

ESREA CONFERENCE AVEIRO
book of proceedings
transitions and identity in learning life

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ESREA CONFERENCE AVEIRO
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transitions and identity in learning life

edited by Barbara Merrill

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INTRODUCTION

**Transitions and Identity in
Learning Life**

Transitions, Adult Learning and Lifelong Learning

Research on life transitions and adult learning has become increasingly popular in recent years (Field 2012, Field, Gallacher & Ingram, 2010, Ecclestone, Biesta and Hughes, 2009). This interest reflects a societal change from a traditional chronological lifecourse to one which, in an era of late modernity and globalisation, has become subject to frequent changes. As a result a person's lifecourse can sometimes be unpredictable and risky (Edwards, 1997, Bauman, 2005). Modernity has brought about increasing individualisation whereby individuals have to take greater responsibility for making choices and life planning in their lives in relation to learning and work, for example. At the same time globalisation has brought about greater insecurity in the labour market as well as new technologies and new forms of knowledge and skills. Employees and organisations need to be adaptive and flexible in response to the rapid and frequent economic and skill changes. Working lives are subject to vertical and horizontal transitions. This may be within one organisation or in different organisation/s. Increasingly a transition may be into a new career or periods of unemployment as a job may no longer be for life (Castells, 1996). Learning, in a variety of forms (formal, non-formal and informal) both inside and outside the workplace has become a mechanism and a process in the transition from one type of job to another. The transitions which an individual experiences may be through choice or imposed externally. The latter may have implications for the way an individual experiences and copes with the transition and learning and their attitudes towards it.

Learning transitions are not just confined to the workplace and the labour market as adults may decide to return to education as a result of a transitional experience such as a divorce, children growing up or a death in the family. For many who enter adult, further and higher education the learning experience itself is also experienced as a life transition transforming the self and their identity. As Folke, Hake & Schedler argue: 'such transitions will grow both more frequent and more significant for the quality of life in late modernity' (2004: 303). Learning has, therefore, come to play a central role in enabling and managing transitions in adult and working life. As Field points out:

Education in adult life becomes both a resource for individuals seeking to promote their employability and mobility, and at the same time a cause of further uncertainty and risk. (2006: 1).

The individualising tendencies in society have brought about increasing risks and uncertainties for the individual in all spheres of life (Beck, 1992). For Bauman;

'individualization' consists of transforming human 'identity' from a 'given' into a 'task' and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequences (and also side-effects) of their performance (2000: 31-32).

Individualisation implies a greater need of the use of agency by the actor in institutional and social life (Beck, 1992). For Giddens (1991) the self in adjusting to and coping with change, has become 'a reflexive project' constantly constructing and re-constructing self and identity. In a similar way Beck

(1992) outlines what he calls a reflexive biography and asserts that the 'individualization of life situations and processes thus means that biographies become *self-reflexive*; socially prescribed biography is transformed into biography that is self-produced and continues to be produced' (1992: 135).

Research on adult education and transitions is an emerging but an increasingly popular area of research, particularly in the field of higher education, (Field et al, 2009) as it reflects the nature of life in late modernity. As stated above a person's lifecourse is less linear now and instead may be subject to changes, sometimes frequently. Working life, for example, is no longer characterised by a job for life and many people experience work transitions as a result of redundancy, the need to upskill or in order to change to work in another sector. Transitions may be triggered by more personal factors such as divorce or an illness. At times of change some people may look to returning to learn and adult education as a means of transforming their life in a different and 'better' direction. Learning and adult education may be perceived by the learner as an opportunity for self-development, changing identity and transformation as well as gaining educational, social and economic benefits. For some adults, however, transitions in learning may not always be positive as they struggle to cope with their learning or with external and/ or personal constraints. Transitions may, instead of a taking a person forward, move them backwards or back to where they were before they started learning as they find it impossible to 'keep on going on'.

Transitions and Research

A transition infers a change and movement from one identity, self and situation to another. It implies having to let go of part or all of a person's 'old identity' to assume a 'new or modified identity'. This involves a process of self-reflection through learning. Transitions are, therefore, about 'becoming'. Transitions occur in between periods of stability (Levinson & Levinson, 1996) and, as Merriam argues, 'change is fundamental to adult life' (2005: 3). However, transitions are not linear and an individual may experience more than one transition at once or overlapping transitions. Transitions are linked to social roles, experiences, behaviour, social contexts, agency and structure. As George illuminates: 'Research on life transitions continues to grapple with two major issues – the challenges raised by heterogeneity, and the need to better link macro and micro perspectives' (1993: 353). In the process of transition, identity formation and change becomes a dialectical process between structure and agency.

Elder et al link the concept of transition to the concept of trajectory thus placing the notion of transition within the life course:

Trajectories, or sequences of roles and experiences, are themselves made of transitions, or changes in state or role...transitions often involve changes in status or identity, both personally and socially, thus opening up opportunities for behavioural change (2003: 8).

For Ecclestone transition:

...depicts change and shifts in identity and agency as people progress through the education system...transition is a change process but also a shift from one identity to another (2009: 11).

Gallacher and Cleary define a transition as a 'personal transition between two states of 'being' – the before and after of specified learning experiences' (2007). Transitions can also be viewed as 'turning-point' moments (Elder et al, 2003) which they define as 'a substantial change in the direction of one's life, whether subjective or objective' (2003: 8). This links transitions to biography as the term is also used in a similar way by Denzin to define the biographical method (1989). Within adult education Antikainen's Finnish study referred to 'distinct turning points' and 'significant learning events' (1998: 218) in a person's life history.

Much educational research in the past has focused on the transitions of young people from school to further education colleges (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000) or from school to work. In recent years research in adult education has focused on the transition of adult learners into further (Crossan et al, 2003, Webb & Warren, 2009) and higher education (Kasworm, 2010, Fuller, 2007, Merrill, 1999) and in the workplace (Jenkins, 2006) as well as research which looks at the relationship between transitions and learning (Merriam, 2005). Some adult education research highlights that learning transitions may be seen as risky, even a negative experience, for example, for some working class students studying in elite universities (Reay et al, 2009, Fuller, 2007, Alheit and Merrill, 2004) while for others the experience is a positive and transformative one.

Research on transitions in learning has been helped by the development and growth in the use of biographical methods in adult education across Europe (West et al, 2007) as biographies capture a person's experiences of transitions across a lifecourse. Research is revealing the complexities between the experiences of learning and transitions in a range of adult education contexts. It can also help to inform policy and practice.

Learner Identity and Adult Students

Identity is a word which is frequently used in both academic and everyday language. It has become an important issue in Western societies to the extent, as Atkinson and Houseley state; 'identity matters' (2003, p.163). It has been highlighted sociologically in recent years through the work of feminists and postmodernists. Giddens (1991) and Castells (1997) discuss identity in relation to the individualisation of society and the concern about risk and uncertainty in late modernity, which makes the notion of a coherent identity problematic. Giddens (1991) also links identity to biography and sees identity as being 'the self as reflexively understood by the individual in terms of his or her biography' (1991, p.18). The self and a person's identity is shaped and constructed through past and

present experiences (Ferguson, 2009). Individuals also imagine a future identity of who they want to be and become. The identities of adult students have been shaped by their experiences at school, in the family and workplace. Returning to education is viewed by some as being about completing their education. Education is also viewed as a means of developing a new identity and transforming the self. The educational journey, however, also entails coping with multiple identities of being not only a student, but also possibly a wife/husband/partner, parent, worker and carer. Class identity, as research shows (Reay et al, 2009, Kasworm, 2010), is also important as many define themselves as being working class and this forms a strong part of their identity as a learner. During their learning career they are constantly changing identity and in Goffman's (1974) terms moving from one frame to another as they switch between their student and other identities.

Identity is, therefore shaped by social, institutional and personal experiences and processes so that 'identity is produced and reproduced by individuals interacting in institutionalized contexts' (Jenkins, 2000: 14). Identity is generally discussed in individual terms but identities can also be collective (Ferguson, 2009). A collective learner identity can help to sustain learning and enable non-traditional adult students to cope with being in a minority, such as in a university context. Identity, as Côté and Levine argue, also links structure and agency as it is 'a function of both external (social) and internal (agentic) factors' (2002: 9) and similarly, as Berger and Luckman state, 'identity is a phenomenon that emerges from the dialectic between individual and society' (1973: 195). The interaction between structure and agency is evident in the stories told by adult students in research as they strive to use their agency in becoming a student while also sometimes struggling against constraining structural factors.

The concept of a learner identity has been developed by adult education researchers in recent years to further understanding of the learning processes of adults in the UK. At different times, and with different researchers, different terms have been used such as 'learning career', 'learning trajectory', 'learning biography' and 'learning identity'. For example, Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000) established the term learning career in their study of students aged 16 – 19 in a further education college (post-compulsory institution) in the UK. The concept was further developed by Crossan, Field, Gallacher and Merrill (2003) in research on marginalised adult learners in Scotland. This study drew on symbolic interactionism and particularly the work of Goffman in its understanding of career. Goffman defined career as 'any social strand of any person's course through life' (1961: 119). Symbolic interactionists do not view career as happening in a linear fashion although for many people this is still how the term career is viewed. In a later European research project the biographies and learning experiences of adult students in higher education, I and a research colleague, Rennie Johnston, felt that the concept learner identity was more appropriate. For us learner identity acknowledges:

First the irregular and complex interrelationship of learning and identity and the fact that, particularly for non-traditional adult students, learning and identity co-exist with and influence and are in turn influenced by other adult identities. (Johnston & Merrill, 2005: 44).

Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2002) and Hodkinson et al (2004) have researched the concept of learner identity in relation to workplace learning. They argue that a person's dispositions to learning and their biography are important in understanding a worker's attitudes towards participating in work-based learning. Attitudes and engagement in learning are shaped by an individual's past experiences of learning and training. Wojecki's (2007) study of learner identities in the workplace used a narrative perspective to look at workers working in the community and social services sector who were studying on a two year vocational and educational training programme in a formal learning context. He draws on the metaphor of 'wounded learning practices. He explains:

The metaphor of wounded learning practices is offered in the externalising of some adult learners' previous experiences of formal learning environments, and the implications these experiences might have for some adult learners and the identities and relationships they construct regarding their participation in formal training programmes. A narrative perspective of identity has been developed, inviting adult educators to appreciate how adult learners' use of stories about learning may affect their current and future renderings of self. ... Stories of an individual's experiences of formal learning may shape how an adult learner sees herself as a 'learner'. (2007: 179)

Using biographical approaches illuminates the formation and development of a learner identity and the impact of the past and present life on this.

Biography, Biographical Learning and Transitions

As outlined above transitions, biographical learning and biography are intertwined. Biographical learning is a concept which is increasingly being used and researched as a means of understanding life transitions within the context and discourse of lifelong learning (Dominicé, 2000, Bron's work, Alheit & Dausien, 2002, Glastra et al., 2004, Biesta & Tedder, 2007, West et al, 2007, Alheit's work, Hallqvist, 2012). Biographical learning is a resource which enables people to cope with change and transitions in their lives and in a rapidly changing society. The concept also challenges the policy and economic perspectives of lifelong learning by offering an emancipatory and social approach.

Alheit and Dausien (1999) originally coined the term biographicity to refer to biographical learning. By this they meant:

an 'inner potential', a sort of 'autopoietic' (- self creating) resource of coping with current reality...an active construction of what personal needs actually are. But it is more: in a very particular way, it represents reality. We could say that biographical constructions are a result of ongoing coping processes with social reality. (Alheit & Dausien, 1999: 5).

Biographicity or biographical learning takes into account both the individual and the social. It enables

individuals to control their lives, take decisions and manage transitions thrust upon them by social structures, which in the process affects their biography. Alheit and Dausien stress that lifelong learning is 'tied at all times to the contexts of a specific biography' which means that 'without biography there can be no learning, without learning, no biography' (2002: 15). To engage in biographical learning implies that the individual draws on their 'biographical stock of knowledge' (Alheit & Dausien, 2002: 15) and reflect upon their past experiences to identify strategies for coping with a transition. Biographical learning also involves interaction with others in social institutions. As Hallqvist et al (2012) point out the most quoted definition of biographical learning is the following:

a self-willed, 'autopoietic' accomplishment on the part of active subjects, in which they reflexively 'organise' their experience in such a way that they also generate personal coherence, identity, a meaning to their life history and a communicable, socially viable lifeworld perspective for guiding their actions. (Alheit & Dausien, 2002: 17).

Other adult education researchers use the concept of biographical learning in slightly different ways. For Biesta and Tedder it is about 'learning about one's life and learning from one's life' (2007: 139). Hallqvist et al use the following definition:

Thus we consider biographical learning to be composed of two components: reflexive identity work and creative action. As part of the overall concept of biographical learning, reflexive identity work is understood as the efforts by which individuals use and revise their life story to sustain or elaborate change in their identity. As an outcome, creative action in the framework of biographical learning is defined as the efforts by which individuals act on their current life conditions in order to change or sustain their new life course or reaffirm their old one in new conditions (2012: 74).

Hallqvist et al applied the concept of biographical learning in their Swedish study of people who experienced 'restructuring, job loss and enforced work transitions' (2012:70). They argue that:

such transitions may be understood in terms of biographical learning, acknowledging that learning in work transitions is not only about ensuring one's 'professional competence' or 'employability' but includes identity issues and decision-making that affect one's biography. (2012: 70).

In their study they identified people who had either, what they term, 'a strong mode of identity work' or a 'weak mode of identity work'. With the former individuals identified that the transition had changed them so that they were different to who they were before their redundancy. Those with a weak mode of identity work talked about a continuity between the past and the present. They concluded that:

we find the concept of biographical learning to be an important tool for both describing and understanding the kind of changes that have become commonplace today for a majority of people in the Western world: work-related disruption of life course and a search for new

career opportunities that more often than not entail change not only of identity but also of social circumstances. (2012: 83).

Biographical learning, therefore, provides a useful approach for understanding the learning transitions and identities of adult learners in a range of learning contexts.

The Story of this Book and the Network

The European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA) provides opportunities for adult educators from across Europe to meet, discuss and exchange research ideas. ESREA has several research networks covering a range of adult education topics. This book has developed from the work of the ESREA Access, Learning Careers and Identities Network and the meeting of researchers from across Europe to discuss their research at Louvain –la- Neuve in 2006. The life history of this network reflects the changing nature of research in this field. This network started its life in 1996 as the Access Research Network and held its first network conference in Leeds, UK. The convenors were Chris Duke, Etienne Bourgeois and myself. As the publication – Access, Equity, Participation and Organisational Change - (Hill & Merrill, 1997) from the conference illustrates the theme of the network was a narrow one focusing only on higher education, access and participation. This focus dominated the themes of the next two network conferences in Barcelona and Edinburgh. Ten years later the network was re-launched under its new title of Access, Learning Careers and Identities to reflect the new and wider concerns in adult education research around the concepts of identity and learning experiences and processes. The emphasis was no longer on getting in and accessing an institution. The re-launch conference was held at Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium and organised with Etienne Bourgeois. This conference produced a book published by Peter Lang entitled *Learning to Change? The Role of Identity and Learning Careers in Adult Education*. The next conference moved south to Seville, Spain and was organised with José González Monteagudo at the University of Seville. The conference papers were published in two volumes with the title of *Educational Journeys and Changing Lives: Adult Student Experiences*.

This book consists of articles based on papers presented at the 2011 conference in Aveiro, Portugal and was organised with Lucília Santos and Elsa de Almeida at the University of Aveiro.

The Chapters

The chapters in this book focus on transitions, identity and learning life in a range of educational and country contexts. The educational contexts include professional and workplace learning, learning in higher education, folk high schools as well as looking at the training and educational experiences of adult educators. Some of the chapters look at the impact of gender and class on learning and the

role of prior learning. A geographical spread of chapters from north, south, east and west Europe are represented in this book as well as two chapters from a Canadian perspective. While there are many similarities in the issues discussed across the countries there are also some differences. The key areas discussed include the following:

- » How transitions are shaped and experienced by adult students in relation to class, gender, ethnicity, age or disability
- » Conceptual and theoretical approaches to transitions, identity and learning career
- » Patterns of transitions and identity in relation to retention and drop-out
- » The impact of learning, identity and transitions in relation to family, work and community
- » The interconnection (or not) between learning and the lifecourse
- » Methodological approaches to researching transitions and identity.

Methodologically the majority of the chapters are qualitative with many using biographical and life history approaches. Many of the chapters draw on empirical research as well as theoretical approaches. The chapters in this book, therefore, make a contribution to the understanding to the transitions and identity in learning life which researchers and practitioners in the field of adult education will find interesting and stimulating.

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**Identity(ies), Training and Non-
Formal Learning: teaching
experiences with adults in Higher
Education**

Introduction

The text that is presented here focuses upon the process of training experienced by the option leader of a particular discipline in an academic post-graduate university course over the past five years. The setting is in the area of the training of adults and professionals, who work, predominantly, in the field of education and teaching, that is to say, it is a discipline which is integrated in a Masters in Educational Sciences that specialises in Curriculum Development. The students are mainly teachers of various levels of education from pre-school to higher education. The professional field of the trainees and the designation of the discipline – apparently contextualised in opposition to their professional interests and requirements – generated at the start of the course indifference, even disinterest in the course option. It was recognised that ‘non-formal learning’ is frequently irrelevant for teachers distanced from their professional field and which is not focused on disciplinary and formal learning. In this sense, the object of the study of this discipline, evidenced in the experience of the course, seemed in some ways, imponderable for the students, as can be deduced from the following statements:

Identity(ies), Training and Non-Formal Learning – the name of the discipline caught my eye when I saw the curricular plan of this Masters Course... At that time I thought: How is it that a discipline of this nature (non-formal learning) can fit into a course of such a formal and rigid nature? Happily the treat was not “poisoned” and we had an opportunity to reflect, discuss and learn in a space in which the ways of the world emerged from silence and real places, where our individual lives revolved (Silva, 2006). (Student Portfolio, academic year 2005/2006).

... the more the classes progressed, the more I felt that I had taken the right option (Student Portfolio, academic year 2007/2008).

When planning the syllabus various aspects were taken into consideration which included the characteristics of the students, the designation of the discipline and the meaning attributed to them – a different meaning from the one initially admitted by the students. In other words, the discipline was, from the point of view of the author, pertinent and necessarily located in the area of post-graduate training of educators and teachers and in the area of the Masters in question. Taking into account these elements, the course staff were not indifferent to the pedagogy for adults – or andragogy, as it is known to some authors (Knowles, 1984, 1986; Pratt, 1993) – with its specific characteristics and demands, which the trainer sought to highlight in the conception and implementation of the syllabus. As an essential aspect of the training plan, the preoccupation was with placing the students - the subjects of the training - at the centre of the learning and cognitive process with topics located and situated in social and historical contexts (Pratt, 1993, p. 18). That is, the training plan was underpinned by a comprehensive theory of adult learning (Mezirow, 1985) in which the structuring of experience has a fundamental place and, consequently, knowledge does not only result from an objective and external reality but also from a complex construction in which the trainee has an essential role (Silva, 2003).

In this way, it is possible to emphasise three elements of the syllabus of the discipline that are considered relevant: its content, its methodology and its evaluation. The reason for highlighting them is not because of the elements themselves since they are part among other components of the conception and implementation of any educational or training syllabus, but because of the form and content that each one of these elements takes, which in the experience of the author has never been tried out with students in previous training situations¹. The presentation about the discipline² identified – in a succinct way – the various pedagogical aspects that characterise it; namely, its purpose, aims and methodology, which were as follows:

The Curricular Unit Identity(ies), Training and Non-Formal Learning takes lifelong training-learning as an area for discussion and critical analysis and particularly non-formal learning. This area will not only be an object of study external to the actors involved in the process of post-graduate training but will also result in a system of self-analysis of the training-learning processes of the participants and of their (re)construction of identity(ies). It will favour an analytical and critical perspective of content and fundamental participative dynamics in order to develop and strengthen the self-analytical and self-critical dimension, which encourages the identification of training pathways and learning situations (Silva, 2010).

This proposition, as can be deduced, results in an investment in formative interventions distanced from merely cognitive and instrumental rationality. It seeks to develop instances of the piloting of well-considered moves and of the development of networks of complex and diversified interactions (Silva, 2004), which can contribute to the adaptation of the complexity of personal and socio-professional systems. In view of the presentation carried out there are frequently a variety of students that end up accepting the challenge. What is made known to them is a working proposition of a pathway to be carried out that, as with any other pathway, takes individualised and unique routes within the group in which the ‘teacher’ is included and where each one must assume responsibility on the voyage of training and learning. The journey is frequently experienced, recognised and explained by students throughout the process as, for example, as it was understood by this female student:

... as has been mentioned many times, I consider fundamental the fact that this training centres itself, in first place, on the person, starting with ourselves, with our own re-discovery and re-construction, towards the re-discovery of knowledge” (Student, Portfolio, academic year 2007/2008).

So, in spite of the pedagogical work being carried out in an academic training context, she focused on (self)reflective work about the contexts of the lives of the trainees and those that organised the process of self-training and co-operative training.

1 As has been emphasised many times by the students, orally or in writing, and as can be read in the following transcribed statement: “the discipline of “Identity(ies), Training and Non-Formal Learning” was the one that surprised me more in the Masters course by the way it was organised and run and by the working methodology adopted.” (Student Portfolio, academic year 2005/2006).

2 The syllabus of the discipline is presented at the start of the semester at which time the students can choose the option.

The pedagogical challenges

Within the scope of the training outlined above assumptions that underlie them result – in great measure – from the convictions and pedagogical principles, which are defended by the author. However, they often leave doubts for the students, who see as manifold the challenges that they themselves raise and which are permeated with enthusiasm, uncertainty and apprehension. Taking up the perspectives and expectations of the trainees with respect to the discipline, two female students made the following statements about its purposes:

At the start of the academic year, and before the first day of classes, I had reflected about the optional subjects that would be to my liking (...). The curricular unit 'Identity(ies), Training and Non-formal Learning' had not been selected! However, in the class in which each of the four optional subjects was presented, and without any other influential factors, I wanted to listen attentively to what each professor said about the syllabus to be developed. (...) the curricular unit that I ended up opting for seemed to me that it could offer me a good opportunity to discuss the worries that I encounter many times. (...) The presentation of the curricular unit looked attractive to me. I confess that, on the same day, I commented to a friend: "This subject was made for me!... I am going to thrive with it!. (...) For this reason, I had no hesitation in taking the option" (Student Portfolio, academic year 2010/2011).

To participate in this Curricular Unit meant for me at that moment, the possibility of being rescued from a subterranean chamber (Student Portfolio, academic year 2010/2011).

The author only had access to these written records at the end of the semester and after the process of training had been concluded jointly. Nevertheless, it was possible to frequently read – in a certain sense 'foretell' in the attitudes and commitments assumed by the students (at least by the majority of them) – that their option had a significant added value for them as people and professionals and not only as pure trainees. There was, therefore, in some way a tacit but also an explicit commitment, which they adopted as trainees in order to contribute to their growth as people and professionals. This maxim was the point of departure and arrival: it was like a place of embarkation for a journey to be taken together - trainer and trainees - and where to return to at the end. It was a great pedagogical challenge! With the objective of accomplishing this challenge some of the elements of the pathway were revisited, elements inherent to the pedagogical process, which are essential in the process of (self)discovery and development.

In this way the content of the work is presented; including the evaluation of the process, the learning of the trainees and the favoured methodology. These three elements were united in the form that articulated the major pedagogical challenges and through them the (self)discovery, while the people and professionals fulfilled themselves by taking on an inevitable interdependence. The content that was put into perspective from the beginning, which was like a motto for investigation, questioning,

reflection and discovery was the following:

- a) The concepts of: Curriculum; Training; Learning; Identity and Pathway;
- b) The experiences of: training and learning; learner subject; production of knowledge and its social recognition;
- c) Spaces and ways of learning: how and where people learn; wise knowledge and common knowledge; pathways, the real world and expectations; lived identity(ies) and attributed identity(ies);
- d) Training, learning, professional and identity dynamics: training and learning; training pathways and professional pathways; the real world, socio-professional dynamics and (re)construction of identity(ies) (Silva, 2010).

This field, as the horizon line that is going to please its observers, is more than an object of external study to the actors involved in the process of training, as it constitutes a system of self-analysis of their own training-learning processes and (re)construction of identity(ies). It became more viable, agreeable and significant for the different actors, as the trainers developed the course through a methodology of co-operation and agreement which, as pointed out in the syllabus of the discipline, favoured:

activity-based working methods, analytic-reflexive, favouring participation and experiential contributions from the trainees, particularly through the autobiographical method of training that especially values autonomous work and tutorial work (Silva, 2010).

Returning to the image of the port of embarkation, it is important to emphasise three maxims with which the journey is usually started. The first is the belief of Gaston Pineau, when he states that “training times are too important to be only institutional training” (2004, p. 14). This is a recurring maxim throughout the journey, one that comes and goes continuously between the horizon and the process of reflection and (self)reflection of each actor about his/her own pathway.

The second is directly associated with the first and is reflected in the commitment: “to the discovery of non-institutional training times.” Each trainee was invited to reveal their training times by going over their own, personal and professional biography. The third is a commitment with ‘authorship’ by adopting his/her emergence, as a witness of the individual passage of the condition of the object to the condition of subject of a project (Gonçalves, 2000). This is a central condition and a demanding commitment, which for some, is more interpellant and more significant than for others but which everyone always recognises as essential:

to tell, as an author, is not easy and demands of us a position of detachment and self-reflection that infers the condition of being responsible for our faults, weaknesses, self-assuming conflicts, which are important for the building up of our lived and attributed identities (Student Portfolio, academic year 2010/2011).

These maxims, which were presented at the start of the journey, were maintained in mind throughout the journey and are the links uniting the content, methodology and evaluation process. The third

element that should be highlighted is the evaluation, something that each academic year, like the other elements, is open to the suggestions of the trainees, their interests and their worries. To be suitable, a proposal, is presented, always discussed and revised in accordance with suggestions from the different participants in the process, though always accepted in its principal components, which are:

- a) participation in the questioning and discussions about the content in all sessions; b) construction of an individual portfolio throughout the semester for presentation at the end of the semester; c) production of narratives, short narratives, written and individual, for submission during the semester, as follows: 1st. *Learning and Training Experiences* (13/11/10); 2nd. *Lived professional Identity and attributed identity* (18/12/10); 3rd. *Socio-professional dynamics and construction of identity(ies)* (29/01/2011) (Silva, 2010).

The methodology of evaluation, which the trainees received with a mixture of curiosity and perplexity throughout the different years of the course, for the trainees has had results that were innovative, interesting and appropriate for the learning process that they decided to undertake. Also it assumed the commitment of co-operation and of continuous feed-back in the face-to-face sessions and in the written commentaries in each one of the narratives delivered by the trainees on the dates that were agreed together in the first working session. This is an essential condition in the construction of authorship and in the production of knowledge in interaction but also an important element for the progressive acquisition of self-confidence in the unique and (self)reflective processes that each trainee was generating. As they always stressed, it was a totally unknown journey for them. For they also assumed command as authors - command of their own learning and of the production of new knowledge. They needed to learn to confide in themselves and to have 'anchors of support,' incentives, (re)direction and questioning. This was their essential work throughout the journey. Even more of a challenge, for the trainers was that many times they were confronted, interrogated and questioned by the students and it was necessary for them to give appropriate feed-back at the right time. The trainer was pleased, when she received from the Students their opinions about the impact of their comments. These were moments of (self)discovery and mutual growth - both personal and professional. As one female trainee stated at the 'end of the journey':

What can be said about this journey that started tentatively and with high expectations? What balance did I make of these months during which I was called upon to reflect on, to comment critically about and to analyse carefully and pertinently of all that surrounded me, being aware that the training emerges out of multiple contexts and is not limited by formal, institutionalised training? (...)

This journey now ended but marked by joy, surprises and doubts, made me understand, like a poetic person, "what is important is to start, not to arrive" (see the poem Viagem (Voyage) by Torga) (...)

On balance, I consider that the making of this portfolio constitutes an important moment for

my professional and also my personal development.

(...) it was an opportunity to 'visit' dark alleyways that now are illuminated (...) it was a way of descending to my depths and finding lost reminiscences in the ship of my fantasies, aspects that helped me in the process of writing and that reflected my characteristics of identity (...)

Therefore, the writing about my person and professional experiences...the writing of this portfolio made it possible for me, without doubt, to experience feelings of joy and calmness, which did not always happen when we carried out work of a scientific nature (Student Portfolio, academic year 2005/2006).

This last statement highlighted with clarity something essential in the learning experience and in the value of knowledge, which the writing of Sousa Santos (1988: 54-55) also underlines. In other words, "the quality of knowledge is evaluated less by knowledge that controls or functions in the outside world than by the satisfaction that it gives to who gets access and shares it. (...) This way – subjectivated again - scientific knowledge shows how to live and results in practical knowledge". At the end of each journey, working jointly with the group of trainees, their uniqueness is reviewed. Despite always leaving from the same portal, each one is permeated with doubts and surprises that have helped the author to explore other horizons and to run the risk of new challenges.

Place(s) for training and learning

The pedagogical process - constructed together - has as its main intention the facilitation of access to the discovery of places for training and learning, calling to the first level the non-formal or informal contexts of learning: namely, the commonplace, everyday life, the least obvious events but also not the least irrelevant. This access is initiated with the proposal of a simple exercise, almost always perceived as grotesque - to make a daily record of a happening with some significance on the day for each of the trainees. It could be a meeting, a reading, a picture ... Each trainee is required to do this exercise for one week recording only the title given to the event.

One is dealing with a simple, accessible exercise, whose objective is to allow access to reflection about the most familiar and everyday life outside of the teaching-learning context. It seeks to facilitate an encounter with this everyday life, which questions it – for better or worse, for indifference or commitment, for eccentricity or spontaneity... for more differentiated reasons, to what amounts to access by self-interrogation: Why do I choose this event? Frequently the trainees are surprised by the proposal that is just derisory in appearance. But they are also confronted with the relevance of the exercise, which many times they finish off by transposing to their professional contexts in a spiral of reflection, appropriation and participation that gives visibility to the continuity and interaction between situations of training and work, as can be read in the following record:

I recognise now, with greater clarity, the importance and role of the daily recording of auto-biographical narratives for reflection that involves the act of setting free the words inside of us, of putting them on paper, of becoming aware of them. It was from the noticing of their importance that I started to ask my students to do the same, at the end of the day: stop a little and record, in a few lines, the events that for them were most significant, inside or outside the classroom – that is to say, in formal or non-formal learning” (Student Portfolio, academic year 2007/2008).

As has been highlighted (Silva, 2003: 59), it is essential to value the experience(s) in the context of adult training and learning, by means of interaction between theoretical knowledge, process knowledge and practical knowledge, structured by a recursive cycle between the symbolic way and a material way of learning (Malgaive, 1995). In this sense, “the experience of who learns becomes the point of departure and arrival for the process of learning.” So seeking to extend the perception of the adults about the places of learning, they end by discovering, particularly through the exercise previously mentioned and from the writing of biographical narratives that there are many, besides the formal or scholastic places. Like this a methodology of supportive training is started in a self-teaching approach that seeks to rehabilitate the pedagogy of knowledge (Correia, 1992), which is considered it fundamental in the sphere of adult learning.

The process of discovery and authorship

The assumption of authorship in the process of training-learning is, as has already been mentioned, a fundamental commitment, which places the trainees at the centre of the learning process. In this sense, it puts them “on the one hand, the assignment of a sense of a complex reality, an assumption of what is not the cognitive, affective and social story of anyone else (Barth, 1996) and, on the other hand, his/her mobilising for the self generation of his/her own life (Pineau, 1983), by using him/herself as a resource in the process of training and learning (Charlot, 1997)” (Silva, 2003, p.60). This mobilising of the adult, who assumes his/her own responsibility for training and learning, takes as its point of departure the statement of Pineau (2004, p.14) mentioned earlier. An assumption that the trainees generally recognise as particularly interpellant in their process of self-discovery, as is indicated in the following records:

That statement of Pineau³ that the Professor quoted as a motto for reflection, stuck in my mind and I thought about it for several days... I thought about me, in fact, my formal education, which was received in institutions, often silenced and gagged, limiting the idiosyncratic characteristics of each of us, thus almost limiting ourselves to be called to a meeting to compare authors without never assuming this role ourselves (Student, Portfolio, academic year 2005/2006).

3 The quotation used was: “...training times are too important for only being institutional training” (Pineau, 2004)

...this week, the quotation of Gaston Pineau⁴, the paired work about the recovery of memory of knowledge and, afterwards, writing "Live Narratively" and "(In)Visibility of Training and Learning: Knowledge, Experiences and Authorship" made me understand, clearly, that this was the way that I hoped for my professional reconstruction – I did not only hope that the reconstruction would also be personal – it was, perhaps, even bigger and deeper than I could have imagined. (...)

Throughout the path that now emerged I perceived not only the profundity of the questions but also the importance of this type of work (Student Portfolio, academic year 2007/2008).

The inclusion of experiential knowledge in the training process, namely, through biographical narratives and self-reflection gives access to the subjects under training not only in terms of the recognition of knowledge and of knowledge accumulated throughout their life pathways (Silva, 2003) but also to the reworking of their personal and professional identity in accordance with the acknowledgement of the trainees cited above. The exercises and suggested readings bring together, little by little throughout the training process and with more or less difficulty for the trainees, their capacity of detaching themselves personally and from the world in which they live, since detachment is essential for the reconstruction of knowledge already acquired, the production of new knowledge and their own '*professional and personal reconstruction*.' This process of (self)discovery is frequently the most demanding exercise and more gratifying for the trainees, because they gain responsibility, particularly through the drawing up of their biographical narrative(s) and they recognise that the knowledge that they produce themselves is essential for the appropriation of their personal and professional identity.

In this process, (self)reflection constitutes a fundamental element, which though the trainees recognise they are not use to the exercise, they also acknowledge its importance for accessing (their) knowledge, transformation and personal and professional development, as can be read in the following statements:

"The critical reflection type of activity, which developed throughout the semester, presented many possibilities for the development of my critical and reflective attitude towards my personal and professional life" (Student Self-evaluation, academic year 2008/2009).

Writing narrative is my process of identity, it enabled me to re-evaluate my memory, my life story, my subjectivity and to reflect about the meaning and the relevance of writing as a training practice, self-training and the transformation of my own self" (Student Portfolio, academic year 2008/2009).

I was very grateful for the opportunity of living through this process and could not imagine how much richness the methodology of reflection would bring me (Student Self-evaluation, academic year 2010/2011).

4 ibid.

Summarising, the process of (self)discovery and authorship did not need the (self)reflective dimension which - in our case - was fundamentally practised by the periodic elaboration of written biographical narratives, which simultaneously allowed for (self)recognition of knowledge and the discovery of personal and professional identities.

Personal and professional development and (re)construction of identity

I now return to the point of departure, which is the initial course outline of the syllabus of the discipline and to the commitment of contributing to the personal and professional development of the trainees. This commitment was progressively consolidated and perceptible to the trainees throughout the process of training. They recognised in it the measure that their co-participation and consequences in the work of (self)training was becoming more evident and indispensable for themselves and for the group with whom they shared this experience. In this process, they progressively acquired self-confidence for establishing themselves as authors and, when they felt it consolidated, they were able to detach themselves and their subjective world and choose to be 'observers' of their own selves. The following statement bears witness to this pathway:

Having passed a semester of work on themes that were not part of my usual reading, I congratulated myself for the learning that I achieved. I observe, now, my professional identity with more maturity and a much sharper critical eye not only the concepts that I understood, which gave me this support, but also the participation in the reflective work that was proposed for me (Student Portfolio, academic year 2010/2011).

The narrative dimension is fundamental for the creation of meaning and the construction of knowledge, because it makes possible the recognition of responsibility for the experience, turns it into themes and organises it spatially and temporally, by creating a meta-cognitive consciousness that is essential to the development of the individual subject of a project (Silva, 2004), as the following female trainee recounts:

I put in motion as the forms of expression and knowledge that I had been silencing. To collect the fragments that I was composed of was to find myself in a territory of questioning, of production of meanings and of recognition, for myself, about that which constituted me (...) to see my formative pathway in this space-time showed its complexity and allowed me to call my attention to an integrated understanding and it integrated the theoretical and practical dimensions of (my) knowledge (Student, Portfolio, academic year 2010/2011).

To conclude, it is possible to state that the access to the personal and professional development, which the trainees desired and recognised, was in large measure achieved by the narrative route, which enables the necessary distancing for the desirable appropriation of their 'story' of various experiences, by giving them meaning(s), the subject to enunciate and to understand themselves at a given moment of their existence, thus establishing a relationship between their diverse experiences

and the various fields experienced for themselves when (re)developing and (re)constructing their personal and professional identity (Silva, 2004).

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**Transitions to the dominant
literacy. The views of
the coordinators of New
Opportunities Centres on the
recognition of prior learning**

Introduction

The New Opportunities Initiative (*Iniciativa Novas Oportunidades*), particularly the recognition of prior learning (*Reconhecimento, Validação e Certificação de Competências - RVCC*) has brought about the largest movement of 'requalification' of adults ever seen in Portugal. On the national political agenda this process was considered a priority for the certification of basic and secondary education. At the same time it was viewed as a pillar for converting society and the economy within the framework of globalisation and the strategy for lifelong learning promoted by the European Union. The RVCC process consists of assessing skills acquired by adults throughout their lives, which, for this purpose, are contained in a portfolio that includes a life story together with other written evidence of those competences. Because it is not mainly an education and training process, but a recognition one, the RVCC is based on adults' ability at narrative writing. It thus involves an assessment of literacy skills while also intending to improve competences in the use and production of texts. Consequently, it can be said that in this process what is at stake is the validation of vernacular literacy practices by reference to the characteristics and patterns of the dominant ones. The way this relationship between vernacular practices and dominant ones is viewed by the local promoters of the RVCC – the New Opportunities Centres (*Centros Novas Oportunidades*) is, from our point of view, a determinant for the kind of literate identities to be legitimated and transformed by this process.

Under a wider research project that is being developed at the University of Minho and University of Algarve about the impact of RVCC processes on the literacy lives of adults, nine New Opportunities Centres' (NOCs) coordinators, the people heading their pedagogical and management areas, have been interviewed. For the purpose of this article we selected three of the nine interviews and data about the way these actors valued vernacular practices and viewed the conditions for transition to the dominant literacy.

The analysis of what might be called the official pedagogical discourse of the NOCs' coordinators, in relation to adult literacy, already allowed: i) the identification of (dis)continuities between the guidance contained in official discourses and declared practices, ii) a 'deficit' discourse about the adults who are seeking certification, and iii) positive representations about the trajectories of the adults, with particular emphasis on their identity transitions concerning literacy. RVCC was strongly valued as a means for developing literacy skills, although from a viewpoint marked by 'academic' perspectives and 'school-like' approaches. A significant concern about regulatory practices' impact on adults' identity transitions was noted in NOCs' coordinators' discourses while problematisation, critical reflection and effective transformation of ways adults built narratives about their lives were downplayed.

The Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences: a new context, a new educational process

Policy discourses produced by the European Union (EU) and by the Portuguese Government and the government department responsible for developing adult education and training policy in the last decade have called for the building of a knowledge-based society and an information-based society. This call included aims concerning the rise of productivity and the improvement of people's employability. They were devoted to developing the Portuguese economy to make it more sustainable and competitive in terms of globalisation. The poor school and vocational qualification standards of the Portuguese population were considered constraints on economic development.

It was against this background that the adult education and training policy was adopted in 1999. This policy's strategy has been extended significantly since 2007 with respect to adults' access. The aim was to certify almost 10% of the Portuguese population with a) a school education diploma (basic education or secondary education diploma); and b) a vocational qualification (levels I, II, III and IV according to EU guidelines). The recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) was therefore stressed. It aimed at 'formally recognizing skills developed by adults throughout life (in professional, social, family, etc. contexts) and giving these skills an equivalence to school qualifications, providing the same certification levels given by the formal education system, at the basic education and secondary education levels' (Freire, 2009: 20).

Giving special emphasis to knowledge acquired throughout life by experience in various domains – personal, professional and social domains among others – the RVCC was regarded mainly as a place for recognising learning. It was formally seen as having the same value as other processes within formal education and training systems. In policy guidelines and educational documents it was argued that experience led to tacit and implicit learning and the RVCC gave this a value, once it had been identified, designated, given visibility and legitimacy within personal, professional and social dimensions (Pires, 2007). Furthermore, the RVCC programme had a secondary aim, which was to develop learning and competences, especially with respect to literacy, because literacy was seen as pivotal to achieving all the tasks adults had to achieve through the RVCC programme.

In general, it is possible to argue that the principles on which the RVCC was based were *coherent with the ideological model of literacy*. This model sees literacy as a set of social, historical and cultural practices within events mediated by texts (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000). Opposed to this model is the *autonomous model of literacy*, taken as the ability to interpret written technical texts as an outcome of independent skills (Luke & Freebody, 1999; Gee, 2005). According to this perspective, the subject (but not the procedures or the contents) is the centre of all learning. He/she has several experiences and identities, motivation, personal interests and plans for the future.

The RVCC recognised learning and competences developed throughout life after adults had reflected

upon them. It was supported by a retrospective view of adults' ways of living and experiences. This allowed the identification of knowledge and competences that were the outcome of life experiences. As long as the confrontation between experiences was also a confrontation with the personal identity of the subjects the RVCC had to be thought of according to a rationale of formal valuation of learning already achieved (and the devaluation of competences that were only established when the RVCC started). The RVCC was based on an individual rationale of self-evaluation, albeit hetero-regulated, of self-estimation that could be considered as the starting point for the competence validation phase, in which the learning and competences that were outcomes of the recognition phase were validated. The adults' learning was thus given a formal character. Knowledge and competences were first identified and compared with the knowledge and competences set out in a Key-Competences Reference¹ (Alonso et al., 2002 and Gomes, 2006); next, legal value was given to learning experiences (Ministério da Educação, 2005).

We may say that the RVCC is supported by literacy practices because of the production by adults of oral and written life stories. While the RVCC was generally framed by an understanding of learning and competences according to the ideological model of literacy, in terms of specifically literacy practices some tensions could be identified. On the one hand, a situated perspective of the individual, living and acting in contexts that were meaningful for him/herself and learning as a continuous process makes the RVCC a device structured by the *ideological model of literacy*. However, in the RVCC, literacy (taken as a set of linguistic and cognitive skills) just values the communicative competence and the normative orientation of the uses of language. According to this perspective, literacy in the RVCC was a procedure of the *autonomous model of literacy*. This meant that vernacular practices of daily life that served real aims could be devalued, unlike dominant practices that were more formally structured (Castro & Laranjeira, 2009; Barton & Hamilton, 2007).

On the one hand, ideologically relevant social analysis might be applied to the RVCC, emphasising its instrumental character, aimed at training people. On the other hand, it could be argued that the RVCC helped to develop an autonomous, critical subject, able to interpret, transform and build new knowledge (Fingeret, 1990; Lima, 2007). As a consequence, we believe it is important to discuss (dis)articulations on which the development of literate subjects is made. Particularly with respect to the acquisition modes of social languages that were valued by people, in which literacy practices might be considered a *passport to citizenship* (Lucio-Villegas, 2007), another issue had to be considered. This issue concerned to the continuities, the discontinuities and the hybridization of practices and competences that adults brought to the RVCC and those that occurred and were mobilized during the course of the programme.

¹ We held the Reference to be a normative instrument for the recognition of prior learning and an instrument that legitimized education, training practices and literacy practices. As argued by Castro and Laranjeira (2007/2008: 97), the Reference was 'materialization of a first level of policy discourse within the pedagogic field, not only as a relevant factor for the delimitation of the universe of reference of pedagogical actions – of "recognition" and of "adult education" - , but also as a source for training professionals who work in the field of adult education'.

Literacy could not be considered as the same thing in all contexts. Several literacies could be found in various domains of life, with each one mobilising a social language and a specific identity. The New Opportunities Centres² were the relevant context for literacy and they were interesting places for studying changes in the adult subjects' identities and language when they attended the RVCC. These changes led to the emergence of a new Discourse on adults' lives. Here, we agree that the RVCC could involve learning as an outcome of literacy practices used when performing tasks and writing the portfolio. As a result the RVCC involved changes in literacy skills and in the way adults lead to at themselves and the world.

What were the most relevant literacy practices in the RVCC? How did they foster a re-construction of these subjects' identities? How were adults represented in relation to literacy practices by those who managed the New Opportunities Centres (NOCs), the coordinators of NOCs? What changes did these coordinators stress? These were questions for the research project on which this paper is based. How were practices involving the use of written texts seen by NOCs' coordinators? This was the question that underpinned the debate that is unfolded in this paper. This debate refers to changes in adults' identities, according to the NOCs' coordinators' representations. The first part of this paper sets out the methods adopted. Then NOCs' coordinators' discourses are analysed. Specific attention is given to the procedure on which the RVCC was based, i.e. the pedagogical practices and literacy understandings involved. The last part of this paper discusses the changes indicated by NOCs' coordinators in relation to adults' literacy practices.

Adults and literacy practices: the New Opportunities Centres' coordinators' insights

The data discussed in this paper are the representations of NOCs' coordinators on changes in the adults' literacy practices. These data were collected in a research project designed to understand changes in the literate identities of adults involved in RVCC that allowed them to obtain a basic school education certification. Nine semi-structured interviews to NOCs' coordinators were conducted between March and June 2011³. Topics covered included: i) the characterisation of NOCs⁴, and ii) the ways these Centres were developing the RVCC with respect to strategies chosen and instruments

2 The New Opportunities Centres were the organizations that locally implemented the adult education and training policy, i.e. the RVCC.

3 The New Opportunities Centres' coordinators were interviewed under a research project called 'Changing lives' (*A Vida em Mudança. A Literacia na Educação de Adultos*) funded by the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) - research project PTDC/CPE-CED/105258/2008. These coordinators were responsible for Centres in the Braga region which formed the sample selected for the project.

4 New Opportunities Centres were 'projects' of larger institutions that could be State run, private enterprises or non-governmental organizations. They were established after the submission of applications. Due to the ambiguous organizational character of NOCs, the interviews were conducted in light of the link established with organizations through which the Centres were set up (in particular the reason why the organizations had decided to create such centres, and the educational programme and rules of the said organizations and the NOCs).

used to identify and certify adults' competences. Three NOCs' coordinators' representations of adults' literacy are discussed in this paper, in particular their understanding of the link between adult education, reading and writing⁵. We also set out to interpret the NOCs' coordinators's representations on adopted literacy practices and changes occurred in adults' literacy lives.

