

School and Vocational Guidance Through Graphology: A New Opportunity to Reverse from an Informative Approach to A Self-Assessment Approach



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Opinion

This paper describes the results, in terms of appraisal and effectiveness, of the project “At school in continuity... with Graphology”, carried out in Bologna in 2010-2011. This project was allowed by USR ER, Office IX, Cultural and Educational Services and School Net of Area 3 and led by “Istituto Comprensivo 9” as leading school. This research focused on teenagers mental stress and learning disabilities, studying disorders ranging from mild to critical, including school dropout issues and potential treatments.

Background and Ratio

“Orientation” is the word we use when talking about “educational guidance”, especially when referring to middle and high schools support, where students will choose their further education. Hence comes the concept of “self-orientation”, by which using given landmarks should help improve one’s awareness of their own place in time and space. However, these landmarks are being undone by quickly changing socio-economic realities, new, different criteria for defining “success”; and what schools have to offer: The landmarks we used to help us think about our future are no more, which makes it increasingly difficult for someone, especially if young, to “know what to do”.

Educational guidance within the Italian school system can be described as part of the education process. *Educare* comes from the latin “*ex-ducere*” which means *to “extract” or “elicit”*; in other words, it provides students with the means to express themselves to their fullest through the use of the appropriate tools. This comes in terms of skills, competence and self-awareness, which

will stay from school until one’s own professional life and beyond, making us ourselves and laying the groundwork for our personal development. It is exactly in this respect that the analysis of handwriting can be a useful and powerful instrument to pin point the fields where young people might do better academically, for instance languages or mathematics, and reveal their endowment of personal resources, such as good memory, social intelligence, intuition, or even highlight unknown potential. These skills will not only help young people to improve their grades, but also their lives. We can see how graphological investigation could become a powerful educational self-guidance instrument to help young people understand themselves in a simple, objective way. This will help them evaluate the best choice and when to make it by pondering the risks and benefits of every decision, increasing their self-awareness and their chances of success, as well as improving their self-esteem. It will also help them harness their own innate resources and, of course, prevent excessive expectations, and thus potential disappointments in the future.

In the field of education, school and vocational guidance may play two roles. It offers information about local job opportunities, and it deals with learning assessment from external examining boards in the form of multiple choice tests like SAT in the final years of middle and high school - 8th and 13th grade. However, it is common knowledge that academic achievement depends on how well individuals assimilate and adapt themselves to a given teaching system, which is standardized after given national curricula. This leaves no room for the individual’s personality.

Aim of the Study

The main purpose of this project is to show students, but also teachers and families, what a powerful tool graphology can be. The insight they gain will allow them not only to recognise the markers, but to also see them in a new light, and this will start a change in both roles and goals of school and vocational guidance, and also about when and how the guidance should be given. The result would be a better awareness of “external information”, often offered by schools and universities, which may be confusing or even misleading for someone young who has not a clear idea of what they want. However, a student who has acquired “inner information”, which is self-awareness and individuality, through graphological analysis, will be able to confidently develop their own project of self-realization using both “inner” and “outer” landmarks.

One of the major concerns for the graphological counselors in the project was to stop students and parents from making so called “value judgments”, showing them the importance of gaining SELF-AWARENESS of one’s own strengths and weaknesses, and even of what could come with a little practice. The aim of the project was to straightforwardly prompt to the awareness of one’s limitations and how to turn these into new strength, also to develop healthy SELF-EVALUATION criteria, useful both at school and for the rest of one’s life.

Casistic and Methods

The project was led and promoted by Istituto Comprensivo 9 “Il Guercino”, Longo Street, Bologna (Italy), and joined by Istituto Tecnico Agrario “Arrigo Serpieri”; Istituto Tecnico “Manfredi – Luigi Tanari”; Istituto Comprensivo 18 - Scuola secondaria di primo grado “Fabrizio De Andrè”; Istituto Comprensivo 16 – Scuola secondaria di primo grado “Guido Reni”; Istituto S.Domenico-Farlottine - Scuola secondaria di primo grado “S. Tommaso d’Aquino”; Scuola secondaria di primo grado “Guido Guinizzelli-Annibale Carracci”, Istituto Tecnico “Rosa Luxemburg”.

