

Vito Flaker

INTERVIEW AS AN ART OF GETTING TO KNOW

ETHNOMETHODOLOGICAL NOTES ON HOW THE PROFESSIONAL GET KNOW USERS

Dr. Vito Flaker is a lecturer at University of Ljubljana School of Social Work.

On the assumption that the traditional matrix of getting to know people in the distress leads to the perception of the users of various services as helpless, stigmatised, morally wrong etc., an ethnomethodological experiment was devised. It has elicited the questions that are usually asked in the setting of social work. These questions establish a frame, which, although based on kindness, is of an institutional nature and, besides getting to know somebody, directed towards the individualisation of problems. When peers were asked the same questions in everyday settings (streets, bars, stations), they were felt inappropriate and rude. In observations of various attempts at re-establishing the ordinary context of civil interaction or at assuming the role of a client, the differences between the two modes of getting to know somebody have been analysed and compared. Professional matrix produces problems, seeks inadequacies, and elicits sad tales. The division of roles is asymmetrical from the start; the client is subordinated and dependent, while the professional's efforts include his/her own distinguishing and keeping away from him/her. The relation is based on the tinkering, personal services model, uses the institutional, formal spaces, people are encouraged to tell tales with predetermined object, thus reducing the experience by reinstating the theme in a rigid frame of the conversation, individualising the responsibility and intruding into intimacy, which is warranted professional secrecy. Ordinary conversation matrix constructs personal and social mappings, concentrates on virtues, and encourages happy and successful stories and entertainment. The roles are on principle symmetric, based on the assumption of equality and reciprocity and the feelings of trust and conspiracy. The model here is a peddlers' and rhapsods' conversation, which takes place in public or intimate spaces and is characterised by a net of diffused topics; it is open and may expand autopoetically, it is associative in nature and thematically peripatetic. Responsibility is collective, tone unofficial, intimacy achieved by seduction and protected by conspiracy and trust. In order to get to know people, the ordinary context seems superior, and it is recommended for use in professional settings as well. The author concludes with a possible synthesis of this model with pertinent professional skills, discipline and ethics.

Keywords: interview, conversation, ethnomethodology, everyday life, critical psychology, intimacy.

Vera Grebenc

EXPERT REPORTS ON THE BASIS OF EXPERIENCE AND THE FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE
IN THE NARRATIVE OF DRUG USERS*Vera Grebenc is a research coordinator at the University of Ljubljana School of Social Work.*

The article presents the drug users everyday conversations in the context of narrative characteristics and shows the content and language used in these stories, considering social background of social representations that are used to explain everyday life of drug users. Stories of drug users are analysed in the view of special and expert knowledge that is accumulated inside subcultures of drug users and is circulating as prohibited knowledge among them through storytelling.

Keywords: drug users, metaphors, practical knowledge, prohibited knowledge.

ABSTRACTS

Mojca Urek

LIFE STORIES AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

SOME STARTING POINTS FOR AN EXAMINATION OF STORYTELLING IN SOCIAL WORK

Mojca Urek, M. A., is an assistant lecturer at the University of Ljubljana School of Social Work. She is currently working on her PhD on storytelling in social work.

The paper describes characteristics and significance of storytelling and indicates some theoretical starting-points and possible directions of researching storytelling in social work. Narratives include constructions and expressions of meaning, which is a crucial practice in human life. They are significant structures of the production of meaning; therefore, it seems necessary to maintain and respect the ways of the respondents' construction of meaning. Storytelling in social work, as well as in general, exhibits at least three features: the social construction of stories, the interpretability of processes, and the relations of power that dominate the stories. The author introduces a variety of theories and concepts (literary, sociological, social-psychological) that are relevant for the field of the narrative and, by way of divergent applications, for both the theory and the practice of social work.

Keywords: community mental health, narrative theory, storytelling, biographical method, documentation in social work.

Vera Grebenc

FAILED ESCAPES BY THE PRISONERS OF BIOGRAPHIES

The concept of individualisation of living situations presumes that biographies have become "self-reflective"; a socially prescribed biography is transformed into a self-created biography, and one that continues to be such. But the plenitude of stories supposedly at the individual's disposal turns out to be fictitious. As a story is placed amongst other biographical accounts, it usually shows that the course of events is by all means preconditioned and prescribed. They find support in the concepts of "high reality" from prescribed biographies, in which the points of career are determined with regard to the standardised life periods and the related institutional expectations.