Identity transformations: perspectives on changes

The RVCC emphasises learning in non-formal education contexts. It places value and validity on knowledge and competences acquired in a wide range of situations. The RVCC thus believes that 'people learn with life, with experience, within a net of relationships' (Lima, 2007:60). The subject was understood to be the core of the RVCC, having competences and experiences that cannot be detached from the contexts in which knowledge and skills are developed. The RVCC programme was based on an understanding of learning and competences structured by the *ideological model of literacy*. Reading and writing are situated and complex practices. However, reading and writing representations shared by NOCs coordinators have characteristics of the *autonomous model of literacy* owing to the stress on psychological skills used and under development. These two models could be identified in NOCs' coordinators discourses on the learning pathways developed by adults. Interviewees tended to emphasize the lack of competences, a characteristic of the *autonomous model of literacy*, when referring to deficits presented by adults:

We notice that people do not relate things (...), they are not used to reasoning with respect to relationships between things... they is a clear lack of reasoning. (...) They do not perceive what is going on in the world, they do not see changes occurring. (...) Of course they have had very interesting experiences, but it is very difficult for them to synthesize, to make links between things... they just have things stored in their heads [E(C)1].

People are not systematic and organized. They always need someone else to organize things for them, a continuous monitoring. These people are different from us [E(C)2].

These two extracts betray a reductionist representation of how adults are 'made up', given that they were not socialised according to prevailing social and cultural practices. This understanding of adult identities was quite surprising, especially considering that the RVCC was a process for recognising and validating knowledge and skills acquired throughout life. When considering the literacy practices developed by adults or children in formal education contexts such as school it is important to remember that the different domains of life are based upon different literacies. These domains embrace modes

⁵ Three of the nine interviews were chosen for the analysis reported in this paper. This was because the discourses of these coordinators represented three different views of RVCC as a form of provision of adult education and training. These were the coordinators of three non-governmental organizations involved in adult education in the last twenty years. However, even though they belonged to organizations that stressed different aims for adult education, as mentioned later on in this paper, their understanding of literacy and identity changes related to literacy practices did not differ much.

that are socially preferred and legitimised for giving meaning to written texts, different ways of using these texts and also different ways of referring to these texts (Dionísio & Castro, 2007/2008; Barton & Hamilton, 1998). According to NOCs' coordinators' representations, the RVCC involves a plurality of tasks, some of which could also be found in formal education contexts:

In the RVCC we have to note that quite some time ago we were asking people to read a book. Well, in fact it is compulsory to read a classic book [E(C)3].

There is something that we have been doing here which is reading. In the RVCC that gives a basic education or secondary education certification, we are promoting this dynamic of reading a book. (...) Afterwards, people write a synthesis of the book read, to oblige them to systematize... [E(C)1].

Some practices concerning the use of texts, vernacular practices because they occurred on a daily basis, were not regulated by formal rules and procedures of dominant social institutions (Barton, 1994). These practices could even be regarded as illegitimate by NOCs' coordinators. Of these, not reading books was stressed, an idea opposed to the idea that adults should have 'reading habits':

We always try to motivate adults (...) to have a reading habit. (...) Because many of them are resuming this habit that they had lost, others have started to read, haven't they? In this case, it is not a habit, it is a starting of a process of reading, because they didn't used to read at all. When they attended school, they were forced to read what had to be read; but for many years they didn't read anything, except these magazines with very poor articles that you can find easily in any place, especially in shopping centres [E(C)3].

According to the NOCs' coordinators it was clear that reading a book was a trait of a literate identity. It was also evident that the interviewees believed that reading skills could be learned by reading books, preferably classic books. In these circumstances, adults' experiences with the variety of texts available in contemporary societies were devalued. Therefore, the cultural modes of using the written language that adults used regularly and that shaped the literacy events were deprecated. Furthermore, NOCs' coordinators all felt that the written component of texts was developed mainly through reading classic books, dominant texts. Vernacular texts, such as the magazines with very poor articles, even if interesting and valuable for the development of literacy skills were undervalued:

We are insisting on literature, on books (...). Why? Because we noticed adults have a huge difficulty in expressing themselves orally or in writing; so we thought of adding some value to the RVCC and of facilitating the writing of Reflective Learning Portfolios [E(C)1].

Factors concerning formal education and training attended were the basis of this understanding of literacy shared by the NOCs' coordinators. This understanding was forged in Portuguese classes in school, also influenced by readings, experiences, beliefs, values, shared by society (Barton, Ivanic, Appleby, Hodge & Tusting, 2007). Surprisingly, these concerns with 'reading classic books' promoted

practices that were found in all the Centres where the data were collected for the study. Even if this task of reading a book was not suggested either by the government department in charge of adopting the adult education and training policy or the RVCC, uniformity in these reading practices could be noticed. In addition, normalisation occurred when reading involved obligatory tasks adults were asked to perform to promote a 'real' understanding of what they had read, such as the synthesis of the story told in the book, just as pupils were asked to do in regular schools.

The analysis of the interviewees' discourses revealed a clear contradiction between that the officially stated purpose of the RVCC – a process of recognition of prior learning acquired throughout life, covered by the characteristics of the ideological model of literacy – and the pedagogic work accomplished in New Opportunities Centres (NOCs), in the context of the *autonomous model of literacy*, according to an understanding of literacy based on measurable skills, skills that could be learned by teaching and independent of contexts in which they were developed and used.

Changes in identities

The changes in the relationship between subjects and the literacy practices developed while attending the RVCC (practices that were identified and declared by the NOCs' coordinators interviewed) were found to be mainly ideological, related to the domain of the self, including attitudes, beliefs and behaviours:

I believe that there is a significant improvement in the physical behaviour of people, how people are and how they relate to other people... In my opinion, it is the most relevant improvement, where a development can be found... but nothing more than that [E(C)1].

Although ideological transformations may be indicated as the main impacts of RVCC, changes of an autonomous kind, focused on the acquisition of new knowledge and the enlargement of adults' cultural capital, were also mentioned by the NOCs' coordinators:

They learn to use the computer, they socialize with other adults, get to know new people and learn... Well, they also read more, write more often and that's it [E(C)2].

Interestingly, the changes identified by the NOCs' coordinators interviewed about the relation between subjects and literacy were dissociated from their own representations of education for promoting reading and writing. Even when stressing the importance of developing formal contents, which were declared pedagogical practices in the NOCs, the coordinators often pointed out transformations in the adults' identities and their awakening to new Discourses:

The RVCC doesn't directly develop new competences [of reading and writing]. The RVCC involves the acquisition of new behaviour. Behaviour concerning... how people communicate

with one another. There is clearly a development. People lose their inhibitions. People are usually not used to... many adults are not used to... except for the relationship with bosses, people are not used to communicating in formal contexts [E(C)1].

On the one hand, the way the Coordinators viewed the changes in relationships of adults in relation to literacy seemed to be detached from the way they viewed education for reading and writing. On the other hand, the changes they pointed out when referring to adults' literacy skills were appropriate to the principles and aims of the RVCC.

Final thoughts

Each person embodies a unique combination of practices and identities that are the outcome of various life experiences. It is through their involvement in diverse social practices in different life contexts that subjects develop new skills and learn new ways to handle written texts. Beliefs, attitudes, knowledge and values concerned with what can be said or done, and according to which resources, are also aspects related to these contexts. Even if we assume that people's participation in different situations that generate learning unleashes new modes of having access to, using and valuing texts, it is important to realise that generally only literacy practices developed in school education are thought valid and legitimate. This means that people's textual experiences gained from daily practices are often devalued and forgotten; very often, these are determinant practices that respond to social requirements.

Since the RVCC transformed the subjects' relationship with literacy, it is also an interesting place to understand the changes occurring in the literacy domain with adults. Because 'people's current practices are shaped by their life history' (Barton, Ivanic, Appleby, Hodge & Tusting, 2007: 18), we decided to analyse key factors associated with representations declared by New Opportunities Centres' coordinators. These factors involved discourses not only on teaching and learning but also on the place of literacy practices in RVCC. The Coordinators expressed a conservative view on education for reading and writing, focused on valuing technical competences to decodify written texts – characteristics of the *autonomous model of literacy* – but they also identified changes in identities of subjects that went far beyond a simple improvement of grammatical, correctly written sentences. In fact they indicated changes in the literacy life of adults, mostly related to the self, such as self-confidence and self-esteem that could have a relevant impact in social environments. In addition, the changes identified by the NOCs' Coordinators seemed to be further from their own representations on reading and writing. These practices tended to be reduced to links to social processes (and not so much to individual characteristics), which was in fact a question debated in this paper.

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From Folk High School to University: the impact of social identity on educational transition

Introduction

This article presents some of the results of my thesis: *A particular perspective on higher education? Folk high school participants' social representations of university*. The aim of the thesis was to investigate folk high school participants' social representations of university and of studying at university and to investigate the origins of these social representations and how they developed over time, as well as whether and how these representations were affected by other social representations, such as those of the distinctive character of folk high schools. The present article elaborates on how social identities among Swedish folk high school participants influence their choices of whether or not to continue on to university.

The empirical data for the thesis consisted of free associations (Abric, 1995), interviews, and document/homepage studies. In 2004, 100 folk high school participants were asked about their associations to the words folk high school, university college and university. Five years later, 36 of these participants were again asked about their associations. In addition, nine former folk high school participants who went on to study at a university were interviewed about their experiences of folk high school, university and the transition from folk high school to university.

The Swedish folk high schools

In Sweden children usually go to pre-school from the age of one until they are five years old. Pre-school is a pedagogical group activity and children attend for varying numbers of hours per week. The year Swedish children turn six years old they enter into pre-school class, a one year non-compulsory education which provides a platform for their future schooling by combining the pedagogical methods of pre-school with those of compulsory school. After pre-school class the children enter nine years of compulsory school. Upper secondary school is a free, non-compulsory school that comes after compulsory school. It consists of 17 national – specially designed – and individual programmes and lasts for three years. Peoples who successfully complete secondary school are eligible to apply for university education¹.

People who have not satisfactorily completed their secondary school studies have the possibility to receive such an education through adult education or popular adult education such as the folk high school. Folk high schools were initially organised to provide education in agriculture, and the courses were mainly attended by farmers' sons. These courses were soon extended to meet a growing demand, as labour organisations began organising their own schools to satisfy other educational needs within the working classes. Over time, the educational levels and standards of folk high schools have developed in accordance with and reflected the increase in the general level of education in Sweden. Folk high school participants comprise a highly heterogenic group, with diverse backgrounds and experiences.

¹ For more information about the Swedish educational system: www.skolverket.se

The first folk high schools were established in 1868, and today there are 150 folk high schools spread throughout the country. Folk high schools offer courses for adults from the age of 18. Many folk high schools are run by popular movements, such as organisations within the workers', temperance or Free Church movements. Others are operated by county councils or regions. The schools have different profiles and emphases in their activities. The folk high schools are not guided by national curricula, but are free to shape their own activities. The length of the courses varies from a few days to several years². Throughout their history, folk high schools have been considered to provide a unique form of education and have been attributed a very strong identity, contributing to and reflecting their spirit, or particular nature. Opinions differ as to what exactly characterises this spirit, and whether or not it is of any essential importance (see, among others, Andersén, Lundin & Sundgren, 2003; Bergstedt & Larsson, 1995; Berntsson, 2000; Paldanius, 2007; Paldanius & Alm, 2009; Sundgren, 2000). Through my studies of the folk high school teachers' magazines, in which I analysed the folk high school teachers' representations of folk high school and university, I have been able to identify that the core of these representations is that folk high school is a special and unique educational phenomenon, different from other educational institutions. The representations do differ, however, concerning the ways in which folk high school is considered to be unique and with regard to which institutions can be regarded as the opposite poles, i.e., with regard to what folk high school does not represent.

All folk high schools offer a preparatory course, referred to as the 'general course', leading to the possibility of higher education. The general course provides knowledge equivalent to upper secondary studies and is available to participants who, for whatever reason, have not completed their upper secondary education. The subjects studied in the folk high school general course closely resemble those in comprehensive schools or upper secondary schools; however, a different approach may be adopted in the folk high school. The folk high school has no centrally established curriculum; each school determines its own programme. At the same time, the content of the general course covers a wide spectrum of subjects, and a variety of optional subjects are usually offered. The participants study for a period of one to three years, depending on their previous educational background³.

The theory of social representations and the social identity of folk high school participants

Social representations and social identity are interrelated phenomena, and this duality has been discussed in several previous studies (see, for example, Breakwell, 1993; 2001; Duveen, 1993; 2001; Duveen & Lloyd, 1986; 1990; Howarth, 2002; 2006). According to Duveen (2001), identity entails not only one's identifying oneself, but is equally about being given an identity by others — that is, identities are constructed both internally and externally. According to Howarth (2002), identity does not necessarily involve a physical likeness or the sharing of identical feelings, ideas and concepts. A

² For more information about liberal adult education, "folkbildning", and folk high schools: www.folkbildning.se

³ www.folkbildning.se

person may be identified with several social identities at the same time, such as being a woman, black, middle aged, and a student. Social representations function as building blocks for social identities, which in turn create other social representations. How social identities are formed and the role of social representations in this process is the focus of Duveen's research.

An explanation of identity should begin with the inherent dynamism of how we are represented and how we are able to maintain this representation of ourselves. For example, when someone enters an existing social group (such as at folk high school or university), this person may absorb, in the course of time and through a complex process of resistance and remaking of representations (see Howarth, 2004; 2006, for a detailed discussion of this issue), some of the group's prevailing representations. Duveen and Lloyd (1986, p. 219) further state that individuality cannot be apprehended independently of social relations. I believe a similar process to that described above is likely to occur when adults enter new social situations and contexts. In the same way that children are born into a world of prevailing gender representations of what is considered typically girl-like or boy-like, male or female, and thus acquire and accept the prevailing gender identity, I maintain that new folk high school participants acquire the prevailing folk high school identity, as well as its implied representations when they begin their studies. The formation and development of this identity then continues as part of an ongoing process. Folk high school participants seem to take on already prevailing representations characteristic of the identity of folk high school and of themselves as folk high school participants, i.e., as something different from students at upper secondary schools or students in civic adult education. Based on these social representations, new folk high school participants attempt to identify themselves with the existing identity of their folk high school. As formulated by Duveen and Lloyd (1986) and Duveen (2001), this identity, based on social representations, will also lead to other social representations. In this respect, my own research results are in accordance with previous findings showing that the collective identity of folk high schools and the social representations which support this identity contribute to participants' acquiring certain social representations with regard to higher education and with regard to their prospects for successfully undertaking a university education.

Through my studies of folk high school teacher magazines, in which I analysed folk high school teachers' representations of folk high school and university, I have been able to identify that the core of these representations is that folk high school is a special and unique educational phenomenon, different from other educational institutions. I also found (Andersén, 2010; 2011) that folk high school participants re-make the social identity of the folk high school as it is introduced to them, relating it to their previous experience and understanding; they then form their own representations of folk high school based on this information.

The impact of social identity on educational transition

In an earlier study (Andersén, 2010), I examined and highlighted what I refer to as 'folk high school identity', which is based on folk high school teachers' and participants' social representations of folk

high schools and of individuals who study there. I have also attempted to show what further social representations of university may be the result of this identity. Our social representations are based upon our previous experience; if we do not have our own experience, we must depend on the experience of others. When we belong to a certain social group and identify ourselves as members of this group, it is very likely that we accept and assume the social representations of this group.

In the autumn of 2004, I carried out a survey based on a questionnaire of one hundred participants taking the folk high school general course concerning their associations in relation to the concepts of 'folk high school' and 'university'. I found that some particular words and groups of words were more frequently used than others. For example, the participants associated folk high schools in terms which describe them as an alternative to other forms of education, as offering supplementary courses allowing adult participants to complete their upper secondary education. Others described folk high schools as being very similar to upper secondary education and civic adult education, but as taking place at an easier and more acceptable pace. Other associations described folk high schools as allowing for 'less study over a longer period of time' and as offering subjects which can be studied together and in parallel, while time is always allowed for personal development and growth as well as spending time together with other participants. The study level at folk high schools was considered to be easier and more suitable for people with learning difficulties. The survey participants also described folk high school as a form of education that is not as difficult as others for those who have study difficulties and have thus obtained low marks during their compulsory school period. It should be noted, however, that a smaller group of about 15 survey participants also associated folk high school with the opportunity to improve their marks in order to be accepted at university.

My study shows that the more acquainted folk high school participants become with university, the more positive they are toward starting a university course. The perception of 'us' as folk high school participants is instrumental in the formation and acceptance of 'them', with reference to, among others, university students, whose own social representations may not necessarily – or not at all – match these. Folk high school participants' social representations of university are often formed by second-hand and reproduced experiences, as participants themselves have not yet studied at university. Most of them have neither visited a university nor do they know any current or former university students. These representations change, however, as they gain their own experiences of studying at university. This is illustrated by the responses given by the folk high school participants 5 years later (Andersén 2011).

Folk high school identity as an obstacle to further studies?

As discussed and described above, folk high school identity may be an obstacle to university studies because those who have chosen to study at folk high school due to previous school fatigue or unsatisfactory study experiences may regard university as an opposite pole to folk high school; they

may regard themselves as incapable of studying at university and may think that a university education is not intended for them. According to an official report of the Swedish Government (SOU 1997:158), one of the most common reasons for not progressing to higher education is lack of self-confidence. Folk high school participants' self-perceptions and their perceptions of university students depend on the participants' images and experiences of folk high school and university. If participants perceive folk high school as being different from their previous experience of other forms of education, they are probably more likely to regard both folk high school and themselves as different, and therefore regard themselves as not good enough or as unsuited to study at university.

Folk high school identity as promoting a positive idea of university

My thesis (see Andersén, 2011) illustrates that it can, in fact, be a positive experience to enter university from a folk high school as compared to entry from upper secondary education or civic adult education because the teaching methods of folk high school are similar to those of the university. Folk high school participants who have had the opportunity to meet people who have attended folk high school and then gone on to university should have more positive representations about the transition from folk high school to university.

In 2004, I carried out a survey of one hundred participants taking the folk high school general course concerning their associations in relation to the concept of folk high school and university. I found three types of representations of university among folk high participants: representations of university as a (final) destination, representations of university as a (final) step in an educational stairway, and representations of university as not folk high school. Some of the participants saw university as something positive, something they wanted to continue on to. For these people, university was associated with a (final) destination: *my future, continuing education, a good education, future, university is my final destination and after university I will have reached my goal*. For these participants university is a continuation after folk high school.

Five years after the first study, about 25 percent of the former folk high school participants had continued to study at university. In contrast to those who did not continue on to university, these former participants did not, in 2009, represent university as a (final) goal, probably because they had already started, and in some cases even finished, university.

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Academic education and expectations related with professional trajectories of highly qualified technicians in the Third Sector

Introduction

In the field of adult education, the relationship between learning and the personal, social and professional life trajectories, is often analysed in relation to adults with minimal academic education. The same thing usually happens if the analysis is centered on the relationship between the academic training (taken here as a way of learning) and the professional life trajectories. In fact, considering only the Portuguese case, there are several studies which focus on the analysis of the influence of the academic trajectories or the compensatory education received by those adults throughout their lives. There is a vast amount of research in Portugal which aims at understanding the effects of the new education models and adult training on their lives. It is the case of the study by Ávila (2008), who tried to understand the consequences, namely in terms of literacy skill acquisition, on the lives of adults who attended a Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences Centre (RVCC).

Similar research work was done by Costa (2005), Fernandes (2007), Cavaco (2008), Moreira (2008) and Carneiro (2010), who, in a quite direct way, studied the link between such educational offers, attendance and their effects on the adults' life route in personal terms (self-esteem, confidence, self-awareness), social terms (new social relation skills) professional terms (employment, work market) and attitudes towards learning. Other authors have tried to analyse that relationship, while having as a core emphasis more traditional educational offers, as it is the case of the recurrent education (Gomes, 2002)¹. Another type of investigation, which can be related to the mentioned relationship, has tried to answer the following question: does the improvement in the level of adult instruction have any positive influence on their children's educational route?

Salgado (2010) has recently tried to answer this question through the coordination of an investigation about the influence on the primary school success of children, whose parents have gone through a process of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competencies (9thgrade).

Whilst not ignoring such research which we consider to be very meaningful in the field of adult education, we think that similar importance must also be given to the life route, namely the professional trajectories, of adults academically highly qualified and include, in those analyses, the contributions of sociology of professions and sociology of work, among other perspectives. Also, we consider of great significance to the analysis of these adults' life route the theoretical approaches which help us understand, for instance, the demands of the new work contexts on the new professionals, as well as the relations between the theoretical and practical knowledge, competencies and skills upon professional practices (Svensson, 2006). We also think relevant the theoretical approaches which help us analyse the professional work and the professional trajectories as realities closely related to knowledge and learning as a product of abstract knowledge (Freidson 2001; Evetts 2003; Caria

¹ Recurrent education: a type of educational training for adults, established by the Basic Law of the Educational System (Law 46/86, October 14), which intended to offer a second opportunity for elementary and secondary grades.

2005) coming from the academic education, among other sources. This does not mean that such approaches, consider the professional work and professionalism only the result of abstract knowledge. In fact, it has been recognised that, in the development of professional knowledge, the tacit and informal knowledge is also relevant, which results from work experience (Schön, 1983; Caria, 2007, 2008; Loureiro, 2010).

Whatever the case, and considering the theoretical assumptions which articulates the abstract knowledge and professional work, we are to ask whether leaning resulting from that is relevant when finding a job, and consider the objectives achieved by adults when they are already working in an organisation. We must also ask, and considering the social representations approach in education (Gilly, 1980), what these adults views are regarding the adequacy and usefulness of the knowledge acquired in academic training in their current jobs. The aim of this article is to evaluate the connection between academic training (and related learning) and the highly qualified adults' professional routes: Technicians who qualified in human or social sciences (CHS) and work in the Third Sector. We are meant to present some preliminary results from a research project (2003-2013; geographical area: Oporto, Braga, Trás-os-Montes; sponsored by FCT) called "Knowledge, Autonomy and reflectivity in professional work in the Third Sector (SARTPRO)" which is being carried out in the north of Portugal. Such data, among other aspects, relate the academic training of a number of those technicians to their professional routes, including diverse expectations, functions and tasks. Whenever possible, we shall focus on the technicians within the Third Sector who develop activities in the adult education field. We begin by contextualising the research as a whole, referring to its different phases and methodology, followed by presenting some of its results and we end it with a brief final remark.

Contextualization and methodology of the research

The research which presents the data in the following section (SARTPRO project) arose from another piece of research work as part of an investigation about the social analysis of the professional knowledge within the technical and intellectual work (ASPTI), supervised by Telmo Caria, and it is currently inserted in the Investigation and Educational Intervention Centre (CIIE). That group has carried out studies on primary school teachers (Caria, 2002, 2007), adult education technicians (Loureiro, 2005, 2009; Loureiro & Cristóvão, 2010), special needs teachers and tutors (Filipe, 2005), agricultural extension technicians (Pereira, 2005, 2008), social workers (Granja, 2008), among others.

The SARTPRO project's main objective is to answer the following question: What are the skills and knowledge which are associated to the reflectivity in the processes of professional work autonomy, based on human and social sciences in the Third Sector organisations? This is research work which relies essentially on a comprehensible methodology and consists of three phases.

Initially, between November 2009 and October 2010, a census was carried out through a questionnaire

in the Third Sector organisations in order to find those with human resources and training in Human and Social Sciences (CHS). We found a total of 41 organisations with 422 professional technicians with that type of academic training. From those, we selected 63 technicians (criterion: socio-geographical area, professional group, gender and age) which answered a structured interview.

The second phase of the investigation took place between January and June 2011, and it consisted of deep interviews to 21 of the 63 technicians, having as the main selection criterion the reflectivity level demonstrated during the previous phase about aspects relating to their training and work, among others.

The third phase started in September 2011 and is due to finish in early 2013.

It consists of an ethnographic monitoring of the 10 technicians' work, focusing on their knowledge and reflexive skills. The criterion for selecting the technicians was: relationship with the interviewers, answer development, reflectivity and availability to continue participating in the project. In this article we consider the preliminary treatment of part of the data collected in the first phase of the study, in particular the structured interviews of 63 technicians and which are directly connected to the relationship mentioned above and which is the main purpose of this article: What is the relationship between the academic education and professional trajectories of highly qualified adults: technicians educated in Social Sciences, working in the Third Sector.

Results

We have divided this section into two parts: characterisation of the interviewees, academic training and expectations related to their career route.

Brief characterisation of the interviewees

Most of the 63 individuals who were interviewed were youngsters, their ages are between 30 and 39 years old (63,5%). It is mainly a female group (79.4%). That tendency is visible in almost all types of interviewees' academic qualifications, where social work and psychology are the most common. It is also worth mentioning the qualifications in sociology and education (Education and Social Education) (table 1).

Table 1 – Academic qualifications by gender

Academic qualifications	Gender		Total
	Masculine	Feminine	
Social work	2	14	16
Psychology	3	13	16
Sociology	1	7	8
Education	3	3	6
Social education	1	5	6
Management	2	3	5
Economics	1	1	2
Other qualifications in CHS	1	4	4
Total	13 (20,6%)	50 (79,4%)	63 (100%)

(Adapted from Marques, Caria & Silva 2011)

A large number of the interviewees have worked in organisations for quite a short time: up to 5 years (41%) and between 6 and 11 (46%). Taking into account the current market circumstances and the type of organisations in which they work, these contractual situations can be considered good, since 38.1% of them have a work contract (certain/uncertain) and 57.1% have a permanent contract. With regards to the hierarchical position among the technicians in the organisations, we found that some of them work as part of their direction and others hold a supervision position. The data has shown us that between 18 of 63 technicians (28,6%) work in the field of adult education, although their involvement in that type of activity is differentiated: 6 of them have an exclusive engagement, 5 have other activities, 3 have a diffuse participation and 4 have a very diffuse participation.

In general, that group has the same characteristics as the other technicians, although, in some cases, the tendencies mentioned above are found even more intensively. The technicians are very young (67% of them are less than 35 years old), most of whom are female (only an individual is male), and a very high proportion of them have worked in the organisations for a short period of time (44.4% up to 5 years). Regarding their academic training, the most meaningful information concerns the fact that only one of them has a qualification in education. We shall remember that among 63 technicians, 6 of them had that type of qualifications and the other 6 had qualifications in social education. The predominant academic qualifications are along the general tendency: psychology (5 technicians), social work (4 technicians) and sociology (4 technicians). These results are similar to other studies which show that, in most cases, those professionals working in this field, don't have any specific academic qualification in adult education. This is one of the factors which lead various authors to say there are no professionals in this field (Sáez, 1994; Maza, 1997).

Academic training and professional expectations

Hence, we present data relating to: the technicians external and internal route in relation to their current work situation, their work content, expectations, whilst taking into account their academic training, in relation to their work and the usefulness of what they learnt during that training to the tasks that they accomplish throughout their careers. The average length of waiting time between having finished the academic training and the first job contract of the 63 technicians is around 6.5 months. More than half (52%) had been working in other organisations when they concluded their academic training. Most of those (85%) had been in Third Sector organisations, and those with training in social work (9 technicians) and in psychology (7 technicians) are to be mentioned.

In what concerns technicians who work in the field of adult education, the results are very similar: half of them had been working in other organisations, all of which are Third Sector organisations.

As for the contractual route within the current organisations of the 63 technicians, we can conclude that there has been a tendency for a greater stability in terms of contracts. As we can see in the table below, the permanent contract is the type of link which is currently the most found among such technicians (57.1%), while at the beginning of their professional activities there were only 4.8% of them in that situation.

Table 2 – Type of work contract evolution

Contractual links	Start of activity (%)	Current situation (%)
No work contract	19,0	3,2
Contract (certain/uncertain)	49,2	38,1
Permanent contract	4,8	57,1
Without a written work contract (informal)	1,6	1,6
Temporary contract	1,6	—
Professional training	19,0	—
Other situations	4,8	—
Total	100	100

Almost all technicians, although at different levels, have simultaneously done administrative, decision-making, management and technical tasks. More than half of them (57%) stated that their tasks overlap with other team technicians who had different academic training. That fact was most evident among the interviewees with qualifications in sociology, social work and psychology. The data referring to the technicians who work in adult education is very similar. The interviewees' opinion about the connection

between the work they currently do and what they expected to do when they finished their academic training is, in general, positive, since 77.8% of them manifested a degree of correlation between “corresponds totally” and “corresponds partly” (table 3). However, if we look carefully at the table below, we verify that the inferior limit of what we consider a positive correspondence (“Yes, partly”) was the most frequent answer. That type of answer is not yet found in none of the academic qualifications, except for the qualifications in psychology, where the answer “No, almost nothing” was the most frequent. In fact, we considered the weight of the negative correspondence very considerable (22.8%)

Table 3 – Relationship between academic qualifications and work done in the organisations

Academic qualifications	Correspondence					Total
	Total	High	Medium	Weak	Null	
	“Yes, Totally”	“Yes, Almost totally”	“Yes, partly”	“No, Almost nothing”	No, nothing”	
Social work	3	6	6	1	—	16
Psychology	2	3	4	5	2	16
Sociology	1	1	5	1	—	8
Education	2	2	2	—	—	6
Social education	2	2	2	—	—	6
Management	—	1	2	1	1	5
Economics	—	1	—	—	1	2
Other qualifications in CHS	—	2	—	1	1	4
Total	10 (15,9%)	18 (28,6%)	21 (33,3%)	9 (14,3%)	5 (7,9%)	63 (100%)

With regards to the technicians who work in adult education, although the positive connection is higher (61%), the percentage of the negative correspondence increases to 39%. It is still to be highlighted that most answers were the negative correspondence “No, almost nothing” (6 in 18 responses).

We shall mention the fact that 16 of 63 interviewees did not justify their answers; of those 16, 15 presented a positive correspondence between their academic education and what they expected to do professionally. Among those who confirmed the existence, one other justification has got to do with the articulation between the formal education, we have found two main reasons for that. One of the reasons is that their education as a whole, or their course choice, corresponds to the tasks they perform:

... Since during our training, we were told that our approach towards the client was the basis of our work, and that indeed happen to be true... (interview n°. 52).

During my degree I chose to specialize in Educational animation and Social and Personal Development, which is, in fact, what I currently do. (interview n°. 50).

One other justification has got to do with the articulation between the formal education and the interviewees' willingness to work in a specific area:

I have always hoped to work in the field of Psychological consultation and training, and so I have completely met my expectations (interview n°. 41).

The technicians who said that their academic education corresponds, in part, to what they hoped to do have pointed out three main reasons for that to happen. One of them is that because there is a discrepancy between the theory taught during the courses and the work which they do (performance):

it corresponds only partly, as the course presented a very theoretical component, which does not totally correspond to the work that is done in the area (interview n°. 25).

One other reason presented by the interviewees is due to the fact that they are working in an area, which although relates to the course, it does not correspond to the interviewees' preferred field:

During my academic training, I intended to have a professional activity in an enterprise context, although I knew all along that this area was a possibility (interview n°. 26)

Finally, some of them justified their answers by saying that within the tasks they performed, there is a lack of autonomy at work:

Since the social work is pre-planned and because of that the technicians do not have much capacity to manage their own work, there is a lack of autonomy in the management of tasks. (interview n°. 45).

The technicians who stated that their current work does not correspond at all or hardly corresponds to what they hoped to do according to their academic education stated a firm justification – the academic training did not predict the professional activity in that area:

the academic field was in gerontology, but I started working in the field of drug addiction (interviewee n°. 27).

As for the technicians who work in adult education, the reasons to justify the positive or negative correspondence between the academic education and the activity they hoped to have go alongside the reasons given by the other technicians. As for the usefulness of the learning resulting from the academic training to the performed tasks throughout the interviewees' careers, the perspectives were very positive. Only 6.3% of the interviewed stated that such leaning has been little useful. The most pointed answer was "extremely useful" (41.3%).

Table 4 – Usefulness of the academic learning to the professional activities

Academic qualifications	Utility					Total
	Total	High	Medium	Weak	Null	
	“Completely useful”	“Extremely useful”	“Partly”	“Little useful”	“Not useful”	
Social work	2	9	2	3	—	16
Psychology	7	5	3	1	—	16
Sociology	2	3	3	—	—	8
Education	—	4	2	—	—	6
Social education	2	2	2	—	—	6
Management	2	1	2	—	—	5
Economics	1	—	1	—	—	2
Other qualifications in CHS	1	2	1	—	—	4
Total	17 (27,0%)	26 (41.3%)	16 (25.4%)	4 (6,3%)	—	63 (100%)

Once more, the results relating to the technicians working in adult education follow those of the whole total, although the negative correlation percentage is higher (11%). A vast number of interviewees did not explain the reasons for their answers (38.1%). Only one of them had made a negative evaluation in relation to the academic learning before working. The reasons given by those who stated that the learning obtained during the academic training has been “completely useful” to their jobs can be classified as a type of answer that sustains that such learning allows to develop skills needed for developing their tasks:

... it allowed us to acquire skills in the area of psychological support, psychotherapy, and also in the area of vocational guidance, and in the area of education, adult training...which allows me to do my work. (interview n°. 24).

Among those who stated that the learning has been very useful, we found two main types of explanations: some of them make a clear articulation between the theory (academic learning) and practice (experience), although it is done in a different way; others highlight the importance of theory but, also, point out its incompleteness. In the first group, we can distinguish three levels of articulation. A first level, where we establish a complementarity relation:

The academic education is important as it complements and supports the professional experience, which I acquired throughout recent years (interview n°. 42).

A second level, in which we find an important resource to interpret and plan the action within the theory, which are two fundamental aspects of the intellectual work:

The academic training allowed me to acquire fundamental theoretical tools in order to interpret social phenomenon and plan the intervention (Interview no. 23).

A third level leads us to an inverse way of carrying the articulation, which is from the practice to the theory:

The practice forces us to reflect upon the theory... (interview n°. 1).

These statements follow the theories which defend that the professional knowledge results from the articulation between knowledge and learning theories and the knowledge and learning from professional practice (Schön, 1983; Caria, 2007, 2008; Loureiro, 2010). The assumptions from those who highlight the importance of theory, but are also attentive to its incompleteness, can be illustrated through this quotation:

I have put into practice all of the knowledge that I acquired at university. However, there have been other more informal knowledge which the university did not provide me (interview n°. 40).

The technicians who stated the learning resulting from the academic education has been “partly” useful to their profession have given two types of justification.

Some of them referred to the usefulness of that learning in the development of skills such as problem awareness, dealing with situations and evaluate them, among others, which, although have practical utility, they do not really relate to the professional situation in itself. It is an indirect utility:

In order to do my work I did not need my academic qualifications, but the fact that I had qualifications helps me a lot at work, as I am able to capture, interpret and do my work better. (interview n°. 4)

Others have justified their answers by defending that the learning resulting from the academic education is apart from professional practice:

the academic education is not enough by itself, it presents a lot of theory. We study situations that are not ours (Brazil) and which are not adequate to our real situation. Afterwards, practice is much more complex (interview n°. 38).

Those who stated that learning which resulted from academic training is of little help have presented the same type of argument. In general, the assumptions presented by those who work in adult education presented similar arguments to those mentioned above.

Brief final remarks

We shall end this article by pointing out some aspects and queries which are directly related to this study, whilst always taking into account that the data which we present here is preliminary and can lead to other correlations and interpretations. We consider that studies on the relationship between learning and the professional life route are important in the field of adult education, especially highly educated adults. Furthermore, among these studies, those about adult education workers are of specific interest. Hence, we conclude that research on the adults' professional route is of great importance. Some questions were mentioned above and, in part, those queries were answered but there is still a need for more investigation in the field. This article has focused on an investigation project about a specific area of adult education, which invites us to apply, properly adapt and explore the question: what is the learning, knowledge and skills, which are associated to the reflectivity in the autonomy processes of the professional work in the adult education field, in general and specifically within the Third Sector?

Will the reflectivity mechanisms development which leads to such professional work autonomy processes in the adults education field benefit the least decontextualised educational practice existence in relation to those adults really interested in education? That is, could the development of non-reproductive professional practice from the adult education technicians – which is often far away from the interests of the adults who are being educated – be related to professional learning which leads to such reflexive processes that allow for the acquisition of autonomy at their work, and in turn, allows for the recontextualised use of programmes within so many adult education offers? As far as the results of this and other studies are concerned, we find that whoever works in adult education in Portugal does not frequently have qualifications in that area. Having that in mind, shouldn't we consider, at least, introducing knowledge on the field of adult education in the human and social sciences degrees?

Finally, as there isn't such previous academic learning, how can that knowledge be given to workers? And, can those facts cause different specific leaning processes in the work places when compared to other professionals with previous academic preparation? Does that specificity relate, in any way, to their professional routes? These are some of the questions that can be raised after this preliminary data analysis and that are expect to be answered in future works.

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**Research training in Higher
Education: exploring the case
of three doctoral students with
different backgrounds**

The growing complexity of the information society and the Bologna Declaration led higher education institutions to revise their curricula and contributed to renewed understandings of teaching, learning and research. Since the Berlin Communiqué, adult education at doctoral level gained more recognition as a means to articulate post-graduate education and research. Although much has been written about the main aims of doctoral education, many authors agree that a doctoral study involves creative endeavour through which the student contributes to knowledge development. Furthermore, the focus of this third cycle of education is no longer limited to the product of an original thesis, including also the students' development towards high quality and scholarly researchers of the next generation.

This paper reports work in progress exploring the learning experience of three doctoral students with different backgrounds (two Language teachers and one Biology/Geology teacher) working together in the context of a first year module integrated in the curriculum of a Portuguese Doctoral Programme in Didactics and Curricular Development. The research aims to discuss evidences of the impacts of the collaboration process in which the doctoral students were deeply involved throughout and beyond the one semester module, in particular on their learning experiences. Taking into account that the first three authors are the doctoral students, the study has an autoethnographic nature. Drawing on the concept of learning development/transition from first year doctoral students lacking academic research experiences to (future) active and independent researchers scholarly engaged in the promotion and extension of a 'knowledge society', a qualitative content analysis of five types of documents produced by the group/community is being analysed. Analysis is on-going. However multi-dimensional key-features that should be taken into account in the design of adult learning strategies in the context of research in education can already be identified. It is believed that the discussion of this study might be relevant towards the effort of facilitating the learning transitions from doctoral candidates to early career researchers, thus supporting fine tunings of research training strategies already being implemented in the context of doctoral programmes.

Introduction: New challenges for adult education at doctoral level

The debate around the Bologna Process (1999) has brought to higher education arena a renewed understanding of the relationships between education, learning and academic research (Evans, 2010). Doctoral education has become one of the key features within the Bologna Process since the ministerial meeting in Berlin (Berlin Communiqué 2003). Doctoral studies are recognised as being the interplay between education and research and therefore an opportunity for reaching scientific quality and development. Indeed, the European University Association (EUA) recognises doctoral students as the future knowledge generators and innovators:

Doctoral education is a major priority for European universities and for EUA. It forms the first phase of young researchers' careers and is thus central to the drive to create a Europe of knowledge, as more researchers need to be trained than ever before if the ambitious objectives

concerning enhanced research capacity, innovation and economic growth are to be met.
(Georg Winckler, European University Association – EUA President, 2005 – 2009, <http://www.eua.be/cde/Home.aspx>, retrieved September 2011)

Therefore higher education institutions and particularly doctoral schools started to be seen as privileged spaces for research training and thus knowledge generation and innovation (Evans, 2010; Kehm, 2004) and great attention is devoted to the design and implementation of research training strategies integrated in the first year of the Doctoral Programmes. In this sense, the curricular modules of doctoral studies can be conceptualised as ‘pre-research stages/phases’ where the early career researcher has the opportunity to develop and to consolidate research competences needed to carry out an independent and original research, namely his/hers PhD project.

During PhD studies students are expected to move beyond fact finding, towards conceptual, critical and creative levels, identifying problems and questioning fixed truth, in order to engage in deep learning and contribute to knowledge development (Wisker & Robinson, 2009). Actually, the main tasks to fulfil throughout doctoral studies form part of a complex creative process which entails: i) identifying and describing a research problem, ii) selecting an appropriate approach to investigate the problem, iii) collecting and analysing data, iv) writing the thesis and defending it during a viva voce examination, and writing research proposals and papers (Dewett, Shin, Tohn and Semadeni, 2005; Trafford & Leshem, 2009). Thus, and considering the purpose of the Bologna Process, in today’s context, the focus is not (only) on the quality of the academic research product, namely the PhD thesis, but on what Frick (2010) and Trafford and Leshem (2009) define as *doctorateness*. The authors claim that this process led doctoral students to become a responsible scholar, e.g., a researcher who has the confidence and courage to take risks, to make mistakes, to invent and re-invent knowledge, by transferring knowledge between context, and to pursue critical and lifelong inquiries. The study presented in this article draws conceptually on the key-idea of the learning transition process of a group of first year doctoral students with limited academic research experience to an active and independent high quality researcher (Evans, 2010). The following table illustrates the characteristics that should be developed during the previous mentioned learning process.

- » Uses and adapts established research methods and develops methodology;
- » Generates and develops theory from research findings;
- » Conducts highly rigorous research drawing upon basic and advanced research skills;
- » Strives constantly to develop and extend his methodological competences;
- » Strives constantly to apply deep levels of analysis;
- » Recognise the value of, and utilises, comparative analysis, meta-analysis, synthesises, replication and so forth;
- » Constantly reflects upon, and frequently revisits and refines his/her own studies;
- » Has developed the skill of effective criticism and applies this to the formulation of his/her own arguments;
- » Publishes frequently in high ranking academic journals;
- » Disseminates the applicability to a range of contexts of generic skills developed within and alongside research activity.

Table 1 – Characteristics illustrating the extended professionalism in relation to research (adopted from Evans, 2010, p. 670)

The present study: learning transitions facilitated by collaborative work

1.1 Settings/Contextual Background

The focus of this article is the reflection about the learning experience of three doctoral students' with different backgrounds (two Language teachers and one Biology/Geology teacher) who worked together in the context of a semester long module of the second edition of a three year long Doctoral Programme in Didactics and Formation of a Portuguese University, which started in the academic year 2009/2010. The module is part of the first year, while the implementation of the research project designed by the students is to be implemented during the second and third year of the programme. Generally, the dissemination of the ongoing work (for instance, in research meetings) and PhD thesis report are made throughout the three years. This study aims to identify impact evidences of the collaboration process in which the three colleagues were involved throughout the semester (2009/2010), and which continued after the curricular unit assignments, at the level of the learning

experience/transition of the involved doctorate students. The qualitative content analysis of the documents produced by the students individually and by the group is expected to contribute to extend the understanding of how research training opportunities involving collaboration, between students with different backgrounds, benefits the learning experience of the doctorate students empowering their transition into independent researchers.

In order to fully understand the settings to which this study reports, the following paragraphs briefly describe (a) the learning outcomes of the curricular unit in which the students collaborated, and (b) the process of conducting the assigned learning task, namely a collaborative meta-analytical study.

a) Learning Outcomes of the curricular unit Didactics and Curricular Development (DCD):

The curricular unit DCD is integrated in the Doctoral Programme of Didactics and Formation (University of Aveiro, Portugal). The main student task of the module was to conduct a collaborative meta-analytic study focused on the analysis of published literature related to the students' specific academic interests, but also including a common umbrella theme, linking the students' individual research interests. In order to maximize the learning opportunities the two university teachers (senior researchers and the two last authors of this paper) of the curricular unit suggested that the meta-analytical study should be carried out by a group of three to four doctoral students, if possible from different backgrounds. The group, to which this study reports, was composed by three students (2 Language and 1 Biology teachers). All three students have extended teaching experience (at different levels). However research background is at the initial level – Table 2. Thus, the students profile corresponded to "(...) a learner who within a work and professional context might be an expert and at the same time an initiant into research education." (Kiley, 2009: 295). The motivations to attend the doctoral studies (Table 2) are in coherence with Shacham and Od-Cohen (2009) arguments that adult learners are lifelong and goal-oriented learners. The research students expected/aspired to be involved in the learning experience relevant, authentic, and meaningful, as well as geared at raising their self-esteem, self-confidence and self-fulfillment (Aldridge & Tucket, 2010). Evaluation of the students' performance in the curricular unit was based on the scientific quality of the final written report and also on the quality of the oral presentation of their meta-analytical study (supported by PowerPoint slides) to the remaining class.

Drawing on the principles of the Bologna Process, it was intended that each student:

- » learns to access, select, systemise and analyse research literature, in order to collaboratively write an academic report;
- » has the opportunity to extend and deepen the theoretical knowledge in a specific area related to her individual PhD project.

Thus the learning expectation was that during the process of conducting and writing the meta-analytical study the students would develop competences related with the research process, facilitating and empowering the implementation of their individual PhD research project in the following academic years.

Student	Background	Brief Description of the Professional Background	Motivation to do the PhD
Ana	Language (secondary and primary school level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Bachelor in Portuguese Teaching; » Master in Education » teacher at higher education (teacher training since 1997) » Co-author of the Portuguese (language) Curriculum for Basic Education (Portuguese Ministry of Education); » member of the research Project PROTEXTOS (about writing) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » To deepen knowledge; » Design, implement and evaluate teaching and learning strategies involving the development of writing competences
Beatrice	Biology/Geology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Finished her Bachelor in Biology/Geology in 2004; » Has been teaching as a part-time teacher at several secondary school since 2004 » Concluded her master at Science communication and education in 2007 » Collaborated in a research project from 2007 to 2009 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » To continue the work started throughout the collaboration in a research project and extend the learning/skills acquired throughout that project; » To enhance the opportunity of employability.
Carol	Language (secondary school level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Finished her graduate in Portuguese studies in 2006; Has been teaching as a part-time teacher at several basic schools since 2008 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » To learn more in the area » To develop personally and professionally

Table 2 – Professional and Motivational background of each doctoral student

b) The meta-analytical study

The meta-analysis should be about research papers in education with a common section and three different parts related with the research topics of student involved in the group work. The general thematic (which linked the individual project), and number of papers to be analysed was defined by the students themselves. The final written report of this particular group was entitled *Learning to write and writing to learn in the 21st century* (Figure 1).