The goal was to test the new method on 149 students, but despite the effort to get samples also from the students who had not been at school on the test days, the final number who took part was 127; 83 from middle school and 44 from high school. Once the professional graphologists had completed feedback interviews with either the students’ parents, or with the students, if they were legals, each of them was given a satisfaction questionnaire with the following questions (attachment 1):

a) Before experiencing graphology first-hand by taking part in the project “At school in continuity... with graphology”, whose aim was to carry out school and vocational guidance through the interpretation of handwriting movement, what did you know about graphology in terms of actual knowledge?

b) Were you aware of its application in schools In terms of knowledge?

c) How did you feel before taking part in the project? Were you keen to participate in the project, and if not, why?

d) What is your opinion about employing graphology as a tool for educational purposes in order to improve communication between family and school?

e) What do you think about employing graphology at school in order to learn more about the boys and girls’ preferences, their potential, temperament and character and its benefit for teachers and parents?

f) How satisfied were you with the graphology counselors’ work in the feedback session after your evaluation?

g) Do you think a parent will find it useful for their child to take part in a project aimed at establishing new criteria for school and vocational guidance that will help to choose their future education through and as a form of self-guidance?

For each question, the writer could choose from the following:

Absent low medium high very high the student could also express an opinion in a separated blank space. The questionnaires were filled in anonymously and collected by a teacher in each class and then delivered to the project designer and coordinator, PhD Mara Massai.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Of the initial 149 students enrolled, 127 finally received the questionnaire and 104/127 (82%) gave it back properly completed, representing the ‘study sample’. All the questionnaires collected were complete and each part correctly filled in. Out of 104 questionnaires, 33 were filled in by over-18-year-olds in 3 different schools, 71 by parents of middle school students. Very few added a comment, and some expressed their perplexity about the whole ordeal, which is hardly surprising given that little is known about graphology and its effectiveness. However, many expressed favor and a wish to continue on this line of experimentation in the future, possibly involving more classes.

At the end of this engaging experience, we deemed it opportune to re-elaborate the collected questionnaires in order to assess the real effect of the project on the people involved. We believe the feedback from the people who were directly involved in both their first encounter with an in-depth and precise graphological analysis, and their perceived feelings of well-being, or possibly discomfort, during the feedback interview would be the most likely to give us a qualitative measure of the whole experiment. So after re-examining the comments about the “graphology approach”, we decided to read the evaluation in qualitative terms of “effectiveness” rather than “satisfaction”. This would show how useful the approach was to obtain:

a) a better understanding of oneself and/or one’s children

b) better School and Vocational Guidance and guidelines for future

- c) acceptance of oneself (self-acceptance?)
- d) focus on one's own personal resources to rely on

Although the collected material may not be enough to stand for an exhaustive and universal response, it is undoubtedly significant. It reflects the opinion regarding the perceived validity, usefulness and effectiveness of graphological investigation as a tool in School and Vocational Guidance, as supported by the 82 % of the participants of the whole sample. It also acts as a valuable, effective and non-intrusive way to give both parents and teachers a better understanding of a child's aptitudes and qualities, which will only improve the dialogue between parents and teachers.

Our main focus was the very aspect of "satisfaction" expressed both by the students' parents and students themselves involved in the experimentation. According to average responses to question 1, 72% stated a limited and partial knowledge of graphology, with approximately 18% reporting NO KNOWLEDGE at all of this discipline. In response to question 3, 63% wrote they were unwilling and even skeptical about the idea of participating in the experiment, while 55,76 % reported a MEDIUM, and 7,69% a LOW level of willingness. Despite this, the final outcomes of the experiment yielded really encouraging, and certainly satisfactory, qualitative data in terms of participant satisfaction when considering the usefulness of implementing this project at school. Question 6, which asked respondents for an evaluation in terms of experience satisfaction, registered positive answers in 83% of the whole sample, with 55.76% of the whole sample showing a HIGH satisfaction level, and roughly 28% VERY HIGH.

The most interesting findings, however, only came during the feedback interviews. It was then that the results, developed by the graphology counselors, could be compared to the expectations and self-awareness of students and of parents about their children. There is absolutely no doubt that there were cases that rose concern, for instance those where the handwriting samples revealed unexpected differences between the hoped achievement and the actual results; or when talents, character traits, or attitudes did not correspond to the image the child or their parents had of them.

In order to achieve self-awareness, we should take the following steps:

- a) scale back our expectations and dreams;
- b) Recognize that there may be qualities and characteristics that we do not like about ourselves, or our children;
- c) Accept our uniqueness as something positive, and that one's limits can be turned into a resource

Then we will experience a true moment of evolution and start accepting responsibilities. This process can happen anytime, carefully built and day after day in full awareness, with a serene and mature attitude and the help of experts who will help us see

and comprehend ourself without judgments. Bearing this in mind, 45,45% of 18-years-old boys and girls, whom the graphologist interviewed directly, rated HIGH and 36% VERY HIGH, giving a positive evaluation of about 82%. The same can be said for middle school pupils's parents, whose percentage was about 60% for HIGH satisfaction and 23,9% for VERY HIGH, on a total of 84,5% positive responses in terms of satisfaction.

