal and institutional relations, their construction of identity – of the act of being an educator – related to the different

moments and socio-political, economic and-cultural scenarios of between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century (Abrahão, 2002, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d, 2004e, 2005, 2008c, 2010).

Beyond these categories I want to emphasize in this text the three-dimensional characteristic of narrated time that I captured in analysis of the memories of the outstanding educators in our study. They all appear side by side within the same excerpt of a detached educator narrative:

So, in the day we left the Secretariat<sup>7</sup> we went to look for a house [...] where we began our school with 115 students (**perspective: past**). Today [1992 MHBA], there are more than 2.000 students (**perspective: present**). One of the aims was to found a school with the participation of the parents, teachers, students and employees, in such a way that when we enrolled the student we were “enrolling” the parents too. Later, we bought a piece of land and built the school. We created a not-for-profit community school (**perspective: past-present-future**). Today it is a foundation kept by parents who have taken over the community life of the school, where the teacher, the employee and the student have their own life, and they have reached the conclusion that the school has to be kept by them (**perspective: present-past**). I have always said that we had to build a great school not a big school, but it has had such high prestige, it began growing and growing and it was hard to avoid its growth. When I left in 1973 there were not so many students as there are today but it was already very big (**perspective: past-present-past**). In my point of view, the school has grown a lot. It would need to stop a little bit to keep the quality because it is not easy to do this job (**perspective: present-future**).

This autobiographical excerpt shows what I have already stated before, i.e. that the narrative breaks with the linear space-time mode of giving meaning to experiences, once the memory retrieves history, the past, present and future are intertwined in the moment of telling the story. Narratives are, thus, elements that carry a strong personal meaning and articulate the present, past and future, instigated by remembrances, telling not a life as it really happened but a life remembered by the ones who lived it (Abrahão, 2008a).

In our research, described in the second section, I was aware (in a meta-cognitive sense) that I was developing narratives based on the selective and reconstructive memory of our outstanding teachers and the other source-people. It is possible to find theoretical explanations in the literature for reconstructive memory; I may refer, among others, to: Bosi (1994), Catroga (2001), Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2002).

Thanks to this research I have been able to identify some aspects of this rebuilding of memory. In the first place, it appears that memory is not intentionally selective. Selection occurs in situations in which the narrator keeps in his memory of the facts, people, relations and situations to which he attributed relevant meaning when he experienced it.

Similarly, this occurs with elder narrators. They remember facts of their initial education and from the beginning of their professional practice, but had enormous difficulty narrating events or facts that happened later in time, or simply did not remember them. Even when I used techniques such as viewing pictures of the time being reported, the elicitation of memory was not expressive. In this case, the narrative of their students and younger relatives, besides documents, very much helped in the filling of gaps.

A second expression of selective memory occurred when the narrator intentionally selected the information so as not to remember disagreeable facts, many of which made him remember moments of intense suffering, or situations that he thought should not go public. Or still, with the intention of pleasing me – this became obvious many times – the narrator presupposing what I wanted to hear.



Another expression of memory rebuilding became evident when the narrator of an event or a fact used various translations of a specific fact in successive narrations about the same fact, during the same narrative discourse or in the narrations conducted in different moments.

Also there is a case of what I call “memory of shared life”. The source-person, when narrating facts about another person, in this case one of the outstanding teachers, added their own experience in the report. This was in fact the most frequent situation. I have not found in the literature the description of this kind of memory. I shall exemplify this:

When I was four years old I met my godmother, for whom I had, from the very first moment, a feeling of love and care. Thanks to her I met my godfather Ary<sup>8</sup> and his eldest daughter, Maria da Graça, who was my friend and companion during many years. When looking at him with my childhood eyes, I saw him as a giant... At the time I met him I lived at 823, João Alfredo street, where the *Nacional* Supermarket today stands. The cars were rare at that time but my godfather owned a black Citroën. In fact, the majority of the cars were black. The fact is that a number of times he would drive me around the block just to see my happiness, as a child wanting to have a sweet. When it was carnival, which he did not like very much, Maria da Graça and I would put on our costumes and he would take us to see the parade on the streets.

Later, my parents and I moved to a different neighborhood. Right after this they moved too. On many Saturdays my mother and I would visit them. When it was raining, and Maria da Graça and I were bored, he would spend the whole afternoon playing domino to distract us. I still did not know anything about my godfather’s profession but I recognized in him many qualities and the affection he had for me.