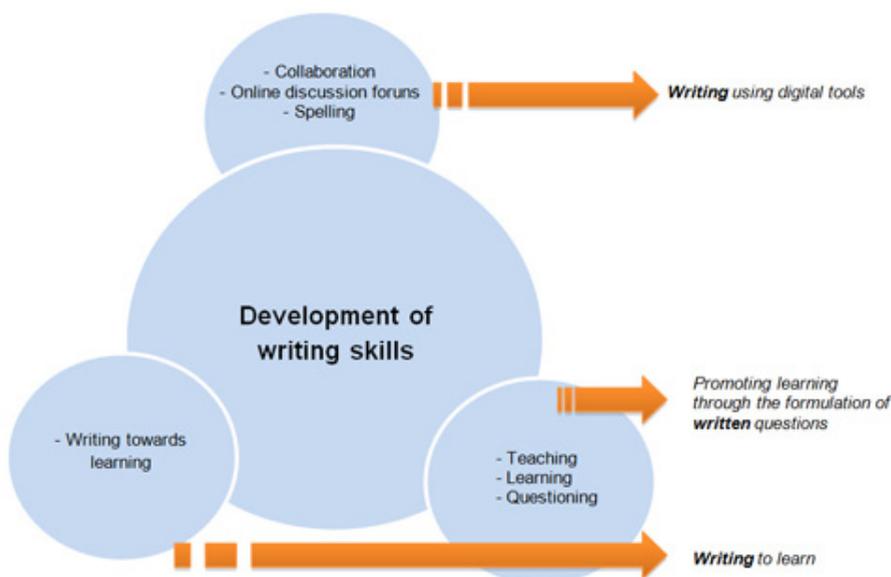


Figure 1 – Areas of interest of the group members and confluence theme.

The collaborative meta-analytical study is a product of a complex learning experience that can be divided into three procedural stages (Macário, Lopes, Pinto, Loureiro & Ançã, 2011):

» Constitution of the Corpora:

In order to define the corpora the three students had to describe to each colleague of their group the theoretical framework, rational and main aims of their individual PhD project in order to identify the umbrella theme, namely 'Development of writing skills'. After this, the students selected the scientific research/papers/articles to be considered for each of the three individual meta-analytical sub-studies. Due to time constraints the group decided that each individual study would include the analysis of 12 research papers, being those preferably of empirical nature. Therefore the findings of the final report resulted from the analysis of a total of 36 papers (3 x12).

» **Corpora analysis:**

After the creation of the database to be used in the meta-analytical study the group prepared its qualitative content analysis. This task implied the definition of common analytical categories by the students based on the floating reading of the collected information (namely the twelve studies by each student). Individual analysis was supported by frequent discussions between the three students in order to negotiate common interests and take shared decision. Naturally some categories of analysis were common to all, while others were adapted, included or excluded considering the specificities of each individual assignment, which would constitute the different sections of the final written report.

» **Writing the final report:**

Like previously referred, throughout the individual analysis of the selected papers, the students had to continuously share, discuss, negotiate and synthesise ideas in order to scaffold the process of emphasising common concepts and findings. Along the process they co-planned and co-constructed the final report, defining a common structure for the three meta-analytic sub studies. Moreover, using collaborative writing tools the group members wrote the introduction and conclusion of the final report, linking the individual studies and findings.

1.2. Main aims and research questions of the present study

Like previously stated it is aimed to identify/define evidences of the impacts on the learning experience of the three doctoral students' due to the collaboration process in which they were involved. By exploring more systematically the documents produced by the students it is expected to contribute to the understanding of how research training opportunities go beyond individualism. To focus the investigation the following research questions was defined:

Which learning transitions/experiences entailed a collaborative work aiming at conducting and writing a meta-analytical study, involving doctoral students with different backgrounds?

1.3. Methodology of the study/Methodological Outline

The study follows a qualitative model/paradigm. Using a template approach (Robson, 2002), content analysis of the following five types of documents is being undertaken:

- **formal and obligatory group documents:** (1) one final written report of the meta-analytical study and; (2) one power point presentation used to support the presentation of the meta-analytical study at the end of the module,

– **voluntary documents, produced by the community after the curricular unit ended:** (3) three individual reflections/narratives about the learning experiences concerning the collaboration between the students; (4) one powerpoint presentation elaborated by the group presented to the colleagues of the third edition of the Doctoral programme (academic year 2010/2011). This presentation aimed to share the students' learning experiences and to suggest recommendations. This talk was given by invitations of the senior researchers responsible for the module (the two last authors of this article); (5) one descriptive research paper entitled "Research training in the 21st Century: A reflection on collaborative work and emergent learning" presented at the International ICEM-SIIE'2011 Conference, September 2011 (Macário, et al. 2011). Finally, taking into account that the analysis is realised by the doctoral students themselves as an effort of outside positioning from their personal learning experience, while supported by their teachers, the study can be identified as being an auto-ethnographical reflection (Hernández, Sancho, Creus, & Montané, 2010; Mitra, 2010), where the concept of "auto" has a twofold meaning: i) at the individual level, each student per se and ii) at the group level.

Main Findings and discussion

In the present section we will present some selected findings resulting from the ongoing content analysis of the previously identified documents. Considering the aim of the study, and drawing on the conception of development towards being a researcher (Kiley, 2009) we focused our attention on excerpts that evidence the idea of learning contributing for the ability of 'doing' research activities in a 'better way' (Evans, 2010).

Three dimensions, entailing specific characteristic of Evans' (2011) concept of research professionalism, were defined integrating the main template (Robson, 2002). Being the learning experiences mainly a process of transition towards development the following template dimensions are conceptualised as overlapping and synergistic:

- a) *Creative Abilities*: According to Frick (2010) creativity results from the complex interplay of the following intellectual abilities: **synthetic ability** (be able to see problems in new ways and to move beyond the boundaries of conventional thinking), **analytic ability** (be able to recognise which ideas are worth pursuing) and practical-contextual ability (to know how to persuade others of an idea).
- b) *Attitude towards research*: research is a process of constant knowledge extension and even re-invention. An active researcher recognises this essence of lifelong learning, being truly engaged in reflective, critical and creative thinking (Evans, 2010; Frick, 2010);

To date, besides these two main dimensions, another dimension emerged from the data interpretation, namely:

c) *Interpersonal skills*: the ability (and the disposition) to communicate with others in a constructive way. Sharing knowledge and doubts with others (via oral communication) is not an intrinsic personal characteristic of every student. Some have the need of developing this facet.

Analysis is still running, however some first findings considering the types of learning experiences, due to collaborative work between students with different backgrounds, could already be identified and will now be pointed out. Due to space constraints only excerpts from the personal narratives will be used. However, the aspects highlighted below are also reflected in the documents used for data gathering.

» *Deepening and Extending the boundaries of Academic/Domain-specific Knowledge and Cognitive Skills*

The fact that the students had so far developed their career in different academic fields enhanced the challenge of conducting a collaborative meta-analytical study. In order to link their interests it was first of all necessary to get familiar with the state of art of each research field and also with the individual project of their colleagues. This contact with different (but related) scientific areas, that facilitate crossing each own 'comfort zone', would not have happened if the students had exclusively worked alone, or with colleagues of the same area. Like Beatrice and Carol state:

In my PhD work [...] I basically try to design and implement innovative teaching-learning-assessment strategies that help undergraduate biology students to develop their questioning skills. By reading the references suggested by my colleagues about the stages of 'learning to write' and also references about the process of 'co-writing'... I realised that I had to think of this dimension also... because when I ask the students to write in different moments their questions down... well to what extent can I assert that the improvement of the questions quality is due to the improvement of their thinking skills, which are the focus of my research? Isn't it possible that what actually improved was their writing abilities?! I never thought about this so obvious issue. I definitely will have to read more about this for my thesis... It is exciting to think how I can get inspired from Language teaching! After all questioning is a complex competence..." (Beatrice)

During the journey of conducting the meta-analytical study I realised that the research area considering questioning, deeply embedded Science Education, seems surprisingly not to include the dimension of the process of learning to write that is intimately linked to the formulation of (written) questions... (Carol)

Furthermore, the effort of trying to explain your own research project to someone that is not an expert on that particular academic research topic extends the use of your own knowledge. It is like the *Information literacy* of the student who is trying to explain his ideas and expose his arguments is

putted under 'special proof'. Drawing on Beatrice's statement, the student has to be twice effective in selecting, organizing and synthesising the main information. The key-points of your rationale have to be shared in a simple and, still, rigorous form:

During the first phase of the curricular unit, when we were trying to identify our common theme I had to explain my PhD project to Anna and Carol. This caused a moment of anxiety, (...) How would I be able to show, and convince [them] that what I do in Biology [teaching] is important and make sense...and is NOT boring? (...) I was surprised with the interesting comments of my colleagues and (...) during the process of answering to their clarifying or simple curiosity doubts I realised I started to refine my own project... sometimes an external view is very positive [...]. (Beatrice)

In the previous narrative excerpts the important ability of dealing with the comments of peers and integrating them in a constructive and relevant way is also present. Each student had to be able to understand the other and be able to recognise which 'items' of the work of her colleague were linked to her own research interest and therefore were worth pursuing. These learning challenges remained during the entire process of conducting the meta-analytical study:

For me one learning output was the frequent process of sharing ideas while we were conducting our individual sub-studies... we constantly had to plunge back... reflect on what we have produced so far in order to be certain that the 'bits' would fit together... we had to share and negotiate constantly our interests... it is like a meta-work about your own work... it was very stimulating to step back... every time (of the meetings) the bits gained more shape as one coherent work with a richer texture (...). (Anna)

Indeed, only by a continuous effort of re-shuffling information, training their 'cognitive flexibility' it was possible to identify a common research topic underpinning the final report entitled 'Development of writing skills'.

» *Developing and researchers' attitude/ Engaging into a research 'culture'*

The constant cognitive challenge facilitated the students' 'engagement' into a critical, reflective and creative 'mood' which defines the attitude of a researcher (Evans, 2010), identified by Kiley (2009) as the research culture. The constant strive to discuss arguments, generate ideas and understand the perspectives of others, and also the willingness to handle/manage critique, grew along/throughout the learning journey, being particularly strong during the last moments of the module:

By working with my colleagues throughout this module, I realised that not every questions need a quick answer...there are issues that need deep reflexion...and not an immediate answer. It

is ok, and even desirable, to be involved in a study where new doubts are raised. And even when the questions came from the others it doesn't mean that the study or work is bad or weak. It might mean: interesting!... so doubts... might be a good thing... it doesn't mean that you have done a bad work... (Beatrice)

The students' 'will to engage' into research activity was re-expressed when they prepared a presentation to share their learning experience and their field knowledge with their colleagues of the following edition of the doctoral programme:

The teachers' invitation to share our 'knowledge' with our colleagues of the third edition was really rewarding... not just because it meant that the teachers recognized our work as being of merit to be presented to others... but also because it would be another opportunity to discuss ideas... and perhaps move one step further in our own research project. (Carol)

Finally, throughout the semester, the collaborative work, which implied the negotiation of common area of interest and the re-organisation of information in order to create common and (new) knowledge helped students to create and maintain solidarity and to be aware of the individual, but also shared responsibility (Shamcham & Od-Cohen, 2009). First within the group, then with learners in the same situation (colleagues of the same Doctoral Programme) and more recently with researchers in a broader community:

On another level, the contact with my colleagues enhanced my awareness about belonging to a community of (novice) researchers, and the importance of collaborating towards a common goal: co-construct more and better knowledge. (Carol)

» *Developing Interpersonal skills*

As previously stated the ability to express your ideas and argue with peers is also an ability that can be developed. The process of meaning making through oral or written communication is mainly acquired by 'field' experience, e.g. 'generating practical knowledge through their practice' (Shachman & Od-Cohen, 2009):

[...] For example presenting our work the second time [to the colleagues of the third edition of the Doctoral Programme, academic year 2010/2011]... I felt much more confident. I was not that nervous, the ideas came out more clearly. And I honestly felt that my colleagues and me were already doctoral students with some valuable field expertise... at least to our younger colleagues... this gave us confidence... during the presentation, while speaking you are being confronted with your own learning progress and also developing communication skills in public. (Carol)

Finally by reading the documents written by the students, other, more specific learning outputs could be identified:

- **Construction of artefacts/Methodological instruments**

Anna's' knowledge about the methodological approach when organizing data was crucial. She alerted us to the importance of DEFINING, a set of common key-concepts, as well as transversal criteria for including/excluding references to be included in the corpora. So we constructed a common grids to be used by everyone... Otherwise we would have lost a lot of time doing this in a more intuitive approach... (Carol)

- **Use of new information technology (ICT)**

Looking back, I now feel that I was a complete ignorant about many informatics tools that are available at the Internet. Ana and Carol were much more advanced in this knowledge, I never had used Google Docs... and this was an enormous help because it allowed us to work at a distance... (Beatrice)

(...) the high quality of the collaboration (was) facilitated by the use of many informatics tools/instruments (...). It was throughout this particular collaboration that I recognized many other facilities/potentialities ICT tools of which I already had some knowledge... Some of those tools I actually started use on my own PhD project. (Carol)

- **Development of academic writing**

Academic writing constitutes, normally, a process of evidencing knowledge in a very personal format... The work we developed implied a bigger effort of adaption of the 'individual writing style' of each student, in order to obtain a coherent puzzle, where every part fitted with the others. This challenge was an asset, since it 'forced' to constant syntactic and semantic reformulations (...). (Anna)

Concluding remarks: towards the empowerment of an early career researcher identity

Nowadays doctoral education is considered as one of the key adult/lifelong education strategy in order to achieve a knowledge based society (Pires, 2009). Indeed doctoral candidates are conceptualised as the next generation of researchers. Moreover, it is expected that they will undertake research of the highest quality. In order to achieve this aim, innovative and student-centred research training strategies have to be designed and implemented (Kiley, 2009). Within this exploratory study the focus was a group of three doctoral candidates with different backgrounds which undertook and auto-ethnographical reflection in order to identify the learning outcomes that emerged from the collaborative research training strategy implemented in one semester long curricular unit. By doing this study, the aim was to

understand how it is possibly to enhance strategies that assist/empower the PhD students to achieve more creative outcomes by interacting with peers, than when they work alone, since research on doctoral learning processes has shown that learning to do research has been, so far, experienced as a solitary process (McWilliam & Dawson, 2008; Shamchman & Od-Cohen, 2009).

The first findings provide evidence that the collaborative work involving PhD students with different backgrounds provided access to new and different visions/perspectives on their previous knowledge. During the entire learning experience the members of the group had to immerse in several research linked tasks, negotiating common area of interest and re-organising information in order to create common and (new) knowledge. By doing this critical and creative development students benefited not only their research project and thesis, but also their ability and disposition to be an active (future) researcher. Indeed, opportunities for democratic work, collaborative decisions and collegiality (McWilliam & Dawson, 2008) were created. As active researchers the students had to assess the arguments of their peers and give input, even if their mates' topics were not exactly related to their own work (take as an example the peer-review process), developing cognitive flexibility (Evans, 2010) and self-management skills (Frick, 2010), that are considered to be important research skills.

The continuous challenge that the heterogeneous group had to deal with strengthened the cohesion between the PhD students, enhancing the development of a sense of belonging - pivotal to the constitution of learners communities (Henri & Pudelko, 2003; Wisker & Robinson, 2009) and stimulating the students to make their first steps as and into a (broader) community of (research) practice (Shachman & Od-Cohen, 2009), empowering therefore their own 'researcher identity' (Figure 4). Indeed the doctoral learning experience is all about undertaking a 'rite of passage': Many doctoral candidates "(...) demonstrate through their writing, presentation, and even demeanour, that they have undergone a change in the way they understand learning and themselves as learners" (Kiley, 2009: 293).

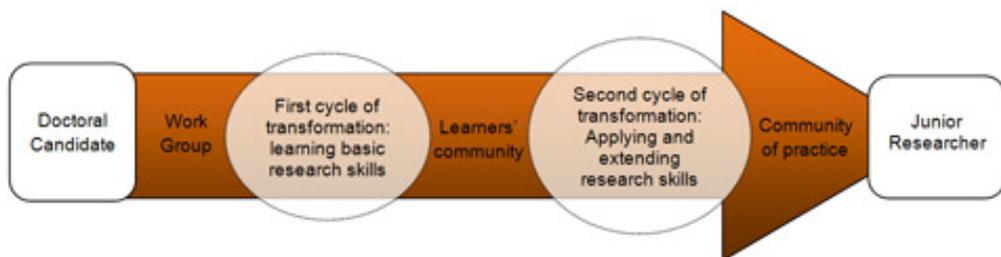


Figure 2 – The doctoral student in transition between lack and achievements of research ability (Evans, 2010; Shacham & Od-Cohen, 2009) or the “minimal state” (Kiley, 2009)

Significant within this auto-ethnographical study is that it was at the community level (and not individual level) that creativity, was initially fostered. Like McWilliam & Dawson (2008) state: "(...) the creative impact and output of such research (working in teams with similar interests) is far more beneficial than small scale individualised studies. Indeed we believe that working with colleagues with different backgrounds helped the students to cross the *threshold concept* (Kiley, 2009) of 'doctoratness' (Frick, 2010; Trafford & Leshem, 2009). Therefore, and in order to enhance relevant PhD learning experiences, crucial for an innovative and creative Europe, the authors believe that the maximization of the diversity of that unit – group – by joining people with different backgrounds, raises substantially the significance of the learning experience/transition of each PhD student, particularly during the first years of curricular units. Experiences as the one described in this contribution which value divergence and diversity, encourages risk-taking and experimentation supporting and promoting students' creativity (Shachman & Od-Cohen, 2009; McWilliam & Dawson, 2008).

Despite the relevant and rich highlights for training doctoral candidates of the adopted model in this particular curricular small-scale study, findings were obtained from a singular case. In order to assert (with more certainty) the impact of the training strategy that the students experienced on their identity (and ability) as researchers, the following future investigations are suggested: a) conduct this kind of auto-ethnographical with other future doctoral students that attended similar research training strategies; ii) include interviews with the senior researchers (teachers); iii) revisit this particular group after finishing their PhD, when theoretically the transition of the doctoral candidates towards an active researcher will be completed/consummated (Kiley, 2009). This would give access to their reflection about the entire learning experience after some time distance.

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Theoretical implications of the interest in analysing lifelong and life-wide learning in life course¹

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Introduction

The shift of interest toward lifelong learning (Hof 2009) has raised new theoretical and empirical questions in the area of educational science and educational research.

Firstly, learning becomes visible as a lifelong process that consists of a multitude of small-scale and large-scale life course-transitions and biographical transformations. In this respect, the examination of learning in the life course requires fundamental changes in learning-theoretical discourse. The crucial point, therefore, is to interpret learning as a lifelong process that involves not only the short-term acquisition of new experiences but also the transformation of knowledge and skills over the lifetime.

Secondly, the orientation toward learning in the life course goes hand in hand with an interest in learning as a life-wide activity/practice - being not only centered on educational institutions but also taking place in a vast variety of social networks, such as peer-groups, families, among colleagues or in virtual communities. With the shift of interest towards learning as a life-wide process, educational research focuses even outside formal, pedagogically organised learning environments and is interested in occupational and everyday contexts as places of learning. I would argue that this new field of research goes hand in hand with a view of learning as part of the socialisation process.¹

Biographical research and studies following the life course paradigm have in recent years given important insights into plural ways of living and learning, and into time and space as important factors for comprehending the complex interdependence of past and present learning activities and their impact on current life course transitions. However, the implications for learning theory are rarely discussed. For this reason the paper aims to illuminate the implications of these research programmes for adult learning theory.

Investigating the Processuality of Learning

Approaches for studying the processuality of learning in the life course can be found first in the tradition of *biographical research*, which is concerned with a reconstruction of the changes and transformations of subjective interpretations and explanations of life as it is lived, and secondly in the framework of sociological research on life course, which is concerned with the study of the social and institutional scope of action of the self.² Both of these areas of research make it clear – each in its own way –

1 Overall, greater attention is indeed being paid to diverse learning processes in adulthood (Allmendinger 2011, Staudinger/ Heidemeier 2009, Biesta/ Field /Tedder 2010, Biesta et al 2011, Alheit/ Rheinländer/Watermann/ 2008), but there is still a lack of analyses of learning outside formal and non-formal learning environments.

2 Developmental psychological models that study transformations of experience and behaviour during the life span as universal patterns of change are increasingly being superseded by transactional perspectives, which place the focus on the relation between the person and their surroundings.

that the analysis of learning over the life course should take into account both the perspective of the actors and the conditions for action.

Focusing on Learning in Biographical Research

By reconstructing life histories as learning histories (Krüger 2006, p. 14, see also West et al. 2007) and at the same time by taking a particular interest in understanding the 'meandering paths of biographical organization' (Marotzki 1999: 111), biographical research enables a 'knowledge of different individual worlds of meaning, lifestyles and problem-solving styles, learning and orientation patterns' (ibid.). The interpretation of biographical interviews leads not only to typifications of different biographical trajectories but also affords insights into the structure of learning and educational processes (Nohl 2006). Through the use of detailed case analyses, it is possible to formulate hypotheses on the conditions for specific trajectory curves (Schütze 2001). On the whole, biographical research has up to now focused on the subjective patterns of experience processing. In so doing, its results point to the fact that the forms of previous experience processing also constitute the bases of new experiences and new forms of experience processing. To this extent, the study of learning is increasingly being embedded in a theory of biographical learning (Hof 2009: 131ff.).

» To see learning in the context of biography means to see **learning as an active process** of realising the world and constructing meaning from experiences. As Alheit and Dausien have explained, biographical learning means that the individuals give meaning to life history in the way that they construct personal coherence and identity. Biographical researchers point out that learning is not only the acquisition of knowledge or skills but necessarily includes the connecting of the new experiences with the given knowledge and ideas. In this sense Jarvis describes life as "a journey and (...) our experiences are episodic and we impose meaning on them as we join them together in telling our story. Not every one of those episodes is of equal value to our story, however, since there are some moments that are life-changing." (Jarvis 2006: 136).³

» Biographical research shows that learning has to be seen as a process that starts not from zero but from a certain basis. Individuals interpret the world/the new experience as educated persons. This means that the world is interpreted from a certain perspective. This perspective – the knowledge, the interests, the goals and wishes – will influence the way new situations are perceived and given meaning. For this reason, **learning has to be seen as being embedded in the education process and in the biography.**

³ The individual competence to bring different experiences together and to reflect the own biography as a result of learning processes, this competence to construct biographical meaning is Peter Alheit calling biographicity (Biographizität) (Alheit 2003).

» As a further result of biographical research, learning is to be seen to be embedded in the concrete learning context, in the biographically available options for action and resources. The learning history is – as Bettina Dausien (2008) has emphasised – embedded in the biographically available options for action and resources. She describes this process using the analogy of a building site: “Life is a building site, and learning is the constructive process, in which experiences and meaning are produced from actions and events. The biographical significance, or the configurations of knowledge that emerge, depend on the one hand on the “material” and tools available on the relevant building site, and on the other hand on the possibilities for concrete action, for trying things out for the first time and for renewed attempts again and again (...), for mistakes, modifications and new designs; and ultimately, they are also dependent on the communicative possibilities for individual and group reflection” (Dausien 2008: 167).

What emerges from this is that a life history has certain actions and learning procedures at its disposal and that these in fact limit the options for action that would be possible in principle (Dausien 2008: 166), i.e. learning is not only dependent on personal patterns of interpretation and experience, but also on the individual’s concrete conditions of life and experience.

This means: **learning is embedded in the social context and the learning possibilities that are available in the life sphere.**

Focusing on Learning in Life Course Studies

While biographical research focuses on subjective perspectives and patterns of interpretation and asks how individuals interpret life events and integrate them into consistent life histories, sociological research on life course aims to analyse the sequence of activities and life events in their social and institutional context (Mayer 1990: 9). It focuses on the **social pathways of human lives**, particularly in their historical time and place (Elder 2004: 4), with a special interest in the analysis of disruptive societal events, such as economic depressions, wars or political changes.

From a theoretical standpoint that views “life course as consisting of age-graded patterns that are embedded in social institutions and history” (ibid.), it has been assumed that a person’s life course could be understood as the result of the endeavour to achieve an optimal shaping of their life within the terms of the given social, institutional and situational conditions and opportunities (Blossfeld & Huninink 2001; Heinz et al. 2009, Elder et al. 2003). In other words, the description of these life domains gives the framework for the individual living and learning. “Life courses are influenced by institutions, intentionally and unintentionally” (Allmendinger et al. 2011: 287). Initially, sociologists assumed that these institutions indicated the chronology of activities or events across the life course.

But the results of concrete research studies showed that the theoretical assumptions had to be differentiated. Life course studies have clearly shown that one should assume a pluralisation and individualisation of life courses (Mayer 1990). In this context it has become increasingly clear that life is not only a reaction to institutional guidelines and expectations but also that people make use of their scope for action in very different ways.

In this regard, life course research studies elaborated the biological, psychological, social and historical factors in the life course as important influences on individual life course and biography. They explored the continuity and change of human lives in relation to interpersonal, structural, and historical forces (Elder 2004: 5). Furthermore they showed that the power of the influence of social changes and the transformations of institutional regulations depends on the time that they occur in the life span. For example, the changing of the political system in eastern Germany had other consequences for children than for middle aged people⁴ (*principle of time and place*).

Other studies showed that communication in the family context and in social relations has an impact on the type of coming-to-terms with transitions in the life course (*Linked-Life Principle*). This means that learning in life course has to be seen as a process that is not only an individual transformation of attitudes and knowledge, but is embedded in social practice and social relations.

Last but not least, the research emphasised that individual decisions (pathway decisions) are closely associated with individual goals, situations and options (*Agency Principle*); 'Life courses are influenced by institutions, intentionally and unintentionally, as well as being decided by the individuals themselves – partly in a goal-orientated behavior and partly as unintentional outcomes of their actions' (Allmendinger et al. 2011: 287). As individuals construct their own life histories through the choices and actions they take with the opportunities and constraints of history and societal circumstances (Elder 2004: 11), they have the possibility to resist particular social or institutional expectations or to make particular use of specific options for action – of a political, cultural or social nature, for instance – aspects that appear for instance in the shaping of one's everyday conduct of life (Voß, 1991) or of one's lifestyle (Bartelheimer & Wittmann 2003).⁵

This means that individual decisions are not solely dependent on social, institutional and personal (biographical) options and the scope for action but also on previous events and experiences. According to Elder, individual life experiences affect the selection of pathways: "The planning and choice-making of individuals, within the particular limitations of their world, can have important consequences for future trajectories" (ibid.).

4 Research differentiates between intended and unintended events (for example the death of a partner, the possibility of pregnancy, etc.).

5 To the category of 'lifestyle', researchers from the Göttingen SOFI-Institute [Sociological Research Institute] assign such factors as use of time, occupational orientation, household division of labour, life course patterns, educational behaviour, consumption patterns and way of life (cf. Bartelheimer/ Wittmann 2003, p. 38). 'Common to these elements is the practical context formed by the day-to-day behaviour of individuals and households' (p. 42).

Thus, life course studies – as well as biographical research - came to the conclusion that individual decisions in the life course are more than a rational reaction to institutional and social options. They have to be seen as being influenced by historical events and social institutions with all their options and constraints for learning and living. Furthermore, the learning process is embedded in the individual life history and in a concrete life sphere.

Sociological and biographical researchers now refer to a broadened concept of agency (Biesta & Tedder 2007, Field 2006, Ecclestone, Biesta & Hughes 2010, Field, Gallacher & Ingram 2009, Emirbayer & Mische 1998, Heinz 1993). They all argue that the concept of agency not only comprises the fundamental ability of human subjects to make decisions and act autonomously. It also implies that the motives of action are rooted in subjective interests and psychological needs as well as in actual social contexts of interaction and experience. 'They are stimulated by actual situations which individuals feel to be relevant to them' (Stauber, Walther & Pohl 2011: 23). Consequently, the concept of agency points to the fact that individual plans of action and intentions are embedded in processes of identity work and biography, and in actual social and situational options for action, as well as in an individual's past experiences. 'These give rise to different resources and opportunities for discovering subjective interests, for developing personal goals and for acquiring those competencies that are needed for achieving one's personal goals' (Stauber, Walther & Pohl 2011: 23).

Agency is not something that people have; it is something that people do. It denotes a "quality" of the engagement of actors with temporal-relational contexts-for-action, not a quality of the actors themselves. We might therefore characterize such an understanding of agency as an ecological understanding in that it focuses on the ways in which agency is achieved in transaction with a particular context-for-action, within a particular "ecology" (Biesta & Tedder 2007:136f).

Therefore life course studies are in keeping with biographical research, which emphasises lifelong learning as a process of experience.

At this point we have the possibility to combine the two theoretical approaches and to emphasise that adult learning research has to focus not only on the reconstruction of individual patterns of interpretation and action and an examination of the social-structural and institutional contexts of action, but also on the description of the individual shaping of a person's life as a reaction to these basic conditions.

Particularly with regard to learning in life course transitions, it is necessary:

- » to reflect on the options people have open for learning and proceeding,
- » to examine what relevance past experiences, the current scope for action and projections for the future have for the way in which people interpret their present situation and the type of decisions they make.

Consequences for the Theory of Lifelong Learning

Learning as a Process of Experience

The research on learning in life course and biography shows that it is not enough to define learning as the acquisition of knowledge and skills on the basis of experiences (Zimbardo & Gerrig 2004). One has to consider in the tradition of Dewey (1998,), that experience is not a phenomenon that brings information from the outside world into the individual's mind. In fact the perception of new information/ of experience is governed by individual and social contexts. On the one hand, the attributes of the person – such as motivation, goals, intentions, expectations, knowledge, and interests – mean that some experiences will be seen as a starting point for learning – and others will not. The way a person reacts to experience is also influenced by personal knowledge, skills and interests. That's why Bloomer & Hodkinson 2000 talk about the learning career. Learning as an experience depends on the situational and social context. This context can include new events or troubles and uncertainties that could be the starting point for individual reflection and learning processes. Last but not least we have to recognise that the interpretation of new experiences also depends on the cultural scripts learners have available to them. As West et al. explained: "Learning is a subjective process, related to immediate sensory experience and to specific situations in which we are placed, as well as the cultural bodies of knowledge or scripts for interpreting experience, mostly mediated via language(s), available to us." (2007: 286)

Learning as a Transformation in Thinking

With the shift of interest toward learning processes that occur outside traditional educational institutions and formal learning environments, a learning-theoretical perspective is required which considers learning not only from the perspective of (pedagogical) imparting and (individual) acquisition but also takes into account what learning opportunities are available overall and how the subject manages these learning opportunities. Learning should thus be understood as a process of coming-to-terms with experiences that manifests itself in a change in behaviour and in the way things are experienced. Learning 'is of the essence of everyday living and of conscious experience; it is the process of transforming that experience into knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and beliefs' (Jarvis 1992: 11). These processes of transformation are seen first as the result of the subject's coming-to-terms with the social and material environment – whereby the influence of the existing self-view and world-view should also be included in a temporal perspective. To this extent, alongside the particular contextual opportunities for experiencing things, the self (in its previous knowledge, its competencies, its interests and goals, etc.) should also be considered in its influence on the transformation of the ways in which human beings experience and act.

For learning theory this would suggest an enlargement of perspective to include the reciprocal relation between learning environment and learning subject. Correspondingly, learning should no longer be conceived solely as an individual acquisition process but 'should [also] be understood as an interactive process between the social environment and the individual in which the two interact and are in the process of transformation' (Faltermaier 2008: 157f.). Since this analysis perspective, which includes the environment as a framework for learning, has up to now been adopted by socialisation research in particular (Hurrelmann, Grundmann & Walper 2008), one could at this point speak of a socialisation-theoretical extension of the concept of learning.

At the same time, an understanding of learning that has been extended socialisation-theoretically opens up a new perspective on learning in the life course, since it emphasises long-term processes and examines learning as well as development in the context of the life span, since the developing individual acts upon his or her environment and the environment in turn acts upon the individual. In the process, the individual actively appropriates the social environment – and thus knowledge, skills, modes of interaction, norms, etc.. The competencies that are acquired through this are not only the foundation for shaping the person's life world in the present but are also the basis for further learning and transaction processes.

'Socialization should be understood in this sense as a continuously occurring process because individuals (as social beings) are always moving within social structures (real or symbolic) and always act socially; through their actions they appropriate social reality and shape them at the same time. Socialization, however, also occurs discontinuously, since a particular need for change occurs at turning points in the life course.' (Faltermaier 2008: 158)

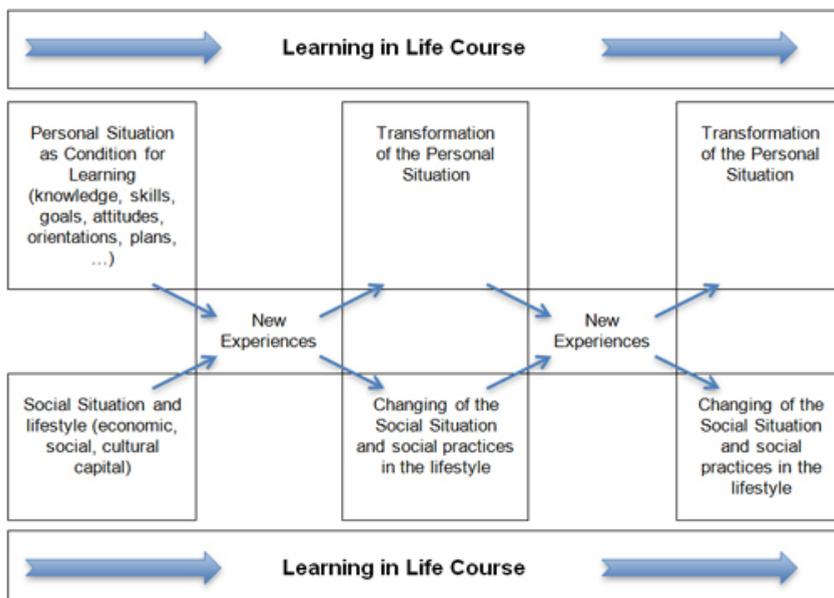
Learning as a Transformation of Acting

To analyse learning in the life course means to perceive learning not primarily as the expression and result of a history of inner development and change, but as an active process of dealing with experiences. This learning influences not only our knowledge and ability, but also our very concrete way of life. In other words, different ways of processing experiences are apparent not only in differences in knowledge and abilities, but also in the different shaping of the individual conduct of life. Research into the course of lives has thus been able to show in detail "what effect the disparities in people that result from past employment and professional biographies continue to have as they get older and what gender-specific differences in this are particularly to be observed" (Blossfeld & Huinink 2001).

There are corresponding prospects in research into socialisation, too. Modern socialisation theory no longer focuses on the development of personality as the appropriation of socially required behavioural competence, but increasingly takes into consideration the interaction between the person and the environment (Hurrelmann, Grundmann & Walper 2008). Up to now however, there has been a greater

emphasis on the fact that people shape social environments (e.g. families) in their lives, which then have an influence on other people (e.g. children). Within a learning theory related to life course, it is the consequences of this shaping of social environments (e.g. the choice of a family lifestyle/a family model) in terms of their effects on life and learning in later phases that ought to be investigated. Looking at a life course, the fact that the conditions for future learning are also changed by current learning should be taken much more into account, i.e. it is not only the individual credentials that change (knowledge, skills, orientations), but also the objective situation as a framework for future learning activities.

I like to explain this idea in a chart, graph/table:



Analyses of lifetime learning need to perceive learning as being embedded in each life history with its individual and institutional options and constraints. Learning activities have to be analysed in their temporal succession and in the light of personal and social conditions. Furthermore it is necessary to emphasise that individual life experiences affect the selection of pathways. As Heinz asserts: "Once a decision is made, the person's involvement reinforces her biographical characteristics and makes other alternatives less attractive" (Heinz 2009: 427).

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**Identity capital – a useful
competence and expertise
with objective and subjective
dimensions**

Adults experience varied and manifold outcomes from participating in learning. In addition to strengthening or changing different objective positions through job change, advancement, higher education, higher income and extended social network, this study shows that subjective elements are especially distinctive as immediate outcomes. Increased self-confidence, self-development, belief in one's own abilities and possibilities, increased communication abilities, co-operation abilities and increased abilities of leadership are described as immediate, subjective outcomes. Côté (1996), Côté and Levine (2002) og Schuller et al (2004) has promoted 'identity capital' as an important form of capital, that is seen to be important in order to meet challenges, readjustments and changes. 'Identity capital' is described as a certain readiness, that modern human beings need as an important competence. The concept has much in common with elements included as subjective outcomes in a study of adults participating in different learning activities.

Introduction

To participate in learning activities have several consequences for adults. Research findings show learning outcomes that are both heterogeneous and complex (Field 2000, Schuller et al 2004, Tønseth 2010). Learning outcomes are often related to accumulation of different forms of capital, which are made relevant in different situations and contexts: in working-life, in leisure time, in organisations, in daily-life and within different social networks. The most central form of capital that the educational-field assign, is school certificates that gives competence certification that can be invested in the labour market. This form of capital is called *education capital*, included as a part of the *cultural capital*, defined as confidence with the dominating culture and the intellectual world, as well as coping with finer cultures, lifestyles and tastes. *Social capital* means connections and networks such as family, friends and colleagues that have a potential in mobilising different forms of capital, while *education capital* can be exchanged into economical capital through income, fortune and materialistically values (Bourdieu 1986, Bourdieu and Waquant 1992).

Development in society is marked by rapid technological changes, globalisation and increased individualisation. This put some request to individual competences, orientation ability and ability to change. The society develops in a direction of a 'risk society' where new threats, risks and insecurities occur (Beck 1997). This development gives increased opportunities for individuals to choose, but at the same time individuals are made responsible, in order to follow this development. To find our place in this new society requires that individuals manage to orient themselves in the society (ibid). Each and everyone will be more or less equipped in order to manage these changes. Here, participation in learning activities can be a way to cope and manage. In this article the identity capital-concept is discussed in relation to adult learning outcomes as a component of the concept of competence. By the concept participant we mean adults participating on different learning activities/courses.

Identity capital is a relatively new concept that explains different resources that individuals can use in order to meet frequent changing social environments in modernity. Identity capital makes individuals able to participate and navigate in different social environments, at the same time as it contributes effectively to identity-construction (Côté 1996, 1997, 2007). Côté and Levine (2002 s.160) refers to Giddens (1996) and his reversion of the characteristic of modernity, and argue that identity capital is needed in order to manage in the modernity. With this as a fundamental conceptual, I want to investigate adult learning outcomes in relation to the identity capital concept and the concept of competence. The empirical foundation is a questionnaire (214) and interviews (N=24) conducted among adults participating in different learning activities/courses¹.

The 'identity capital' concept

Within social science, the capital concept refers to different resources that contribute to individual development, individual choices and actions, social adaption, economical productivity, self-actualisation, complicity, influence and power (Lerner 2000, Côté and Levine 2002). Bourdieu (1997) defined his understanding of the capital concept in the following way:

Capital, which, in its objectified or embodied forms, takes time to accumulate and which has potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form, contains a tendency to persist in its being, is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible. And the structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices (ibid s. 241-242).

According to Bourdieu (1986) there are three forms of capital, defined earlier as *economical, social and cultural* capital. Bourdieu emphasised the importance of objective structures, in order to create individual possibilities. Bourdieu claimed that we are structured into our 'inner core' (Priour 2002). As for taste and habitus², cultural capital is not only an individual, embodied competence, but it is also something that is given a certain value.

Bourdieu also claimed that capital accumulation depends on an individual's habitus and the types of capital that is emphasised within the social fields where the individuals are located (Bourdieu 1984). Côté and Levine (2002 s.145) emphasised that human and cultural capital does not intercept which resources individuals need to possess in the late modernity (ibid s.142). In opposition to Bourdieu, they claimed the individualisation process as being important to individuals, with special focus on the ability and possibility to act reflective, to accomplish a feeling of ownership, self-responsibility

1 Conducted as part of a doctoral thesis (Tønseth 2011).

2 Understood as incorporated and learned patterns of thought, behaviour or taste.

and the possibility to create their own life, so it becomes meaningful. Côté (Côté 1996, 1997, 2002, 2007, Côté and Levine 2002) therefore developed and introduced the identity capital concept, which is built on Bourdieu's (1986) capital concepts, but supplemented by a subjective reflexive dimension, emphasising the conscious subject, their emotions, attitudes and beliefs. Identity capital is described as: *"the varied resources deployable on an individual basis that represent how people most effectively define themselves and have others define them in various contexts"* (ibid). "Identity capital" is used to describe the psychological, subjective and individual learning outcomes, including the need for certain radars towards other people, making people able to adjust to different situations and to say and do the right things.

The psychological, subjective characteristics, defined as components of identity capital are strong self-esteem, strong feeling of personal control, self-efficacy³ and a positive psychological state (Field 2005). Identity capital develops through action and social interaction, and gets its influence by its later use in different social situations. Identity capital as learning outcome emerges by a transformative effect, where learning leads to significant changes in the professional and personal possibilities (ibid). Côté and Levine (2002 p.143) divides identity capital into visible and invisible dimensions. Visible dimensions are titles, contacts and memberships in different networks, and are a combination of Bourdieu's understanding of the objective dimensions of social and cultural capital. The invisible dimensions *"involves ego strengths that entail reflexive-agent capacities such as an internal locus of control, self-esteem, a sense of purpose in life, the ability to self-actualize, and critical thinking abilities"* (ibid p.144).

Unlike Bourdieu's capital concepts (Bourdieu 1986), the volume of identity capital is not limited by class differences. Identity capital is constructed through different social categories including class, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomically status, life phase and develops with the resources available in the social contexts where individuals participate (Côté and Levine 2002). The identity capital concept has been investigated through quantitative studies (Côté 1997, 2002, Côté and Schwartz 2002) and qualitative studies (Sundar 2008), indicating that identity capital are acquired and exchanged through social interaction (Balatti et al 2006 p.38).

Adults learning outcomes

In earlier studies on adult learning outcomes, two main outcome categories are separated; self-development and work-related outcomes. Studies show that learning outcomes both have subjective and objective dimensions (Johnstone and Rivera 1965, Cross 1982, Nordhaug 1982, 1983). According to these categories, Marcus (1976) introduced the concepts instrumental and expressive outcomes in his doctoral thesis. Instrumental outcomes include the satisfaction of important practical needs or

³ Defined in various ways, but often used as synonymous with *faith in his own mastery* or to master. Self-efficacy is also a key concept in Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory. The term appears to be something other than the concept of self-esteem that is about its own assessments of themselves.

goals, while expressive outcomes include enjoyment and delight. His findings were that instrumental and expressive outcomes are empirical separated categories. With age, a transition occurs from instrumental to more expressive outcomes, and age is the variable that strongest divide the two categories. Expressive outcomes are stronger connected to income, profession, education and being a woman. More prosperous lifestyles are strongest connected to expressive outcomes, while less prosperous lifestyles are connected to instrumental outcomes (ibid).

A wide range of studies accomplished by the *Centre for Research of the Wider Benefits of Learning* in England (1998-2008), has shown that learning outcomes in addition to economical productivity, employment and economic growth, also include considerable consequences for individuals, families and society. Findings indicate that participation in learning activities leads to positive changes in behaviour and attitudes, increased participation in the society, increased self-esteem, increased wellness, optimism and better health (Hammond and Feinstein 2005,2009, Preston and Feinstein 2004, Sabates and Hammond 2008).

This brief reversion of earlier research shows that learning outcomes have both subjective and objective dimensions. However, recent research indicates that different outcomes are related to different forms of capital, that can be accumulated and transformed through participation in learning activities. The different forms of capital represent different resources that can lead to changes in individual's possibilities and identity. Identity capital as learning outcomes emerge as a transformative effect where learning leads to significant changes in professional identity and personal possibilities (Schuller et al 2007). Recent studies try to link earlier relatively distinct dimensions through outcome transformation.

Bourdieu's (1990), Coleman's (1994, 1997) and Putnam's (1995) capital concepts are used in order to understand and explain transformation between different effects from learning. Here, human capital, social capital and identity capital represents three corners in a triangle. Measured direct and indirect effects from learning were located as points within this triangle. These effects were considered to be components of different forms of capital. These components shows that learning outcomes that can be defined as individual capabilities (Schuller et al 2004). Capabilities are defined as different combinations of beings and doings that individuals can acquire through education and learning. Knowledge, understanding and skills that have value on the labour market, are for instance, capability components of human capital. Concerning social capital, it is positive attitudes towards other people, willingness to participate in society activities and political engagement that represent the capability components of social capital. The psychological capacities, defined as capability components of identity capital, is, as mentioned before; self-esteem, feeling of personal control, self-efficacy and a positive psychological state. Identity capital also consists of generic capacities valued by the modern labour market, like flexibility, creativity, leadership qualities and ability to cooperate. All these components of identity capital are seen as capacities acquired through education and learning (ibid). These components are in themselves positive capacities, but they also generate further positive effects because they make individuals function effectively in working-life and in society. They can also

have a broader effect, when a strong self-esteem has a positive effect on the identity capital on the people one socialises with.

In a paper about adults and numeracy, Yasukawa et al (2008) use the concept of identity capital when they describe adults anxiety to mathematics, and the influence of social capital to their self-efficacy and self-esteem. In their study, the social environment in the classroom, became a catalyst in the building of identity capital, where increased believe in one's own coping and self-esteem were the central components. Findings related to social capital and identity capital as outcomes were also emphasised in a study where a course was arranged for adults with weak math skills, reading and writing abilities (Balatti et al 2006). The study showed how social networks in the class-environment, was related to the building of identity capital. Through the community of practice in the classroom, new resources were generated; increased reading-, writing- and mathematic- abilities, increased self-esteem, new ways to socialise and new friends. For many of the participants, the social environment in the classroom functioned as a new and safe environment, where the participants could try new aspects of their identity and practicing new skills, in addition to increased social capital (ibid s.38).

Method

The data material is based on a questionnaire and interviews that was originally carried out among adult participants in another study⁴. The data material included in this study a questionnaire carried out when 214 adult participants had finished⁵ their different courses. The courses were different spare-time courses, general studies, vocational education and university/university college studies. The courses were organised as online courses, correspondence courses, combined models and ordinary classroom studies. In this range of participants 30 % were men and 70 % were women and most of them (65 %) were working and was established with family and children (62 %).

