

Reporting as a clinical psychology intervention

by Fiammetta Giovagnoli*

In this article I will address some aspects of the use of the reporting methodology in a university course I have been teaching for three years: a workshop devoted to textual analysis in the clinical psychology intervention. Offered in the final year of the specialist degree¹, the advanced textual analysis workshop has the aim of developing the competence to integrate a methodology, emotional textual analysis, into a model of clinical psychology intervention based on the theory of analysis of the demand². To this end, the students are involved in some research-interventions being carried out in the two clinical psychology teaching chairs present in the degree course, which act as partners in this workshop project.

In view of the argument I will present, I wish to point out that the intervention model adopted by the clinical psychologist is equivalent to the relating model acted out by the psychologist in the intervention itself. Intervening, according to the theory of analysis of the demand, means first of all constructing relations. As Renzo Carli (2007a, b, c) argues, in clinical psychology's knowledge-getting and intervention models, it is possible to find a dichotomy between "diagnosis" and "relationship", between a psychology that knows the object, and a psychology that knows the relationship and intervenes through it.

For a psychology of relationship, the problems of those going to a psychologist originate in relationships and it is in the relationship between the person presenting the demand and the psychologist that the problems can be known and treated. The psychologist intervenes by analysing the client's relational proposal, acted out within the relationship between himself and the client. The relational proposal actualises the client's model of living together, the failure of which gives rise to his demand. "The specificity of the clinical psychologist's methodology consists of thinking, with the client, of the emotions experienced in their relationship and using them to construct a hypothesis of the client's development. There is no "normal" symbolization of the context to aim for. The goal of the work consists of acquiring a method of knowing one's mode of emotionally symbolising reality, which does not try to conform to reality but to an exploration of reality. It is a matter of knowing one's modality of affective symbolisation, one's relational theories, so as to construct others more suited to the realisation of new goals of living together. These are new modes of relating that make those used up to that moment obsolete, not wrong or diseased" (Giovagnoli, Giuliano & Paniccia, 2008, p.76).

In the training we offer, the workshop is the relational context within which to analyse the modalities of emotional symbolisation of reality that are acted out by the students. The relationships that are set up in it – the collusive myths that organise it, the relation between these myths and the goal of the training intervention – become the object of reflection and learning. To develop this reflection, the report of the sessions takes on a strategic role. The reporting activity involves both students and teaching staff, composed of the workshop teacher, some colleagues who collaborate in the teaching and research activity of the clinical psychology chair and a number of trainees.

If the goal of training is not to transmit predefined knowledge but to activate a process of thinking about the emotional dynamics in the training relationship, the planning of the

* Contract teacher at the Faculty of Psychology 1 of "Sapienza" University of Rome.

¹ Specialist degree in dynamic and clinical psychology of the person, organizations and the community at "Sapienza" University of Rome.

² Emotional textual analysis is a methodology of textual analysis that makes it possible to explore the local culture of the context, that is, the collusive dynamic that organises it, by analysing the texts produced by those who share the context. Readers interested can read further in Carli & Paniccia (2002). For more detail on the intervention model based on analysis of the demand, see: Carli & Paniccia, 2006; for the training methodology of the advanced textual analysis workshop, see: Paniccia & Giovagnoli, 2007.

training intervention will be strongly anchored to the specific “culture”³ of the unpublished, and therefore new, workshop to discover. The design of training conceived in this way cannot be done before the workshop starts nor can it finish in the introductory phase, but will involve the entire time span of the training module. In this period the teaching staff will work to produce conceptual categories that can translate the emotional experience in which teachers and students find themselves involved. The teaching staff will also deal with monitoring the cultural changes in the workshop in relation to the interventions that are proposed at various times and hypothesising new lines of intervention.

It is therefore a matter of finding a tool that can reconstruct a process, and place a series of events in a time continuum. To this end the teaching staff create the opportunity to meet periodically to report the training work within the staff group.