When I was 13 and studying in the 2nd year of Secondary School I decided I was going to take Mathematics and only then I found out that he was a Math teacher and, not convinced, I went to him, communicating my decision. Very happily he gave me a wide smile and said: “Very well! If you need a little hand, don’t feel embarrassed to ask”.

Another example of a “memory of shared life” the reader may see in the following narrative:

I met Ary in September 29th, 1942, in a spring prom that took place in one of the social clubs. I was wearing a blue dress and he said: “a blue sky with no need of stars, because it is already luminous”. And from then on we began to see each other, frequently. In September 1943 we got married. When he opted for the teaching career, I became enthusiastic because he was involved with teaching. I just did not know how much solitude this would bring me in the future (his Wife’s narrative).

About another outstanding educator:

I used to love Zilah. She was a very intelligent person, very interesting and modest. From her qualities what I admired most was that she was always fine in any situation. We studied together all our primary and secondary education. Zilah was always a brilliant student; before exams we (a group of classmates and I) would go to Zilah’s house to study with her all the contents. There were even some funny events. Our teacher gave us verses by Camões for us to analyze. At that time Camões was obligatory in the curriculum. Zilah was a genius. She would analyze those verses in a marvelous way! Sometimes I would copy from Zilah and the teacher would give her a ten and two or three for me. I could not complain, for the teacher knew that I had copied from Zilah, because I did not have the capacity to do what Zilah did (cousin, friend and classmate).

Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2002, p. 110) introduce the reader to some features of narratives as representations of the reality, bringing features of narratives that help to synthesize and better qualify the previous examples:

- ‘ - The narrative shows the reality of what is experienced by the storytellers: the reality of a narrative refers to what is real for the teller of the story.
- The narratives do not copy the reality of the world before them. They propose private representations/ interpretations of the world.
- Narratives are not open to corroboration and may not be simply judged as true or false: they express a truth from a point of view, of a specific situation in time and space.
- Narratives are always inserted in a social-cultural context. A specific voice in a narrative may only be understood in relation to a context that is wider; no narrative may be formulated without such system of references’.

The fact that a researcher understands memory as selective and reconstructive, and memory as people’s perceptions of “reality”, that is, re-signified along experiences of life, does not avoid that in the interpretation of narratives he or she also gives a meaning, founded on the set of elements that he or she has, by the triangulation of content of narratives with content from other sources, such as: documents, narratives of other people, and so on.

The interpretation of the researcher does not disqualify the interpretation/reinterpretation of the narrator, who will be respected in his or her “establishment of truth”.

Nevertheless, the interpretation of the researcher represents an analytical view of the narrative material, bearing in mind a “reference of truth” beyond the narratives, in an effort of understanding the object of study in several perspectives: in the personal/social perspective of the narrator – who represents the individualities –, in the perspective of the contextual dimension from which these individualities are product and through which they are producers, and in the perspective of some interests related to theoretical aims, as, for instance, the understanding of the mechanisms that memory uses in a narrative situation.

These were the mechanisms I intended to analyze in this paper when presenting the dimensions, both in theory and empirical material, those mechanisms: the tri-dimension nature of narrated time; the selective and reconstructive nature of memory in a narrative situation.

#### **IV - Ending, but not aiming to conclude ...**

This text is not about the research itself. So, in this moment I do not intend to analyze or report the life stories of educators studied, neither the history of education in Rio Grande do Sul. Both were the subject of previous of my texts (Abrahão, 2010, 2005, 2004a, 2004c, 2004e, 2002). Information of the research was brought to the previous sections only in order to contextualize other findings from the meta-analysis.

I understood memory and time dimensions during the process of analyzing narratives of life as a construct resulting from the meeting of two personalities at the time of narration – the individualities of narrator and researcher. This makes the narrative of a life as a different kind, since the narrator and the researcher are not concerned with the “truth” in the sense of the close relationship between the events

narrated and the reality. Rather, the interest here is with the significance of these events to the narrator, at the time of narration, and as affected by their meeting.