Semi-structured interviews were also carried out with 24 adult participants in different learning activities, recruited from the 214 participants answering the questionnaire. In the interview material there were 25 % men and 75 % women in the age of 22 to 50 years, where most of them were established with their own family and children. Also these participants were spread on different courses and organisers. This paper is based on the interviews carried out at the beginning and at the end of each course. Because many of the students were living in different areas of Norway, some of the interviews were carried out by phone. This functioned rather well, in spite of the disadvantages this kind of data collection can lead to, as the missing opportunity to capture the body language and the tendency to get shorter and quicker answers.

⁴ The data are part of a doctoral thesis (Tønseth 2011) that included a questionnaire survey conducted in the same range both when the courses started (about expectations and motives) and at the end of each course (about the experiences and outcomes). It also included interviews that were conducted in the same range for both the course's start where the motives and expectations was the focus, and at the end, where the interview subjects about experiences and outcomes.

⁵ Conducted when the various courses was finished in 2001 and 2002.

Questionnaire Outcomes

In the questionnaire at the end of each course, the respondents were asked to evaluate their own outcomes by stating their agreement to different statements. A factor analysis⁶ of these assessments showed that 26 of 27 statements were grouped into three factors; (i) *recognition and new orientation*, (ii) *qualification and recognition at work* and (iii) *self-development*. The variables intern consistence, measured by Cronbachs alpha⁷, was high (0,9) within all factors.

Table 1 – Participation outcomes. Three factors. N=214

<i>Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Values over 0,4 were kept.</i>	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Comm.
	Recognition and new orientation	Qualification and recognition at work	Self development	
I have got away from personal problems	,729			.65
I've had joy	,724			.74
I have been motivated for more learning	,624			.65
I am qualified for more education	,616			.68
I have received higher recognition among family and friends	,606			.56
I have learned to be a better spouse/ partner	,605			.51
I have learned something that makes me function better	,570			.49
I've got education	,569			.51
I have developed myself in relation to rel. leisure activity	,545			.61
I have got more faith in myself	,539		,516	.68
I have broken the old routines	,520			.42
I have learned much about courses model	,502			.53
I have repeated old knowledge	,460			.68
I have qualified to continue in my job		,797		.67
I have qualified for higher wages		,792		.67
I have qualified for new tasks		,779		.76
I have learned to do a better job		,777		.69
I have received higher recognition at work		,721		.64
I can do work that I was not allowed to perform		,510		.58
I have been involved in something I like			,764	.72
I have learned more about interesting topics			,751	.68
I've done something meaningful			,667	.61
I have improved my quality of life			,641	.68
I have developed myself	,481		,628	.61
I have increased my general knowledge			,530	.68
Eige value	8,23	2,76	2,19	
Explained variance %	30,5	10,2	8,1	
Cronbach's alpha	0,9	0,9	0,9	

6 A factor analysis is a technique that analyzes the structure of correlations in data sets consisting of many questions (items) to determine whether there are common underlying dimensions / factors.

7 Cronbach's alpha is a measure of how well a set of variables measures a one-dimensional latent structure.

The results show that the factor *recognition and new-orientation* has a higher eigenvalue than the factor *qualification of job and self-development*, and explains more of the variation in the observed variables than the other factors. The factor recognition and new-orientation consists of statements concerning the fact that they have escaped from personal problems, got more recognition among their family and friends, they have become a better partner, learned something that makes them function better in the society and increased their own belief in themselves. The factor self-development includes statements concerning that one can do a kind of work that they could not do before, they had participated in something that they liked, learnt more about interesting topics, done something meaningful in their spare time, increased the quality of life, developed themselves as human beings and increased their general knowledge.

This factor includes fewer variables that for instance Skaalvik et al (2000)⁸ found in their survey. Variables that Skaalvik et al found were connected to the factor self-development and in this study are associated to the factor recognition and new-orientation. Both *qualification and recognition at work* and recognition and new-orientation has more variables that were included in the self-development factor. The outcome-factor *recognition and new-orientation* therefore has more variables that is connected to different contexts in adults life.

It is attempting to interpret this as subjective reflective statements connected to the more subjective outcome elements directed towards a work-context, for example by interpreting work-related outcomes that are recognised as subjective elements in the work – context. Bourdieu (1990) states that subjective and objective structures are connected through the habitus concept and those subjective elements are internalised into the objective structures. With Bourdieus constructivistic approach, emphasising that we are constructed into our inner (ibid), such a connection will be as expected. The results are also interesting from the general tendency that the different spheres in adult's life are more and more connected to each other (Field 2000). In this way, self development, that before was associated with hobbies and spare-time activities, (see Skaalvik et al 2000), can also be about developing in different ways at work, in organisations, in social networks etc..

The new outcome-factor in this study; *recognition and new-orientation* includes statements where the outcomes include both subjective and objective dimensions. The subjective dimensions are outcomes concerning self-development, increased self-efficacy, life enjoyment, increased learning motivation etc., while the objective outcomes concerns education qualification, new working tasks, new job and new spare-time activities.

Interview Outcomes

The interviews clarify the connection between subjective and objective outcomes, by the informants clarifying the objective transformations of getting a new joy eg life, increased self-esteem and by

⁸ Ran with equivalent items.

learning more about themselves. Participation in learning crystallises different recourses that produce different kind of outcomes.

When asked about outcomes, interviewees primarily outline the fresh impressions they were left with after the course was finished. Impressions can be strong after an intensive exam period, experiencing the social community in a classroom as being extra strong. Some researchers distinguish between immediate and long-term outcomes (Schuller et al 2001). Immediately after the course finishing, the subjective outcomes are most prominent, while the objective dimensions will become more gradually visible (see Field 2000).

The timing when measuring outcomes is not trivial and it is perhaps why the results are different from other studies (eg. Skaalvik et al 2000). There is still a clear conclusion from the interviews that the participants have learned a lot, they have developed themselves in different ways and they have learned something about themselves. The subjective dimensions are thus related both to self-development, the view of themselves and the joy of learning. For example, the interviewees included the following outcomes:

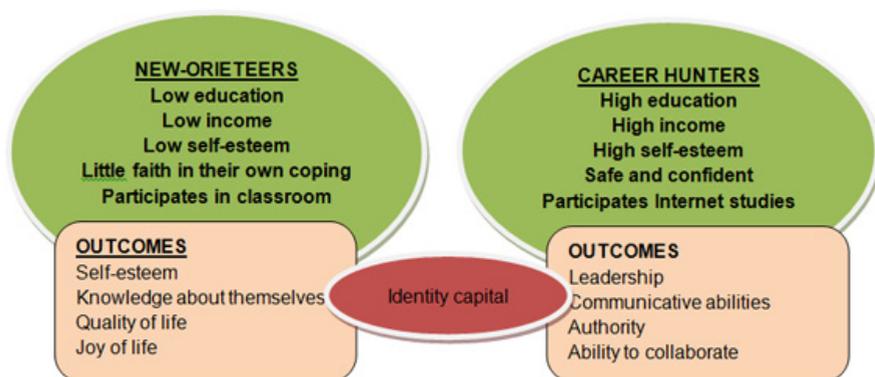
- » Gained a different view of themselves, became more mature.
- » Recognition.
- » Learned a lot.
- » Won more confidence.
- » Gained new friends.
- » Discovered that it's fun to learn.
- » Learned more about themselves.
- » Learned how to learn.
- » Extended their horizon.
- » Want to learn more.
- » Increased integrity.
- » Found out that they can and know more than they think.
- » Learned about ways to communicate and argue.
- » Got more knowledge.
- » Changed outlook on life.
- » Gained new zest for life.
- » Developed leadership skills.
- » Improved ability to cooperate.
- » Mastered new challenges.
- » Perceived to have been clever.

Outcome statements can be seen as different capabilities of human capital, social capital, cultural capital and identity capital. It also noted that the interviewees have increased communication capability, improved leadership skills, developed an understanding for others, and improved collaboration

capabilities. All these elements correspond to the various capabilities which are related to social capital, and include the psychosocial ability to adapt, construct and present their identity in different social situations and perceive and respond to different social cues (Côté and Levine 2002 p. 158-159). Through interviews, the participants expressed that these capabilities will be used actively in various areas of life and in different contexts; occupation, education, leisure, social life and family life. Capabilities are thus resources primarily located in (i) a subjective level with their own perceptions and expectations, but developed and used in (ii) an interactional level. These capabilities can again be transformed into a (iii) objective/structural level with positions that involves different expectations (see Côté 1996).

‘New-orientees’ and ‘career hunters’ outcomes

Both the survey and the interviews showed that it was especially participants with low education, participants with low self-efficacy, unemployed participants and participants who took part in classroom training that emphasised increased self-esteem, increased quality of life and that they had learned more about themselves. These participants were included among the ‘new-orientees’. In contrast, the ‘career hunters’ reported work and career related outcomes, where the subjective elements were aimed at getting more influence, better leadership, more cooperation at work, more recognition and sense of authority at work. These career hunters were highly educated, confident, self-mastery and attended college and university courses as web-based teaching. Bourdieu argued that to acquire the same object, or in this context to participate in learning, are socially different, since they are parts of different lifestyles (1986). Both the questionnaire and the interviews show that the importance of accumulating and exchanging capabilities through participation in learning, manifests itself somewhat differently among groups of adults. The differences were especially pronounced between the new-orientees and career hunters.⁹



⁹ The other two groups were “life-enjoyers” which was well-established adults attended spare time related course to develop a leisure activity, and the “establishers” who were young adults who participated in university

Silvia is one of the representatives of the new-orientees. She completed interior design as a combination of classroom teaching and private study, with mandatory submission of papers on the Internet. During the interview, she presented outcomes that included many elements. She claimed she had learned much about both the subject and about herself. In addition, she had made new friends. She also discovered that success and mastery did something with the desire to try out new challenges. The same elements also stressed Hanne, who completed courses in economy. She emphasised that she had made new friends, gained more confidence, discovered new aspects of herself and new knowledge of what she can and cannot do. These elements are examples that Schuller et al (2001) calls the “wider benefits of learning”, which refers to various individual capabilities which extends beyond the purely economic.

Hanne says:

Yes, I've got more faith in that I can do things. Because if you see that it is possible to manage in one area, and to do things with your life, then you will probably manage in other areas too. It was something I experienced. I started a process where I wanted to do something with my life.

Hanne emphasises the experience of managing, which can be transferred to other situations and contexts. For her, this was a driving force in terms of making different changes in life. Kerstin takes general topics at a private school, she says:

I've just found out that I might be a little more structured than I thought I was - I actually am quite purposeful. Especially in science, when everything looked hopeless and I could not comprehend and understand how to learn it. You work with yourself and want to learn. You can sit at home and wonder how to learn, but still set goals and creates plans on how to do it... When asked if she has more faith in herself she says: “Yes, I have. So I think that I have expanded my horizons quite a bit. Now it's fun to watch the news, because I understand what they are talking about (laughter). I have not attended school since I was a child, and it has been very interesting.

Kerstin emphasises that she has learned much about herself, and she manages a lot more than she thought. She also emphasises a greater confidence in herself and has discovered the interest of learning. Marit has been a certified nursing assistant at an adult school. As Kerstin, she says that she has learned a lot by participating, not at least about herself:

I know myself a lot better now. I've also realised that I know a lot, stuff that I thought was not possible for me to learn. I have also discovered that I really am very stubborn in relation to finish things.

New-orientees express diverse outcomes. In this group, identity capital is accumulated through an increased self-esteem, increased confidence, knowledge about themselves, improved quality of life and greater enjoyment of life. Career Hunters provide relatively few elements when they describe their outcomes. They describe that they have achieved what they expected, and not much more than that. Identity capital in this group was accumulated through increased leadership skills, skills in arguing and discussing, and they are more compelling and keen at work. Christopher is one of the representatives of the career hunters Christopher, who attended a course in management and organisation at the online school, said:

I have received full credit from the course. Perhaps especially in discussions and meetings I have got hooks to hang things on. Become better at debating, has more arguments available and improved management skills. I now understand management and organizational learning.

Ann who attended a course in business administration at the online school says:

I've got good exam results and have got knowledge about management and leadership. I expect to get new tasks at work, more responsibility and the additional salary steps as I expected initially. I also hope to get a more conductive function in the company in a while.

Both Christopher and Ann emphasises leadership. Christopher, because he has improved in discussions and Ann, because she has gained increased knowledge of leadership, which she expects will give her more responsibility at work. Kenneth, who has taken the IT programme through the online school, also highlights the same outcomes. He says:

I have got a more systematic look at things... I got so many eye-opening experiences while I was reading. Besides, I'm better at work and can read other people in new ways. I think I'm better off financially also, by the wage increases and the increased responsibility.

The subjective outcomes that particularly the new-orientees state, such as: "I have developed my abilities," "I have developed myself," "I have got more faith in myself," could be interpreted as outcomes that will increase their subjective positions. The subjective outcomes provided, may be a new status for their subjective position, which also can be seen as the accumulation of identity capital. A new status related to the objective position will eventually be a new job, new position or new social networks. Career Hunters did not emphasise the same subjective elements as the new-orientees. The resources included in the career hunters' identity capital is increasingly linked to the sense of greater authority, better leadership skills, communication skills and teamwork skills. It appears that the career hunters focus on other types of capabilities than the new-orientees.

Accumulation of “identity capital” with social network as a catalyst

As Giddens (1994 a and b, 1996) has pointed out, individuals nowadays are more dependent on their environment in order to confirm their own value. The questionnaire and interviews showed that the importance of the social network was perceived differently among the new-orientees to the career hunters. The new-orientees emphasised the positive effect of being included in a friendly, supportive social environment, assuming that we are social beings who want to interact with others, get friends, get confirmation, support, encouragement from others, etc.. The second meaning was that they wanted to have someone to learn with, discuss with and receive confirmation and feedback from.

Although identity capital is a separate capital form, it is still related to cultural and social capital (Côté and Levine 2002). Identity capital is the psychosocial ability to adapt, construct and present their identity in different social situations and perceive and respond to different social environments (ibid p.158-159). Previous research has shown that identity capital is acquired and exchanged through social interaction. Through social interaction, individuals achieve a common understanding with others about what is considered to be an acceptable response in a given situation. This mutual acceptance allows individuals to collect identity capital and thus increase the stock of what one is (ibid p.143). Related to that Bourdieu primarily maintains social capital as a privilege for the elites in society (Field 2003 p.20, 28, 40), the interviews show that social capital is very important for the outcomes that the new-orientees emphasise. Field (2009) has through his research, shown that social relations can be used deliberately to increase opportunities for life change and identity construction through participation in learning (ibid). For the new-orientees it's all about the benefits one can have from participating in the social networks, such as support, as discussion partners and as a safety environment. The importance of social capital in the group of new-orientees is not to accumulate more social capital because they have little such capital from before, but it rather seems to be a resource in accumulating identity capital.

For the new-orientees, the desire to participate in a supportive classroom environment was an important consideration. Affiliation, support, confidence, encouragement and discussions with others were mentioned as reasons to participate in classroom teaching. This was strategic and for some aimed at providing lasting friendships (increase social capital), and for others a nice unexpected bonus of participating in a class environment. Social capital was for the participants in the class environment, a collective phenomenon that any member of this environment could benefit from. This collective aspect of social capital was particularly emphasised by Coleman (1997), where the trust or the occurrence of mutual trust is described as important for the accumulation of social capital (Fukuyama 1995). For the new-orientees, the classroom environment represented a confidence aspect in relation to their insecurity (cf. Coleman 1994). The social capital is generated through new friendships, confirmation and positive feedback from their classmates, and not least from the adult educators who are perceived as part of the social class environment. Recognition from others was described as an important benefit

for the new-orientees. The social capital, however, was perceived as very unimportant for the career hunters. The career hunters' considerations around a social learning environment and the social network, was that the classroom environment would be disturbing in their own learning process. They did not want to be social; they would only deal with what was learned. Their family, friends and work colleagues covered their social needs. They had no need for a social learning environment, either to increase the belief in themselves or to have someone to have fun with. It is tempting to explain this by saying that career hunters already possess the resources as new-orientees accumulate by participating in a social learning environment. Rather, career hunters acquired leadership, authority, communication skills and ability to cooperate, which are also the capabilities of identity capital.

Identity capital and strengthened subjective and objective positions

The way I interpret the concept of identity capital includes subjective outcomes that are about the accumulation of various capabilities. Increased self-confidence, self-development, learned new aspects about themselves, developed the ability to acquire new knowledge and skills, developing leadership skills, experience greater authority, became better at communicating and developing collaborative capacity are examples of such capabilities. As cultural, social and economic capital can be accumulated in order to strengthen the objective positions, as Bourdieu argued, one can imagine that accumulation of identity capital can improve the subjective perceptions of their objective positions (Tønseth 2011). Paldanius (2002) writes in his doctoral thesis about outcomes as capital markers. Identity capital will, like other types of capital, have an objective dimension implying that it can be converted to a strengthened professional position. Mastering, leadership, authority and communication skills are subjective outcomes that are valued and traded in the modern job market. All these capabilities of identity capital are seen as subjective attributes acquired through participation in learning. This seems to support Côté's (1996) assertion, claiming that identity capital is a resource that the late modern increasingly requires, in order to strengthen objective positions, make active choices and actions and participate in different social environment and different contexts.

Social development, including improved economic and personalised options for individuals, allows people to create their own lives more freely, as Giddens (1996) points out. Fewer worries about unemployment and economic difficulty means that the individual will have greater freedom of action and probably experience a greater degree of goodwill and support from the environment. Field (2000 p.36) argues that the increased focus on individual opportunities, choice and self-realisation, to a greater extent paved the way for lifelong learning as an individual project. We act more and more like we all have an unresolved inner potential (ibid).

The importance of accumulating different capabilities seems to be dependent on the participant's subjective and objective positions. According to Bourdieu's field theory, different objective positions within a given social field (such as a professional position), indicates the need for new/upgraded capital so people constantly can portray themselves as active agents, and strengthen their position in the field. Positions are objectively given by the composition of capital and what is seen as valuable assets within a social field (ibid). The results from the survey and interviews emphasise the new-orientees and the career hunters' different approach to identity capital – accumulation, and shows that the objective position also limits the possibility to accumulate such capital. Based on Bourdieu's perspective, the subjective and objective positions could not be viewed independently, but rather as two perspectives that influence and complement each other, and makes us whole people. Such links between subjective and objective positions appear in the data, while the subjective perspective of the participants' subjective positions appears to be highly visible against the benefit provided.

According to Bourdieu (1984, 1990) we are still in a modern society, but with post-modern influences. The post structural elements in the class structure, is characterised by the dominant discourse with updated information on all the new capabilities introduced in the society. This means that even though there are more signs of change and greater freedom for individuals, Bourdieu pointed out that the structures seem to continue through the class structure (ibid).

Identity capital as a dimension of the concept of competence

A common definition of competencies are skills, abilities, knowledge, capabilities and other personal qualities that contributes to how people master situations, solve problems and exercise various tasks (Hodkinson and Issitt 1995, Hoffmann 1999, Holding 1989). Capabilities refers to the internal capacity to coordinate a set of resources to perform certain tasks or activities (Wiklund 1998). In association with identity capital, capabilities refer to the subjective personal resources. The capabilities which are provided by the participants in this study, is thus primarily directed towards the subjective dimensions included in the concept of competence.

Different capabilities are emphasised by different groups of adults. While the new-orientees emphasises self-confidence, self-development, happiness, increased confidence and increased ability to learn, career hunters emphasise development of leadership skills, experiencing a sense of authority, communication skills and teamwork skills. Regardless, these capabilities in various ways are related to the social environment; New-orientees in that they use the social environment in the acquisition of the capabilities and career hunters in that they supply capabilities in their social environment.

Different forms of capital are not only an expression of the individual's competence, but are something that is valued by others. The competence concept would like the capital concept have both a subjective

and an objective dimension. It is the subjective outcomes that could be filled by the various capabilities of identity capital concept. Identity capital can thus be seen as a subjective dimension of the concept of competence, which is related to the different objective positions. In this way, identity capital is not independent of objective structures, but operates in relation to these structures.

Capabilities, as the participants expressed, can be considered as subjective components of various forms of capital, which can be exchanged and transformed through social interaction and strengthen the different objective positions. With the support from international studies, the Norwegian White Paper (No. 30 2003-2004) *Culture for learning* explains the concept of competence as the ability to use knowledge and skills effectively and creatively in different situations. The paper sums up the concept of competence as the ability to meet a complex challenges, or to perform a complex activity or task. The White Paper *Culture for learning* sees the competence concept in relation to overcoming challenges and demands of today's and tomorrow's society. The competence concept is linked to the broad and comprehensive concept of knowledge, which was adopted for the entire education system in connection with education reforms in Norway in the nineties.

In Norway, we have an educational system that reflects a visionary change, both concerning learning, knowledge and expertise. A traditional view, in which learning is about communicating the established knowledge and the cultural heritage, has been replaced with a greater emphasis on the ability to use different skills in a meaningful way. Action competence means that individuals are competent to assess the knowledge needed in each situation, the social relationships that must be mobilised, and how to use themselves (Østerud 2006). Through the data presented, identity capital is seen as a relevant component of the concept of competence, readiness skills that can be built up, related to, and interconnected with other components (types of skills or forms of capital) in different contexts. The results reveal a capital form and a skill that seems to be relevant as outcomes of adult learning. Identity capital is described as useful competence that people need in modern society. The concept has much in common with the various resources that are distributed as participation outcomes, where the different resources stands out as different dimensions of identity capital. The findings also show a development in the thinking about outcomes of participation that can be useful for adult participants in learning, training providers, researchers, and not at least in education policy. Here, identity capital can be a concept covering the relevant expertise, which includes academic, social and personal dimensions.

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Enhanced autonomy as a transition effect in University Continuing Education: how a postgraduate study programme forms a transition in students' biographies and increases their occupational autonomy experience

Introduction

Transition research deals with various life events that cause changes and shifts in identity and agency (Ecclestone 2009) such as marriage, parenthood, divorce, illness, career entry or job change. Research results on transitions in the field of university education have focused so far basically on the entry into a regular study programme or, after such a study programme, into the first job. However, postgraduate study programmes as a growing component of university continuing education can also be regarded as transition phases in students' biographies. The exploration of the main characteristics of this transition experience forms the research basis for a study at the University of Bielefeld, Germany from which selected extracts will be reported in the following.

For this purpose in this article I will first illustrate how the term 'transition' is understood since there are many similar concepts to describe distinctive changes in a person's biography and the terms are not always used consistently. In addition the term 'postgraduate study programme' needs further specification as, in the context of this study, it refers to the German university system. Researching postgraduate university programmes as biographical transitions then requires a special methodology that focuses, on the one hand, on the transition itself and includes in addition a person's biography up to that point on the other. Therefore a problem-centred interview (Witzel 2000) was combined with the lifeline method (for example Assink, Schroots 2010) to meet this challenge.

First findings from the interview analysis suggest that, depending on their approach to create the occupational biography, a postgraduate programme enhances students' autonomy experience in different ways, due to anticipated job-related changes in the future as well as to changes already experienced.

Postgraduate study programmes as transitions

This chapter serves to clarify the two main terms in this article, 'transition' and 'postgraduate study programme', since biographical changes are defined and characterised heterogeneously and university structures vary in different countries. On the basis of the defined terms the research design is going to be presented at the end of this chapter.

Transition

Concepts on distinctive change in a person's biography are as manifold as the life events evoking change. Prominent examples related to educational contexts are status passage (Glaser, Strauss 1971), developmental tasks (Erikson 1959) or rites of passage (van Gennepe 1972) which view change from different disciplinary perspectives and with varying focuses. In contrast to these concepts the term transition does not only refer to normative passages during the life course and the state before and after a change, but also includes critical life events, like illness or job loss, and also focuses the process of change (Welzer 1993: 37).

Typical transition characteristics were identified for example by Welzer, a German social psychologist, studying Germans who moved from Eastern to Western Germany after the German reunification. Based on his findings he suggests several general characteristics of transitions which include changes in the relationship to others, compensation of losses, varying developments depending on the individual interpretation of the situation and linearisation of the past (Welzer 1993: 284-299). In addition Adams and Hopson point out that predictability and voluntariness are meaningful transition dimensions (Adams, Hopson 1976: 6).

In the context of this study socialisation theory also offers a productive perspective on possible transition characteristics since the transition that is caused by a postgraduate study programme can be regarded as a new socialisation process. Therefore it is likely to go along with the main characteristics of such a process, like acquisition of a new role, entry into a new group, internalisation of new norms and values, coping with losses and stress (Weymann 2004: 17, Glaser, Strauss 1971: 2, Spierer 1981: 45).

Postgraduate study programme

In addition to transition the other main term in the context of the study is post-graduate study programme¹. It refers to the German university system which strongly differentiates between basic academic courses and continuing education programmes. 'Regular' German students enter university directly after school graduation with their *Abitur* (A-levels) and leave it with a Bachelors' or a Masters' degree. University continuing education addresses those graduates after some years of work experience and offers them special Masters' programmes which are separated from the basic Masters' programmes. In contrast to the 'regular' students the postgraduate students need to have at least more than one year of work experience as an entry requirement (HRK 2004: 26). Those programmes are often offered in a part-time structure so that the students do not have to stop working while they are studying.

By definition postgraduate courses can only be Masters' and not Bachelors' programmes since they are based upon a first academic degree. Nevertheless for example private universities of Applied Sciences include Bachelors' programmes into their offer, which are studied part-time and require job experience. They can therefore, from the students' perspective, also be regarded as continuing education and are included into the study.

Research design

The aim of the current research is to explore a postgraduate study programme from a transition perspective and to identify the central characteristics of this special transition phase in students' biographies. For that purpose postgraduate students (at the end of their studies) and graduates

¹ In the following I will reduce the term „postgraduate study programme“ to „programme“, if the context makes clear that the postgraduate course is meant.

(shortly after their graduation) from different universities are being interviewed with the help of a problem-centred interview and the lifeline method, which will be presented more detailed in the next chapter. Five interviews have already taken place with time durations between 1.33 and 2.38 hours. The sampling and the interview analysis are based on the Grounded Theory Methodology according to Strauss and Corbin (2008).

Using the life-line method in transition research

In the following section the life-life method is explained, referring to previous examples of its application in different research fields. How this method has been adapted and applied in the context of this study, will form a second key aspect of this chapter. Drawing conclusions from the implementation of the method in this study, the benefits of the method for transition research in general will be pointed out.

Life-line examples from other research fields

Researchers from different disciplines apply the life-line method in various ways. In organisational research it can be implemented for instance to visualise how employees perceived their developing relation to suppliers (Moldaschl 2009). The following figure illustrates such a life-line (English translations: CL).

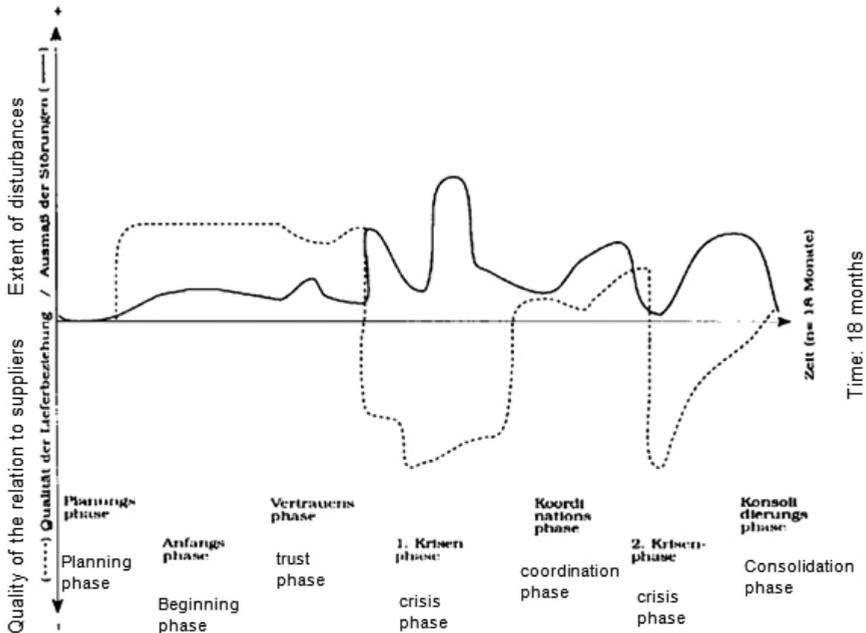


Figure 1: Life-line in organisational research (Endres, Wehner 1995, p. 28)

Already by the 1980s Schroots had developed the so called Life-line Interview Method (LIM) to study autobiographical memory from a psychological perspective. He argues that most humans think of their lives as a journey with ups and downs so that the task of drawing a life-line curve does not need many explanations (cf. Assink, Schroots 2010, p.7). Figure 2 exemplifies his work.

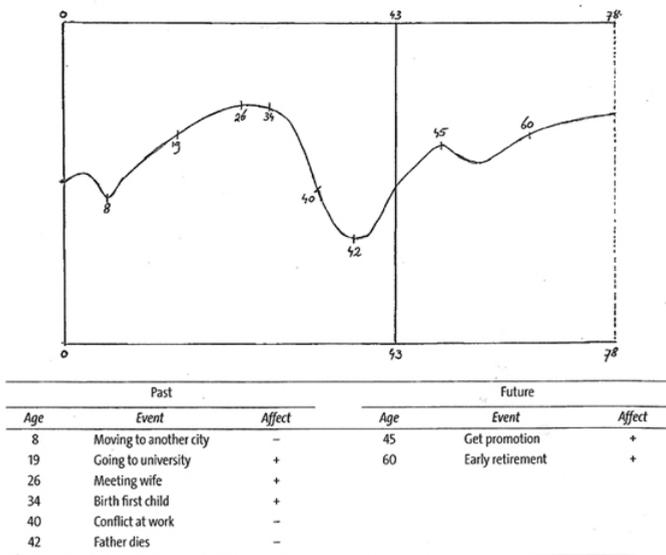


Figure 2: Life-line in memory research (Assink, Schroots 2010: 16)

Despite Schroot's argument the life-line has also been applied without using a curve, as the following example from a study of young women's developmental transitions within nursing research shows:

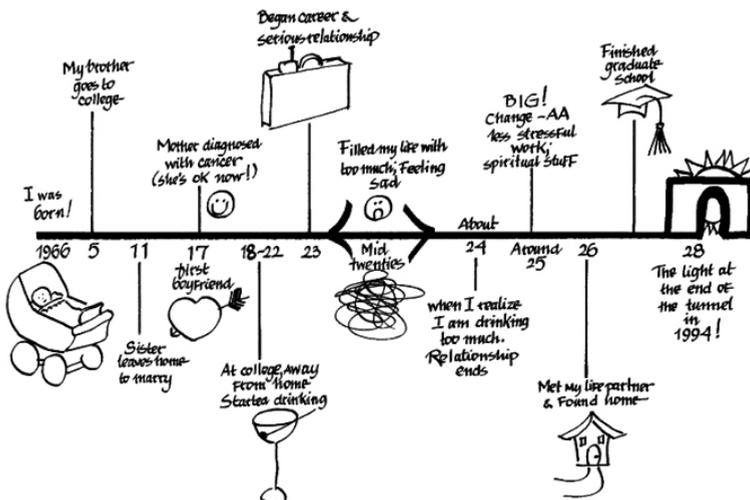


Figure 3: Life-line in life history / nursing research (Gramling, Carr 2004, p. 209)

The examples demonstrate that the life-line method offers a productive approach to visualise processes and how those processes are perceived and assessed by those passing them through. Therefore the method promises to generate fruitful results in transition research as well.

Adapted life-line procedure in transition research

Using the mentioned researchers' methodological ideas as an orientation a life-line procedure was developed which especially fits the needs of this transition study, illustrated in figure 4.

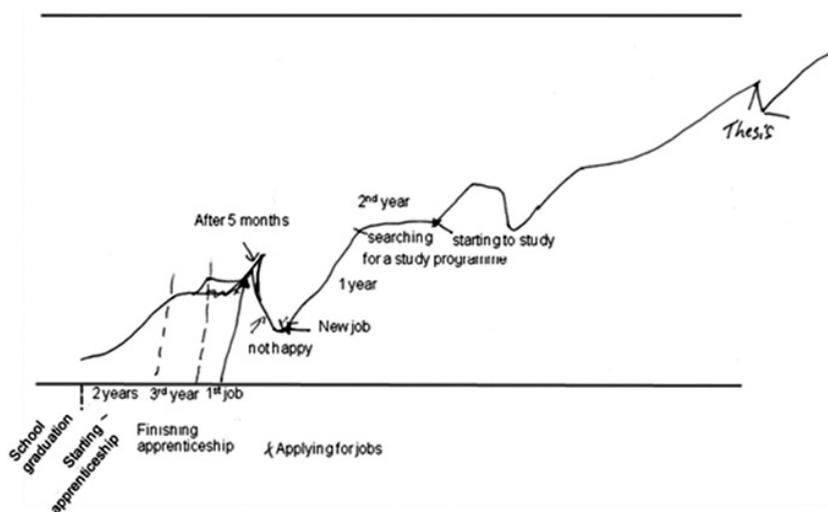


Figure 4: Life-line in transition research

As the emphasis of this study is placed on the students' adult biographies the biographical starting point for the life-line method within the interviews is the graduation from school. The interview partners are asked to draw their path of life as a line with all the ups and downs into the sheet of paper beginning by thinking back of the time when they graduated from school. The prepared parameters at the upmost and downmost position serve as an orientation to mark those phases in life which were extraordinarily happy or bad.

The interviewers' task is to point out that there is no need to draw a perfect line as its purpose is mainly to aid with the memory and illustrate processes. There are always additional life-line sheets available in an interview so that the interview partners can start again, adjust or draw several life-lines for different areas in life. When they start drawing they are encouraged to vocalise their train of thoughts and inscribe the important life events and turning points. During and after the drawing phase the interviewer asks further questions about the mentioned life events for a better understanding of

their meaning for the students' biographies. In addition the interview guideline reminds the interviewer to include certain questions which turned out to be relevant for the analysis: How changes in the job were perceived, which idea the interview partners have of their future occupational development and which experiences they made in former learning settings.

Benefits of the life-line method in transition research

As in general the purpose of transition research is to learn more about a certain transition in somebody's life, it is reasonable to concentrate on that transition within the research design. However, a biographical transition can only be understood in the context of a person's biography, for which reason it is also helpful to integrate the biographical context in transition research.

The life-line method offers an attractive possibility to visualise, in a relatively short time, a person's life history, reveal outstanding life events (turning points) and put them in relation to a current transition. As the method can easily be integrated into other forms of data collection, like an interview or a group discussion, it is a productive instrument to add a biographical perspective to a research design primarily focusing on only one life event.

With the help of the method previous experiences with transitions in the same or other areas of life can be remembered and ups and downs during the transition process itself are narrated. In case of a voluntary transition the lifeline can reveal deeper motives why the change is induced. As for the interview partner, the drawing of the curve can be helpful by offering additional time in remembering important life events and the curve itself produces transparency in the dialogue for both interviewer and the interview partners.

Transition effects from a postgraduate study programme on the occupational biography

Based upon the biographical narrations of three interview partners the following chapter will illustrate how the postgraduate study programme is integrated in the students' approaches to create their occupational biography and include continuing education in it. Depending on their strategies the programme has different influences on their occupational biographies and the scope they feel they have for shaping it by themselves.

Occupational portrait of the interview partners

Frank M.²

Frank M. is 48 years old, married and has two children (16 and 19). At the time of the interview he has worked as an instructor for technical courses in a big company for seventeen years. Having started his occupational biography with an apprenticeship as an electrician and afterwards doing his military service, Frank M. then worked in the technical sector of different institutions over a period of nine years and during that time completed several continuing education programmes. About half a year before the interview he graduated in a part-time Masters' programme on education and training.

Max K.

Max K. is a 38 year old single man, who has worked in an executive position in an advertising agency for five years. After his apprenticeship as a publishing sales assistant he worked in the marketing sector on a publishing house and completed a part-time continuing education programme. He then decided to go to university, however his O-levels did not provide him an access. So Max K. quit his job and went back to basic education in order to gain the necessary qualification to study economics at a university of Applied Sciences. Later on he switched over to commercial law, in which he graduated in 2000. Since then he has worked in the marketing sector of different companies up to his current position. In 2007 he started a part-time Masters' programme on Marketing and Sales, which he completed in 2009. In addition to his professional and learning activities Max K. is engaged in the German Armed Forces since the time of his military service.

Manuel H.

Manuel H. is 32 years old, unmarried, in a committed relationship and has a one year old son. He has worked for four years, together with Max K., in an advertising agency in an executive position. After his graduation from school he started to study economics at a University of Applied Sciences and completed his studies in 2004. He found his first job as the head of sales in a discount supermarket, where he stayed for two years although the working conditions soon became almost unbearable. Finally he quit the job without having a new position and became unemployed for 8 months until he found a job at his current company. In 2008 he follows his colleague Max K. into the part-time Masters' programme on Marketing and Sales. At the time of the interview he is writing his Master thesis.

All interview partners have worked full-time during their postgraduate studies.

² All names have been changed to guarantee anonymity

Creating an occupational biography: different approaches

Frank M.

Concerning his occupational future Frank M. rather takes things as they come instead of steering his career into a certain direction by setting goals. Frank M. is trustful that occupational options will “occur” to him (I1, p. 4, l. 41³). Even though Frank M. draws a positive balance concerning his approach and says he will maintain it (I1, p. 20, ll. 7) he also concedes disadvantages. He narrates, for example, that he already recognised during his apprenticeship that he wanted to work as an instructor (I1, p. 16, ll. 26), however he never realised any attempts to reach this goal until finally a coincidence led him there:

And then the head of personnel told me, er, we don't need people like you here, just go and search for something new. And then he gave me the job as a trainer in G-town [another branch of the same company in another town (CL)]. And that's why I say: Often things just occur. That means I was not supposed to stay where I was and where I should go I had always wanted to be⁴ (I1, p. 18, ll. 26).

On the basis of his occupational experiences Frank M. shows a high trust in his environment as he is confident that occupational options will be offered to him. He has had very positive experiences on the labour market so far, since whenever he applied for a job that he really wanted to have, he was able to be so convincing that he was hired (I1, p. 20, ll. 5). After his school graduation he applied for an apprenticeship in only three companies he really wanted to work in, whereas his school mates wrote thirty to forty applications, and he succeeded (I1, p. 20, ll. 22). In contrast to Max K. and Manuel H. he did not experience unemployment and did not have to search in vain for a suitable job, neither does he report negative experiences in occupational relations. So Frank M. is characterised by a high trust in his occupational environment and in his own capabilities to find a job. This might explain his calmness regarding his occupational future.

Max K.

At first sight Max K.'s approach to create his occupational biography is characterised by ambivalence. On the one hand he has clear wishes and goals for his occupational biography, which he partly developed already in his childhood (for example becoming an officer in the army) and for which he has worked hard and determinedly (I2, p. 31, ll. 39). In addition to becoming an officer he enumerates more “life goals” (I2, p. 35, l. 29) that he has already reached, for example completing his studies with a proper mark, starting a doctorate, being a lecturer at a university, providing leadership, being a member

3 I = Interview; p. = page; l. = line; ll. = more than one line

4 All translations of quotations: CL

of the management (I2, p. 31, ll. 16). It is noticeable that his life goals consist of both educational and occupational goals, which seem to be independent from each other. After this enumeration of life goals it is surprising that on the other hand Max K. then dissociates himself from any occupational planning:

*There **are** those people who plan that from the early childhood on, who plan such a course of development, but I think that you can only be really good in things that are fun to you. And I believe that it would be a mistake or for **me** it would be a mistake if I just planned things because of career-strategic reasons. I think that makes you unfree in a way. I think you have to do things that are fun and have to exclude things that are not fun and [...] I believe like this you will also have a good result. Then you will also have a good result for your career planning (I2, p. 31, ll. 6).*

For Max K. it is extraordinarily important in his occupational biography to have a job that is fun. Career ambitions are rather secondary to him. At the beginning of his statement it seems that career ambitions and fun exclude each other, however the statement reveals Max K.'s belief that success and fun are strongly connected.

Nevertheless it still remains a contradiction that Max K. on the one hand formulates concrete life goals and on the other hand states that planning makes you "unfree". How can this contradiction be explained? Looking closely at Max K.'s interview it seems that his life goals emerged as he started a new activity or alternatively were constructed by him in the retrospective. For example he mentioned "becoming a lecturer at a university" as one of his life goals, at the same time he narrates that the option of becoming a lecturer totally surprised him and that being a lecturer was something he would not have thought about if the chance had not occurred to him (I2, p. 14, ll. 17). So, it seems that Max K. constructs certain life goals in the retrospective, but does not really steer his occupational biography into a certain direction by setting career goals. Instead he identifies his interests and searches for activities and jobs that meet this interest.

In addition to this principle the interview analysis originated another even more important influence on Max K.'s approach to create his occupational biography which becomes obvious when he explains the mistake of a strategic career planning. In his opinion planning makes him unfree. Freedom constitutes the linking element which connects Max K.'s rather independent occupational and educational goals as for several occasions in his life he faced the experience of refused access or limited options, for example when he wanted to enter university with his O-Levels (see chapter 4.1) or when he suffered a period of unemployment (I2, p. 30, ll. 10). So Max K. wants to overcome those boundaries and therefore continuously strives for extending his occupational options and increasing his access to university education.

Manuel H.

In contrast to the other interview partners Manuel H. clearly applies a strategic career planning in order to create his occupational biography:

I always say that I have goals for about ten years [...], well I always use to have certain goals for myself, which I maybe want to reach in a certain period of time. Sometimes that might take another direction, but in principle I do not deviate from the goals (I3, p. 19, ll. 14).

Manuel H. considers his occupational biography to be in some extent controllable, as he identifies milestones he wants to reach in a certain period of time. Although he concedes that unpredictable events might occur he is determined to reach his goals.

It is noticeable that, in comparison to the other interview partners, Manuel H.'s goals are more career-oriented and status-related, which, for instance, becomes apparent when he does not use verbs to describe his career goals (like Max K.) but enumerates social positions, like becoming an executive director or obtaining a doctor's degree (I3, p. 19, l. 16). Occupational success plays an important part in Manuel H.'s life and his strategy can be described as a career-oriented occupational planning by 10-year-goals.

In addition to his career orientation another important influence on Manuel H.'s approach to create his occupational biography seems to originate from several negative experiences in the occupational sector. The most intense experience is related to his first job, when he had to work 90 hours a week in an executive position and his superior exerted massive pressure on him (I3, p. 28, ll. 40). Beside these memories he also narrates further negative experiences with occupational relations, especially to employers (I2, p. 25, ll. 45; p. 26, ll. 8). Against the background of these experiences Manuel H.'s high motivation to be independent, which forms the second principle of this occupational approach, becomes plausible.

Enhanced occupational autonomy as a transition effect

Frank M.

Although Frank M's approach to create his occupational biography seems to be rather expectant it will become obvious in the following quotations that Frank M. steers his professional development indirectly by the participation in continuing education. He does not expect options to occur without him making any contribution, but his responsibility is to "sell his working capacity" and therefore he has to "keep it fit" (I1, p. 21, ll. 9). In his argumentation the quality of his working capacity consists

of his health on the one hand and his qualification on the other hand. To maintain the qualification continuing education is necessary, since without it the qualification would degenerate and diminish the working capacity.

For Frank M. continuing education in general is the key to occupational success. By his participation in continuing education he has always assured his attractiveness on the labour market and has gained new and unpredictable occupational perspectives:

*I **never** did it that way, none of the continuing education programmes [...] to say »afterwards I want to do this or that«. There are many people saying »I want to become the boss or something. What do I have to do for it I'll do it«, I never did it that way. I always did something [continuing education (CL)] and then said: Something will occur. And then I was just open for many things, not so fixed in a certain direction. And that always did me very good. I also **always** changed my job after a continuing education programme (I1, p. 4, ll. 37).*

Within this context for Frank M. the Masters' programme serves to keep his qualification "fit" and maintain his working capacity, which guarantees his attractiveness as an employee and strengthens his position on the labour market. Like this, he can be sure to "always have and always get a job" (I1, p. 19, ll. 45), which gives him a feeling of occupational security and thereby enhances his autonomy experience.

Another component of his autonomy experience consists in a feeling of having multiplied options. As Frank M. expected it, the Masters' programme offered him new prospects for his occupational future and by the help of feedbacks he received during the programme he developed some ideas for concrete occupational change, for instance he wants to take over more executive functions and is decided to switch his training activities from technical courses to courses on personality development.

Finally, apart from those changes in his main occupation the postgraduate study programme enabled Frank M. to become a lecturer at the university where he completed his studies. So currently, besides his main occupation Frank M. works as a lecturer, writes scientific articles and gives papers. For him the Master's programme opened up new occupational possibilities and led to concrete occupational change, which strengthens his autonomy in a third way.

Max K.

For Max K. the main effect of the programme on his occupational biography is not concrete change in the present, but job-related effects he anticipates for the future which enhance his autonomy experience already by now. The first component of this experience consists, similar to Frank M., in a feeling of security on the labour market as the following quotation illustrates:

*Having the **option**, something **could** be changed then [...] You try to, at least for me it has always been like that, you try to create a certain freedom or keep your back free. I can, if this does not suit my plans anymore, I can take my Masters programme, my Master certificate under the arm and go somewhere else. At the very least I will find it easier to go somewhere else (I2, p. 13, ll. 21).*

By increasing his academic qualification Max K. sees himself a more attractive employee and tries to avoid unemployment, which he has experienced before. He also assumes that the time might come, when his current job does not suit his plans anymore, a case for which he wants to be secured. Within his statement the other and even more important element of his enhanced autonomy experience becomes apparent already, as he also appreciates the feeling of having acquired access to more occupational fields by the programme and having multiplied his options:

The more qualifications you have, I think that's anyway the best thing about qualifications, apart from the gain of knowledge, but the best thing about qualific – further qualifications is that you become more and more flexible, that in different situations you can – or that you have far more options (I2, p. 13, ll. 39).

To summarise, by participating in university continuing education Max K. strengthens his attractiveness on the labour market and thereby realises both main principles for creating his career: being able to choose a job that is fun and extending his access to different occupational fields and to academic education (e.g. doctorate).

Manuel H.

According to his strategic career planning by ten-year goals Manuel H. uses university continuing education in order to reach his occupational goals.

Well of course that's also a fundamental motivation also in the occupational sector to be able to provide arguments for the employer or for future employers why of all applicants he should hire me (I3, p. 2, ll. 45).