In parallel, right from the first workshop session, we invite the students to try out reporting the sessions. The reports drawn up by the students are published and placed on a web site which they can access with a password. During the workshop sessions we use the reports to work on the relation between the students’ emotional involvement acted out in the workshop and the theories learnt. Every year we find that the report, as Rosa Maria Paniccia suggests, is “shameless”, that is, it reveals with frightening clarity the fantasies that organise the way the students relate to the training. Remember that in the workshop we apply the theory of analysis of the demand and that the students make the commitment to adopt it to try out its potentialities. Throughout these years of doing the workshop, the report has enabled us to measure the distance between the theory that is supposed to be adopted and experience. The reports in fact show the presence of a “diagnostic” culture in clinical psychology, confused with the common way of thinking, which the students act out to their great surprise, when we ask them to relate to another person, be it client, colleague or the person commissioning the intervention. The psychology of relating, the theory of analysis of the demand, which final year students think they have mastered, proves to be a largely unused theoretical dimension, split from the emotional implications acted out by the students themselves.

What we are interested in showing here is that it is not a matter of finding an error, by means of this revelation. It is not a matter of not having understood and having to come back to the straight and narrow. Rather, by analysing and discussing this acting out, the students can understand that every relational context is organised firstly by basic emotional dimensions; that non-organised emotionality confuses and disorients, and that an immediate, well-known anchorage is needed to solve the ambiguity involved in every new relationship to be constructed. Renzo Carli writes: “Tolerating the original ambiguity, associated with the objects of the relationship, is difficult. It involves the non-solution of the object’s emotional indefiniteness [...]”. (2007d, p. 382). The culture we discover by reporting in the workshop is made up of elementary emotional repertoires – remember that diagnostic culture and the common way of thinking coincide – that we resort to because they provide stability. They protect us from extraneousness, we would say by using the model of living together⁴. To refrain from using them we need to have experience of their failure concerning the goal of the training intervention we are involved in. Remember that the fantasies that hold groups together, that organise the relationship, can be thought out and analysed only in the presence of a productive goal. Without awareness of this goal, the staff’s proposal to discover the emotional dimensions of the culture organising the training is seen by the students as pointless violence. To think of the relationship between teachers and students one needs a third party to deal with: the client. One *gets knowledge in order to intervene*, we could say, again quoting an expression that is well-known to those with training in analysis of the demand. The problems encountered in the relationship with the commissioner of the intervention, with the client, with the students’ research-intervention working group, are an important resource if knowledge of the local culture is to produce changes.

³ In the model of analysis of the demand, the term “culture” indicates the set of affective symbolizations of a context.

⁴ For more detail on the model of *living together*, see: Carli (2001).

During the workshop we find some prevailing modes of reporting that clearly say who one is, and where one is in terms of psychological work. Some examples:

One modality, found above all at the beginning of the workshop describes what has happened in the most “objective” way possible. This is called the “minutes”: “It was Tuesday, we were in Room 3, at the beginning the teacher said..., then we did...” .The psychologist of these reports makes his epistemological premises clear: knowledge is assumed to spring from observation of reality. Experiences are considered a disturbing element to eliminate or contain. The students in the first phases of the workshop seem to have a positivistic vision of knowledge that presupposes the existence of a reality that can be objectively investigated, positioned in a world outside the subject studying it.

Corresponding to this “positivist” option there is another way of reporting, which the students see as radically different from the former, but which is actually closely related to it: the *secret diary*. In these reports the author tells us how he felt, the emotions he had, what intimate thoughts he had about... Also in this case the aim is descriptive, the change in object is apparent, emotions are described and treated as if they were data. There are reports that use both models: first they anticipate the data, then they describe the emotions.

Another mode of reporting that we find particularly in the early stages of the workshop, is the *Ave Maria*⁵. In these reports we find, one after another, all the theoretical concepts – in our case of analysis of the demand – within which every event that happens is ordered and finds its place, or it would be better to say is forced into its place. They are reports that leave one mute, close off all thoughts, and which arouse no comments.