Keywords: autobiographic narrative, identity project, institutionalised biography.

Blaž Mesec, Sanja Kaube

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PATIENTS WITH COLOSTOMY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CORBIN AND STRAUSS' THEORY OF MANAGING CHRONIC ILLNESS AT HOME

Dr. Blaž Mesec is an associate professor of methodology at the University of Ljubljana School of Social Work and Dean of the School. Sanja Kaube is Accredited Nurse and Graduated Social Worker in the Social Service Department of the General Hospital in Maribor.

The qualitative analysis of seven interviews of patients with colostomy, based on Corbin and Strauss' theory about managing chronic illness at home, found the following characteristics of their experience. The first is the biographical perspective: the illness (cancer of colon) as well as the operation, with everything that happens before and after it, together with its consequence, the stoma, represent a critical intervention into the lives of these patients. The experience in the hospital can be traumatic for some people because of the contrast between the technicised everyday life in hospital and the existential threat the patients may feel. The difference between a fatal and a pragmatic experience of the trauma, or between inconsolable mourning of one's own fate and the practical regulation of life with the stoma, can be observed. It is precisely the need to care for the stoma and to introduce a regime of everyday life that lead to the pragmatic attitude and acceptance. With regard to their acceptance of life with the stoma, as well as to their material living conditions, great differences can be observed among patients. They stress as very important the support of their partners and families and of their self-help associations. In this case, categories proposed by Corbin and Strauss seem to be adequate for the description of their experiences.

Keywords: everyday life with a chronic disease, qualitative analysis, biography.

ABSTRACTS

Mateja Sedmak

AUTO/BIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH TO STUDYING ETHNICALLY MIXED MARRIAGES

Mateja Sedmak, M. A., is a junior researcher in the Centre for scientific research, Koper.

The history of researching ethnically mixed marriages is dominated by the studies of the macro-level, with prevailing quantitative research techniques emphasising statistical and demographic incidence of "mixed marriage". Sociological studies on ethnic problems evidently lack qualitative research on inter-ethnic relations with an emphasis on the (inter)personal level, i.e., on the micro-level. This contribution presents methodological and epistemological advantages of auto/biographical approach in examining intimate, interpersonal relations and subtle family microclimate. Because of its basic features that distinguish this approach, collection of auto/biographical narratives proved as a particularly efficient tool in examining ethnically mixed marriages as a specific form of intercultural encounters on the interpersonal (micro-) level of partnership and family.

Keywords: auto/biographical method, qualitative research, ethnically mixed marriages, methodology, sociology.

Christopher Hall

NARRATIVE AND SOCIAL WORK: SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY, ANALYSIS AND PRACTICE

Dr. Christopher Hall is Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Applied Childhood Studies, University of Huddersfield. He has undertaken research on the organisation of children's services, the construction of client identity and professional discourse.

This paper reviews some recent theories of narrative – structuralism, postmodernism and social interaction. Concentrating on an approach that considers the performance of storytelling in everyday social interaction, key concepts of narrative analysis are discussed and illustrated using a variety of social work texts. It is assumed that storytelling is inevitable in the everyday interactions between social workers, clients and other professionals, and narrative analysis offers a powerful and sensitive analytic device. By studying the details of social work talk and writing, we can see how storytelling methods are deployed strategically and rhetorically to get the job done. Finally there is discussion of how narrative approaches inform the practice of social work.

Keywords: narrative analysis, performance, social interaction, storytelling in social work.

Milko Poštrak

ANTHROPOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW

Dr. Milko Poštrak is an assistant lecturer at University of Ljubljana School of Social Work.

Anthropologists have been interested in various human cultural practices. The author gives a brief summary of the anthropological history, from "travelling stories" of the nineteenth century to "scientific conceptions" in the first half of the twentieth century and the "critical revaluation" in anthropology within the last decades of this century. The author is also interested to find any references to Husserl's phenomenological conceptions of the person in anthropology. He thinks that Geertz's demand to look «from the native's point of view» has something in common with Husserl's conception of the subject. Further links are made to hermeneutics, linguistics and communication studies.

Keywords: subject, culture, phenomenology, intersubjectivity, hermeneutics.