Similar to Max K., the programme did, so far, not provide concrete occupational change for Manuel H. Instead he also perceives a gain of autonomy, since in his point of view good final grades and an exceptional thematic specialisation in academic courses provide powerful arguments for employers and guarantee his occupational continuation (I3, p. 2, ll.1). So, one element of his autonomy experience can also be described as a feeling of security on the labour market.

Another source for his enhanced autonomy experience results from a feeling of independence from

other persons in the occupational sector. As Manuel H. made several negative experiences with occupational relations he seeks independence from others in his career:

"I don't want to commit myself to somebody, if I don't have to" (I3, p. 7, ll. 36).

Through the postgraduate study programme he advances his career and tries to get into a position up in the hierarchy in a long-term perspective. This provides him autonomy in terms of independence from others.

Conclusion

In summary, the interview analysis so far documents an enhanced occupational autonomy experience in all interviews, with this experience having different origins, depending on the biographical background and approach to create the occupational biography. In varying degrees a postgraduate study programme can:

1. open up new occupational perspectives and lead to concrete job change,
2. provide a feeling of security on the labour market, as a high academic qualification increases the attractiveness as an employee and assures the occupational existence in times of discontinuous life-courses,
3. evoke a feeling of having an increased variety of options and access to more occupational fields, as a higher qualification makes more jobs accessible,
4. result in a feeling of independence from the current (and future) employers, as it increases the employee's attractiveness on the labour market and so he / she is not reliant on the current employer.

On the basis of further interviews and their analysis these forms of enhanced autonomy will have to be revised, adapted or extended, which will be the next steps within the study.

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**Attitudes towards learning and
the structures of identity in
narrative**

Introduction

The aim of my article is to depict correlations between the course of people's lives and their longer-term learning processes. By reconstructing the narrative structures of narrative interviews, we can ascertain the formation of the narrator's identity and determine the fundamental attitudes that people build up over a lifetime. These fundamental attitudes reveal much about their learning, which can also equally be derived from narrative structures. At the start, I will address the theoretical and methodological principles of our research. Afterwards I will present typical correlations between fundamental attitudes and attitudes towards learning on the basis of two examples.

Theoretical and Methodological Principles

Learning processes cannot be observed. One can draw conclusions about them by perceiving changes in the person's conduct before and after a learning process, as is more common in the field of psychology. Or one can reconstruct learning processes on the basis of representations made by the individual who is learning/has learned. These can be in the form of written statements, questionnaires, structured guideline interviews or biographical narrative interviews. This approach is more commonly found in pedagogic fields or the social sciences.

The favoured approach in our research is the biographical narrative interview in which the person is requested to tell the story of their life and is allowed to do so without interruption. Especially when these stories are off-the-cuff and unprepared, the narrative clearly reveals each individual's own unique structure in the formation of correlations in the biography. The construction of the person's own biography, including the formation of their identity, is expressed in the narrative structures.

Many of the different fields and subjects associated with the narrative research conducted in recent years have highlighted the role of narrative in the development of identity, leading to the following conclusion: identity develops initially in narrative:

[...] over the last two decades, narrative [has] attracted a great deal of interest far beyond the confines of the simple study of literature. Of all the different functions of narrative that have been examined, the formation of identity is doubtless one of the most interesting. Philosophers, historians, sociologists, psychologists and psychoanalysts have discovered, often independently of one another, that the constitution, stabilisation and transformation of individual and collective identities depend on narrative (Neumann 2000: 7).

When the structure of the life story is understood as a genuine component of identity formation, bringing the actions and events of one's life into a chronological order and linking them through a specific connection, then the level of the narrative is of particular importance (Goodson, Biesta, Tedder & Adair,

2010). Evaluations of the narrative are subsequently not limited solely to the content level, but are instead primarily focused on the form level of the narrative. Due to the so-called “systemic structures of narrative”, the “cognitive figures” (Schütze 1981, 1983, 1984) and other narrative structures (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2004) used unconsciously by people telling stories, it is possible to unveil levels of meaning that are relatively independent of the situational self-depiction and that releases more fundamental levels of experiences the narrator has already processed (Bohnsack 2003: 94).

Systemic narrative structures are narrative communicative forms used in situations of interaction. For example, one has to select content, round off the story or bring it to a certain ending and maintain the attention of the interaction partner. Schütze calls these three elements “Detailierungszwang” (the obligation to provide relevant details), “Gestaltschließungszwang” (the obligation to fit story parts into a larger, comprehensible context) and “Relevanzfestlegungs- and Kondensierungszwang” (the obligation to determine what details are relevant or not and condense the narrative down to the essential parts) (Schütze, 1984: 80). Cognitive figures are also used in narrative, otherwise it would not be narrative. This means that every story has a main character, depicts a process, takes place in a situation and is presented in a certain characteristic style or overall form. Schütze refers in this regard to a) the biographical figure and his/her relationships, b) the chain of events and experiences, c) the situations, the way of life and social environments, and d) the overall form of the life story as cognitive figures (cp. ebd.: 81).

Evaluation of interviews on the basis of their narrative structures allows certain of the narrator's views regarding himself/herself and the world in general to be identified in the form of fundamental attitudes. I will demonstrate later in my examples what one can discover in the process.

Fundamental attitudes are the basis of a person's identity formation, and they reveal much about the nature of the person's longer-term learning processes. It must be emphasised here that the term ‘longer-term learning processes’ refers to a specific level of learning, namely by and large ‘Leben lernen’ (roughly, ‘Learning how to live’) as defined by Göhlich & Zirfas (2009). This refers less to learning in curricular correlations (primarily learning knowledge) or the acquisition of certain qualifications (primarily learning skills) than to how one learns to cope with life, for instance in relation to securing one's livelihood, the aptitude for living in an affluent society, coping with risks and setbacks or the art of living as a means of self-design (cp. ebd.).

Regarding the concept of learning, we principally rely on the definition of lifelong learning provided by Peter Jarvis (2006) as well as on the definition provided by Göhlich & Zirfas (2007). Peter Jarvis defines lifelong learning as:

The combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person – body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses) – experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is than

transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person (Jarvis 2006: 134).

Göhlich & Zirfas defines learning as:

Learning denotes changes in our relations with ourselves, the world and other people whereby such changes are not attributable to inherent dispositions, but instead occur based at least on experiences that have been fundamentally contemplated and that are subsequently tangible for the learning person's physical totality as feasible changes in the possibilities available for action and behaviour, in patterns of understanding and interpretation and in taste and value structures; in short, learning is the experience of the reflexive acquisition of specific knowledge and skills undergone by the person learning (Göhlich & Zirfas 2007: 17).

Both Jarvis and Göhlich & Zirfas emphasise the changes in relations with oneself and the world within the social framework and the concept of experience as a means of perceiving the world. They conceive learning as an individual act within its physical totality and distinguish between structures of behaviour, interpretation and values. This indirectly implies fundamental attitudes that people develop over the course of their lives as the result of their experiences.

The definition of Göhlich & Zirfas incorporates hermeneutic and phenomenological approaches. In line with this, it is appropriate to cite the findings of Günther Buck who notes the relationship between learning and experience and describes the process:

The word 'experience' (and accordingly the word 'learning') has a double-meaning. On the one hand it signifies the individual experiences of something. [...] experience simultaneously means a process in which the new is constantly building on the foundation of previous experience. [...] secondly, the word 'experience' refers to a structure that we want to call the inner reflexiveness of the experience. [...] to be precise, we have an experience of every experience. [...] at the same time the person who is experiencing also has a self-experience, learning something about their behaviour and something about future behaviours. The teaching power of experience first reveals itself in this reflection of the experience onto oneself, which is simultaneously a transformation of one's experience skills (Buck, 1989: 3-4).

Michael Göhlich (2007) notes an important distinction between learning and experience:

[...] there [is] a fragile, spiral-shaped relationship between experience and learning. In a simultaneous process of activity and passivity, experience is the source of the dynamic duplex of the real world and the systematic former which in learning, particularly by means of observing negativity, [...] can be processed and is ultimately directed in a new way into a coherent, memorable experience (Göhlich, 2007: 198).

To summarise, the issue is changes that occur as a result of experiences whereby, just as with experiences, learning correlations guide the subsequent learning and thereby denote a process. Life-story learning therefore is related to the particular person and their experiences, signifies change in the social interaction process and, in particular through confrontation with the unknown, is subject to the formation of correlation and meaning and is framed by social and cultural influences (also von Felden, 2008a and 2008b).

In the methodology of our research, we observe different narrative structures (von Felden, 2011, Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann 2004). To provide an insight into the assessment of narrative structures, I will limit myself in the following text to two levels: the interview situation and the type of correlation formation. Both levels provide information about the narrator's formation of identity. From this, I will derive statements about their learning and identity formation processes which I will discuss later in the text. I will take two narrative interviews as examples in which I will address the following narrative structures:

- a) Interview situation: What offers of interaction do the narrators make in the interview situation? What does this say about the narrators' own positioning in the interaction?
- b) Formation of correlations: How do they produce coherence and continuity in their own biographies? How do they construct the transformation from the "I" in the story to the "I" as narrator?
- c) What learning and identity formation processes can be identified from the interview?

Results: portrayals of different examples

Example – Wolfgang Timme:

a) It is conspicuous in the interview with Wolfgang Timme that he actually rejects the monologue style of a narrator in an interview, instead taking advantage of every opportunity for a dialogue. After being asked to tell his story, he begins the interview with the words, "A: (Takes in a deep breath and then lets it out) pffffff [...] (exhales) hhh, that's hard. Where do I start?... Of course, I can start with the dry details; born on November 17, 1948" (Lines 6-10). The wrap-up of the introductory story ends as follows: "A: That's the short version... (laughs). I: Hm, yo (laughs)...I guess you'd like the long version now, huh? A: (laughs) Yeah, um, that's kind of hard for me. Um, yeah, where do we go deeper now? What things are especially interesting for your project (12 sec.?)" (Lines 78-81) What at first appears to be an unsuccessful narrative interview later reveals itself to be an integral component of Wolfgang Timme's personality. His consistent orientation on dialogue corresponds with his concept of other people, who he regards throughout the interview as equals and worthy of respect, remembering and calling them by their names. He says he has learned something from everyone he ever had anything

to do with. Although he repeatedly needs prompting to talk and is reluctant to take the lead in the conversation, the readers nevertheless learn a great deal about him. He rejects being the sole speaker. He is interested in an exchange and uses every available opportunity to steer clear of the impertinence of monologue and to engage the other person in a discussion. He positions himself and the others in the room as equal partners and practically depends on answers from the others to feel comfortable. This does not mean that he has nothing to say or that he doesn't know what he wants. During the course of the interview he reveals insights into his contemplations on his experiences and his life.

b) He begins the interview with one shorter and one somewhat longer main narrative. In the first main narrative he discusses the situation he was born into and gives a brief historical framework in which he talks about the residents of his home region and their occupations, as well as his family's connection to the region. Afterwards he introduces his mother and father and briefly indicates important points in his life. He opens the second main narrative with responses to the question, "How did you live?", describing lifestyles and places where he lived, and then goes on to fill the important points of his life with vitality by telling individual stories about them. This reveals early on the importance of his relationship with his parents as significant role models and the bond he feels with his home region. In the second main narrative he also portrays the paths he has taken: Before finishing high school he 'takes off' to Berlin, then returns to finish school only to return to Berlin immediately afterwards where he is a university student and protester during Germany's renowned 'Protests of 1968' period. He starts a family here, earning his living as a construction worker where he ultimately 'gets stuck' and drops out of university. His alcoholism leads to his separation from the family. He 'takes off' once again and wanders for a while before returning to his now elderly parents who need his help. The death of his father and his inability to help them effectively because of his alcohol abuse prompts him to overcome his alcoholism. He then returns to Berlin and works as a master craftsman with 'stranded' young people for a number of years. He successfully overcomes a battle with cancer. He ultimately decides to return home to his mother to take care of her until her death. He remarries and runs a construction company specialising in earth and clay construction, restoration and the preservation of historic monuments. In this way he describes his life between 'taking off' and 'being settled', and between 'change' as a revolutionary and 'preservation' as a restorer. It is not only in his stories that he is searching for something and finally arriving; he also speaks in his reflections of ambivalences that drive life forward: "A:... well, even the mono-causal explanations limp around on at least two legs [...] yeah, even the former revolutionary has a conservative streak" (Lines 1349-1363).

His stories are full of his own reasoning, his own theories and descriptions, all of which indicate the consistent contemplation of the course of his life. The formation of correlations in his life ensues on the basis of criteria that he has established in his reflections. He is more interested in portraying thought correlations than in telling stories as a narrative: "A:... if you start opening up the anecdotal side [...] of forty years of construction work, then there's no end to the stories you can tell" (Lines 1272-1274). The narrator "I" always has the upper hand over the "I" in the story. This allows him to see why his

first wife had to leave him when he looks at himself as a 16 year-old. He sees himself in a process of his life and observes his own transformation.

His relationship with his parents is characterised by a development process consisting of judging, understanding, reconciling and responsibility. An example of this is that as a youth he judged his 'Nazi father': "A:... *my father was a Nazi* [...], but as I began to start thinking for myself there was no longer any communication at home, none at all. All I hung onto was *how can you get out of here* (mild laughter in his voice)...so I ran away the first time at 16, just hit the road" (Lines 43-64).

Information acquired from his high school and university studies allows him to have a better understanding of his father's standards of propriety:

A: [...] historical correlations of the Nazi era [...] later on I read Theweleit and about the, um, psychological principles of this... hhh (exhales deeply) yeah, today we would definitely have to say this horde of criminals[...] and at some stage I also learned that with these principles and this background knowledge you can even understand them up to a certain degree, and I believe understanding is the whole point...(12 sec.), but you still can't excuse them. That's out of the question (Lines 291-301).

Later on he wants to reconcile with his elderly father. When that fails he takes responsibility for his attitude with self-criticism:

A: Then I just rambled for a couple of years...and then I came home when my father was old, sick...I thought, I need to help these old folks a little...even though our communication with each other was bad, at least they took care of me for a few years [...] so I need to take care of them now... a complete disaster, a *complete* (mildly emphasised) disaster. I... wobbled home at 3 o'clock in the morning from the pub, my father died at 5, and around 10 o'clock my mother was able to finally wake me up and tell me that my father was dead. ...That's how I helped them...That was the kick where I thought to myself that I can't go on like that anymore, that's it with the drinking...Was hard at first, like on the building site, so... pretty much alone without any kind of therapeutic support. [...] ..yeah, my father had to die before I could do that." (Lines 126 – 145)

c) His fundamental attitudes can be identified on the basis of how he tells his story and his formation of correlations. From there, his processes of learning and identity formation can also be derived. His fundamental attitude is dialogue-orientated, open for the process and interested in the development of his own being. He speaks as a reflective individual who wants to portray his life on the basis of certain criteria. It is interesting that these criteria are also expressed unconsciously, as is evident at the beginning of the interview (relationship with the parents, to his home region). This is an indication that Wolfgang Timme actually lives in line with his reflections and doesn't just 'drag them around with him'. The interview demonstrates changes in his image of the world and of himself, as is evident in

his formation of correlations, in the changes in process structures (which I did not depict here, von Felden 2009) and in the portrayal of the narrator “I” and the “I” in the story. This allows longer-term learning and identity formation processes to be depicted. By drawing on a meta-level, he learns his changes through reflected perception.

Example – Kurt Groscher:

a) After being asked to tell his story, Kurt Groscher directly begins a long main narrative. Right at the start he mentions that he is an only child and describes his childhood and adolescence primarily under the aspects of being alone, the moves his family made and his bicycle journeys. He compensates his lack of contact to others in part through his belief in God:

A: In A-city I actually had little contact with kids of the same age group, um, because I, um, well, continued, um, to focus on Suburb A. [...] I um, then I um, from 1951 to 1953 I spent most of my journey time alone. [...] after Confirmation, so after 1953, um, it was, um, a strong need and an inner urge to go to church every Sunday, and I, um, I've kept that up basically until the present (Lines 16-30).

A conspicuous feature of the interview is the precise details about locations and times that are then often corrected to make sure that everything is absolutely accurate. This is evidence that it is apparently important to him to be honest and to address or elaborate on negative topics and taboo topics alike. The stylistic character of his portrayal resembles an accounting, or put more poignantly, a confession where he receives absolution. He seeks to portray everything as accurately and as precisely as possible and be a ‘model pupil’. At times he talks about events as the source for consequences later on, whereby his own theories produce the correlations.

A: I have to add about my performance on the Qualified Business Assistant examination that I, before the written examination, I had, um, holidays. I used these holidays to study and I asked, um, God to stand by me in the examination, to help me pass the examination and that was my concern. I ... um, I also, um, phrased it that if I pass the examination [...] I will get involved in the youth mission work of the Protestant congregation in Suburb A, um, and I, like I said, I passed the Qualified Business Assistant examination with honours, um, and then we moved and I didn't keep my promise (Lines 47-61).

A: Yes, um, after my return from B-city in France, um, um, problems, um, of a mental nature came up with me. I just couldn't, um, in the *day-to-day*, um, find my way in daily life, um, I, I, um, (5 sec.), I, um, still now, um, don't really know exactly, um, why that was exactly. Um, I'm sure different things played a role, um,... but I think that maybe one of the reasons was that

I didn't keep my vow, I mean, it could be, um, one of the causes...the fact that I didn't keep my promise to God, that He, um, showed me then, OK, you didn't keep your promise to me and now this is the punishment for your misconduct (sighs) (Lines 120-129).

Kurt Groscher sets God as a higher authority to whom he has an obligation and must account to. He bases this on his own theories which have not changed throughout his lifetime. One could say that his interpretations are focused on how they relate to him and he is not accustomed to questioning things, for example as a result of outside suggestions from others. His establishment of a higher authority allows him to be humble and dependent. As such, he fundamentally positions himself as a singular person who has virtually no concept of human interaction, but who is dependent upon a god who can punish or bless him.

b) Kurt Groscher tells his life story in a quite additive manner, primarily along the chronological lines of the institutionalised course of events (school, Confirmation, apprenticeship, residence abroad, jobs, marriage, further career training, purchasing a house). When talking about some specific points in his life, he feels the need to include background structures such as his belief in God or also relating to the causes of his mental illness following his stay abroad. In great detail, he explains his inhibited sexual contacts in France. In the interview, he attributes his health and mental problems, extending all the way up to contemplating suicide, to his disobedience to God and to his sexual activities. He quits psychiatric treatment to "rely utterly and completely on God's help" (Lines 149-150), which "actually sustained me all the years up until I got TB, tuberculosis, um, in the spring of 1966" (Lines 150-151). For some five years, from 1961 to 1966, he struggles with mental problems.

It is conspicuous in the interview with Kurt Groscher that the interpretations and his own theories that drove his thinking during the time of the story, i.e. in and around the 1960s, also assert the same meaning at the time of the telling of the story, some 46 years later. The individual narratives are encapsulated stories, all autonomous within themselves and unchanged as a result of experiences later on. Throughout the entire interview no meta-level or reflection is drawn upon that could bring the individual events into a correlation with one another.

In particular, the biggest change in his life, namely meeting the woman who would later become his wife, is only mentioned briefly as a change, but is not referred to at all as a fundamental transformation. After meeting his wife, Kurt Groscher portrays himself as someone who as a matter of course and in the posture of the institutionalised sequenced pattern of events tends to describe his life in a more additive manner, while previously depicting the trajectory of his life as having fallen 'into a tailspin' (Schütze, 1981: 99). There is no more talk about illnesses, mental or otherwise. Kurt Groscher successfully manages in a short time to be promoted from a post as an assistant for the German railway service into the higher grades of the civil service, to provide financially for his wife and daughter, buy a home and lead a 'normal' conventional life. Apparently the period of total loneliness is over that made him ill, but Kurt Groscher himself does not mention this correlation at all. As such, while the interview

indeed depicts changes as a result of the change in the process structures, the protagonist himself nevertheless does not perceive any fundamental transformation of himself and remains focused on the interpretations he acquired in his early years and on his own theories.

c) The analysis of the interview shows Kurt Groscher's fundamental attitudes to be singularity, dependence on a higher authority and no change in the theories he acquired at an early age. Although the interview reveals obvious changes during the course of his life, Mr. Groscher demonstrates a notable resistance to any perception of change. He does not contemplate his experiences, which each stand alone as time-capsule narratives, and he does not gaze at his life in an overall context. He adopts fundamental beliefs at an early age which, due to his total isolation, did not develop or were not corrected through the outside influence of others. He leads his life in accordance with these beliefs and arranges his life's later experiences within them. The interview is an example of how an early experience assimilates the experiences that come after and resists any change (von Felden 2010).

Conclusion

These examples have demonstrated that the reconstruction of the narrative structure of narrative interviews can detect the fundamental attitudes and subsequently also the attitudes towards learning in regard to longer-term learning processes. While Mr. Timme is consistently focused on dialogue, is process-orientated and speaks of changes on the basis of reflection, and as such his learning processes must also be described in this way, Mr. Groscher relays his life in individual, singular stories that stand alone alongside each other and are neither connected at a Meta-level nor contemplated, and that as a result no change in the theories that he acquired at an early age are detectable.

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**Back to University: a first glance
on the transitions of non-
traditional students in Portugal**

Introduction

Lifelong Learning (LLL) was conceived as a goal in the framework of the Bologna Process in 2001, bringing new challenges to higher education (HE) in this domain. Portugal does not have a strong historical tradition regarding adult education, with all the negative consequences that emerge from that reality (FitzSimons, 2009:91). The following provides a quick look to the numbers available: 21% of the Portuguese population aged 25-34 graduated in 2007 while in OECD the average scored 34%. For the population aged 25-64 only 14% had a tertiary degree (PhD) in Portugal, whereas it attained 28% for OCDE countries (OECD, 2009). This scenario highlights the necessity for changes in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), if a successfully pursuit of objectives of widening participation of the adult population on LLL is to be attained (Macdonald & Stratta, 1998). The benefits of education are paramount not only in relation to the human capital or the economic needs (the rise in the adult unemployment and the reorganization of the industrial sector), but also when we look at the individual and their subsequent empowerment potentialities. However, we should bear in mind the risks associated with the new possibilities open in these processes (Beck, 1992).

In Portugal concerted efforts are being made to contribute to a widening participation of the adult population with the implementation of a national directive that opens the door of HEIs to the older publics. The law-decree 64/2006 allows mature students older than 23 years (M23) to apply to HEI. At the University of Aveiro, a student enrolled through this specific way has to pass a three step evaluation process: (1) the analysis of the candidate curriculum vitae, where professional experiences are an important feature; (2) a set of thematic exams with the purpose of evaluating their academic skills; (3) and finally, an individual face to face interview where an appointed jury questions the applicant about his or her motivations and life history. At the end of this process a candidate ranked list is produced. Each candidate then decides whether, or not, to apply for a vacancy allocated to M23 in one of the University of Aveiro courses.

This new public brings new questions and requirements to the teachers, the university management and researchers. With the aim of contributing to a deeper understanding of this reality, we have an on-going research project¹ until 2013, addressing the "*Non-traditional students in Higher Education Institutions: searching solutions to improve academic success*". In this presentation we will discuss some of the preliminary results of our work by trying to combine quantitative and qualitative data from a survey questionnaire and focus-group interviews. Who are the M23 students attending the University of Aveiro between the 2006-2010 academic years? How can we characterize their learning paths? What is the relation between learning and their life course, especially in what refers to the impact of age? These are some of the questions that we will make an effort to explore.

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Theoretical Framework

Our project focuses on new publics who arrive to HEIs: the non-traditional student. The term *non-traditional student* is a concept that encompasses diverse situations and, therefore, it needs to be plastic in order to represent the complexity of the real picture. Bearing in mind the *Socrates Grundtvig Lihe Project – Learning in Higher Education* (2002) or the *RANLHE Project* (2009) perspective, we look at M23 students as specific publics in HE, whose participation is constrained by adverse structural factors, and are, as a result, under-represented (Bamber, 2008; Bago et al., 2011). We will explore the theme of transitions related to M23 and its implications on the learning careers of both genders. Goodwin & O'Connor (2007) offer us a good review of the literature on the transition from school to work. According to these authors, we can recognize two historical trends. Studies undertaken in the 1950s and 1960s are described as optimistic, due the confident period that the youth labour market (markets with an important youth unemployment) were facing, leading to smooth and linear transitions, “albeit homogenises determined by gender, class, family background and educational attainment” (Ibid., p.557). Literature based on studies carried out post-1975 underline the progressively more fragmented, complex and fragile nature of the transitions. Training schemes frequently substituted work and there is a huge focus on lack of opportunities (Ibid., p.557).

The concept of *learning career* is very useful in understanding the experience of M23 students. In this paper, we will assume the vision developed by Bloomer and Hodkinson, presented and enriched by Crossan et al. (2003). Hence, we define learning career as “a career of events, activities and meanings, and the making and remaking of meanings through these activities and events, and it is a career of relationships and the constant making and remaking of relationships, including relationships between position and disposition” (Bloomer & Hodkinson, cit. in Crossan et al., 2003:57). The approach of Bloomer and Hodkinson derives from the Chicago School's contribution on the theory of situated learning and Bourdieu's work. In their work, Crossan et al. (2003), adopting the concepts of Bloomer and Hodkinson, account for the context where we can find the actors: “For us, the concept of learning career is used to shed light on the complex interplay between the social and economic structures which shape people's lives, the educational institutions which determine the processes of engagement with learning, and the learners themselves” (Ibid., p.58). Finally, the role played by personal reflection and external circumstances in the relationship between access and consequences, in terms of young people's trajectories in education, is also an important component to understand the involved processes and aspirations (Heggen & Dwyer, 1998: 268).

We found the work of McCune et al. (2010) very inspiring to understand the impact of age in the different dimensions of our questionnaire and the themes emerging from the focus group. These authors admitted that their findings were, somehow, similar to those presented by Gallacher et al. (2002), where the fragmented nature of mature students learning careers was highlighted and the importance of key incidents “as triggers for mature students to re-engage in learning” (McCune et al., 2010: 700). Mature students are particularly focused on the subjects they study and their personal

fulfilment, on the one hand, and professional reasons, on the others. Davies & Williams (2001), identified a set of key patterns in the profiles of mature students, such as, the personal meaning of the courses' subjects; their career prospects; the development of qualifications; the wish to pursue a new direction in their lives; and the perception that they finally have time to dedicate to their studies and return to learn. Baxter & Britton (2001) identified two main themes on the students' discourses about entering HE: one refers greater self-confidence; and the other connects the accommodation of academic language (Baxter & Britton, 2001: 93). However, entering HE can represent a shock to many mature non-traditional students, "accompanied by a sense of personal powerlessness" (Bowl, 2001). Moreover, there are noteworthy impacts and changes on mature non-traditional students' families, namely the gender division of labour, even if these risks "are gendered and classed" (Baxter and Britton, 2001: 91).

Methodology

We choose to present here an overall picture of the M23 population in the University of Aveiro focusing primarily on their age-groups, hence, to be able to discuss the themes of transitions and life courses. The first phase of our research project deals with a students' survey questionnaire that aims to characterise a highest possible number of students and teachers at both Universities of Algarve and Aveiro, in Portugal. After these, in-depth qualitative techniques we will be using informing biographic interviews both to M23 students, their teachers and academic management staff. In the final stage of the project focus-group interviews will be organised and emphasis will be put on understanding M23 students attending their first year of HE, with the objective of following them along their path at the University of Aveiro. This article presents a preliminary analysis of the M23 students' profiles, the reasons they give for returning to formal learning and also the obstacles they face, according to their ages. Some testimonials from the focus-groups interviews will also be considered, with the intention of combining a quantitative and a qualitative perspective.

The applied questionnaires were divided into four different dimensions: (1) Students and family characterization; (2) Academic and professional courses; (3) Processes of learning and teaching; (4) Socialisation data. Being a preliminary study report we only bring here a partial view of these dimensions as well as data from three focus-groups interviews, each with the presence of 7 to 8 students. These three sessions were two hours long and we discussed several issues, trying to capture the attitudes and representations of the mature students, especially about the meaning of returning to learn and the interconnection of this challenge with their life course.

The responses considered for this study totalled 166, were collected until May 2011 focusing on the academic years of 2006-2010. These were obtained from a universe of 489 students enrolled at the University of Aveiro through the special M23 regime created in 2006 (Law-decree 64/2006). All questionnaires were answered on the internet through the web platform LimeSurvey™, version 1.9, by Carsten Schmitz, Germany.

Results: Students' social demographic background

One of the questions that we would like to answer relates to the social-demographic background of the M23 students at the University of Aveiro between the 2006-2010 academic years. We must underline that our analysis will always bear in mind the different ages groups of the M23 students, in order to explore the theme of transitions and the connection of learning with the life course of the students.

More than half of M23 students are older than 30 years (Figure 1), hence, younger students are not being encouraged to enrol through the M23 HE pathway, but rather through the regular contingent and no "reform effect" (Hogarth et al., 1997) was observed at the University of Aveiro. Most M23 students, 75% accumulate an active profession element with their studies. However, the younger M23 (23-29 years old) tend to be full time students. Retired persons are only 3.1% of our sample; and the unemployment rate on our survey stands at 13.3%, a percentage that matches the national average.

When characterizing the close-family education levels data shows that most parental formal education only attain the Primary Education stage (59,6%); 7,1% and 5,1% completed, respectively, the 12th grade or graduate. The data indicates that most M23 students have a working class origin or come from the less prosperous fraction of the middle class. As it would be expected, the older the M23 student the lowest is the education levels their parents. A large proportion of the mature students' spouses have HE qualifications (47.4%), although the 6th and the 9th grade are also prevalent (33%). If the fathers' education level reveals the Portuguese structural delay towards education, the spouses' qualifications prove the effort recently made in this field and the importance of the ascendant social trajectories. The characterization of family income shows two main groups, those earning 1,500-2,000€ (27.7%) and those below 1,000 (27.1%).

Learning paths

Most M23 students (59.2%) enrol at the University of Aveiro with the 12th grade completed and a residual number having higher academic studies and that this percentage increases for older M23 students (Figure 2). When asked about how long they interrupted their formal education, 35.5% went back to learn after a period of 4-10 years and 31.9% after 11-20 years. Only 11.4% mentioned 3 years or less, and this means that we are facing histories of long trajectories away from formal school. Social sciences, law, health, social work and trading are the most significant domains of knowledge, while the so-called "hard-disciplines" only account for 21.8%. Data shows that these courses tend to be avoided by the older M23s. Education, arts, humanities and services subjects are chosen by 34.5% of the M23 students.

An important indicator of the M23' academic success is the marks they achieve in the Curricular Units. The majority (54.1%) attain marks between 13-15 points, in a rank of 0 to 20. A deeper

analysis also shows that older M23 students obtain better results (Figure 3). When we consider the motives that lead the M23 to apply to the University (Table 1), it becomes clear that they have a main concern about career progression, as well as personal fulfilment. Although, younger M23 (23-29 years old) and older students (above 50) give great importance to the acquisition of knowledge only the latter emphasise the importance of achieving a final diploma. Unlike the results of other studies (Purcel, 2007), the younger M23, at the University of Aveiro do not focus their reasons on material motivations. The vocational reasons are the most important parameter in what concerns the choice of the course (61.2%), although this motive tends to be weaker as the mature students' age increase. Conversely, the acquisition of professional competences, which appears in second place, reveals to become more important with age. In this way, if the instrumental motives are more conspicuous in the decision to applying to HE, we have to emphasize the vocational reasons towards the choice of the course (Table 2).

Our results identify three different types of obstacles felt by the mature students during their academic paths: (1) the professional motives/incompatibilities of professional – university schedules, particularly for the 30-50 age-group; (2) the lack of specific support mechanisms tailored for M23 students, mentioned by older students; (3) and finally, the difficulties to understand certain courses contents, more acute within the age-groups of 23-29 and above 50.

Some testimonials from the focus groups

The focus-groups interviews with first year M23 students allow us to analyse, yet superficially, the attitudes and representations about the University, trying first to realize if our survey questionnaire had any repercussion in these first-year students. And, afterwards, to understand how the process of returning to learn articulates with their life trajectories and own time management.

Our survey shows that M23' decision to return to learn is related mainly with two kinds of reasons: professional reasons and personal-fulfilment pursuits. When we ask M23s to explicitly point out their relative strength most agree in emphasizing the strict complementarities between those goals. However, the imperatives connected with the professional careers are central to their lives:

“We also won't ask [the employer] a day to study before (the exam), and then miss another entire day because we have an examination, ... that's because if we don't want to go to work, there is certainly a lot of people who wants to go to [our] work, and...” (Maria, 32 years old).

It is, therefore, the timetable at the University that must adapt to the needs of these professionals, particularly when employers are not supportive to employees that want to return to HE. We should equally emphasize the will to acquire the qualifications necessary to be better positioned and prepared

to face an increasingly competitive job market. This seems to be the reason why the course choice is so closely connected with the current profession or with the vocation of these students.

For these M23 students entering the University is also the accomplishment of a life-long dream, frequently delayed by biographic incidents. A father who loses the job in the precise moment where it is necessary to take decisions that will determine the future; the successive failures in entering to the University; or, simply, the need to become financially independent through a casual first job which diverts the initial goal of a traditional academic pathway. This is usually expressed as a confidence issue – *“Someday, later, when this is more stable, I’ll go... [to continue the studies]”* (Manuel, 49 years old) – and as a unfulfilled wish.

When we look what triggered the final decision to apply to the University, we find that external circumstances, such as unemployment, played a central role. This was prevalent in interviewees aged around 40, that pointed that problem as the trigger to rethink their life courses and are more aware to the advantages of returning to studying: *“And that’s what opened my spirit to come to study again, since I couldn’t find work”* (Eugénia, 42 years old). In times when life pathways are less linear, losing the job could be an opportunity of change, enabling transformations in the ways of thinking, feeling and acting.

For difficulties experienced along the learning process, the M23s are unanimous: the conciliation between the professional demands, the academic tasks and their personal life is an arduous activity: *“To have to study, to have to do a work and, tomorrow, to have the alarm clock ringing at the half past seven is very complicated... In my opinion, it is necessary a strong will to carry on...”* (Alice, 28 years old). The everyday tasks are too many and so the M23s have to manage carefully their day-schedule situation which becomes more complicated during the evaluation periods. The assignments seem to be very numerous and with very short deadlines. That explains the recurrent reference to the need of specific support to M23 students, namely the great emphasis in the continuous evaluation procedures¹; the constitution of help-groups for M23 and pivoted by traditional students; or the availability of post-work hours schedules for classes.

Although no serious discrimination exists among students, M23s perceive that they are looked upon by non-M23 colleges as “different” even if that happens only in the first moments of mutual contact. They perceive that, for instance, by the use of formal addressing formulae: *“They call me Madam all the time [laughs], «Look, Madam [she accentuates this expression in a grave manner], did you pick up the print copies?»», «Madam did you pick up the notes?» It was really funny”* (Maria, 32 years old). In fact, they seem to see themselves as different, mostly because they go to the University with well-defined goals and with no time to loose – which seems to strongly differ them from the traditional students: *“I think they think we are a world apart, and we are indeed. Because we are not afraid to “dirty our hands”, to come here and work”* (Manuel, 49 years old). Allegedly, this fact made them more

focused and organized. They mention also that they are conscious of having a life experience that enriches the classes. All of them are satisfied with their decisions and have a positive appreciation of the University. In the end, the expectation about what it would be like to go back to study matches the reality. Once they overcome the initial impact of entering the University, they seem to adapt quickly to a lively rhythm of life and the demands of the institution. They underline that, in spite of starting relatively late in the University, they become readily alert to the surrounding reality, having a greater critical attitude and more agile in thought: *“Those who study have more agility at all levels, in the memory, in the attention, at all levels. And that’s also one of the factors why I think it is important for people to study. I think I’ll always be an eternal unsatisfied person. I would study all my life if I could. Because I think it’s very important. We feel much younger.”* (Dulce, 45 years old).

Discussion and Conclusion

First, we would like to underline, as stated by Gorard et al. (2006), that the University of Aveiro M23 students do not constitute a homogeneous group and frequently have only in common the participation in HE in a moment considered unusual (Gorard et al., 2006). The M23s that answered our survey tend to be between 30 and 40 years old and it is possible to note a “feminization effect” in the oldest age-groups of respondents. The family needs are combined with the professional ones, for students that have professional full-time jobs and are obliged to manage their long journeys and working days with the rhythm of normal academic life. The percentage of unemployed among the M23s is analogous to the national average (Portugal) of around 13%, calls our attention to the role played by education in the qualification of society, in what regards the empowerment needed to face contemporary challenges.

Older M23s are likely to enter the University with highest academic qualifications, although, within this group, long trajectories prevail that separate formal school attendance. The majority of the M23s prefer courses within the social sciences, law and health, being clear that the older tend to avoid, intentionally or not, the so-called hard disciplines. Also, the older M23 age-groups obtain better results than the younger and this gives room to challenge the frequent association between adult students and academic failure.

Although some contradictory results may be traced, the professional agenda appears as a priority to the M23 students, which leads us to the importance of creating new solutions that benefit the articulation between learning and work. However, the challenge of entering the University is looked at in a very positive way by all the mature students in the focus-groups interviews. We could state that some key-incidents that triggered important decisions, such as leaving school in their youth, are also important on applying for a vacancy at an HEI. Hence, we agree with Zittoun (2007:195), once the most significant transitions in the lives of these M23 students are related with new circumstances and the sense of rupture created. Returning to learn is effectively seen as a way of transforming

these students' lives, pursuing another direction, with enhanced possibilities, whether at a personal, professional or familiar level. As data indicate, in accordance with Yorke & Longden (2008), M23 students face more obstacles in their academic path than those from the regular contingent, although we should not reduce the rich and diverse experience of these students to this specific dimension. The transitions of the mature students are conditioned by the interpenetration between the macro and micro aspects of society. If the social structures play a central role, limiting the space of the "possible", the education institutions and the market also influence the way in which M23s relate themselves towards the process of learning. The subject himself /'herself is the third element of this triangle, from where the learning identities emerge, always moulded by the intersection between personal reflection and the external circumstances.

Acknowledgements

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Figures & Tables

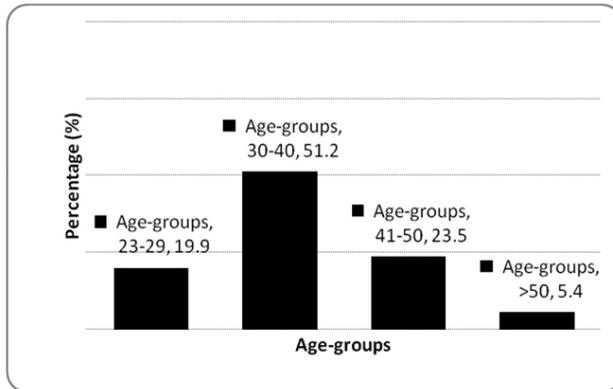


Figure 1 - Age-groups of non-traditional M23 students at the University of Aveiro.

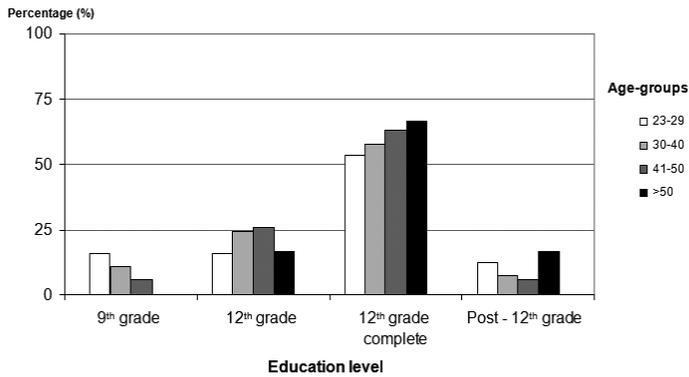


Figure 2 - Education levels of M23 students at the entrance of UA, by age-groups.

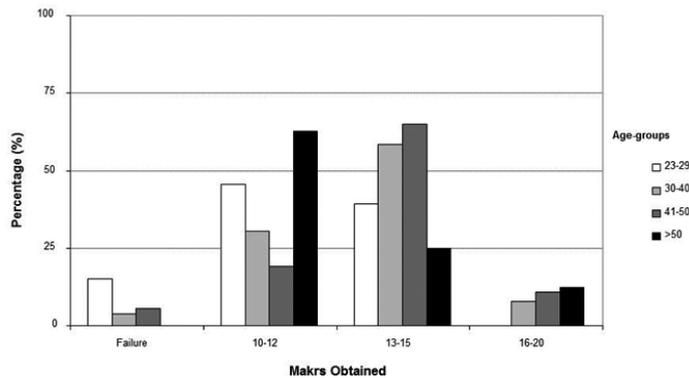


Figure 3 - Marks obtained in the Curricular Units by UA M23 students, according to their age groups.

Table 1 - First motive for UA M23 students to enrol HE, by age-group

Motives		23–29	30–40	41–50	>50	Total
Degree achievement		6.3%	7.1%	5.3%	25.0%	7.3%
	n	2	6	2	2	12
Employability		9.4%	5.9%	10.5%	0.0%	7.3%
	n	3	5	4	0	12
Wish / possibility of job change		9.4%	8.2%	5.3%	12.5%	7.9%
	n	3	7	2	1	13
Career progression		18.8%	25.9%	28.9%	12.5%	24.4%
	n	6	22	11	1	40
Possibility of wage raise		3.1%	4.7%	0.0%	0.0%	3.0%
	n	1	4	0	0	5
Like in the acquisition of knowledge		21.9%	16.5%	7.9%	25.5%	15.9%
	n	7	14	3	2	26
Self-confidence development		0.0%	0.0%	2.6%	0.0%	0.6%
	n	0	0	1	0	1
Improve self-esteem		0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	0.6%
	n	0	0	0	1	1
Personal fulfillment		15.6%	21.2%	31.6%	25.0%	22.6%
	n	5	18	12	2	37
Professional specialization		9.4%	9.4%	5.3%	0.0%	7.9%
	n	3	8	2	0	13
Studies upgrading		6.3%	1.2%	2.6%	0.0%	2.4%
	n	2	1	1	0	4
Total	n	32	85	38	8	164

n – number of occurrences

Table 2 - First reason to choose the course, by age-group

Motives		23–29	30–40	41–50	>50	Total
Interest / vocation		68.8%	60.0%	59.0%	62.5%	61.0%
	n	22	51	23	5	101
Employability / job opportunities		12.5%	10.6%	5.1%	0.0%	9.1%
	n	4	9	2	0	15
Acquisition of professional competences		12.5%	20.0%	25.6%	37.5%	20.6%
	n	4	17	10	3	34
Practical character of the degree		0.0%	3.5%	7.7%	0.0%	3.6%
	n	0	3	3	0	6
Access to a well remunerated profession		0.0%	3.5%	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%
	n	0	3	0	0	3
Course prestige		3.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%
	n	1	0	0	0	1
Curriculum prestige		3.1%	0.0%	2.6%	0.0%	1.2%
	n	1	0	1	0	2
Institution prestige		0.0%	1.2%	0.0%	12.5%	1.2%
	n	0	1	0	1	2
Independence (namely, economic)		0.0%	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%
	n	0	1	0	0	1
Total	n	32	85	39	8	165

n – number of occurrences

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**Images and experiences of
transition: how undergraduate
nursing and medical students
relate to cultural portrayals of
professional learning and work**

Introduction

This paper discusses findings from a two-year study exploring the pedagogical functions of popular or “pop” culture, especially in relation to portrayals of and learning about work and identity in health care. The study involved two American television shows (*Grey’s Anatomy* and *Scrubs*) whose central characters are medical residents. Conversations with undergraduate nursing and medical students who enjoyed one or both of these shows illuminate how cultural portrayals and messages contribute to and mesh with learning in relevant professional education. I was especially interested in exploring three themes: identity, ethics, and pedagogy and learning. Consistent with the focus of this network and conference, I emphasise cultural portrayals of identity construction and expression during a transition from student to professional, and how cultural consumption helps people anticipate and navigate that transitional process. My discussion is especially focused on connecting learners’ experiences and understandings of gender relations.

Literature Review

Although the question of how pop culture functions pedagogically among children and youth has been well explored, the extension of this question to adult learning remains relatively under-explored. In response to the dearth of adult education scholarship, there are calls for greater attention to this topic (Sandlin, Wright, & Clark, 2011). In this review, I summarise some of the recent adult education scholarship.

The film *Educating Rita* focuses on a British working-class hairdresser who enters university. It conveys a traditional message about higher education, which “is seen as a way of accessing a better culture; escaping an unenlightened inheritance” (Fisher, Harris, & Jarvis, 2008, p. 150). A more critical, complicated view of adult education is apparent in the show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Fisher, Harris and Jarvis (2008) outline how Buffy learns important lessons through work. As a fearless vampire slayer and attractive young woman, Buffy learns to challenge and reiterate stereotypes of femininity. Conversely, her important school-based learning relates to the power dynamics operating between students and faculty.

Studies connecting identity, adult learning and work also include Armstrong’s (2008) exploration of national variations of the show *The Office*. Armstrong notes that individuals enter the workplace with notions of what is expected from them. Those notions are developed through various information sources, including cultural representations, and both converge with and diverge from experiences in socioculturally contextualised workplaces. It is more useful, then, to think about cultural representations as resonant with audience members’ experiences, rather than a realistic reflection of them. In her work on an early season of the British show *The Avengers*, Wright (2010) explores how the show’s female

lead, secret agent Cathy Gale, has the feminine attribute of beauty, as well as the masculine qualities of intelligence, strength and fearlessness. For fans, Cathy Gale offered a new image of women as participants in the British workplace and society.

Tisdell (2008) discusses three studies conducted with colleagues to explore how pop culture is used by adult educators. Participants in these studies engaged critically with cultural products that challenge hegemonic ideas. For members of a minority group, cultural portrayals of people who resembled them and achieved success was affirming, and bolstered hopes that new portrayals can spur social change. Often, though, critical responses were limited by the enjoyment and pleasure of cultural consumption; however, “facilitation and interaction” (Tisdell, 2008, p. 58) helped participants expand “their understanding of marginalized ‘Others’ in new ways and/or increase their understanding of how hegemonic processes work both in media and in society at large” (p. 58).