Another interesting point is that everyone's overall responses to items 4) to 7) in the questionnaire (i.e. to items concerning the evaluation of one's personal encounter with the graphological approach and of what kind of impact it had on both the school environment and family relationships) consistently rate HIGH and VERY HIGH satisfaction levels:

- a) regarding positive feedback on Graphology as a tool that improves School-Family relations (question 4), yielded rated 63% of very favorable feedback (50 HIGH, i.e. about 48% and 16 VERY HIGH responses, equal to 15,38%)

- b) the positive feedback increased when asked about the validity of Graphology and its applications as a functional tool to improve the knowledge of aptitudes and individual limits (question 5) with 75% highly favorable responses (57 responses with HIGH, equal at around 55% and 21 with VERY HIGH, equal at 20%);

- c) the percentage of positive answers increases when asked to give satisfaction indexes at the end of the interview and of the experience itself (question 6) (83% favorable results, which include 58 rated it HIGH equal to over 55%, and 29 - approximately 28% - with VERY HIGH satisfaction);

- d) 67% positive evaluation was attained from parents when answering question 7 about the usefulness of Graphology in obtaining an additional point of reference for their children as a means of self-guidance (56 rated it HIGH - slightly under 54%- and 14 rated it VERY HIGH).

The decidedly negative feedback to questions 4) to 7) is based on small figures:

- a) To Question 4, on graphology at school as an instrument to obtain an improved school-family relationship, we registered 8 highly negative responses (2 stated the usefulness was ABSENT and 6 responses rated it as having LOW utility), corresponding to 7.8% of the answers.

- b) Question 5, on the validity of graphology to identify talents and/or limits that might still be unknown to the young person, received 8 very negative responses, again equaling 7.8% (3 responses rated ABSENT the graphological analysis' capacity to outline an accurate profile of the writer as, while 5 rated it having LOW validity).

- c) Question 6 - on the level of satisfaction reported at the end of the experience, showed only 1.9% negative feedback,

corresponding to 2 responses in total, of which one wrote ABSENT satisfaction and the other one LOW satisfaction.

d) With regards to question 7, it should be pointed out that 2 out of 3 responses that rated ABSENT (2.8%) to the question that asked whether parents perceived the usefulness graphology as a tool to provide reference points for self-guidance, were from 18-year-old high school students who wanted their parents excluded from the experience. (see Attachment 2- Numeric data analysis and Attachment 3- Percentage data analysis)

Conclusion

Despite the limited number in research terms, as stated above, the collated sample data shows an interesting and encouraging outcome to the "At school in continuity... with Graphology" experience carried out in the 8 selected schools in Bologna and nearby outskirts. It is worth mentioning that none of the people involved felt that taking part in the project was an imposition or sterile. In spite of 72% claiming to have little or very little knowledge of the graphological discipline, no respondents expressed an ABSENT willingness to participate in the trial. Also, it is significant that the responses, in general and in terms of satisfaction, from students of age 18, who were personally interviewed by the graphologists, more or less coincide with those of the parents of minors.

This suggests that the study of aptitudes, abilities, tendencies and temperaments is worthwhile and that graphology is the right instrument for the job, offering precision, depth and substance. Parents found that the graphological analysis corresponded with their own ideas about their child; but more importantly the young people directly involved identified with the profile that emerged,

unhesitatingly recognizing and acknowledging those aspects of themselves that might hinder or facilitate the achievement of their goals. All the types of behavior that parents often call "irritating" or "unfathomable" such as poor concentration, anxiety, restlessness, listlessness, disengagement, as well as types of behavior though negative may produce good results, such as fear of failure, over-achieving, or addicts to studying can be identified by the professional graphologist based on the study of graphical gesture (in writing and drawing). Indeed, the parents of pupils in junior high in our study found the professional graphologists' explanations regarding the origin and development of their children's behaviour effective and fruitful. It seems clear that this type of exchange can but promote good relations between parents and children.

We also believe that carrying out this project in the school environment was effective and fruitful to promote sound self-awareness and to provide positive input into the self-guidance process for the more mature young people, approaching the end of the fifth year of high school, about to make important career decisions. The results extrapolated from the re-processed and analyzed satisfaction survey questionnaires of the "At school in continuity ... with Graphology" experiment bear witness to the validity of the project, and more specifically that Graphology can set us on a path of self-realization, with its positive support our relationships in the school/family context are healthier and more enlightened, and that it might serve as an effective tool to check the number of school dropouts, which is worrying social phenomenon. We suggest the possibility to update these results, which might represent an appropriate research tool to better define the increasing social and personal uneasiness among adolescents especially in this particular post lockdown period.



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