Corresponding to this order, which is a bed of Procrustes, there is another report modality, in which it is difficult to make head or tail of the text. The name of the writer is missing, there are no indications of context (Where is the writer? Who is he? When did the things he writes about happen? Who is he speaking to?), we find ourselves immersed in the author’s emotional associations, we fuse with him. For those with experience of emotional textual analysis, these reports are called *a2dico*⁶ to indicate that one is invited to enter the emotional dimension where even syntactical links are lost.

I will stop here. The intention is not to present a classification of reports, but to notice the number of ways the tendency to make schisms is expressed, to disintegrate integrations. So-called theory on the one hand, practice and emotional experience on the other. The analysis of reports makes the embracing of this schism explicit; it actually contradicts the model of analysis of the demand and as a matter of fact, even more significantly for our training designs, it contradicts the adoption of any model. Discovering the existence of and acting out the implicit, emotional models of the clinical psychology profession, gives the students experience of the unconscious dimension always present and working in social contexts; a dimension immediately *available* when we find ourselves faced with something new, which means always. This awareness, discovered in a training setting, is experienced by many as a change and an acquiring of competence.

What the students realise is that thinking of emotional experience, integrating experience and theory, means getting involved in the relationships and being confused, at least at first. It means above all taking a critical view of models that seem to guarantee an intervention that disregards the relationship and that does without knowledge of which emotional aspects are organising it. It is a real grieving experience towards fantasies of power over oneself and others, of control over emotionality and the relationship that the intervention that ignores the

⁵ An expression that evokes a discourse made like a prayer that is repeated without bothering to understand the words in a hackneyed ritual.

⁶ In emotional textual analysis, to carry out the statistical steps, specific IT programmes are used. The term “a2dico” refers to a phase of analysis in one of these programmes: Max Reinert’s *Alceste* (Analyse des Lèxèmes Cooccurrents dans les Enoncés Simples d'un Texte). In this phase of analysis *Alceste* produces an alphabetical list of words present in the text analysed. From this list, following the analysis methodology proposed by Renzo Carli and Rosa Maria Paniccia, a selection is made of the words dense with emotional meaning. One obtains a set of words decontextualized from the intentional meaning of the text in which they were originally found and strongly evocative of emotional associations.

relationship seems to promise. This experience is accompanied by experiences of very fierce anguish and anger.

Reporting really begins when one stops being interested in power and in the hypothesis of knowing the other person apart from the relationship. One no longer wants to control oneself and the other person, but makes the effort to construct a relationship, also with the help of reporting. "Presenting clinical psychology as the psychology of the relationship entails proposing a different way of getting knowledge, which involves giving up the fantasy of gaining power over the other person through a profession. It also entails giving up a professional model that presupposes a relationship already established by the social mandate, before the first contact between psychologist and client, and one that does not work at constructing relationships. Such a relationship sees the "ignorant" client depending on the unsharable knowledge of the technical expert." (Giovagnoli, Giuliano & Paniccia, 2008, p. 76).

The shift towards models other than that of power is also seen in some editing decisions in reports. Often at the end of the workshop the reports start with introductions in which the authors state their objectives in reporting, and who the report is addressed to. They choose to deal with one aspect of what happened. Limits are accepted or proposed. This is an important change, a symptom of a different way of experiencing extraneousness. There are approaches addressed to the reader, whose existence is acknowledged. Work is done on constructing a relationship. From the report one begins to appreciate the function of the organisation of the setting. It now becomes clear that a report does not convey contents but organises contexts.

It is the relationship between the students that seems to benefit most from this discovery. We discover that for a student the extraneous that it is worth knowing is also, and perhaps above all, a fellow-student. At the end of the workshop the students who report begin to talk to each other about the goal of the workshop itself. They adopt the report as a tool to create a different way of being together. They are less confused in a familistic theory of relationships, the stick together less in defensive communities against the risk of recognising their competence, in other words, they want to emerge from self-centeredness and start relating with a client.

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