This review highlights how adult educators explore pop culture and adult learning. Despite its fictional basis, pop culture resonates with audience members’ experiences and understandings and, perhaps more importantly, their aspirations. As I explore further in the next section, this resonance exemplifies the multi-dimensionality of learning, the complications of identity, and the links between adult learning and identity.

Theoretical Framework

I adopt several premises related to adult learning, identity and pop culture. These are greatly informed by Gramsci’s (1971) ideas about the role of cultural practices in teaching and learning about social relations. I also adopt the constructivist notion that adults develop knowledge through socially contextualised experiences and learn ‘incidentally’ in daily life (Malcolm, Hodkinson, & Colley, 2003).

Consistent with much of the work discussed above, identity construction is one way that learning is directed, as people come to understand themselves and others through ongoing relational experiences and cultural portrayals of social life. In conceptualising identity, I am developing the metaphor of a translucent crystal, through which the world can be perceived and described. Like facets of a crystal, facets of identity are always joined but never combinable. Discrete facets can be studied and discussed, although looking through a particular facet always yields an incomplete, distorted view. Unlike the facets of a crystal, though, facets of social identity develop continually and, sometimes, unpredictably.

Whether or not it is related to identity, adult learning has a dialectical quality; that is, it has inherent tensions. Pop culture often attempts to enlist consumers in accepting a particular world view; however, it is not always deliberately consistent with hegemonic ideology and the ‘common sense’ (Gramsci, 1971) which justifies social order. Different producers might adhere to different ideological stances

and attempt to convey them through their work, and a single cultural product can both reiterate and challenge hegemonic discourses by presenting characters who represent various perspectives. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that audience members will receive messages as intended (Trend, 2008). Constructing meaning is not an unbounded process, though; rather, there is a “mediated character of all representation and consequent ability of people to invent new or consequent readings” (Trend, 2008, p. 146). Adults are neither “fully autonomous, agentic beings” nor “the wholly passive creations of the culture industries” (Sandlin, Wright, & Clark, 2011, p. 3), and their learning through cultural consumption is tied to other learning sources and contexts. Finally, as I will explore in my discussion to follow, pop culture and cultural consumption exemplifies how the line between so-called formal and informal adult learning is blurred, so that “attributes” of formality and informality are present in all learning” (Malcolm, Hodkinson, & Colley, 2003).

Methodology

This inquiry confirms the flexibility of qualitative research conducted from the interpretive/ critical theory paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 2008). The study began with a textual analysis of *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Scrubs*. I viewed the shows on DVD, and partially transcribed and summarised them. Transcribed sections deal with three thematic interests: identity, ethics and pedagogy. These initial data were not coded, but tracking excerpts which corresponded to my thematic interests was helpful in developing focus group guidelines as well as the code book being used to analyse participant-based data. Viewing the shows was, then, both a data collection and a data analysis process.

Although I intended to talk to participants in groups, that plan quickly changed. Because of their hectic schedules, prospective participants found scheduling difficult. Wanting to accommodate as many people as possible, I held small sessions and even one-on-one interviews. Sessions were guided by a series of questions, which were introduced by clips from the shows. Participants were welcome to discuss any episode of either show that seemed relevant and memorable. Sessions were audio and video taped for transcription, and I took notes. Whenever possible, a Graduate Research Assistant co-facilitated sessions with me. Data analysis, which remains underway, is being supported with nVivo software.

As this methodological outline suggests, this was an interdisciplinary inquiry. It incorporated methods that are used commonly in cultural studies research and others more common in the social sciences. In this regard, perhaps the study’s methodological strategy is best described as a bricolage, the term used by Kincheloe (2001, 2005) to refer to the use of multiple methodologies and methods in exploring questions which cross disciplinary boundaries.

***Grey's Anatomy* and *Scrubs*: The Shows and Characters**

Grey's Anatomy is set in Seattle Grace Hospital and focuses on the speciality of surgery. Meredith Grey is a complicated, attractive woman living in the shadow of her mother who had practised surgery at the same hospital. Meredith's best friend, the steely minded Cristina Yang, plans to become a cardiothoracic surgeon. She is distinct in her cohort as a member of a racialized minority group. Raised in a loving, working class family, George O'Malley dies in a traffic accident at the end of season 5. Also in that season, Izzie Stevens, a romantic blonde who worked her way out of poverty by modelling, marries the handsome but sexist Alex Karev, who was raised in an emotionally and physically abusive family. Miranda Bailey begins the show as the assertive, hard-nosed supervisor to these junior residents. She is unique, initially as a black woman in a still largely white, masculine world and, later, as a parent who faces work-life balance challenges. Derek Shepherd, the handsome, white, well liked and respected neurosurgeon, is Meredith's on-again/off-again romantic partner until they marry. Richard Webber, who begins the series as the Chief of Surgery, is notable as a black man in a senior position and the long-ago lover of Meredith's mother. Mark Sloan, a plastic surgeon, is Derek's old friend and a notorious womanizer. Callie Torres, the only Latina in the show, is an orthopaedic resident from a wealthy family, and comes out as a lesbian. Over time, new residents come to Seattle Grace, including Meredith's estranged step sister, Lexie, April Kepner and Jackson Avery. Other additions are Owen Hunt, a white trauma surgeon who marries Cristina, and Arizona Robbins, a perky, white paediatric surgeon who becomes Callie's partner.

In contrast to *Grey's Anatomy*, *Scrubs* features characters in specialities besides surgery and in nursing. It is set in Sacred Heart Hospital, and revolves around the narrator, John Dorian or J.D., who is introduced as a middle class, white, insecure first-year resident specialising in internal medicine. J.D.'s long-time best friend, Christopher Turk, is a black surgical resident who projects a self-confident swagger. Elliot Reid is an attractive, but high-strung and competitive, white woman from a well-to-do family, and specializes with J.D. in medicine. After dating intermittently, J.D. and Elliot finally marry late in the series. Another important character, Carla Espinosa, is a sexy, spunky Latina nurse from a working class background; she becomes Turk's girlfriend and eventually marries him. The show also features two attending physicians: Dr. Cox, whose regular mocking of J.D.'s anxieties never dissuades J.D. from looking to him as a mentor, and Dr. Kelsoe, whose heartlessness toward residents and patients alike quickly becomes evident. Several medical students appear in the show's last season.

I chose these two shows because they are unique in following individuals in a transition from student to practitioner. They both highlight teaching and learning strategies and present commentaries on them, and use the hospital as an explicit site of learning and work. Popular with medical and nursing students (see Czarny, Faden, Nolan, Bodensiek, & Sugarman, 2008), these shows offer representations of processes that participants themselves are anticipating or encountering.

Participants

The study involved 20 undergraduate nursing students and 21 medical students in three Canadian centres: Vancouver/Victoria, British Columbia; Calgary, Alberta; and Toronto, Ontario. In terms of gender and sexual orientation, there was very little diversity among them: Thirty-six of the 41 were female, and all but four self-identified as heterosexual or straight. In terms of their ethno-racial identities, most described themselves as Caucasian or white and reported a range of ethnic affiliations; eight of them self-identified as being of Asian, Chinese, Vietnamese or Filipino descent; two people were Indo-Canadian; one person described herself as Hispanic and a second person as Arabic. While some people could trace their families' presence in Canada for generations, others were first generation Canadians and a few had immigrated to this country. All participants chose or received a pseudonym.

A notable difference between the medical student and nursing student participants is that people in the former group were more likely to have grown up around medical professionals. Medical student participants who did not have doctors in their families agreed that, indeed, many of their fellow students came from medical families. In Canada, medicine is a profession which is associated with relatively high socioeconomic class position. Moreover, medical education, which only begins after preliminary undergraduate education has been completed, is a lengthy, expensive undertaking. Not surprisingly, medical student participants were more likely than nursing student participants to report having a middle or upper-middle class background. Furthermore, nursing student participants had a wider age range, from several people who were only 20 years old to one person who was in her forties.

Findings and Discussion

Although my analysis remains underway, some patterns are evident already. These patterns do not erase the differences in participants' ages, backgrounds, educational programs and locales. Nor do they mean that participants experienced education, transition and cultural consumption in the same way. Still, my analysis to date offers insights into the complex demands and achievements involved in moving through such a transition, and how cultural consumption contributes to that process.

Learning-to-Work Transition in Pop Culture: Fiction or Authenticity?

Participants understood that, when they watch television, they are watching fiction. Still, they appreciated the shows' focus on a learning and career pathway that they themselves had undertaken, and found points in both shows that seemed authentic. Returning to the Gramscian idea of dialectic, I hear in participants' comments recognition of the tensions that exist between fictional or cultural representations and real-life experience.

One participant, a first-year medical student named M.J., favoured *Scrubs* and found that it balanced a degree of unreality that helped produce humour with a degree of realism. According to her, “it’s not the most realistic depiction I guess of what you are going to be doing but to some extent it makes some things more understandable, and I think it deals with a lot of issues really well, but mostly it’s just fun” (25 November 2010). Another first-year medical student, Crystal, enjoyed watching both shows, for different reasons. While she appreciated the humour in *Scrubs*, the appeal of *Grey’s Anatomy* was often based in its portrayal of clinical situations and procedures. She identified with it because, in her words:

It looks more like it could be real life, right? And so you...wonder, I guess, whether that would be what being a doctor would be like....I think before I didn’t realise that I was thinking like that. Before I got into medicine. There are some things about it that are farcical. You’re like, That would never happen, right? But there are some things about it that seem fairly realistic, the way they put it together. And now that we’re here, I know what of that is realistic and what of that is completely ridiculous, in and of itself. (03 March 2011)

An avid fan of *Scrubs*, second-year medical student Brian was similarly reflective and articulate about the links between pop culture and work-related learning. He wondered about the show’s influence on his developing understanding of the medical field and health care. Commenting on perceived cultural differences among medical specialities, he posed a rhetorical question: “Is... it my bias that came from watching the show that caused me to look for this type of behaviour or is it actually happening and the show is mimicking how things actually are? It’s hard to tell” (21 February 2011).

Such comments echo Armstrong’s (2008) assertion that novices enter the workplace with ideas about work. Moreover, as they move through their programmes of study and are exposed to clinical settings, participants seem to bridge their formal education and cultural consumption in a new way: Pop culture teaches them something about their professional practices and identities, and their educational programmes teach them something about the culture that they are consuming. This observation confirms the conclusion made by Malcolm, Hodkinson and Colley (2003) that attributes of formality and informality are present in all adult learning – an everyday practice such as watching television, typically seen as a form of informal learning, can connect to formal education, and classroom-based learning can spur unanticipated learning about culture and their own cultural consumption.

Watching/Being Novices

Participants appreciated watching and relating to characters who shared their interests and aspirations. For many participants, these shows are helpful because they feature novices who are still considered learners. Brian, a second year medical student, liked *Scrubs* because “it’s... about how the characters

grow and how they are affected by their lives as doctors and nurses. And as someone who wants to get into that as a career it's nice to see... what that might look like even if it's a universal take on it, and that's also what really resonates" (21 February 2011). Another medical student, Gyan, thought that "the whole progression of... [residents] from first year where they are watching a lot and they don't do much, and then they start doing and then they start teaching, you know, that continuum is really cool to see and that's a great character progression" (21 February 2011).

For some participants, watching characters embark on particular pathways helped them envision their own professional pathways. As one first year medical student who was contemplating the possibility of specialising in surgery explained:

I initially wasn't even considering surgery and then I started watching *Grey's Anatomy*... I really liked that they were surgeons and it seemed really exciting and very hands on and just really making a difference immediately for the person and fixing a problem rather than just managing one over a long period of time... I liked that element of it and it was kind over the top and dramatic and interesting and fun and I got addicted. (Madelyn, 14 October 2010)

Like any learning context, a transition from student to professional has intellectual and emotional dimensions. This multidimensionality can be seen in conjunction with the emotional appeal that pop culture has with audience members (Tisdell, 2008). Brian's comments illuminate the importance that pop culture can have, precisely because it registers on an emotional level:

I started watching *Scrubs* when I was waiting... for my acceptance letter to come back in and it was quite comforting because, you know, I was very anxious as to whether or not I would get it. And watching this, it was like... if this is anything remotely close to like what real life is like then I am going to be a student for a long time. I don't need to be perfect when I am there which means I don't need to be perfect to get in, and it was comforting. (21 February 2011)

As I mentioned above, neither *Grey's Anatomy* nor *Scrubs* features nursing students or novice nurses; however, nursing student participants were able to relate to characters who were in transition from student to health care professional. *Grey's Anatomy* appealed to Cathy because "I like watching it, like them starting out, it's kind of a competition... It's so intense and exciting. Like all the trauma cases, I like the medical part of it as well, it's interesting" (20 July 2010). Like many other nursing student participants, Jane concurred with that view, relating to characters in both shows who "felt really uncertain about their abilities as professionals. So I think at that point I... really connected with that as well. Especially now because I'm starting out as well, so I connect with that doubt and uncertainty" (20 July 2010).

Images of Gender and Gendered Professions

As professional identity develops, it becomes a facet which joins with gender and other facets of social identity. There are two ways that the facet of gender surfaces regularly in *Grey's Anatomy* and *Scrubs*, and connects with professional identity. First, there is the matter of how nurses are depicted. Nursing remains a highly feminised profession and, according to participants, nursing education remains similarly feminised in Canada. Not surprisingly, all of the nursing student participants were women. They were motivated to pursue nursing for various reasons: interests in science, commitments to advocacy and helping, and good income potential. Compared to medicine, nursing education is quick and affordable, especially for participants from a working class background or who had immigrated to Canada.

Of the shows included in this study, *Grey's Anatomy* was the more popular among participants. It has been highly rated among the general public, in comparison to *Scrubs* which has a dedicated, but more limited, audience. It is also the more feminine of the shows, featuring an array of female characters in contrast to *Scrubs'* main characters J.D. and Turk. At times, nurses and nursing are insulted explicitly in *Grey's Anatomy*, often as a way for characters to reiterate the superiority of medicine, and insinuate that women are less capable in the historically masculine medical profession. More often, though, nurses and nursing simply are overlooked. Nurses in the show typically remain unnamed, and are most likely to appear as physicians' handmaidens or temporary sexual partners.

Although they enjoyed *Grey's Anatomy's* characters and scenarios, nursing student participants recognized its portrayal of nurses as sexist and unrealistic. Many agreed that *Grey's Anatomy* reflects ignorance among the general public about the "scope of practice of a nurse" (Jane, 20 July 2010), and noted that much of what characters do is actually nurses' work. As Lisa explained, "I see myself as part of the show because I'm in health care, but I'm not represented" (29 November 2010). In turning nurses into phantom figures, *Grey's Anatomy* illustrates how contemporary mainstream (North American) culture adopts a neoliberal perspective which emphasizes personal responsibility and autonomy. This emphasis masks how educational and professional transitions are shaped by gender structures, so that stereotypically female contributions to work and work-related learning are diminished.

Still, nursing student participants related to *Grey's Anatomy* and enjoyed watching it. Like medical student participants considering surgery, nursing student participants who were interested in procedures often commented that watching *Grey's Anatomy* had helped them choose surgery as an interest. Despite their recognition of the show's inaccuracies, these participants found its many scenes in the operating room exciting. Makaela, a second-year student interested in surgical nursing, chuckled as she commented, "it makes me jealous when I watch it – I want to be in those surgeries" (26 November 2010). Jillian, a class-mate thinking about emergency or trauma nursing, mentioned, "I really like idea of... not really knowing what do and having to... problem-solve. I really like seeing those situations when someone comes in and you have to... come up with, on the spot, what you need to do" (26 November 2010).

One participant, Michelle, a first-year nursing student, was frustrated by what she saw as an emphasis in her courses on nursing as a profession which embodies many stereotypically feminine attributes. She related to the no-nonsense Cristina Yang character:

because I... got really frustrated almost to the point of leaving nursing in my first semester because... I found all our lectures were really like focusing super-heavily on caring.... So I got pretty frustrated thinking, I didn't come here to, like, hone my maternal instincts... so it was kinda nice that... Cristina Yang is... *extremely* competent in what she does but she's not sentimental. (20 July 2010)

The association with gender followed participants even if they pursued medicine. Medical and nursing students and nurses often dress alike; therefore, it can be difficult to discern who is in which category. Although participants agreed that *Scrubs* treats nursing characters more respectfully than *Grey's Anatomy*, there are reminders in that show about how gender figures into professional status and public perceptions. In one scene, Elliot, the female medical resident, is offended when a patient mistakenly refers to her as a nurse. Several participants noted a pattern of mistaking female medical students for nursing students and mistaking male nursing students for medical students once they got to hospital placements. Gyan, a second-year female medical student, has encountered this predicament and, although "it still bugs me... I know so many nurses that it doesn't... offend me" (21 February 2011).

Beyond gendered depictions of nurses and nursing, there are also ongoing, gender-related stereotypes about specialities, and associations between the most masculinised specialities and status. In *Grey's Anatomy*, surgery is described 'sexy' and 'macho' (Rhimes & Horton, 2005), and female residents are warned not to become pregnant and slotted into lesser status 'mommy track' specialities. In *Scrubs*, J.D. reflects on a lesson during his first day of residency: "And like that I was back in high school. You see, surgical interns, they're all slice 'em and dice 'em. They're the jocks. Medical interns, we're trained to think about the body. Diagnose, test. Medical interns, well,... we're the chess club" (Lawrence & Bernstein, 2001). Participants described some of these portrayals as over-stated, but agreed that various specialities were gendered in particular ways. Even one of the few male participants in the study worried about this association between masculinity and some specialities. Alex, a medical student participants who self-identified as gay, stated, "The division between medical and surgical interns in *Scrubs*, it actually concerned me quite a bit because I was wondering, I am going into surgery and does this mean like I have to look like a jock? Do I have to *high five* people?" (21 October 2010).

Although some female medical student participants enjoyed procedures and were considering a speciality which remains relatively masculinised, others were wary about choosing a speciality which seems unwelcoming to and of women. Part of this apprehension was based in the perception that masculine specialities place high demands on practitioners' time, and make it difficult to balance work and home life. Especially for students with little or no placement experiences, cultural portrayals

of specialities were influential in developing an understanding of them. For Gyan, who had “never shadowed a surgeon,...I think I form most of my opinions off these shows and that just makes me think I do not want to go into a profession where I am at the hospital like 80 hours a week or 90 hours a week, that does not appeal to me at all” (21 February 2011).

Closing Thoughts

For both nursing and medicine, learning-to-work transitions are processes of identity construction and learning. Identity is related to profession, which is connected to other facets of identity, notably gender. Pop culture is integrated into professional education, and professional education is connected to cultural consumption, so that the line between formal and informal learning is blurred. This inquiry contributes to scholarship investigating popular culture as a source of adult learning, and ties between the cultural and the social and between work-related and broader social identities. Methodologically, it illustrates how research approaches can be mixed to explore how individuals learn about themselves and their world.

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**Transitions – moving from
studying to working: biographical
ways of shaping during
transitions**

Research question and empirical research design

The social psychologist Harald Welzer defines transition to be the “change of established contexts of living” (cf. Welzer 1990: 37); In such a situation, the subject needs to comprehend the new situation of life, adapt to the related requirements and develop meaningful action strategies (cf. *ibid.*). At a biographical level, one of the most distinctive formal transition processes may be the change within or from one education system to another, for instance from university to work life. The change of status related to this transition is experienced and assessed by each individual in a different way: individual action and coping competencies are combined with formal and informal support systems either experienced or needed. It is important to integrate “the past into the present” (Dunlop/Fabian 2002, quoted from Griebel 2004: 26), to adapt to the “changes at an individual, interactional and contextual level“ (Cowan 1991, quoted from Griebel 2004: 26).

In the following section, taking up the special aspects of ‘experiencing transitions’, I will present the key results of the research project “Transitions – moving from studying to working”, based on the 2008 survey among graduates, carried out at Mainz University, Germany. The project, which was conducted by Heide von Felden (Institute of Educational Science) based on a research cooperation of the Institute of Sociology and the Institute of Educational Science, Work Group Education of Adults, at Mainz University¹.

Understanding the process of moving as transitions, the central question of the project was: In what respects does the passage from studying to working represent a transition? On the one hand, this question was investigated from a quantitative perspective in order to describe the long-term processes of the passages as differentiated as possible. On the other hand, we chose a qualitative perspective to follow the graduates’ related biographical construction of meaning. At the **quantitative** level, using a standardised questionnaire (Menard 2008), graduates of the subjects medicine and educational science were asked about satisfaction with their studies, the passage from studying to working and their current job situation (Mayer 2000; Müller et. Al.1998). Six years after the respondents completed their studies, the survey aimed at identifying factors influencing the duration of the passage by using event analyses, and specific passage patterns of the respondents by using sequence pattern analyses. It was investigated in what respect socio-demographic, job market theoretical or study subject-related factors had on influencing the duration and pattern of the passages.

The qualitative interviews focused on identifying how the actors interpret their perception of their university studies, the transitory period and their job situation. Open guided interviews were conducted

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with 16 graduates of medicine and educational science. The open guided interview involved a high percentage of narrative-generating questions to allow for a balance between the emphases set by the interviewees and the questions specified in the context of the survey subject. The focus was set on questions about the previous phase of studying, about the passage as a phase of orientation, and about the job situation as the new phase of life. The interviews were evaluated using the qualitative content analysis of Philipp Mayring, involving a sequence of nine analytical steps (Mayring 2009). In doing so, the content of the interviews was categorised, successively condensed, evaluated and interpreted. Besides the subject- and topic-related responses the protagonists' general and individual attitudes towards studying, moving from studying to working, and their current job situation could also be established. At the same time, differences regarding the corresponding subject-specific socialisations and different action patterns in dealing with opportunities and challenges of the professional structures became apparent. Under the premise of the 'biographical reconstruction of reality' the qualitative research approach also allowed for tracing the contours of the process character of the individual passages.

Contrasting the subjects of “educational science” and “medicine”

By choosing the subjects of medicine and educational science we intended to involve the maximum difference regarding study structure, subject culture, habitus and professional structure (Egloff 2002). While the study of medicine follows a science and fact-oriented approach, in the study of educational science a social-science a cultural approach prevails. The study of medicine is characterised by clear school-like structures, personal hierarchisation and high reproductive intensity of learning. The study of educational science is considered less school-like. It is characterised by a high degree of proactivity, hermeneutical understanding and traditional approaches of the humanities².

Key research results

In order to understand how graduates experience and evaluate the process of moving from studying to working, it is necessary to consider the context and interaction of the different dimensions inherent to studying and the actual passage. These characteristics can be described as follows:

Social relevance of the study course

During the interviews it became apparent that the two subjects enjoy a different social reputation, a fact that also finds its expression in the cultural and economic capital of the students (Cowan 1991). The majority of the physicians' parents were university graduates themselves, almost half of them

² Please note that the results refer to the former diploma courses. The current bachelor and master courses involve less differences with respect to the reproductive intensity of learning and the formal structuring.

physicians. The family context of the educationalists was more diverse and did not necessarily involve a university background. While medicine enjoys a good reputation, educational science with its indifferent professional culture – except the profession of a teacher – is accorded a lower level of esteem.

Biographical relevance of the study

For both groups the biographical relevance of studying is closely connected with the orientation towards the future professional activity. The responses clearly refer to the aspect of employability (Klenke 2009). The students' orientation is the job market. Accordingly the studies are to provide a toolbox for the future professional activity along with adequate preparation for possible related requirements, and the training of corresponding competences. Hörmann and Henniger outline the presented paradigm shift with respect to the consequences of the Bologna process as follows:

The traditionally prevailing input orientation is replaced by an output orientation, considering the competence objectives of a study course to be the leading aspect of its development. (Hörmann/Henniger 2007: 211)

Following the internalised idea of employability, students of medicine and educational science alike attach special importance to practice elements during their studies – in the form of both practice-related seminars and actual internships. Apart from representing direct job experience, the first practical experiences serve both groups as individual and technical orientation in using the theoretical knowledge acquired during their studies, and as a possible professional orientation. Although not explicitly mentioned, working also provides the context for the individual meaning of the studies, and offers the students personal and technical orientation. While for the physicians working leads to the development or consolidation of a professional habitus, for the educationalists working serves as a means for orientation given the wide range of work opportunities. Practical experiences – as the interviews make clear – suggest a feeling of safety for the passage from studying to working. For instance, the students believe that the transition to the working world was easier – a conclusion which might prove treacherous, for:

However, numerous internships and side jobs during studies as such do not [...] automatically lead to a successful career entry. Rather, what is central is, following the results of this study, how far such experiences are actually used for obtaining professional orientation and anticipating the passage. (Bührmann 2008: 83)

Half of the respondents emphasise that their studies were not only relevant with respect to their future career but also provided them with a learning and educational space of their own (Marotzki 1991). While the physicians particularly consider the study period as a space for self-development, the participating educationalists regard their studies also as a period to develop a socio-critical attitude which they have considered to be the basis of their social and political commitment to this day.

Learning attitudes in coping with studies and passage

The learning attitudes during studying clearly correlate with the individual coping strategies during the passage. The learning process of the physicians is related to the successful passing of exams and the reproduction of the required knowledge of facts:

Well, it really was the way that almost the complete leisure time was used up, at least for me. I'm not a person who is good at rote learning, [3 secs] – well, and studying medicine involves a lot of rote learning and also understanding, of course – well. in the end. (Interviewee doctor A7; line 87-90)

While in the study of medicine the focus is mostly on reproducing the comprehensive subject matter, the openly structured study of educational science refers to learning by understanding. The graduates embed learning into a pedagogical professional understanding of reflexivity and processes. Not only do they choose the subject of learning more independently, but frequently also submit it to critical review and analysis. Referring to the professional routine of physicians, their understanding of learning is based on purely technical foundations and the quick reproduction of medical know-how in order to ensure adequate, sound and fast professional decisions. As a result they manage the passage in a pragmatic and target-oriented way. Formal questions, such as application strategies, specialisation and material considerations, determine the design of the transition. The educationalists, however, realise the process adopting a reflexive-critical attitude. To them, questions of professional identity and the search for meaning are most important. The actual search for an employment seems to be more casual.

Bühmann presents a three-phase model for moving from university to the working world (Bühmann 2008: 19): a phase of detachment, characterised by activities illustrating the detachment process (e.g. writing a degree thesis, sitting exams, etc.) is followed by a threshold phase or transformation phase. During this period of being 'in between' the preparation for the following phase (e.g. writing applications, establishing contacts, attending seminars, etc.) takes place, e.g. entering work life. During the following integration phase the graduates integrate into the new phase of life, into a new world. According to Bühmann this may also take the shape of a reintegration into an already known phase (ibid.: 20). Regarding this classification into phases, now the focus is on the period of moving from studying to working. In doing so, both formal and non-formal transitional structures become apparent. Due to the clear structure of their study course, comprising a theoretical and a practical part, the physicians can predict and plan the phase of the passage. The increasingly positive job market situation for physicians represents an additional supportive aspect in the context of this formal structure. None of the interviewees experienced a period of more than two months between graduation and start of work. The fact that their professional area is transparent and their work is very clear facilitates the reflection of their identity and the forthcoming change of status from being a student to being a physician. For most educationalists, the passage takes place less smoothly. They

have no formal practice phase at their disposal to enter work life. The mode of examination as such is prescribed, however, preparing the written and oral exams and writing the thesis has to be done individually and outside of the usual connection with university life. In addition, the diversity and broad range of career options in the context of educational science make it difficult to find a clear thematic fit. This experience is also supported by the results published in the 'Report Erziehungswissenschaft' (report on educational science) of Tillmann et. al. (Tillmann 2008: 72):

The graduates also have a series of alternative activities at their choice, such as continuing their student side jobs, accepting temporary work and service contracts, and staying at university, either by starting another study course or by doing a doctorate. (ibid.)

At this point, at the latest, many respondents from educational science face the question regarding their individual professional orientation within a wide range of options. Some avoid this deliberate reflection by using familiar side jobs, expanding them to regular jobs, to enter their career, or by combining several areas of activity. The decision for a specific thematic field or area of work is held open for a longer time. For some of the respondents it is only now, after a few years of working, that the question of a thematic change arises. In these cases the first job served to provide technical orientation and personal consolidation. They rather understand the study of educational science to be a tool, an opportunity to acquire professional competences. Even if the passage has already taken place at a formal level, the protagonists only experience it with a time lag. The narrative parts of the interviews provide examples – the physicians telling about the topic of first on-call or night duty, the educationalists about the praxis shock:

The exciting moment was always the first service, I had done it after four weeks or so, and then it was the first time you were alone in the hospital and it was said "If anything should happen you are first to act, for although your support can be reached he will need 15 minutes to arrive at the hospital", and I thought "well, this will be exciting". (Interviewee doctor A8; line 575-580)

After some delay, the young physicians face the scope of their changed status – the experience of the first service is the corresponding metaphor. At that moment, when completely on their own, their high degree of responsibility becomes apparent. Although all respondents are aware of their high responsibilities and although, in the course of the passage, they have reflected the change of status from being a student to being a physician at a cognitive level (Bühmann 2008: 19), the first (night) service is the tangible experience of the passage. Also to the students of educational science the passage to the working world represents a tangible change. Although their professional practice does not usually involve a first (night) service, to some of the respondents the first weeks of work represent a praxis shock.

I have to admit, though, that it was kind of a praxis shock (laughs) ... I think I had kind of rather ideal ideas about how a team works, how the practice looks like and, well, I mean,

then in the beginning there were kind of hard lessons to learn. That between an ideal state and what is realistic, that this looks completely different, but now actually I count it as, was a good experience. (Interviewee educationalist P6; line 127-132)

Both groups of respondents consider formal and informal support systems to be of elementary importance during the transitory period. Family and friends are regarded as part of the informal support system. Formal support systems are seen as part of the structures and the content of the study courses. In addition to the already mentioned job experiences, personal support is essential to them. They expect to be provided with advice and mediation, and be accompanied by the teaching staff of the faculty. In his ethnological research on rites of passage, Van Gennep emphasises the basic function of this kind of mediator (van Gennep 1986: 53). Here the mediator serves as “bridge, chain or connecting link” (ibid.). Bühmann transfers the model to the professional context. Here, on the one hand, the mediator supports the individuals in their passage to a new social group, on the other hand, the mediator is frequently also of central importance for the “successful integration into the professional institution” (Bühmann 2008: 101). Taking up the concept of this ‘passage assistant’, Struck develops the term of the gatekeeper in the sense of a lock keeper (cf. Struck 2001: 35). As opposed to the unspecific concept of a “socialisation assistant” he uses the term “gatekeeper”

for key individuals with the authority to take decisions in mediating between individuals and organisation with respect to institution. That is, for ‘lock keepers’ who, at the borders of social subspaces, represent the requirements for passing these spaces in an assertive way, applying potent definitions. (Struck 2001: 37)

Their decision-making power and the fact that they are part of the respective institution or organisation including the related social structures give gatekeepers a central role as key figures in processes of passage. In the study of medicine, the figure of the doctoral advisor reflects the image of the gatekeeper:

They assess the passage aspirants on their way from status to status. Thus they have a mediating role between the individuals’ wishes, aims, attitudes and abilities on the one hand, and the requirements, objectives, values and/or functional constraints of organisations and socio-cultural and institutional conditions having an impact on the latter, on the other hand. (ibid.: 49)

Correspondingly, all participating physicians attribute a biographically central role to their doctoral advisors. To them they are figures providing support but primarily orientation in the process of developing their individual professional identity. The educationalists lack that experience as they do not have a comparable personal structure at their disposal.

To the interviewees, support systems and formal but also informal networks (Strauber 2004, 2007) are of essential importance, not only during the transitory phases but also in the following everyday

working life. Here again, the different culture of the study courses becomes apparent. While the educationalists describe reflecting to be a matter of course which is part of the professional culture, for the physicians it is not always easy to address issues in the team, to expose technical uncertainties or admit feeling overloaded. It seems that in the context of a physician's habitus more importance is attached to knowledge than to learning. As a result they have difficulty in asking for support of their colleagues in the course of transition processes. Due to their rather reflexive-communicative study structures, the educationalists do not encounter this problem.

Under the premises of a "biographical Gestaltschließung (i.e. *building a complete image of reality from individual segments*)" (Schütze 1981, 1983, 1984, 2007; Riemann 2003) and the stringent presentation of identity, all of the participating physicians and four of the participating educationalists build a positive consistent image from the reflected experiences of the passage and attribute meaning to the individual phases.

I think it was a good experience, now, with what I know now (laughs) I would, no, no, I mean of course there are two sides to it, so it was, this changing not knowing what, this was certainly also a period of uncertainty, and in the end, actually I have drawn a positive balance and I think I have benefited from all the experiences, of course. (Interviewee educationalist P6; line 1142-1145)

Transition – Summary of the results

To be consonant with the definition of transition by Harald Welzer as a "change of established contexts of living" (Welzer 1990: 37); we defined transition as a combination of structural attributes and individual interpretations of the subjects. This appreciation includes on the one hand the societal and institutional structure of transitions, on the other hand the subjective meaning of transitions for each individual (Böpple/von Felden/Nierobisch/Wagner 2010: 237). In the course of the study it has become apparent:

Summarizing it can be stated that the passage from university to work life [...], can neither be explained in a linear causal way nor without considering social processes, but is a result of different factors working together: the individuals, their subjective interpretations, the social rules, the control circuits, the material and social environment and the prior development. In this context, these factors are not isolated from one another but interrelated. (Bühmann 2008: 42)

Regarding the focus of the transition from studying to working, there is evidence that the physicians deal with the institutional passage at an early stage and at an individual level. However, this does not comprise a simultaneous personal reflection on the part of the respondents. Reflecting the changes

related to the transition takes place with a certain delay in the sense of a biographical processing pattern. It can be found in the descriptions of the first on-call and night service or the praxis shock. It is only in the conflicting area of professional non-/experience, technical competence and degree of responsibility that the passage actually becomes tangible. With respect to the technical preparation provided by the content of their studies the physicians feel adequately prepared for their everyday professional life. In the view of the interviewees, the figure of the doctoral advisor has a special position, accompanying and supporting the passage in the sense of a gatekeeper. Based on the stringent professional structure of physicians with its clear allocation of tasks, system hierarchies and technical requirements, the physicians become rapidly familiar with their new position and gradually develop a habitus of their own. During their passage to work life, the educationalists experience a period of questions and uncertainties due to the heterogeneous professional structure of educational science. Their study course does not offer them a formal structure for entering work life so that the individual graduates have to deal with this phase on their own.

To the educationalists it is of central importance – not only for a seamless passage but also for finding their way in and familiarise themselves with new areas of work – to learn how to deal with new subjects and acquire knowledge in an effective and quick way. They see this as a central outcome of the study course, whereas the physicians clearly focus on the acquisition of technical knowledge. The causal relevance of the categories “*attitude towards studying*” – “*satisfaction with their studies*” and “*job satisfaction*” is obvious. The physicians started studying with clear expectations. After an adaptation phase they were able to accept what was required in the context of the study course and have managed their studies and the transitory process in a pragmatic, professional and target-oriented way. Consequently, they think of their education and their current situation as a good time, both professionally and personally. A similarly direct link can also be stated for the respondents from educational science. However, as many of them took the decision to study the course rather reluctantly, the same attitude also shows in securing the results in their present situation. To them, satisfaction derives from the meaning of their work and from enjoying the work content. They consider a wider range for their professional development, including completely new areas of work. Their attitude towards the transitory process can rather be interpreted as reflexive - which is also a result of the social science orientation of their studies. They ponder and critically question the process of studying – passage – work life.

The results of the research clearly show that formal, standardised passages are not necessarily the same as the passages experienced as biographically relevant. Even if formal conditions in the sense of clear transitional structures (e.g. final phase and examinations during studying, practical year, etc.) refer to the process and prepare it, it is not necessarily of biographical importance at an individual level. The subjective experience and evaluation of a meaningful passage rather depends on a complex interaction of several factors: technical, institutional and personal support systems, individual expectations regarding the change, the available material and non-material resources, and

the feeling of being able to take action in the course of the passage. In understanding one's life as a project design (Welzer 1990: 139) "the respective available option of planning the future [...] has an influence on the current perception and evaluation of opportunities" (ibid.). On the one hand, formal passages, integrated into the institutional structures and corresponding information and support systems, can be recognised by the individual student at an early stage, thus allowing for long-term planning. On the other hand, increasingly individualized requirements and life situations also find their expression in experiencing indirect, hardly predictable and de-standardized passages (Wohlrab-Saar 1992). With increasingly diversified and differentiated life plans the number of these de-standardised passages is growing and becoming more relevant at an individual level. It will be important to capture these transitions and their reconstructive, biographical relevance.

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Adult Education in Portugal: new identities in a dynamic of lifelong learning¹

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Introduction

Adult Education in Portugal has undergone some changes, in particular with the New Opportunities Initiative, which fostered the appearance of new professional groups and profiles. We are referring to the adult education and training (EFA) course mediators, in the EFA courses, diagnosis and routing staff and skills recognition and certification officers in the New Opportunities Centres (CNOs).

Our study was carried out in Portugal and France and has a predominantly qualitative methodology. It aims to study the professional profiles of these mediators, taking a comparative approach between the Portuguese officers and between these and the French staff, who use a very similar model to the one we use in the CNOs, the *Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience*.

According to Silva (2007: 302): “acknowledging the growing trend towards confining education and training to the contexts of its social visibility, a visibility inscribed in perpetual – lifelong – certification processes which seek to foster competitiveness, access and success in the job market, keeping individuals employable, we have tried to understand how individuals see themselves within these frameworks and what frameworks they develop themselves to ensure a sense of self, for themselves and for others”. In fact, this sense assigned by professionals to their work and the representations they have of what they do, how they do it and the conditions in which they do it have been the focus of interest throughout our research. In this article we attempt to discuss the issues of identity, of the sense attributed to the work, of the relationship between the profession and the training, whether it is initial or continuous, from the preliminary analyses of semi-structured interviews and autobiographical narratives carried out in the exploratory study of our work, in Portugal.

Professional representations and identity dynamics

The representations and the identity(ies) are exposed as dynamics that interact with the professional activities, because, as Blin states (1997: 160, cit. by Silva, 2003: 77), the professional activities are a “structured set of practices, of representations and of identities capable of adapting to the constraints of the organisation and of self-regulating under the pressure of the collective actors”.

And then, “the intervention practices or styles characteristic of each professional group are closely related to the representations and identity(ies) experienced and assigned, both within the work context and outside it, contributing to the appearance of new professional groups” (Silva, 2003: 77). But what do we mean when we refer to representations? Based on Silva (2003: 84-85), we view representations as “interpretation systems” that “orientate the relationship of the individual with the world and with other individuals”. The author presents us with four main functions of representations:

1. “they contribute to a meaningful organisation of the real”, inasmuch as they allow meaning and sense to be attributed to the surrounding environment, permitting its interpretation;
2. “they orientate and organise (...) the behaviours of individuals”, since our behaviours are regulated by our representations;
3. “they are also an important support in the interaction and communication processes between individuals and groups, because of the central role they have in the orientation of evaluative and explanatory activities”; by communicating, we are activating representations;
4. They intervene in social differentiation, since each group has its own representations, contributing to its differentiation.

Within the representations, we are interested, here, in working with the concept of professional representations that Gilly (1986, cited by Silva, 2003: 87), sees as “constituting social representations pertaining to professional roles, and the specificity of the professional representations depends on the social nature of the subjects, as well as the characteristics of the interaction situation”. Therefore, bearing in mind that each professional context will generate professional representations pertaining to it, we attempt, through our research, to understand what representations and the sense that the EFA mediators, the diagnosis and routing staff and the skills recognition and certification officers assign to their professional context.

The representations differ from individual to individual, “according to the situations that they experience, the constraints and the resources, the place and the time, depending on their organisation of the real and the meaning they attribute to it” (Silva, 2003: 87). Here, professional socialisation is very important and it is within the context of the communication and action that “social representations are developed, communicated and shared” (Idem: 88). The professional representations appear in the action context in which the professional activity is developed, albeit constrained, nevertheless, by the normative prescriptions found in any work situation. So these representations will enable communication and interaction between several elements within the same context, using a language that everyone knows, guaranteeing the constructed ideologies, values and identities. In other words, “*they protect the specificity of the intra- and inter-professional groups (...) orientate and guide professional practices (...) they allow professional viewpoints and practices to be justified a posteriori, which is to say they explain and validate the individual's “routines”*” (Idem: 91).

With respect to the concept of Identity, Gonçalves (2000) mentions that our existence is configured by very diverse spaces and times, where we construct ways to fill them. The author actually uses the metaphor of our life as a blank sheet of paper, on which we draw our own journey, constructing our identity in light of the formal, non-formal and informal learning that we experience in a vast array of contexts. Silva (2003: 92 citing Dubar, 1998) states that “identity incorporates the subject’s

representations of himself and of others and to that extent they are constructed in a dynamic of constant interaction in which the actual representations of self and another's view intervene". According to Dubar (1997), the notions of identity of self and identity to others are inseparable and, simultaneously, problematic. In fact, we only know who we are in light of the view of another, but the truth is that we do not live through the experience of that other, which means that there is always uncertainty: we can imagine, rely on verbal and non-verbal communication, though we do not know, in reality, if my identity of self coincides with my identity to the other. Nóvoa (1995: 16) indicates that "identity is a place of struggle and conflict, it is a space for constructing ways of behaving and being in the profession", introducing the concept of "identity process".

To construct our identity, we use socially available categories: acts of assignment and acts of belonging. From here, the identity predicative of oneself can differ from the identity assigned by another, but the former enables the latter. In other words, I can only be identified by others if I identify myself, and it is in my activity with others that I am identified and I accept or not the identifications that I receive (Dubar, 1997). Thus there is an incorporation of identity by the individual, which results from personal trajectories, which, in turn, lead to the construction of identity for me; it is the story we tell ourselves about what we are. For this, we use categories that must be legitimate to us and to the group which, subjectively, has legitimacy to us.

On the other hand, attributed identity derives from the social systems in which we are implicated and the legitimacy of the categories used, a legitimacy which becomes a challenge, since it is imposed, collectively, on the actors involved.

However, quite often the identity of self and the assigned identity diverge, causing identity strategies to emerge which are defined as survival strategies, of adjustment or of rupture. Who has not felt a discrepancy between what I feel I am, based on my history and what I perceive others think of me, which is translated into attitudes, behaviours, acknowledgement, and other indicators? Faced with this scenario, we have two key strategies, according to the author (Idem: 107-108): i) objective transaction, through which I adjust my identity to the identity attributed by the other; ii) subjective transaction, which involves combining one part of the inherent identities and the desire to construct new identities (perceived identities).

Within this realm there is a balance between what we are, what others expect of us and the way they perceive us, aspects that, grounded in deep introspective thought, will lead to the construction of a new identity: we do not lose our essence, we are not subservient to the other, but we consider him and seek to evolve; we are referring to identity that is real, assimilated or projected by the individual. The processes of individuals' future identification should be read from the perspective of how these used them, accepted or rejected the official categories, which implies permanent reorganisations, since a dispersal of the subjective identities can be observed, according to the social scenario. It is

in and through the categorisations of others that the individual experiences his first social identity (initial socialisation: family, school); however, one of the essential moments in the construction of an autonomous identity is linked to leaving school and entering the job market.

In fact, training and work are pertinent and often predominant areas of individuals' social identities and it is confrontation of the job market that leads to identification by the other of the individual's abilities, of his status and his professional career, generating the self's construction of the possible project, the aspirations and the identity (Dubar, 1997).

The biographical construction of a professional and social identity implies relationships with the other and the space of identity recognition, fundamental in this setting, depends on the power relationships within this same space, the position the individual occupies and the group he belongs to. In short, our biographical process includes the construction of social and professional identities in time, based on the categories provided by the institutions of family, school, work, and so on. The relational process implies, at a given time and in a space established as legitimate, the construction of identities associated with knowledge, skills and images of self, proposed and expressed by individuals in the action systems. The interaction of these two processes encourages a projection of the space-time identity of a generation. Thus, identity is not transmitted from generation to generation, but constructed by each person, based on categories and positions inherited from the previous generation and through the identity strategies unravelled in socialisation spaces (Idem).

For the aforementioned reasons, "identity is a complex phenomenon tempered by psychological dimensions (intra-individual and inter-individual) and social dimensions" (Silva, 2003: 92). Identity involves a feeling of individuality and singularity, in a space-time *continuum*, but, at the same time "it conveys a feeling of likeness, of proximity and of sharing characteristics common to a group or social collective" (Ibidem) and, therefore, it presents itself, simultaneously, as individual and relational, personal and social. In this last case, it should be noted that our social identity stems from the socialisation processes and is constructed by the identity to the other and by the way the individual "reacts and adapts to these attributions (...) and also by the auto-definitions or identities-of-self" (Idem: 94). Here we are faced with another question: is it possible for us to separate the personal "I" from the professional "I"? (Nóvoa, 1995: 17). To what extent is our personal identity not mixed up in our social identity? How can we separate them? Or even can we? As we are not people who are extrinsic to the motivations of our actions, it is concluded that performing our job will reveal our way of being and this will influence our professional practice. In short, the construction of our identity is a "complex process thanks to which each person takes ownership of the sense of their personal and professional history" (Idem: 16, citing Diamond, 1991). The construction of identities requires time "a time to re-cast identities, to accommodate innovations, to assimilate change" (Ibidem).

The construction of professional identity

Sarmiento (2009: 48) claims that “the construction of professional identity always requires the direct action of the elements of the professional group, in a process of ongoing relationship with multiple conditions: historical, political, cultural, social and organisational” and, moreover, indicates that “nowadays it is consensual that in all professional groups we refer to identities and not an identity, in the sense that it is not known whether there is homogeneity in the composition, in the functions, in the perspectives, in the values and in the attitudes of all the members of the same area (...) There is, in any profession, a common nucleus in relation to which all members identify themselves, even though the individual means of structuring and expression may differ”. In our case, that common nucleus involves increasing the qualifications of adults and their personal and social development; nonetheless, the way to achieve these objectives may vary. Lopes (2001: 188) says that “professional identity is a particular social identity (among other social identities the person has), a particularity that stems from the place of the job and work within the social setting and, more specifically, the place of a certain job and a certain work within the structure of the personal identity and lifestyle of an actor”. The professional identity involves inter- and intra-personal factors and is therefore dependent on contexts, learning and interactions that occur in the most varied circumstances of an individual's life.