Advancing this understanding, I am theorizing some dimensions that seemed important. My contribution for this text means to clarify the understandings that research, of the kind referred to above, can go beyond the specific research goals. In this sense, this research enabled a syntheses that allowed me to consolidate different theoretical and methodological elements of autobiographical research, especially dealing with dimensions of narrative memory and narrated time, during the encounter between narrator and researcher.

These dimensions, emerged through the life stories of prominent educators. They were considered in the light of theory, namely through:

- a) the question of memory in relation to the three-dimensionality of narrated time, especially inspired by Ricoeur (1983, 1995, 2000, 2007), which is due to the temporal nature of human experience (personal/social) articulated by life narrative, especially when clarifying the duality “chronological time”/“phenomenological time”. The correlation between time and narrative by Paul Ricoeur makes me wonder about the influence of a historical narration upon a historical consciousness in which the present, the past and the expected future intertwine in a three-dimensional perspective. So, the temporal three-dimensional nature of narrative accounts (looking back to the past with the eyes of the present and allowing prospecting the future), offers a reason why narrative discourse does not necessarily follow a linear and sequential logic;
- b) the conception of reconstructive memory, understood as the reconstructions of meaning which the subject who recalls his own trajectory in the moment of enunciation links to the subject of his narration as he is seeing it in the present moment (Benjamin, 1988);
- c) the understanding about the selectivity and the reconstructive nature of memory in relation to the forgetfulness, because the new meaning of the events let the researcher be aware that she or he will try to capture the events knowing that they were rebuilt by a selective memory, intentional or not (Catroga, 2001);
- d) the memory sharing during the narrative act between narrator and researcher thanks to the joint construction at this time, because understanding memory at the time of narration means establishing an active process of creating significant meanings to both narrator and listener (Passerini, 1988);
- e) the truth of the events is what is true for the narrator. Thus, the trajectories when narrated provide the construction of a sense of life - the story of this trajectory is not the result of what really happened in terms of experience and knowledge, but is the result of the organization of these elements as an argument with temporal dimension, space and multiple social relations (Bolívar, Domingo, Fernández, 2001);
- f) the “shared living” memory (Abrahão, 2010, 2008a), as evidenced by virtue of the sources when narrating the trajectory of another person, usually overlap her or his own trajectory in the account;
- g) the art of narrating is ‘an artisanal mode of communication’ (Benjamin, 1988, p. 205). However, the narratives are not just an individual construct; they acquire real meaning when they are placed in the historical context and socio-political and economic culture of the narrator (Abrahão, 2008c).

These theoretical and methodological dimensions were seized by me through the intersection of the empirical data with the literature, briefly mentioned here. This whole relation was important for me to understand the autobiographical narrative in its triple dimension: as PHENOMENON (the story, the event), as METHOD (research) and as PROCESS (the signification of the experience for both: the narrator and the researcher (Abrahão, 2008a).

So, in this research process the narrators' memory and the analysis and interpretation of the researcher are elements that are intertwined and complement each other in understanding the representative dimensions of life narratives.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Other approaches to memory, such as collective and public memory, see, among others: Halbwachs (1990), Le Goff (1995).

<sup>2</sup> (Abrahão, 2004e, 2004c, 2004a, 2005, 2010). Beyond these publications I employ discussion about the results of this research in my classes at the Graduation and After Graduation Courses of Teacher Education. The research about the life of outstanding teachers is very significant to teacher education. In a second stage my students construct and discuss their own narrative about their lives, their education and their professional career (Oneself Memorial). I have presented the results of this research in many seminars on teacher education, in Brazil and in many other countries.

<sup>3</sup> In other texts of mine there is much material and I discuss it on the three main dimensions which appear in the 36 teachers' life stories studied: **teacher education; teacher professional identity; theory and teaching practice**. This is not the aim of this paper. Here I present a reflection on memory and time dimensions in autobiographical narratives, as result of a meta-reading I made based on the narratives of our 36 teachers whose life stories I have been working with since 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Research: "Identity and Teacher Education: narratives in the first person" with results published in seven books and several articles in national and international publication (reviews, journals). In section II of this paper I described some aspects of this research.

<sup>5</sup> Abrahão (2004a).

<sup>6</sup> Abrahão (2004a).

<sup>7</sup> Secretariat of Education of the State of Rio Grande do Sul, where the narrator was the Secretary of Education.

<sup>8</sup> One of the outstanding teachers studied by us.

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