It is important here to highlight the distinction between prescribed work and real work, as professionals may identify themselves and construct their identity at work and through work, but they can never disregard the normative aspects that regulate their profession. Déjours (1993) notes that there is a difference between prescribed work and real work. Real work enables us to express real everyday situations, by looking for alternatives to problem-solving and these strategies may not coincide with prescribed work or extend it. In this context, the author alludes to another relevant aspect in the field of individuals' relationship with work: suffering. In fact, at work we are a little like actors and that can create conflicts between my identity and the attributed identity, causing suffering. But suffering is a barrier to creative intelligence and the less space we have to discuss work, the less recognition we have for what we are (judgment of beauty) and for what we do (judgment of usefulness), the greater our suffering, the more affected our mental health and, as a result, we have a tendency to isolate ourselves, sticking to schedules and tasks, forgetting the team and the reasons we took on a certain job. Satisfaction at work is compromised and consequently so is the personal and professional identity. How, then, to deal with inner conflicts, when prescribed work opposes real work? How do professionals solve this internal struggle?

According to Pereira (2004: 34), “coherence in a situation of interaction and conflict can be maintained through the mechanisms proposed by Elster (1985), to whom we owe the theory of multiple *selves*, who postulates that contradictory beliefs or desires can coexist as long as they pertain to different sectors of life; that choices can obey hierarchical levels of preference; and also that choices can correspond to illusions, in other words, an individual can opt for the worst choice and be clearly aware of this”. This points to the existence of multiple and contextual identities, invoking the issue

of the coexistence between the personal self and the professional self: I do not stop being who I am in my professional context and this leaves a mark on my personal identity, and it is in this to and fro of identity construction that we deal with the “inconsistencies” that arise in our professional world.

In the construction of a professional identity, it is Hughes, cited by Pereira (2004: 36-37), who claims that “this author establishes very distinct mechanisms for the construction of professional identity in a work context, thus: dismantling the idealised professional identity, constructed in a virtual manner during initial technical training; the search for a balance, in a “zigzag”, between the idealised and the pragmatism required by organisational everyday life; and the phase of “fitting” in a professional group of reference, which creates the conditions to achieve a professional identity (or, at least, a professional conduct) with some degree of stability”. These aspects corroborate the hybridism and transitory nature of identity construction, which is why professionals tend to associate what they would like to do with what they really do. In this context, what meaning does work have for the professionals included in our study? How do they identify themselves with the work they do?

The analysis of the semi-structured interviews and autobiographical narratives allowed some viewpoints to be captured, herein described, with regard to the sense attributed to work by adult education and training course mediators (2), by the diagnosis and routing staff and by the skills recognition and certification officers (3). The following Table presents the meanings attributed by the Professionals to the work they do:

Table 1 – Meanings attributed by Professionals to the work they do

Meaning attributed to Work	Quotes by the Professionals
Seriousness; contribution	“very serious work with adults” (TDE) “I think that it is a very important job” (M 1) “has responsibility” (M 2) “a lot of dedication” (TDE) “I always give my utmost to the groups” (M 1) “at the moment I could not see myself abandoning the groups without them completing the training process” (M 1) “I work every day so that the work that the groups that I coordinate will be the best” (M 1) “opportunity to re-educate, learn and transpose to daily life” (M 1) “I work to promote self-esteem, stimulate learning, so I consider myself a true educator” (M 1) “Contribution” (PRVC 3)

Meaning attributed to Work	Quotes by the Professionals
Challenging	<p>“challenge” (TDE)</p> <p>“challenge” (M 1)</p> <p>“experience filled with challenges” (M 2)</p> <p>“it has been a unique experience dealing with this audience” (M 2)</p> <p>“seen as a challenge” (M 2)</p> <p>“The meaning of the work I carry out can be summed up as a new challenge in my professional life” (M 2)</p> <p>“challenge to learn and develop professionally” (PRVC 3)</p> <p>“it is an area that I am passionate about and a challenge in itself” (PRVC 3)</p>
Exhausting: overcoming personal and professional limitations	<p>“this set of activities that imply great effort” (TDE)</p> <p>“it is, it is difficult” (PRVC 1)</p> <p>“because it is a job that requires a lot, really a lot” (PRVC 1)</p> <p>“I think that in terms of mediation, that it is extremely different, right, and it involves a lot of training, having a complicated group” (M 2)</p> <p>“even though it is extremely tiring work” (M 2)</p> <p>“significant time investment” (TDE)</p> <p>“It is very exhausting work” (M 1)</p> <p>“it brings out strengths in me that I didn’t know I had” (M 2)</p>
Gratifying	<p>“it has always been very gratifying” (TDE)</p> <p>“it gives pleasure” (M 1)</p> <p>“the work that I am currently doing is a source of great pleasure for me” (TDE)</p> <p>“Gratifying” (TDE)</p> <p>“I love it” (M 1)</p> <p>“The work that I do at the moment is worth a lot to me” (M 1)</p> <p>“everything I do is with pleasure” (M 2)</p> <p>“I like what I am doing” (PRVC 2)</p> <p>“Starting the day with groups always does me good” (PRVC 2)</p> <p>“I like what I am doing” (PRVC 2)</p>
Opportunity	<p>“an opportunity to enter the job market” (PRVC 1)</p> <p>“it has always been something that I would like to do one day” (PRVC 1)</p> <p>“It presented itself as a new opportunity when I was looking for directions in my professional life” (PRVC 3)</p>
No recognition	<p>“Ungratefulness” (PRVC 2)</p> <p>“the image that exists out there about the measure displeases me as a professional” (PRVC 2)</p>

Work is of great importance in people's lives and the scenario is no different for these professionals. In fact, the analysis of the data supports the conclusion that, when the work meets its goals, in other words, when it is meaningful and is a source of pleasure for the professionals, there is a feeling of contribution and gratification. On the whole, the professionals show initiative, enthusiasm and involvement with their work, seeing it as an opportunity, an activity filled with pleasure, challenging, enriching and very important. Nevertheless, we must also highlight the exhaustion that the work represents to them; yet, from what we could see, this does not interfere with the more positive aspects of their activity, which means that the pleasure they derive is greater than the tiredness and lack of recognition they feel. In turn, this effort is also a way to overcome limitations and, in this sense, can present itself as another source for self-motivation, when they realise that they are overcoming their own expectations.

Since the work is motivating for the professionals, we conclude that they are very involved in their activity, and do not care solely about results and objectives to be achieved. But what do these motivations and satisfaction mean? Coda and Fonseca (2004: 8), citing Coda (1992: 6), claim that "motivation is a direct or intrinsic energy, connected to human needs and the meaning and nature of the work done. Satisfaction is an indirect or extrinsic energy, connected to aspects such as salary, benefits, recognition, leadership, colleagues and several other conditions that need to be tended to – fundamentally from the perspective of the employee – in the working environment". It is, therefore, concluded that the needs and nature of the work itself give the Professionals a sense of achievement, on the whole, fulfilling them almost entirely, which means, as a result, that they are motivated and satisfied, particularly with respect to recognition from the Coordinators and the adults they work with; this leads us to consider this added variable of recognition as being of extreme importance for the construction of professional representations and identity. Thus, we take it that "the meaning of the work is determined by the individual's choices and the experiences (...) and by the organisational and environmental context in which he lives or works" (Coda & Fonseca, 2004: 11); choices and experiences that allow the work to be experienced in a particular way and organisational and environmental context, relating to work conditions, work relationships, specially between colleagues and, in this specific case, with the adults and the recognition that stems from here.

According to Hackman and Oldham (1980, cited by Coda & Fonseca, 2004: 12-ff), intrinsic motivation and satisfaction are present at work, when there is:

1. Knowledge of the outcomes of the activities undertaken, allowing the professionals to understand the impact of their work;
2. Identification of the responsibility of the outcome of the work, having a key role in it;
3. Work experienced as something significant and important for individuals.

To sum up, we can say that the professionals included in our study respond to all these points, since they have feedback from their work on a daily basis or, at least, in the medium term, because there is a direct impact on the adults' lives. They feel responsible for the results they achieve because these depend not only, but also, on their daily effort and dedication. In general terms they assign a very positive meaning to the work they carry out, with all the constraints and exhaustion that it implies, resulting in high motivation and satisfaction for the activities they perform, and seeing work as a very important aspect in their lives that drives projects and achievements.

Training and identity construction

Pineau (2004) underlines the socio-pedagogic approach to the alternation(s) between training time and work time, which values experiential knowledge outside institutional learning. In this text, the author warns that alternations can create a certain entropy, meaning, in fact, that what organises the individual becomes more destructuring for the system instituted and it is here that a line is drawn between the training of people and institutions. In reality, constructing systems based on alternation leads to a clash between legitimised knowledge and practical knowledge, between theory and practice, between training and production, aspects that should be coordinated. This model of alternation implies that the individual does not complete his/her growth with the professional certification and subsequent job. Rather, we should encourage ongoing training, which should include periods of experiential training and periods of formal training. The alternation allows training time to be analysed and fulfilled at various times, in a kind of cyclical movement and not in a static space-time framework. It also broadens our horizons and makes us reflect on the different times and the various spaces where we can find training opportunities, and it is those various periods of learning, of experience, of training that will continually (re)structure our being, our identity.

The alternating movement is the basis of training times and the author creates an analogy between that movement and that of the conductor of an orchestra, in other words, for every training time, there should be a conductor who coordinates the different times and creates the flexibility to understand what is the right moment to give meaning to each training period. The existence of a certain space and a certain moment are the reason for creating a training period and it is from this combination of space and moment that learning opportunities will arise.

We further highlight the term "schizochronia" (Pineau, 2004: 216) that the author proposes and defines as a sickness of modern times, which pertains to chronological markers that dictate our lives and demonstrate that the relations in time and training are limited. However, we have witnessed a broadening of these relations, with the introduction of the concept of "chronotraining" (Ibidem), which seeks to enrich time through education and training. In fact, training should be viewed not as a temporary space of learning, but as an ongoing activity, which will enable the subjects to evolve.

In short, as Silva (2003: 91) observes, “training (...) favours this construction of meaning as a driver and consolidator of the subjects’ reflection, understanding and participation as actors and authors in social processes”, underlining the importance of periods of training and reflection on professional practices. In this context, what value do the professionals place on continuous training? What need do they see for it? In what arenas? In what forms?

The exploratory study shows that lifelong learning and continuous training are definitely important for the professionals, who mention the following training areas: training management; interpersonal relations; time management; adult education and training; social education; secondary education benchmark; mediation; human resources; education policies. From this list it can be said that the training interests and needs are related to the professionals’ areas of intervention, which shows their satisfaction with the domain in which they work and an interest in improving their knowledge.

In terms of methods, the need to share experiences with peers was mentioned often, the purpose being to alter content, understand practices and adjust procedures so that training actions and discussion groups would be the most appropriate to match the needs of the professionals. This willingness to share with professionals from the same area of intervention indicates the importance of peers in the construction of the professional identity of these professionals, that is, another variable to bear in mind when we analyse identity construction.

We should further draw attention to the way they match the functions they perform with respect to attending continuous training or, otherwise, how could professionals linked to adult education and training who promote lifelong learning think they know everything there is to know in their sphere of action?

Final thoughts

After what has been discussed, we may ask ourselves: how did each of the professionals become what they are today? Why did they become **these** professionals, not others? We need to mention here Nóvoa (1995: 16), in an effort to summarise professional identities. Nóvoa says that identity is constructed in a threefold process of Joining, Action and Self-awareness. First, a person has to want to be a professional in adult education and training and believe in the potential of the adults involved; then, in terms of pedagogic action, “(...) in choosing the best ways of operating, too, professional decisions interact with personal ones” (Ibidem), so professionals change their way of operating with respect to adults but never set aside their personal stamp; finally, an ongoing process of reflecting on the professional action must be developed, inasmuch as the change and pedagogic innovation are depend closely on this reflexive thought” (Ibidem).

From all this it is concluded that professional identity is an integrating part of the personal identity as a whole and is built on the continuous interaction between factors internal and external to the individual and the meaning assigned by the subjects to their professional context, and their need to upgrade and improve the knowledge related to their functions are relevant variables for their identity construction, in the professional field.

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**Researching on transitions in life
courses among women-adult
learners. A biographical approach**

"People's life stories were often more interesting than they were themselves."

Iosip Brodsky, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature

Introduction

In my article I am focusing on the results of my research on transitions which was undertaken with women-adult learners on different educational courses they decided to take in the academic year 2009/2010. This research can be treated as a mirror which shows the discrepancy between how people are willing to present themselves and what is actually inside them. I think that analysis of one's own life and the history of one's own family in the learning process stimulates self-development and makes it possible to shape the relationship between adult learners and their surroundings harmoniously, to identify certain inner resources, and thereby to sketch out markers and prospects for further development. In my research report life stories are described as the evidence of narrators' development, governed by the interplay of specific factors such as nationality, gender, environment, language or dialect, etc. My research presents also the proof that a person's path through life is influenced equally by such parameters as personal factors: sense of belonging, place of origin, individual life plans and finally by external ones: chance occurrences, divorce, losing job or retirement. Work on these elements of individual human lives in the framework of educational programmes makes it easier to understand the story of human life as a whole. The interplay and interaction between these factors (including nationality and gender), both when they agree and when they conflict with one other, carry people through their life courses so it is easier for them to speak and present the influence of their decisions, actions and attitudes to the listener / researcher. Giving strict data in a form of storytelling during the interview means creating a construct, a particular structure that exists in people's consciousness. A single element of a life story is an event, which is defined by having a beginning and an end. Apart from the essential elements (events) of my research, a life story also contains a variety of transitions, bridges, precipices, unseen mismatches, obstacles and accelerators. Because of these auxiliary elements a life story does not break down into individual fragments, but rather determines the overall direction of life. Basing educational work with adults on the biographical method therefore represents the creation of mental constructs, the structure of which becomes apparent in the present in the context of situations actually experienced in the past. The biographical method, presented in my study, is underpinned by memories, the repetition in thought of events, of episodes which have remained in the memory of the narratives.

Theoretical Background

Without any doubt a learning process is treated by contemporary researchers as an integral part of human nature, a value in itself, essential for people's happiness and fulfillment, vital for developing and maintaining the full capacities of people's senses and intellect beyond the scope and age of their economical activity, needed for their alert interest in what is happening with them and their

surroundings, for their concern and commitment for the welfare of themselves as well as that of their neighbours, for their participation in the management of their neighbourhoods, their communities, their countries and that of the entire world, in essence for active citizenship and democracy. Nowadays, an increasing proportion of adults, mainly women have been returning to colleges or universities. Some want an additional degree to move up a career ladder or seek training to perform their present job better. Some decide to attend university to feel prepared to changes during their working life stories by moving to different professions. More and more women, while being pensioners, are taking courses to fill leisure time and not to feel wasted by daily routine and housing. Others need to learn about subjects they've always found challenging but had no time when they were younger. They just want to expend their knowledge in special interests areas such as photography or sculpturing and art to be active, up-to-date and still feel modern in thinking.

Women-professionals in some rapidly growing fields such as IT, computer science, medicine, law or teaching need to keep up with new developments. Social work practitioners often take workshops or continuing education courses to keep abreast of new treatment techniques, new programmes and changes in social welfare policy. In our modern, complex society it's obvious and essential that learning continuous throughout human's life span. Women-learners try to find their common space for sharing their own working knowledge, social experience and finally they help themselves by working out their possible, future life-courses with clearly defined directions to follow. It is well known that many older learners in various educational programmes, courses and workshops find the main, almost the essential, value of them to be the opportunity "to talk to people like me", "to communicate with people who understand you", "to share memories with someone". It has been seen that we all have favourite stories about ourselves, which can be told repeatedly with visible pleasure, without their losing their attraction or novelty, topicality or meaning for the narrator. At the same time, the identical event is never recounted in exactly the same way: intuitively, the author and narrator chooses the style, way of speaking and speed; and the necessary details and even the nature of the text chosen depend on the specific circumstances (of today). When older people speak, the narrative motive may be a declaration, a means of self-presentation, but frequently it may also be the reason behind a choice or decision in real life. This means that it may be a brake or a saying that shut off new opportunities and prospects at some stage of their lives. That's the aim of learning process during the life course. As such, it is perceived by observers as permanent and continuous, what's more, it's realised in an articulated manner by all the participants who are involved in every moment of it, finally including every participant's narrative life story in a concrete, tamed space of life.

Research

This research data below uses narratives of development and transition of adult women who struggle with such issues. They demonstrate the real-life process of developmental change that comes about

for them while hoping to change their private lives or move into professional ranks in employment. These women are conscious of being derived from case studies of women in diverse socioeconomic strata in middle and later adulthood. Their stories of emotional challenges and cognitive-inform attitudes help our understanding of the process of learning for many adults. Here are some examples:

Marta, (68) *My parents were traditional. My dad's role was to be the breadwinner and my mother stayed at home and took care of five children. Both had finished high school and my dad did two years of college. He worked his whole life (...). He rose through the ranks to be a vice president and retired at age sixty-five. My mother took a part-time job after the kids left home. All five children finished high school and my two brothers went on to college. My sisters and I attended junior college and married in our early twenties. I've never had the opportunity to start academic education before because of taking the role of housewife. Now, after being divorced, thanks to my children, I have a great opportunity to gain knowledge of professional photography at the University of Third Year. I'm fulfilled as a human being at least.*

Krystyna, (62) *I do not reject the typical state of life circle as marriage but now I see it had also negative influence on me and my friends life. We didn't consider lifelong learning or education for pleasure and, what's more, self-development wasn't so useful earlier (...). Partly a matter of feeling old, partly because few of our friends were employed, partly because of the conservatism of our husbands, and largely because most of us were mentally dependent, the great majority, I think, continued to live within the homemaker role. Now we – five girlfriends from primary school – decide of our educational path, being involved in social worker training. We want to work among children, starting in 2012.*

Beata, (70) *Life is like playing a violin alone on a stage and learning to play the instrument while you're doing it; when you're young you do not think about the passing time and all these lost opportunities you had while playing, you just want to come back home after school home and need to get a profession to earn living; you're accustomed (...) Having a job and family you're so tired and finally the aim of education is getting away your thoughts. Now, being alone after the death of my husband, (...), I can be here and study cosmetology. (...) This group is my new family. We are together in everything and we will move through this transition (of education) together! I'm not alone on a stage of my life circle.*

Jadwiga (65) *My children have just settled down and they do not have so much time for me now. So I realised it's the right moment to do something else, finally to grow! It's the time to learn what I love since I was seven – taking care of plants and gardening. I attend this workshop to be prepared to start my studies at plants as an example of tool to modeling interior architecture of modern houses (...). Next month I hope to get certificate and I'm ready to start my working career as a floral designer.*

Barbara, (55), (...) *I needed some advice in the master of arts program in human development/gerontology. The conflict for me started two years ago and was not that I felt my life was over, or that I was limited by gender in my struggle to have a career; rather, it was the need to pursue an advanced degree and earn a living simultaneously. With two children in college and another finishing high school, I did not have the luxury of finding myself.*

Women learners are often self-observant about their process of differentiation within the classroom community. They experience some confusion while getting a great deal of energy to learn something new. This situation sets high goals for themselves and requires affirmative feedback from their instructors. Connecting in learning settings and building trust and confidence of training staff seem to be crucial for older adult women-learners. Discussions, group projects, dialogical classroom interactions offer a framework for bonding and support:

Teresa, (56) *I have learned more about myself during this term than earlier in my whole life. I know what learning potential I have and which parts of knowledge is easier for me to grab.*

Maryla, (59), *Last winter our group strategies class really bonded, I mean, it's the way we tug on each other (...) and now we've had two other classes with these people. We trust each other and support our private initiatives and try to solve problems (...) We finally built cohesive networks.*

Petronela, (67), *We, women-learners, are cooperative groups, more than individuals, common sense of participation, we have robust personal networks which indicators include high levels of trust and believes.*

Maria, (70), (...) *being a student I didn't realize the fact that I will be seventy-one in November, I think that I'm at the cusp of acceptance but I still have some way to go before I can bask in the confidence of being a mature woman. I'm confident, however, my age is working for me! I feel like a teenager being in our learning group. I'm in the right track of my life!*

Anna, (64), *Having thoroughly enjoyed my teaching profession for thirty-two years, I was surprised of the intensity of transition that I was called upon to undergo during last three years of workshops and trainings in my life. I was being called to new understand of self-identity, divested of the role I had exercised well. I was pushed to redefine myself, as person, rather than as teacher. I did not like the feelings of vulnerability, powerlessness and confusion which overtaken this whole process of transformation.*

Magdalena, (62), *I deeply feel being a human who is changing the environment and gaining some social capital thanks to the process of building new relationships. I definitely feel that I'm at the end of one phase of my life and I'm ready to begin a new journey into an uncharted exploratory. I'm neither happy or unhappy with my life currently but I know I follow the right path to develop social skills and learn something which is very interesting (...)*

Conclusion

My current research into the transition of older adult women in the educational world gives us the opportunity to focus more on the process of moving towards not only career but also life transition. Through analysis of gathered interview data with adult women, we can observe the emerge of their challenges, their personal struggles and finally their sincere joy. What's more, a sense of united support from the other learners and family relations appear during the need of succeed transition. The biographical approach supports data from a detailed review of the literature of adult development including into this perspective such relevant factors as: gender roles, gender opportunities and implications of these theoretical perspectives. Furthermore, strategies and underpinnings for a growing understanding and consideration of the educational space as a 'safe, holding environment of the learner' in transition are also mentioned and treated as an important part.

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**Bridging the Gap – changing
perspectives on transitions in
learning biographies and their
impact on learning within the
life-course**

Introduction

Within the scope of recent social developments individuals are more than ever before expected to continuously adjust themselves to the permanently changing conditions of modern society via learning and unlearning. Modernity therefore can be characterised as an era of accelerated and accumulated transitions over the life-course – which creates changing subjects embedded in changing contexts. Bridging the gap between the life lived in the past, the life one lives in the present, and the future possibilities of lives yet to be lived becomes a main objective of individual's struggle of 'learning to be'.

In our research project we are interested in the various modes in which transitions are depicted in biographical narrations and the ways in which these depictions change over time. At the centre of our research project thus stands the question what impact transitions and narrations about them have on the life-course as well as biographies of learning and which significance adult-education has within this inter-relationship. Yet research on changes or transitions within the life-courses has to deal with a plethora of methodological problems. Based on a case study, we will present our project's solutions as well as our continued struggle for a methodology that enables us to disclose how individuals handle transitions in life, how they handle transitions in narrations, how the narrative handling of specific transitions changes over time and what these changes in the narrations might tell us about changes in the life-course of a person. Our thesis is that bridging the gap between someone's past, present and future not only involves learning and unlearning on the level of the actually lived life, but also on the level of the narration depicting this life.

Modernity and lifelong learning – between chance and risk between continuity and discontinuity

The catchword 'modernity' has nowadays become a commonly accepted denomination for the society we live in. Giddens characterises modernity as "modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence" (Giddens 1990: 1). Today modernity is perceived as being much more ambivalent than before. Besides chance, risk has also been acknowledged as one of its essential features (Beck & Lau 2004). It is the disembedding of time and space which underlies the risks as well as chances that modern individuals have to deal with. Since individuals are now seemingly 'free' to decide upon their respective place in social time and space, they also have to face the necessity to continuously readjust their place in regard to the current situation and the decisions of significant others. It therefore becomes arguable, if the current situation is marked by the subject's deliverance from traditional bonds or if it is marked by the loss of formerly existing securities. Probably both cases are to be considered. Modern subjectivity then would oscillate between security and insecurity as well as continuity and discontinuity (Alheit 2009, Fischer 2007), or as Hunt puts it: "discontinuity is

also a fact of life for many individuals” (Hunt 2005: 5). This means that individuals are now – more than ever before – expected to adjust themselves to the permanently changing conditions of the modern society via learning and unlearning. In this respect lifelong learning might probably be the one prevailing option to deal with modernity’s continuity and discontinuities, since it allows the subjects to continuously readjust their lives and life courses to an ever changing environment (Hunt 2005, Hof 2009, Kraus 2001).

From lifelong learning to biographical learning

In the wake of these transformations the question how modern biographies – as accounts of changing individuals within changing contexts – are constructed, comes to the spotlight (Hunt 2005, Fischer-Rosenthal 2003). Fischer-Rosenthal as well as Alheit (Alheit 2003, 2009) suggest an approach which centres on biographical work as a means to solve the problem of how to integrate the changing individual within a changing society.

In Fischer-Rosenthal’s concept for example, biographies are structures which discursively emerge at certain points in time. They are time-bound, and therefore flexible constructions shaped by the individual’s life-history and present stage of self-awareness which itself is embedded in current circumstances. Since biographies are based on language they allow:

the recall and representation of past events, reordering and placing them in the context of what can be expected in the future [...]. At a general level, spoken language enables us to temporalize events and actions, producing a multi-referential network within which the individual can both become and change who she or he is [...]; the ability to narrate who they have become enables them to present themselves for the time being as integrated persons, despite the presence of various other possible and often contradictory renditions of the story (Fischer-Rosenthal 2005: 220).

Hence, from the perspective of researchers such as Alheit and Fischer-Rosenthal it is not lifelong learning but biographical learning which represents a way to deal with securities and insecurities as well as continuities and discontinuities of modernity. This insight into the importance of biographies and biographical work recommitments to a point made much earlier in the context of considerations about lifelong learning: It is not so much the ‘learning to know’ or the ‘learning to do’ prevalent in the (1996) Report and the EU Memorandum (2000), which enables modern individuals to cope with an ever changing environment, since knowledge and competence may become invalid over the course of time. It is the ‘learning to be’ (Faure 1972), which Faure already outlined in 1972, that empowers individuals to integrate themselves into social time and space under the conditions of modernity.

Assessing biographies and lifelong learning – methodological background

Biographies and biographical work – as forms of lifelong learning and ‘learning to be’ – represent an option through which individuals are enabled to re-embed themselves into time and space as well as society. Considering these starting points, one question to ask might be what impact change has on individual biographies and what significance lifelong learning has within this inter-relationship between biographies and change. To answer this question – which focuses on the assessment of changing subjects embedded in changing contexts – a longitudinal approach to lifecourse research seems inevitable.

With regard to the question what significance lifelong learning has within the inter-relationship between individual biographies and changing contexts many studies come to mind, such as the German LifE-study (Fend 2006), the Canadian NALL-study (Livingstone 2001) or the UK based ‘Learning Lives’ study (Biesta & Tedder 2009, Biesta, Field & Tedder 2010), which centred around the question “what learning ‘means’ and ‘does’ in the life of adults“ (Biesta, Field & Tedder 2010). Of those studies mentioned, the ‘Learning Lives’ study comes closest to fulfilling the five basic principles of life course research (Elder et al. 2006: 11¹), which are meant to provide theoretical guidelines for analysing life as a process. The study understands human development as a result of an individual’s actions within a confining context, and as a lifelong process, embedded spatially as well as temporally. Considering time, the study distinguishes between three aspects of time: the mostly chronological organisation of life events, the embedding of one’s lifetime within a generational framework of “shared or collective experience” (Biesta, Field & Tedder 2010: 323), and the narrative reorganisation of the life course as biographical account. The biographical account of one’s own life and learning experiences is structured from a present point of view and therefore genuinely refers to current problems the individual faces: “While in the chronological representation of time, time runs in a forward direction, the narrative representation of time leads to a retrospective reinterpretation of life events; a reinterpretation that works from the present into the past, not from the past into the present” (Biesta, Field & Tedder 2010). Like Alheit and Fischer-Rosenthal, Biesta and Tedder thus refer to biographies and biographicity as artefacts of modernity – artefacts that arise out of processes. Since individuals as well as circumstances change over time, biographical narrations may change as well, given that biographies themselves can be the object of learning (Biesta & Tedder 2009). This leads to a multitude of personal biographies an individual might narrate over the course of time, with each biography having its own accentuations and blind spots. The discrepancies between certain narrations point to specific plots anchored in the very present the tales are told from that structure the logic of the individual’s current life as well as the narration (Biesta, Field & Tedder 2010).

1 Elder et al. postulate five basic principles of life course research, that are to be considered when examining changing lives within changing contexts: 1. “Human development and aging are lifelong processes”, 2. “Individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstance”, 3. “The life course of individuals is embedded and shaped by the historical times and places they experience over their lifetime”, 4. “The developmental antecedents and consequences of life transitions, events, and behavioural patterns vary according to their timing in a person’s life”, 5. “Lives are lived interdependent-ly and socio-historical influences are expressed through this network of shared relationships” (Elder et al. 2006: 11-12).

Assessing changing subjects within changing contexts via changing narrations: The research project

A modern approach towards research on biographies of learning cannot stop by characterising modernity as an era of prevailing discontinuity and instability, resulting in changing subjects that are embedded in changing contexts. It must take one step further, and therefore consider change squared: Changing subjects within changing environments that can only be assessed through their present and therefore ever changing narrations.

The DFG promoted Research Project “Precarious Formations of Lifelong Learning”² intends to explore the impact individual and social change has on biographies of learning and what significance lifelong learning has within this inter-relationship between biographies and change. The main research interest is, whether and how individuals integrate their manifold experience of life and lifelong learning into a biographical account of their lifetime – and their educational development. Therefore our research concentrates on biographies of learning – as narratives which change as time passes. The project’s starting point is a sample of 85 narrative-focused interviews on the subject of instruction and learning, which were conducted from 1983 to 1985. The interviewees were adult educators (n=40) as well as course-participants (n=45) at different adult-education centres (German: Volkshochschule) in an urban region in Germany. To examine how individual biographies of learning change over the course of time the project has conducted a second wave of interviews – 25 years later – with the same persons as in the 1980s. Currently 40 new interviews exist, one half each with instructors or participants. The data will be analysed using the Documentary Method (Bohnsack 2001; Nohl 2006), which is based on grounded theory and strongly emphasises a comparative approach.

The project’s solution of the problem of Life Course Research: Our methodical approach

The project’s observation of the impact lifelong learning has on biographies of learning cannot but start with subjective accounts of the matter, as for example, with biographical narrations. As mentioned before all research on lifelong learning therefore has to deal with the problem of the time dependency of subject-bound and respectively biographical information (Alheit & Dausien 2002, Fischer-Rosenthal 2005, Alheit 2009, Biesta, Field & Tedder 2010). To bypass this ‘problem’ our research process has taken three steps.

Step one makes use of the information included in both interviews alike. Step two draws a sharp contrast between both narrations, using the summarised information from step one and two as a counterpoint of comparison. The concluding step three then asks for the basic schemes and variations

² Original German title: “Prekäre Kontinuitäten. Der Wandel von Bildungsgestalten im großstädtischen Raum unter den Bedingungen der forcierten Durchsetzung des lebenslangen Lernens“. Project Leaders: Prof. Dr. Jochen Kade (University of Frankfurt) and Prof. Dr. Sigrid Nolda (Technical University of Dortmund).

which link both narrations as artifacts of a certain individual's life course. Based on a summary of two different biographical accounts of one individual we reconstruct two specific formations of lifelong learning, thus analysing the specific meaning lifelong learning has within each of the narrations. By contrasting the summary with its separate parts we can identify schemes and variations which indicate the processes that lead from formation one to formation two. Subsequently we want to give some insights into our research process to explore the steps using the example of a research subject who we might simply call Mrs. Duber.

Step 1: The Timeline – A summary of life events

First, we extract all mentioned life-events and transitions from two biographical narrations from one individual over a time span of 25 years. These life events are then ordered chronologically to form a life course overview. Our project interviewed Mrs. Duber twice. The first interview was conducted in 1983, the second interview was conducted in 2008. Both interviews were narrative-focused and centred around the topic of the importance lifelong learning had on her biography.

Summarising the information from both interviews alike, the life-history of Mrs. Duber starts in 1940, when she was born one of six siblings. Since her family lives in the nowadays Czech area that has then been occupied by German forces, the whole family had to flee by the end of World War II. After their flight the family settles in southern Germany. Her father – an ardent national-socialist – has a hard time coping with the flight and the defeat of Germany in the war. Her mother – who holds a more moderate, yet still national-socialist position – starts to distance herself from her husband. In the end she sides with her now grown-up children. They refuse further contact with their father and only agree to further contact with their mother if she keeps her lamentation of the past times at bay. Making a life in post-war Germany is difficult for refugees, therefore, none of the six children is able to receive higher education and all of the siblings enter apprenticeships and worklife early. After Mrs. Duber has finished her apprenticeship she works as an insurance employee for several years. She likes the job, since it allows her financial as well as personal freedom which boosts her self-esteem. To keep up with other employees, who come from a better educated background she starts taking courses in English at the local adult education centre. She does this against her father's orders, who does not want his children to learn the 'enemy's' language. During adolescence her occupational as well as her adult educational experiences help her to gain the necessary self-esteem to dissociate her-self from her parents and to take life into her own hands.

Around 1965 Mrs. Duber marries a man who works as an engineer for a big company. Her husband wants her to leave her work-life, but it is not until she gets pregnant some years later that she quits her job by her own will. After the birth of her child and a subsequent relocation to a home within a newly founded suburb she becomes more or less confined to the marital household. In this situation of tightened disembedding framed by three intertwined transitions – leaving work life, giving birth to a child, moving away from one's former home – which expands until the year of the first interview,

Mrs. Duber struggles to regain her personal freedom and self-esteem. She fears to be cast off as a housewife, to become expelled from society and to be bereaved of her autonomy. In this situation it is another local adult-education centre that opens up a possibility for her own self-actualisation. She starts participating in a multitude of courses. She books courses on sewing, stitching and more frequently cooking. This way she is able to refine her competences within the household. By sewing, stitching and cooking she also helps to keep the family's expenditures at bay. The knowledge and manual-abilities gained within the courses thus help her to fend off the husband's ironic comments on 'being a lazy housewife'. She also takes part in a series of guided tours through museums and exhibitions, enjoying the possibility to get into touch with high culture and demonstrating her own knowledge of history and the arts to others. By getting into discussions with other participants she feels able to re-establish herself within the public sphere. Through her participation in adult education she updates a biographical creed that stretches from her childhood throughout her life: In the face of dire circumstances one must not give up, but one has to focus on a better future and take assertive steps towards it. In this way participating in lifelong learning is a form of biographical work towards the foundation of a better future for herself.

Later on Mrs. Duber is obliged with many public administrative tasks (e.g. attending banking activities, representing her husband at several advisory services) which she gives up when her husband is going into retirement. The daughter's family lives in the parental mansion, and Mrs. Duber being the manager of the family's 'hotel' – as she puts it. She takes great pride in organising the daily routines within the household and is generally content with the way her life turned out. In the years from 1990 until 2000 she and her husband have gone on a series of long distance journeys, discovering nearly all the world from the Andes to the United States. She has not visited courses at the adult-education centre for over ten years. Nowadays – at the age of 68 – she is no longer able to travel far distances, as due to an operation on one of her leg's nerves which was accidentally cut so that walking has become difficult for her. The main task she has set for herself therefore is to relearn how to walk. To achieve this goal she and her husband visit a local training centre five times a week, again drawing upon Mrs. Duber's creed never to give up easily. Learning to walk again is the only future goal she has set for herself, otherwise she focuses on the present and tries to enjoy the time that she has left, remembering the good times she had. She is well aware that death gets closer as time passes by and is still shocked by the loss of a very close niece, who recently died from a cardiac arrest, being only 47 years old.

Step 2: Two biographical formations at two points in time – The reconstruction of present-bound lifelong learning formations

Unlike the first step, the second step takes a closer look at each biographical account separately. Narration 1 as well as narration 2 are now analysed as artefacts which are articulated at a specific time within the life-course. Both narrations indicate individual biographical formations of lifelong learning. The special quality of both formations can only be understood in contrast to each other and the timeline. In this step we therefore examine the different ways in which specific life-events,

life-passages and life-topics are presented in both narrations. To unravel the differences between the narrations we examine the vocabulary and metaphors the subjects use to talk about their life and lifelong learning. We especially focus on how change as an irritating form of dis-embedding is depicted and how coping with change is represented in the narration. Comparing the two tales we subsequently search for schemes and variations that link the two tales together. In most of our data certain core-metaphors can be found (Habermas & de Silveira 2008). These are relatively short passages within the narrations where the narrator tries to get to the heart of a certain issue and therefore uses highly metaphorical vocabulary, often resulting in something like a personal creed or a statement of faith. If we have found such a passage in one interview, we search for a possible counterpart in the other narration. By contrasting the core-metaphors as well as the overall life-architectures presented by each narration we strive to reconstruct the time-dependency which is inherent to both narrations. Comparing the different high-lights and blind spots of each interview thus yields insights into how Mrs. Duber reconstructs her life in the 1980's and the 2008's and how this reconstruction influences her learning activities.

Getting back to the two life-histories of Mrs. Duber we can find several passages that deal with the same life-events or life-topics. Among them are two passages, in which she points out what learning means to her at the moment. In 1983 she metaphorically depicts her learning activities as the emergence of once submerged knowledge with the result that one learns to see something with completely different eyes. In 2008 she talks about learning as discovering new things, using the metaphor 'to see something with the eyes of someone else' as a description for learning and its effects on herself. Let's have a look at both passages with their metaphors and what they might tell us about change and lifelong learning as a means to cope with change³:

I1: So what are you doing at the moment?

D1: At the moment I take courses in cooking, and than this – apart from that they offer wonderful courses with Mrs. Dr. Archer: Visiting museums, churches. You know, usually you visit a church – beautiful – and then you walk away. So now you start seeing churches with completely different eyes, and I think this is, when you yourself have visi-tors and show them around, then you can tell them something yourself, that's really great, I really like it. I have not been concerned with those things in the past, when I was working, until now that is. And so you just go there, taking part in guided tours for churches, cities, and then again I visit a museum or an exhibition. Well I believe that humankind is kinda phlegmatic, as I can tell by myself and from many people whom I know somehow: So considering museums and exhibitions, you usually say: 'Ah, next time, ah well there's still much time left, oh well.' And then the exhibition is over. Right now I have a set date, which I have pinned down – alright: Friday we visit the exhibition – and I have to say that until now, I can speak of no tour that I did not like. Each of them has given me something and I've always had fun.

3 I1/I2 = Interviewer 1983/2008, D1/D2 = Mrs Duber 1983/2008

I1: So you say, you show those things to friends yourself?

D1: Of course, you have to show off what you got. I have – as I said earlier – a friend from Düsseldorf who loves visiting the Museum of Modern Art and when she visits us in summer, well in spring, when she comes: ‘Are you going to bring mother along?’ She doesn’t like to come along, so the two of us are having a nice day in the end. And many things stay in your memory, and when the picture is shown, then you know again – ah well – this and that. This and that. And I have to say, it was good.

I1: Did you have that in school already?

D1: I had this in school already, and you know what is amazing? I have to realize that over and over again, so when it starts – it’s about the history of art – and Dr. Archer really does it very well, she asks: ‘Think about that what has been.’ And at once again all that which has been submerged emerges again. You start again: ‘Of course, clearly, this was that and this was there, and that way this all was interconnected.’ So all the, also the historical interconnections come back to mind, all those things which you usually are no longer occupied with in everyday’s life. But when you are in the midst of the tour, and quite some time after that, when we’re having a coffee party – there where some women whom I meet regularly on the subway, it’s mostly the same persons, so you meet some other women: ‘Well, you know this was great!’ And then we talk enthusiastically. I must admit that I like this as well.

I1: That’s interesting. You say: One forgets what one knows.

D1: One forgets what one knows. That is, and when you are approached by someone – at once: ‘Yes, that’s right. Of course, you have heard this before. You have learned this before.’ And I think this is amazing as well, very amazing. Your mind becomes animated to occupy itself with negligibilities again, as some put it.

I1: What do you mean with negligibilities?

D1: Well in everyday’s life the 30 years war or the painters, the times they lived, are no longer of importance. But when you have been there, you think about it and then you take out art books and you look at it with completely different eyes.

The first interview is centred on the present situation in 1983. Mrs. Duber finds herself in a threefold transition – departing from working life, becoming a mother, moving into a new environment – as she struggles for integration and autonomy.

From Mrs. Dubers’s point of view learning is an activity which allows you to overcome difficulties and disparities by somehow acquiring knowledge and skills. When speaking about learning and its results in 1983 she frequently uses the metaphor ‘learning to see something with completely different eyes’.

From her point of view learning is a process which starts with persons she describes as 'blind hens.' Those blind subjects neither grasp the full potential of themselves nor do they completely understand the symbolic universe that surrounds them. Before learning – so the logic of this argument – one is incapacitated. It is by learning that things finally become clear. Once learning has come to an end, the 'completely different eyes' acquired in the process enable the subject to interact with the world in a different way. How is this metaphoric description of learning linked to the change Mrs Duber faces in 1983 and what does it tell us about lifelong learning as a means to cope with change?

The situation Mrs Duber experiences in 1983 is marked by the already mentioned threefold social disembedding: Out of work, locked up in a newly built house in a newly built suburb, as a young mother raising a child, her living context has changed dramatically within a short span of time. Irritation thus results from a change of context. This contextual change is – at least in the case of Mrs Duber – encountered by means of subjective change. In this respect learning seems to be a process that is not only confined to the sole acquisition of knowledge, but refers to the acquisition of skills – as corporeal devices –, which lead to a changed behaviour. Learning is directly linked to changing one's own existence within the world. This view on learning seems radical, as it presupposes that the only chance to solve the discrepancies Mrs. Duber experiences in her current situation is that she changes herself and her way of being. To soften the idea that learning necessarily is combined with radical corporeal changes Mrs. Duber introduces a construction which brings Plato's meiotics to mind: Learning is not only corporeal change but also the 'emergence of the submerged'. She points out that in school she has already learned a lot – but this knowledge was buried and thus lost over time. The current lack of knowledge, she experiences in interactions with people from a better educated background, therefore is nothing that should or could bruise her ego: She believes that she already has the knowledge everyone else has – she is just currently lacking to skills to make it work. The guide's actions of asking the tours participants to remember what has been gives her an anchor to depict what might be an actual process of learning as a process of remembering. This way ignorance is not bliss but the result of submerged knowledge. Whereas one can hardly undo bliss, sediments can be dug up, debris can be removed, and ruins can be rebuilt. Starting from her idea that learning necessarily incorporates corporeal change, the metaphor of the 'emergence of the submerged' seems to be a way in which learning – as adaption to change – still seems viable via autonomous action. As an act of reconstruction learning does not change, or worse, destroy the person, but it completes and reconstructs it. Learning therefore helps to overcome experienced differences between the self and the world as well as between different temporal versions of oneself by putting together what seems to have fallen apart over the course of events.

The result of the reconstruction of one's memories is the ability to 'see with completely different eyes' – giving a paradox twist to the image of learning formulated beforehand: Although learning just seems to be remembering – not adding something new to the picture – the cognitive reconstructive work done while learning leads to a corporeal change of the person: The acquisition of new eyes. The result

of the action thus betrays the basic assumptions it started with. Learning is not about reconstruction, but about the construction of something new. Experienced difficulties are not overcome by learning, but augmented: In the end Mrs. Duber does not just have to abandon her work-life and her former home but also her very self – at least the eyes with which she saw the world before it changed.

Learning does not solve the issues Mrs. Duber has as a result of the enormous environmental changes she had to face, but casts those external problems into an internal form – focused on the eyes with which one sees. This enables her to solve disparities that result from a changed context by changing herself. The direction of this personal change seems to be framed by her new position as a mother and the knowledge and skills associated with her activities as a housewife, which she acquires in the courses at the adult education centre.

Twenty-five years later, she still speaks of learning with reference to metaphors of “seeing” – but in a different way:

I2: So my last question is: Everyone's talking about Lifelong Learning. So it has become sort of a catch phrase within the last five to ten years. If you would be asked what you think of Lifelong Learning, what would you say?

D2: Oh well, Lifelong Learning, you know, if you have grandchildren, you come, you're learning different once again. They practically see the world completely different from how we see it. And this is somehow another kind of learning, to see with the eyes of the children.

I2: Oh well, so that you-

D2: You understand this, that, that which I say, they just see it completely different? And when we discuss: 'Well what do you mean?' 'Yeah, well grandma, what YOU mean again.' You understand, so we learn through our children somehow.

I2: So, like, that you go to Disneyland, although you say: 'I'd never go there?'

D2: NEVER, yes. Or they say, well then we will just do it. 'This is just so great!' Oh well, then you just do it. But in the end you do it for the children's sake.

I2: But you do not come to like these countries⁴? So that you'd say: 'I liked it a little bit?'

D2: Oh well, yes somehow.

I2: So you do in the end, don't you?

D2: In the end somehow, yes.

⁴ Mrs. Duber has mentioned beforehand that they travelled with their grandchildren to Disneyland, Florida. She also pointed out that she does not like the USA nor does she like Disneyland.

I2: So you're not completely taken, but you say: 'Its kinda nice?'

D2: Yes, it's kinda nice. As you say – it's kinda nice.

I2: But you wouldn't do it on your own?

D2: Not do it.

I2: No, well, so they practically draw you into things?

D2: They draw you into it and teach you another view of the world, if you want to put it roughly, because they see everything different from how we see it."

The second interview is focused on the situation Mrs Duber finds herself in 2008. Over the course of the past 25 years she has accustomed herself to the life she started in 1983. She has raised her daughter, become a grandmother of three and now manages the household of the combined families, caring for four adults and three grandchildren altogether. Being an integral part of the family and the neighbourhood, Mrs Duber's current life is only flawed by the fact that she is now bodily handicapped. As a result of an operational error a nerve has been cut, and she has great difficulties walking. In the new interview thus the theme of emancipation within a coercive environment no longer prevails. The acquisition of knowledge and skills is no longer a means of reconstruction but subject to remembrance. Learning has become a part of the past, where it helped Mrs. Duber to overcome difficulties. In the current situation of a bodily handicap that severely irritates everyday routines and has to be rehabilitated, learning is cast aside as it would only add more unstableness to an already unstable situation: Who needs new knowledge and new skills, when one has no control over one's own body? So learning can only be pursued further if the body – and with it the ability to walk – is reconstructed.

Where learning leads to corporeal change and helps to complete the person in the first interview, corporeal change and being a complete person becomes a necessity for further learning in the second interview. In 2008 she speaks of learning while referring to her grandchildren, who metaphorically 'see everything different from how we see it.' Learning hence is the quest to "see the world with the eyes of the children', a quest Mrs. Duber has just recently begun and not finished yet. She has found out that her grandchildren have a different perspective of the world which irritates her. She has problems naming the differences as she cannot tell what the grandchildren's perspective is. She points out that they obviously find her own perspective odd – for example when she puts the words "Yeah, well grandma, what YOU mean again" in their mouths. But they do not give her any clue on what the other perspective would be. Being unable to explore the children's knowledge landscapes herself, she has no idea what she precisely might learn from her grandchildren. Anyways she points out her fascination for the way 'they see everything different' – things she is unable to see with her own eyes. This new kind of learning she experiences – with the eyes of others - is a different learning, because it is fundamentally rooted in her own inability to move just as it is rooted in her social embedding which allows her to make use of other persons' ability to move.

Contrasting the passage from interview 2 with the passage shown some pages earlier from interview 1, one can draw some conclusions about the nature of the differences that separate both types of learning: Learning to see something with completely different eyes is another type of learning than learning to see something with someone's eyes. Whereas the first type is learning based on individual corporeal change – a switch of the eyes, so to say – the second type refers to a socially embedded activity, as it takes at least two persons to be able to interactively exchange points of views. Learning is on the one hand associated with individual change over time, but on the other hand is based on inter-individual exchange within a present – not really changing any of the participants but yet widening their respective horizons. In both cases learning is linked to irritation and discrepancies: In the first case irritation caused by the individual's environment is the starting point for learning as an activity focused on reconstruction: In 1983 Mrs. Duber struggles to put back together the pieces of her life that have been torn apart due to the transitions she has recently faced. She changes to better fit the virgin soil she finds herself in.

In the second case learning is an activity that causes irritation all by itself and is not focused on any particular goal. Yet there's a difference between learning and training in this interview – as training in the second interview takes over the role learning had in the first interview: The reconstruction of something damaged: Mrs. Duber strives to regain her ability to walk, which would enable her to fully participate in the family's voyages. If she were able to walk again, she could just do what her grandchildren suggest. This would allow her to start exploring unknown destinations, thus helping her to learn something new. Right now she cannot name what she would learn as she cannot access the places where the confrontation with something irritating takes place, but she can tell that there's a different kind of learning available to her through exchange with her grandchildren. Although she is corporeally bound to the family's house, their reports of the voyages made help her to visit those places at least virtually. She needs to change – once again – but this time it is not as a result from learning but as a precondition to learning, which would enable her to explore new territories, exchanging views of the world with the persons one might meet over the course of the journey. Learning does not result from changes in the context which have an direct impact on the individual – changing someone's eyes –, but empowers someone who participates in an interactive activity to actively change the context with the help of others – by seeing things not only through one's own eyes but also with the eyes of the others.

Step 3: The Logic of Change – The reconstruction of basic schemes that explain the transition from one formation to another

The final step of our research process relates both individual biographical formations of lifelong learning to each other via systematic comparisons. In this step we aim to identify variations and contrasts which are unique to each narration or which are common to both narrations. These comparisons enable us to reconstruct basic schemes and to generate archetypes of biographical formations of lifelong learning. Considering the case of Mrs. Duber this step includes an exhaustive comparison between differing as well as similar passages of text within both interviews – like the comparison demonstrated

in the passages above. Comparing both passages of text gives insight into the continuities and discontinuities that have occurred over the last 25 years.

In 1983 we see Mrs. Duber as a person that has to face a lot of environmental changes at once. Being a disembedded individual she encounters these changes with a concept of learning that strongly focuses on individual activity and potentiality. In this concept learning is depicted as an individual's instrument to overcome disintegration via reconstruction: The personal disintegration is encountered with an activity described as reconstruction of knowledge and skills which have been submerged. Remembering knowledge and skills is the key not only to overcome personal disintegration but also social disintegration – as a person with socially relevant knowledge and skills one can socialise with others. Paradoxically this concept, which highlights individuality and individual potentiality, is closely linked to the possibility or necessity of corporeally becoming someone else. This way cognitive reconstruction of what was lost leads – according to Mrs Dubers metaphoric description of learning – to the corporeal construction of something new. Irritation resulting from a changed context is solved by learning, which is depicted as a form of reconstructive work on the subject itself.

In 2008 Mrs. Duber does not have to face any environmental changes at all, but she has to deal with a physical handicap resulting from age and a miscarried operation. The consequences of the lost mobility are threatening her social integration, as she is no longer able to partake in the activities of her family and friends. She encounters these changes with a concept of learning that highlights learning as a social activity based on interaction as well as shared experience. In this concept learning is described as the result of social ventures – it presupposes social integration. Being socially integrated one has the possibility to exchange viewpoints with others, thus widening one's own horizons with little effort. Life becomes easier as difficult tasks – such as exploring a country within a limited span of time – can be subdivided between different persons, each one profiting from the knowledge and skills of the others. As one can draw upon the other's competence one does not have to dig up submerged knowledge anymore. The ability to jauntily remember the good times is the benefit this concept of socially shared learning and living yields. Yet only an integrated person possessing socially relevant knowledge and skills is able to enjoy this benefit. Paradoxically this concept, which highlights sociality and socially shared potentials is closely linked to the necessity of corporeally staying who one is and being mobile regardless of one's age and health. In this way irritation, as the precondition of the cognitive construction of something new is based on the corporeal reconstruction of what was lost – mobility. Irritation can only be acquired through change of context, but as the individual cannot initiate this change by itself anymore it has to rely on others who make the world out there interactively accessible.

Conclusion: Learning as a means to keep the balance between integration and disintegration on a personal and social level

Considering the case of Mrs. Duber we have two concepts of learning: An individualised one and a social one – presupposing each other. Both focus on learning as an activity which oscillates between integration and disintegration on two levels: The social integration/disintegration of the individual within a society of others and the corporeal integration/disintegration of the individual itself. Both levels are closely linked with each other – erratic social disintegration is dissolved by purposeful corporeal disintegration, or becoming someone else. Unforeseen corporeal disintegration threatens social integration and can only be encountered by intensified efforts to keep one's own body in shape. It thus seems as the fragile balance between the changing individual and its changing social context can only be kept in check as both sides stay somewhat flexible. As one cannot control the flexibility of the society, the only chance to secure one's integration within society seems to stay flexible oneself. This does not necessarily mean to be able to corporeally change oneself – or one's eyes – all the time, but also can mean to be cognitively able to draw upon different points of view – just like the others view of the world. In this sense Mrs. Duber's struggle of 'learning to be' is a never ending process with a more externalised, corporeal dimension and a more internalised, cognitive dimension.

Further questions now are why we can observe this shift of learning concepts within the biography of Mrs. Duber. Is the conceptual change a result of aging processes? Do younger people tend to learn more individualised, goal-orientated without backup through others while older people prefer learning within socially-embedded arrangements? Does the change depend on the changed focus on lifelong learning from 1983 to 2008: Do we all learn rather socially embedded in 2008 than individually organised – learning 2.0., so to say? Or is the change in the learning concepts not so much related to time but moreover to a specific situation one finds oneself in: So if one has to prove oneself to others, struggle for autonomy and acceptance within a society yet to be explored, one might rather focus on an individualised model of learning. Someone who has established him- or herself within society does not have to learn individually anymore, but can make use of the other's help – giving rise to a more social model of learning. The question what might be the case and what might be the exceptions could be answered by looking at other cases, from which we have longitudinal data.

Our ongoing research and analysis of changing subjects embedded in changing contexts via changing narrations might open up an opportunity to establish new and different ways of thinking about the manifold functions of lifelong learning for the individuals themselves but as well for the society which depends on them. In this respect 'learning to be' (Faure 1972) – or biographical work (Fischer-Rosenthal 2005, Alheit 2003) could be a promising concept, when it comes to unravel the impact and importance of lifelong learning for individual biographies within modernity.

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**Professional identity work of two
new teachers in the context of
Finnish day care**

Introduction

New teachers in early childhood education start their career amid a rapidly changing field and work environment and construct their professional identity in a situation of increasingly complex functions, changing policies and practices. In day care, the increasing complexity of teachers' work involves broader educational, social and cultural requirements, including collaborating with parents from diverse backgrounds and with various local communities (Urban 2008: 139). The early childhood practitioner is increasingly required to go beyond their pedagogical task in order to confront and address these increased demands and pedagogical and curricular changes. Practitioners are also increasingly required to engage in administrative tasks and to have more and more advanced technological competence. It can be difficult for new teachers to adapt to the level of decision making that is required without the benefit of experience to guide them (Le Maistre & Paré 2010: 561). Young teachers construct their professional identities in a context that is characterised by multiple uncertainties. There is a need, therefore, to examine the situation of new teachers and to investigate their identity construction processes in these demanding and challenging contexts (Karila & Kupila 2010).

This study investigates new teachers' identity work in the contemporary Finnish day care context. It approaches professional identity as a socio-cultural phenomenon. To understand the development of professional identity, it is necessary to consider the mutual involvement of professionals and the social world. In this study, professional identity is described as the interface between the individual and social contexts (Wenger 1998, 2002). Identity is shaped through participation in various communities of practice, where participation in those communities is shaped by identity (Wenger 1998). Professional identity is also the result of the individual's response to the work environment and the expectations of it (Kirpal 2004).

Complexity of the professional context in day care in Finland

In Finland day care has been considered part of social and family policy and, more recently, also as part of educational policy. The socio-cultural context is thus a macro-level definer of professionalism (Karila 2008: 211- 212). As in many other countries, there is also a current shift of perspectives in early education, as the focus moves from the individual practitioner towards the reciprocal relationships between various actors and their roles at different layers of the system (Urban 2008: 149). Working with other people is thus also a marker of professionalism (Dalli 2010). Professionalism, then, can be understood as an attribute of the entire system and as something to be developed in terms of its reciprocal relationships (Dalli & Urban 2010; Urban 2010: 18.).

Recent Finnish ECEC policy has placed an emphasis on partnership with parents, child' individuality and multi-professionalism (Stakes 2003; Strandell 2010, Karila & Kinon 201:55-69). New teachers in day care are now faced with the new professional demands of a multi-professional workplace.

In Finnish day care centres children are instructed and cared for by day care teachers as well as nursery nurses, and the staff division between early childhood teachers and childcare workers presents a number of challenges. Following a recent change in staffing policy, kindergarten teachers now have sole responsibility for the teaching of children in public day care centres. In the context of this policy, multi-professionalism is seen as the sharing of expertise from different fields of practice. Multi-professionalism has been regarded as an appropriate and functional policy as it suggests that professionals from various fields can contribute via their own expertise to shared problem solving and thus achieve higher quality decision making through shared expertise (Karila & Nummenmaa 2001). In the working practices of Finnish day care, however, internal multi-professionalism, in particular, has been interpreted in a unique way. Instead of identifying the special expertise of professionals working in day care centres and developing new shared expertise based on this, we have reached a situation where the use of special expertise in the workplace is not a matter of course (Karila 2010, p. 88).

Multi-professional teams are thus central to the participatory process and form part of the broader socio-cultural context within the teacher's work. The assumption of this article is that the intertwining and negotiation between professional identity and social pressures shape how teachers view their work and their sense of self as teachers; i.e. the social dimension of professional identity. This process is also influenced by practices of power.

Social nature of professional identity

Work is a means through which identity is shaped. Urban (2010: 13) argues that the 'practice' in early childhood education unfolds in interactions between children and adults, individuals and groups, families and communities, laypersons and 'professionals' - all pursuing their own and often contradictory interests (see also Edwards & Usher 2008: 76). Professional identity is mediated through others (see Edwards & Usher 2008: 76). Such an approach brings to the fore the social nature of professional identity, something we can see as a possible analogue of moves towards inter- and trans-disciplinarity and team working. Identities are, therefore, produced in a variety of settings, including workplaces (Chappell, Scheeres & Solomon 2007: 168).

According to Wenger (1998; 2002), communities of practice are the basic building blocks of a social learning system because they are the social 'containers' of the competences that make up such a system. The competence required for the practice is something the teacher derives from his or her colleagues through daily interaction. The social theory of learning suggests that professional knowledge exists in the interactive practices of working life (Wenger 1998). To understand the construction of professionalism and the process of developing as a professional, it is necessary to consider the mutual involvement of professionals and the social world. The professional development of the beginning teacher is thus scrutinized from a socio-cultural perspective.

The theoretical framework of this article considers that social interaction contributes to new teachers' professional identity. The individual and social are not analytically separate influences on the course of development. Instead, the individual teacher, social partners and the cultural milieu are inseparable contributors to the ongoing activities in which professional development takes place. The focus of the theoretical framework is on the importance of social processes in the individual's knowledge building and learning. The construction of knowledge is both an interpersonal and intrapersonal process.

Social interaction is an essential aspect of development. Being a teacher involves acquiring and then redefining an identity that is socially legitimated. This process continues in the ways in which colleagues, children and parents respond to the teacher (Coldron & Smith 1999: 712). These relationships are dynamic (Kupila 2007), with interactions constantly shifting and rearranging in unpredictable patterns (Urban 2010:13). Identities are in a constant process of 'becoming' (Scheeres & Solomon 2006; Hall 1996). What is central is not the fixed position or state of being, but the active and open state of becoming, which is an integral feature of the process of positioning (Edwards & Usher 2008: 141). From the beginning of, as well as during, their careers, teachers are engaged in developing themselves as teachers. Professional identity is thus not fixed or unitary. The conceptualisation of how persons acquire their identities as teachers has implications for the kind of support needed for professional development (Coldron & Smith 1999: 711).

Study context and research questions

This study is part of a larger research project 'Professional identity construction in early childhood education through encounters with different groups and generations of professionals'. The project participants included two day care organisations located in two cities in Finland. One of the aims of the project was to determine the processes involved in the professional identity development of new teachers. Specifically, the project sought to investigate whether and how new teachers were becoming integrated in the social and professional cultures of the public day care centres in which they worked. This article focuses on one aspect of this project, namely the development of the professional identities of two female kindergarten teachers, Aija and Heini, who had been working in public day care for two years. The teachers were thus just starting their career in early childhood education and had minimal professional experience in the field of ECE.

The research process continued throughout the year from August 2009 to April 2010. A multi-professional team provided the context in which Aija and Heini worked. The study investigates the ways that these new kindergarten teachers constructed their professional identities from the discourse available to them in the multi-professional work community. The teams in which they worked consisted of 3–4 public day care professionals, each with different professional or educational backgrounds. Each team was responsible for one group of children. This article will elucidate how the identities

develop during the transition from novice to professional teacher. The focus is on individuals and their identity work. The paper presents an analysis of the qualitative study and of the data gathered from interviews and diaries of the beginning kindergarten teachers.

Biographical approach and thematic analysis

Billett (200: 90) argues that the impact of global and local changes needs to be understood from personal and subjective viewpoints. Thus, it is necessary to include subjective experience in the methodological framework. Qualitative data were gathered from semi-structured interviews and personal diaries to shed light on the professional development process and identity construction. Personal interviews were conducted twice: at the beginning of the term and at the end of the term. Interviews were conducted face-to-face at the day care centre. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The diaries were written throughout the year and included structured questions to support reflection on work experiences. The teachers were asked to make diary entries twice a month. Through the diaries and interviews the new teachers were asked to explore their experiences and perceptions and reflect on their work. A guarantee of confidentiality was given to the interviewees stating that no actual names would be used and no kindergartens identified in the reporting.

A biographical approach (Merrill & West 2009) and thematic analysis provided the methodological framework. Teacher narratives were built through the interviews and diaries. In this study, we consider interviews and diaries as narrative acts. These can be seen as long-term narratives over the course of the interviews and diaries, that provide over time – biographical accounts of the teachers' new career and process of identity work (see Riessman 2008:23). We acknowledge the significance of the biographical approach in documenting the new teacher's experience and providing a nuanced examination of the narratives that constitute individual professional development and identity construction.

The biographical method is seen to capture lived and textualised practices, through which sense is made of the teacher's professional identity. This methodological framework allows participants to negotiate their identities and to make meaning of their experience (see Bathmaker 2010: 3). The biographical method is also understood according to Merrill and West (2009: 10) as denoting research which utilises individual stories or other personal documented accounts to understand lives within a social frame of reference.

The reflective statements and transcriptions of the interviews and diaries were analysed thematically. Thematic analysis was chosen as it is compatible with narrative text and can be applied to stories that develop in interview conversations and written diaries (see Riessman 2008: 53). One of the most basic elements of a narrative is its story, told through a range of characters (Holley & Colyar 2009:

681). Thus, the story is a stable narrative element (Holley & Colyar 2009: 681). The thematic analysis reports the experiences, meanings and the reality of the initial stages of the working life of the new teacher (see Braun & Clarke 2006: 81). The analysis attempted to describe the essential details of individual cases. In these case descriptions the characteristics of the working context were also scrutinized. Thus, the aim was also to understand the social and cultural nature of the process of becoming a teacher in early education.

Using a narrative approach to data-analysis enable the interviews with each teacher to be analysed as a whole. The analysis gave particular attention to storylines, continuities and transformations in self-positioning as well as to developments during the course of the year: the process of change and identity construction. The study employs a naturalistic, qualitative approach premised on the assumption that individuals construct their own meanings from their lived experiences.

We are aware of the possible repercussions of writing about peoples' lives and identities. The biographical and identity focused approach of the project touches on sensitive issues. Ethical research practice requires the researcher to treat the research subjects as "full human beings: knowing, creative subjects in their own right, rather than as repositories of 'data' to be extracted and understood by researchers alone" (Merrill & West 2009: 168). We are also mindful that the participants were asked to give up their time and to share personal issues.

Findings

The results indicate that entry into work is not always smooth for new teachers in early education. Indeed, the process is often uncomfortable. Many of the demands and changes in the work environment seemed to confuse Aija and Heini, the two new teachers investigated in the study and also had an impact on their professional identities (see also Karila & Kupila 2010). Many of the issues faced by Aija and Heini concerned how to function as a teacher in a multi-professional team, how to identify the pedagogical goals and mission of this team, and how to implement their pedagogical philosophy in the multi-professional team context. Aija's and Heini's experiences were similar, but their working contexts were different. Consequently, their narratives regarding beginning as a day care teacher differed. Both nevertheless had a willingness to assume responsibility for their professional growth and development, sought new professional responsibilities, and strove to determine the nature of their professional role as a teacher.

Heini's accounts of beginning as a day care teacher is a description of managing and coping amid a fast-paced work environment with a continuous staff turnover. Her problems resulted from a lack of trained personnel and poor personnel management at the day care centre. Heini's early experiences of the work community are of frequent sick leaves and temporary posts. The group of children and

the team of educators were both in a constant state of flux, and yet the 'basic day-to-day had to be in place'. Heini's work as a kindergarten teacher during the autumn term consisted of practical daily arrangements arising from the continuously changing staff situation and trying to achieve at least some degree of operational continuity. She has neither the time nor resources for pedagogic considerations. She does not mention the pedagogical grounds or quality of the activities of the children, nor does she reflect on her personal pedagogical activity. She examines her command of different pedagogical content areas only in technical terms and her working approach is highly procedural and routine-based. Heini felt isolated. Lack of staff resources resulted in lack of time for sharing and learning, leaving Heini deprived of someone with whom she could discuss the pressures she was experiencing. In the spring term, however, she gained a new colleague, an older teacher, and this relationship empowered Heini.

Aija experienced difficulty in obtaining a professional role and space within her multi-professional team. This caused uncertainty in Aija as to how to operate in different pedagogical situations and led to considerable frustration and tensions within the team. In this case, rather than serving as cooperative learning environment in which members share views, learn from and support one another, the multi-professional team clashed over their conflicting professional views concerning childcare and education practices. In particular, Aija clashed with the nursery nurse on the issues of pedagogical practice and child education. There was no open discussion between Aija and the nursery nurse and no compromises were made by the team. This restricted Aija's learning and development. Aija was denied a safe space for professional growth. Furthermore, Aija felt that the other members were denying her the opportunity to put into practice her pedagogical philosophy and were suppressing her initiative. In addition, Aija also felt that she had valuable theoretical knowledge to contribute to the team, but the practical day-to-day routines stood in the way of this. Aija was dissatisfied with her role in the team and ongoing tensions in the workplace engendered feelings of isolation and professional self-doubt. To help resolve these conflicts and contradictions, Aija began to seek external colleagues with whom she could reflect on her situation. Her conflicting approaches with the nursery nurse caused her embarrassment and emotional distress and she felt that she was being forced to act against her own values and views. Aija expressed the need to establish a balance between her personal and professional life and expectations and the reality of the multi-professional situation.

During the spring, Aija experienced a growing recognition of the professional role she should have as a teacher, and this realisation increased her ability to assume her professional role and responsibility. This growing awareness was the start to her empowerment. Beginning to express her thoughts and pedagogical views more clearly and courageously was an empowering experience for her. By the end of the process she was stressing the importance of addressing issues clearly and directly. She also had the courage to face opposition and learned to make independent quick decisions without fearing the disapproval of others. As a result of this process, the other team members began to listen to her. By her own account, Aija also came to realise the importance of knowledge with respect to her competency and professionalism.

At the beginning of their careers, Aija and Heini were both assailed by a sense of unsettled identity and self-doubt. They did not have a trusting, safe space to share, ask questions and receive honest constructive feedback from their team members. Aija's narrative is one of vulnerability and loss of identity. Both new teachers experienced difficulties in establishing a professional role and space in their multi-professional team. There was confusion in the content and description of work and responsibilities. The new teachers tried to learn the norms and modes of practice and professional interaction in their teams and workplace. According to the data they needed support from other colleagues to develop understanding of their responsibilities. During the transition process of developing as a professional teacher, Aija and Heini each developed an understanding of their professional roles in the multi-professional early education context. This transition was manifested as a gained awareness of the nature of their professionalism and of their professional role as a teacher. Through the process of transition they developed a professional social identity, moving from novice to full member of the team's culture and community (see Wenger 1998).

The results echo those of Dymoke and Harrison (2006) concerning new teachers in the school context. In early childhood education, the professional development of teachers seems to be largely rooted in performance-led systems that can leave new teachers unsupported in relation to their professional and personal goals. In day care, there is often very little time for reflection and discussions (Karila & Kupila 2010; Kupila 2007). The results indicated that developing as a teacher requires reflection on one's own developmental challenges and potential. The development process involves cognitive, social and emotional interchange. These are: the socio-emotional aspects of beginning teachers' learning (see also Kupila 2007; Peterson et.al. 2010).

Concluding comments

The results highlight the transitions and continuities of professional identity development. Professional identity work was manifested as a process of positioning within the team. This development process takes place in the multi-professional team and in the cultural and social context of the workplace. On the basis of the results, the construction of professional identity can be described as a complex process which takes place within the interaction not only of the social and cultural dimension, but also the subjective and personal dimension of the work community. The team as a work context is important for the development of the professional identity of the early education practitioner. Equally, the team can also hinder this professional development. The process of identity construction of beginning teachers is emotionally challenging. The current system may leave the new teacher unsupported in relation to their professional development, identity construction and personal goals. A lack of personal professional identity and lack of clarity regarding one's professional state present difficulties to the new teacher in finding their place within the work community. This is reflected in the construction of professional identity. In order to foster empowerment, it is important that areas in which an employee

can contribute are recognised. In Aija's and Heini's accounts it was essential that they, as new members of the work community, formed and deepened their own personal understanding of what defines them as professionals and also made this visible to the other team members. Empowerment thus involved making their skills and professional abilities known both to themselves and to others. This was a change process.

New teachers need support in developing understanding of their roles and responsibilities and in conducting their identity work it seems to be important for the teacher to be encouraged to reflect on his/her experiences. The identity development process also included numerous affective and emotional elements. These personal elements are crucial part of the process of becoming a teacher (see also Dymoke & Harrison 2006: 84). The results of the study can also help new teachers reflect on their professional identity and professional role and responsibilities and the decisions they need to make within their practice. We argue that, due to changing work practices, newly qualified teachers need to learn to redefine themselves and to engage in continuous negotiation of their identity.

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Adult educators' identities in transition: changes occurred within adult education and training policy in Portugal (1999-2005)

Introduction

In this article we discuss adult educators' representations of work they have achieved within the provision of adult education and training policy from 1999 to 2005, in Portugal. This analysis considers the professional trajectories of these adult educators, stressing the learning acquired through practice, due to experience, including trial and error, dilemmas, etc. In fact, Portugal has never had, and still does not have, a specific formal education path designed to train these educators. The initial formal education of these practitioners therefore included very different university degrees.

The discussion about changes in adult educators' identities starts from an analysis of the historical developments in adult education since 1974, when the Democratic Revolution occurred. Three policy approaches were identified (Lima & Guimarães, 2011; Guimarães, 2011). These approaches had two aspects: i) a political aspect, which focused on State intervention in adult education and on (informal and the lack of formal) education pathways followed by adult educators; and ii) an educational axis, with the emphasis on work developed by these educators in local settings. This debate was supported by data collected in two different research projects, based in two NGOs, one in north Portugal and the other in the south. One research project was based on semi-structured interviews held with adult educators and learners involved in adult education and training courses implemented from 2001 to 2005 (Lima & Guimarães, 2011; Guimarães, 2011). Ethnographic research which involved participant observation and open interviews with adult educators working on the recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) was also a source of empirical data (Barros, 2009). All the data were submitted to content analysis.

The final considerations of this article reinforced the finding that tensions emerged, resulting from profound changes due to 'pluriscale governance' (Barros, 2009), in a combination of trans- and international development trends in adult education policies, as well as national and local dimensions. These changes stressed the importance given to education and training for competitiveness (Guimarães, 2011) in public policies. In addition, these policies have had a considerable influence on the identity changes of practitioners involved in adult education and training.

First thoughts

A brief analysis of adult education policies is outlined in the first part of the article, especially since 1999, when the adult education and training policy - or the 'new' adult education policy, according to Barros (2009) - was adopted. This discussion is based on political and educational aspects, and in particular priorities and forms of education that different policies have promoted and profiles of adult educators involved in their various activities. Three education policy approaches were then proposed for the analysis in this paper¹ (Guimarães, 2011):

¹ Even if different, these policy approaches and the adult educators' profiles should not be considered solely in the sense that the analysis of social reality should allow intersections, dimension crossovers in these practitioners' identities.

- » policies for *critical education* in which adult educators showed a strong commitment to social change through education;
- » policies for *social conformity* in which adult educators mainly performed tasks similar to those done by teachers and trainers of formal education and training;
- » policies for *education and training for competitiveness* in which adult educators are 'lifelong learning technicians'.

The second part of this article reports on the data analysis related to two separate qualitative and comprehensive research projects. These involved semi-structured and open interviews conducted with adult educators and learners and the direct observation of adult educators' daily work. The data collected was submitted to content analysis.

Final considerations reinforced the finding that tensions emerged that were the outcome of profound changes that occurred due to 'pluriscale governance' (Barros, 2009), in a combination of trans- and inter-national development trends in adult education policies, such as lifelong learning proposed by the European Union (EU), as well as national and local dimensions (particularly these concerning adult education and training policy and its re-interpretation by local promoters and learners). These changes stressed the importance given to *education and training for competitiveness* (Guimarães, 2011) in public policies. In addition, these policies have had a considerable influence on adult education and training practitioners' identity changes. A significant effort of self-directed learning was therefore achieved. Learning occurred in the frame of practices that combined traditional school-based methods and other more innovative ones, supported by humanistic approaches. At the same time, there was a trend towards the technicisation of work done by practitioners. 'Governing by numbers' (Lawn, 2003), especially in relation to the need to achieve the targets established by the government department in charge adopting adult education and training policy, seemed to have a significant impact locally on work achieved by practitioners. Here, adult educators seemed to be in a delicate position.

Different policies, several adult educator identities

The evolution of adult education in Portugal is very much linked to the development of democracy and the Carnation Revolution of 1974. Up until the mid-1980s, *critical education policies* were more dominant (Lima, 2008; Lima & Guimarães, 2011; Guimarães, 2011). Social justice as a result of relevant changes in peoples' living conditions was at the heart of policy discourses. Popular education fostered a widening of participation at a time when around 30% of the population was illiterate. In addition, adult educators were trying to develop new jobs based on tasks relevant to the implementation of programmes and local development projects. These policies were the outcome of negotiations between the state, civil society and social partners regarding the aims, strategies, provisions, administration and management of organisations. Activities were designed to promote critical and reflective adult education, according to policy narratives that aimed to transform society.

After 1976 when the National Assembly approved the Constitution, and especially after 1986 when Portugal became a member of the European Economic Community (EEC) and the Education Act (Law 46/86) was adopted, *social conformity education policies* became the norm. The state was the main actor responsible for the aims, strategies, forms of provision, administration and management of educational organisations. Policy discourses emphasised formal second-chance education. They also stressed the development of skills required by the economy, structured by the needs and aims of social and economic modernisation, and the internationalisation of the economy. Basic (formal) education was a priority in the context of programmes that fostered social justice (Guimarães, 2011). In this context, the normalisation and formalisation of activities became a serious concern, which led many authors to criticise the ‘scholarisation of adult education’ (Canário, 2001) and the role of adult educators who were mostly teachers in the regular system. Pedagogic decisions resulted in the creation of barriers to participation, low rates of adult basic education certification and a slight decrease in illiteracy rates (compared with other European Union members) that was considered inadequate.

Meanwhile, the existence of EU programmes (notably the European Social Fund) prompted the launch of the Programme for the Development of Education in Portugal I (PRODEP I) in 1989 and, for adult education, many initial and continuing vocational training courses were implemented. They were under the control of state ministries and departments (the Ministry of Labour and the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training, as well as the Ministry of Education and the General Directorate for Adult Education/Nucleus of Basic and Secondary Education). This revealed the ‘vocationalisation of education’ (Stoer, Stoleroff & Correia, 1990; Silva, 1990) in policy narratives: there was an effort to combine education and training contents and methods in activities offered to adults, in which trainers had an important role.

In 1999, under the Socialist Government, the ‘new’ adult education policy (Barros, 2009) was adopted. This policy was based on a contradictory narrative, pessimistic in its evaluation of the educational situation and optimistic in its selection of policy aims. This policy marked a breach with the previous one, which focused on second-chance education for adults and on evening classes. Discourses accordingly centred on aspects that signified a break with the past. In fact, the Government programmes of 1995 and 1999 justified this policy with the need to modernise the economy through education and training (Programa do XIII Governo Constitucional, 1995 and Programa do XIV Governo Constitucional, 1999). The discourse was then focused on repositioning Portugal within the European knowledge economy, specifically with respect to educational indicators. In light of the ‘educational deficit’, adult education and training policy stressed the need to reduce the gap between school certification and vocational qualification in Portugal compared with other EU countries, such as Germany, the United Kingdom or Sweden (Melo, Matos & Silva, 2001). Policy documents stressed the need to improve adult access and participation in different types of education and training in terms of *education and training for competitiveness*. Therefore, novel activities were proposed for people who did not have a basic education certification (up to 9 years of formal schooling or, after 2007, 12 years of schooling) and/or

a vocational qualification (1, 2 and 3 levels, according to the EU guidelines), such as adult education and training courses (AETCs) and the recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC). Adult educators were formally recognised in this policy and several job categories were created: directors of organisations promoting adult education and training forms of provision; coordinators of organisations promoting adult education and training forms of provision; trainers; diagnosis and guidance technicians; recognition and validation technicians; and external evaluators².

Since then, several studies have shown that these adult educators saw themselves as lifelong learning technicians (Guimarães, 2009), combining practices based on different educational and pedagogic approaches, fostering adults' certification, stimulating the acquisition and recognition of adults' competences. They could also be seen as human resources managers in that they motivated adults' learning according to economic profitability by identifying 'competences to compete' and promoting processes of learning to learn in work context (Lima, 2008). They were thus professionals who stressed knowledge related to work, anticipated problems and tried adaptive solutions designed for adults facing social and economic challenges in the context of a policy that emphasised *education and training for competitiveness*. Meanwhile, practice developed from experience, including trial and error, dilemmas, etc. (cf. Schön, 1996; Wenger, 1999) was the main strategy for building these adult educators' identities. This situation was closely linked to the fact that there has never been a specific initial formal education path, and there is not one today. These practitioners had all kinds of university degrees (Unidade de Educação de Adultos, 2008 and 2010). This enabled them to make use of their personal experience as students in formal education settings when they had to implement educational and training activities, which was the case for trainers. Additionally, for many adult educators performing tasks involving recognition of prior learning (such as diagnosis and guidance technicians and the recognition and validation technicians), there was a clear trend towards the technicisation of work. This was due to the influence of supra-national guidelines for lifelong learning, such as those produced by the EU, and to the impact of 'governing by numbers' guidance (Lawn, 2003), the consequence of goals established within an extensionist policy by the government department in charge of adopting the adult education and training (Barros, 2009).

Methodological path followed by the two projects

The qualitative and comprehensive research projects on which this article is based included the intersection of two paradigms: i) the interpretative and constructivist paradigm; and ii) the critical paradigm. This intersection sought to emphasise the inter-dependence between the subject and the object in relation to the importance of representations of social action, specifically the complex interactive task of 'reading the world'. It also implied a balance of political and ideological circumstances

² All the other adult educators mentioned were hired and had a contract, even if some were short-term contracts to achieve a specific goal; external evaluators were hired on the basis of the number of portfolios they were asked to evaluate.

in which social action happened, including research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Two loci for collecting data were selected: two NGOs, one located in the north and another in the south of Portugal. The purpose of this choice was to observe how adult educators acted within civil society organisations when engaged simultaneously in existing adult education and training forms of provision, and in the 'new educational order' established both nationally (by Portugal's adult education policies) and supranationally (by European Union funded programmes concerned with the forms of provision under development) (Field, 2006; Antunes, 2008; and others).

A sociological-based research project that required semi-structured interviews conducted with adult educators involved in adult education and training courses held between 2001 and 2005 (Guimarães, 2011) was combined with an ethnographic-based research project that involved participant observation³ and open interviews with adult educators within the RVCC programme between 2004 and 2005⁴ (Barros, 2009). Although different, these two projects could be taken as social and critical research work (Smyth & Shacklock, 1998: 2-4). As Cox argued, "(...) to be critical is to get away from the prevailing world order and ask how this order came about" (Cox, 1980: 129). Content analysis was used for interpreting the interviews and field notes collected. Frequencies of specific themes were obtained; the structural analysis led to the identification of associations between themes. We also chose to approach the content of written texts using the semi-inductive procedure suggested by Maroy (1997), with three steps: i) immersion in data to reduce it; ii) a codification and systematic comparison in order to organise it; and iii) the interpretation of data according to a 'seesaw motion' in interpretation⁵. These research projects were based on critical and humanistic approaches that focused on the link between policy and power. Assuming that reality was complex and heterogeneous, we were looking for guidelines and norms, commitments as well as discontinuities and omissions in practitioner and learner representations.

New adult educators: old problems and untried challenges

According to Dubar (1997), professional identity is a process in permanent change. It combines 'external factors' such as legislation, norms for work organisations, rules defined by professional organisations, etc., and 'subjective factors', i.e. what individuals think of themselves as professionals

3 Four observation scales were used. This enabled the collection of data of mega and macro sociological dimension (mainly concerning policy discourses) and other data of meso and micro dimension (collected locally). An integrated and complex interpretation was undertaken according to a 'seesaw motion' involving supranational and national approaches, as well as theory and practice. The aim was to critically consider the goal of the study.

4 For written documents the categorical thematic analysis was preferred.

5 According to Maroy (1997: 136), the work achieved in this first stage was a 'seesaw', including classification, concrete manipulation and analytical separation of data in order to interpret and give meaning to the information collected. The purpose was to have a specific and clear line for discussion. The idea was to build categories and develop an analysis structure that would be used later on. This would lead to the development of a first series of discussion proposals that would be validated afterwards.

and how they view the work they achieve. These were the factors on which we focused our attention in this paper. In the context of adult education and training policy, for the first time in the history of this field in Portugal a number of conditions were established for a fragile emergence of jobs⁶ and for the building of a labour market. This labour market was based on public forms of provision, such as the RVCC and AETCs⁷ that have involved an impressive number of adults in the last 10 years⁸. As a result, several profiles have been created in the past decade, based on legislation and different formal guidance. Initial formal education such as a university degree became a requirement to be an adult educator and a few continuing education courses were implemented by both state and private organisations. Furthermore, in comparison with other social and educational practitioners there was a complexification of knowledge (because of the existence of formal rules) and the formal specificities of tasks implemented by adult educators were identified. All this happened within a differentiation process (in relation to teaching) and involved a wider (albeit within changing trends) social recognition of adult educators.

Other factors influenced changes in adult educator identity. Both the RVCC and AETCs allowed learners with low school education levels to participate in adult education. Involving very heterogeneous groups and was based on individualistic education and training pathways, these forms of provision were aimed at giving adults a formal education certification and a formal professional qualification. This led to a conflict between the need to retain singularity (of each adult biography and educational pathway) and the need to standardise educational and training procedures. In addition, the hiring of these 'new' adult educators has changed the national social and professional panorama. Several studies have shown that adult educators were better qualified than in the past, they were younger and included a larger percentage of women. Thanks to their longer initial formal education and the innovative educational and training procedures offered by the forms of provision, these adult educators were more demanding in terms of continuing education⁹ (Unidade de Educação de Adultos, 2008 and 2010). A number of professional associations have been established in recent years, too¹⁰. In spite of the useful work done by these organisations, there has been neither enough time nor the appropriate conditions to establish codes of ethics or even to promote relative autonomy for adult educators,

6 We did not see adult educators as professionals. As argued by Afonso, they are good examples of an 'ambiguous condition of a profesionas' (for more details, see Afonso, 2008).

7 Since 1999, when the adult education and training policy was adopted, these were the two main forms of provision implemented. A third one is the Modular Training Course.

8 According to the National Agency for Qualification (2011), more than 500,000 adults obtained a certificate of basic education (1st, 2nd and 3rd cycle, equivalent to 9 years of school education) or secondary education (equivalent to 12 years of school education). This was the most significant effort of involving adults in adult education activities since 1974, the year of the Democratic Revolution.

9 Rothes (2003) argued that in relation to mediators and trainers working in the north of the country in 2003, 82.6% were aged between 24 and 44 and 65.7% were women. When comparing mediators with trainers, there were more women mediators than men and they were younger and less experienced than the trainers. Therefore, the demand for continuing training was greater among mediators.

10 One of which is the national association for graduates in education sciences (in Portuguese 'Associação Nacional de Licenciados em Ciências da Educação').

especially in terms of accountability and professional responsibility (Afonso, 2008).

Data collected on AETCs revealed these tensions. These courses were an interesting example of pedagogic eclecticism and hybridism. In fact, they embody a convergence of traditional formal education and non-formal education strategies in them, the aim being to motivate adults and re-use knowledge acquired throughout life could be observed. This blending was referred to by learners as 'smoother ways of learning' - a new opportunity for learning in which the individual was a central piece. The idea was to use what people already knew and to build new knowledge. As one of the learners interviewed said,

[Trainers] do not look on us as children; they think like us, as if they were the same age as us; they explain things in a way we understand. Of course people who attended regular schools know how we learn in a regular school. Here things are different. [Trainers] explain things using games, using different words, with drawings, exercises, things like that... we did lots of exercises in all the subjects tackled, on subjects we were working on in classes. Based on exercises, drawings and things like that we worked a lot (...). This would have been much more difficult in a regular school because we would spend most of the time dealing with numbers and here it is different. We learned maths in a different way [E(FM)3].

Moreover, the possibility of choosing innovative pedagogical methods, the interaction between theory and practice in the development of curricula, the central role of the learner and his/her life with respect to the content tackled, the proximity between learners and adult educators (with the establishment of more symmetrical power relations), and the support given to adults by adult educators were rated positively by learners. The kind of work achieved by adult educators led to a closer relationship. This relationship benefited from the fact that learners were central pieces in the education and training process, especially in terms of their biographies, their education and the training paths they had already followed. The emphasis on competences with respect to the practical and professional dimensions of these courses favoured this situation. All this reinforced the individualisation of educational and training process, along with the definition, shared by adult educators and learners, of the path to be followed in these courses. As one of the adult educators interviewed observed:

I believe education and training is basically a personalised process. Since we have always learned as trainers to build a training session, to make plans for sessions on a specific issue. But this is usually done at the beginning or even before the course starts. I have a plan for my sessions that I build before the courses start but it is adjusted when I know who the learners are and then it is negotiated with them.

And do you consider their opinion, any of their suggestions?

Of course I do. When possible, I try to find out what are the social contexts of learners, what are their expectations, what they want from life, so that I can adjust what I intend to do according

to the social and personal contexts of each of them. I am a little bit against preparing plans for sessions and then going to classes just to follow the already-established timetables. I believe that education and training should be more dynamic than that [E(FR)1].

Because they are based on a different educational and pedagogical approach from that of formal education, these courses were seen as an opportunity by everyone. They were supported by a curriculum that did not include school-based disciplines. These circumstances made the courses more appealing to learners, and then they felt more motivated to complete their educational and training path. This motivation was enhanced by expectations created by training in the workplace and by the possibility of introducing learners (mainly the long-term unemployed) into the local labour market. For adult educators the courses were an opportunity for daily pedagogical reinvention. Being supported by an innovative educational and training model, pedagogical experimentation was allowed; new knowledge could be produced that learners would regard as more relevant.

In the context of a trend of differentiation in education, especially in relation to teaching, the work achieved by adult educators, as seen in declared practices, was basically different from that done by regular school teachers. This difference was based on the fact that the courses benefited from learners' experience, which was used to build the curricula and new knowledge. However, in many circumstances adult educators saw learners as people with 'omissions' in terms of knowledge and competences. They believed these gaps could be filled by the courses in question. In fact, the change of learners' behaviour and attitudes was greatly emphasised, as an adult educator interviewee said:

First of all, these courses give learners autonomy, especially women who have previously been at home for many years, and when they get here they are down, suffering from low self-esteem, afraid of talking or expressing themselves. And after a year and a half [length of a Course], a sudden change occurs, in physical terms, in the way they dress; they style their hair and change the way they act in public. They change. They feel more interested in life. They are not just going home to take care of their children, they want to go out, have a job, support their family in some other ways. I believe this is a very important contribution of these courses to such people [E(M)3].

The analysis of the pedagogical administrative processes and formal notes made by adult educators concerning work achieved in the AETCs, and suggested in interviews, showed a reality other than the one emphasised by learners. Even though not taking place in schools nor relating to regular school education content, these courses lived off confluences. Sometimes they were focused on the development of competences in the context of an *education and training for competitiveness* approach, and at others they were based on active pedagogy. In some other situations these courses reflected the school paths followed by adult educators in the past and their experiences then, within *education for social conformity* approach¹¹. The outcome of such convergence was a pedagogy

¹¹ Interviewed learners also showed the influence of their previous school experience, sometimes due to good experiences, sometimes to bad ones.

that lived from intersections or, as Dionísio says, they were 'hybrid pedagogies' (Dionísio, 2007). In fact, it was possible to identify the input of several educational practices: some resembled school-based practices, based on transmission and stressing the idea of 'learning according to what was learned in school'. Others were situated and involved reflective practices, inclined towards learning by discovering and by experiencing, emphasising 'learning in life'. Two semantic fields, one closer to transmissive pedagogic practices and the other closer to active pedagogy were to be found, as observed by a practitioner:

One of the last sessions I had, it was the last one of the course, and I thought a lot about what I could do with learners. I like to write poems. I wrote a poem. And we had to motivate adults to read because they were afraid of reading, because usually books are big books. I started by talking about Christmas and they read the Horseman from Denmark. They thought it was fun to discover where the tradition to have light on the Christmas tree came from. I showed them pictures from Sophia de Mello Breyner on the computer¹² [E(FR)5].

Although very different, these two fields of educational practices came together in educational and training contexts, showing tensions that were generated by policy programmes and other documents such as the key-competences reference¹³ (Alonso et al. 2002; Gomes, 2006) and formal guidelines on which these Courses were based. These tensions were very evident in interviewees' discourses, alluding to school experiences of the past, to the professional experience of several trainers (who were also teachers) and to their past status of students-learners. In fact, as argued by Dionísio, AETCs were 'not school-teaching' but 'school was there' (Dionísio, 2007).

A complex composite network of situated educational practices stressed the combination of educating, learning and teaching. There seemed to be a concern to transform the learner in him-/herself, a learner understood as a rational individual able to make suitable choices. There was also an emphasis on the learner-worker motivated by professional and economic development following the *education and training for competitiveness* approach. A preference for school-based content could be noticed, along with transmissive methods (such as oral explanation, demonstration, transmission and reproduction of knowledge and skills) and the roles of the teacher and the student following an *education for social conformity* approach. Thus, these courses were miles away from *critical education*. A cognitive appropriation of the world was not fostered in them, and problematisation and dialogical education were not the outcome to be achieved. In fact, the individual pedagogy preferred did not promote the transformation of learners in order to overcome an effective change of their lives.

¹² Sophia de Mello Breyner was a poetess who wrote several books and poems for children. Because of this her texts are very widely used in regular school education in Portugal, and one of these is the *Horseman from Denmark*.

¹³ The key-competences reference are the documents referring to key-competences that have to be acquired or shown by adults who have taken an adult education and training course or been assessed under the recognition, validation and certification of competencies programme.

In relation to the RVCC process, several tensions were identified in the political area (especially in the relationship between adult educators, organisations promoting the aforementioned process and the government departments in charge of the adoption of the adult education and training policy) and in the educational area (between adult educators and learners). Data collected showed that there was a consensus about the general benefits for adults attached to the recognition of prior learning. As mentioned by an interviewee:

The process has had a positive influence upon people... those that have finished it tend to come back to join other activities. For instance the number of people using the library has increased [RO(E)5].

In spite of such perception, the need to accomplish outcomes in relation to the number of adults certified became progressively more important in the studied NGO context in the last decade. This revealed the implicit acceptance of financial and management application rationales, owing to the control exercised by the departments responsible while the RVCC was being implemented. These were measurable outcomes with a rationale closer to the *education for social conformity* policies. The humanistic ethos that the recognition of prior learning could have was replaced by organisational skill, strategic decision-making and efficient planning looking for a quick identification of key-competences following the *education and training for competitiveness* approach. As an interviewee argued,

"Certification is necessary so that the RVCC centre can open next year..." [RE(C)1].

This was a major dilemma that adult educators were facing owing to government regulation. It made adult educators learn how to deal pragmatically with their work. The research showed they understood their job in education and training in ways that should improve the competences of adults according to a competition model of education. Adult educators nonetheless had some critical questions:

How to accomplish outcomes and keep the quality of the process? That is the main question [RO (D) 6].

The recognition of prior learning process is becoming faster... but I do think we are searching for quality of the product, instead of searching for quality of the process [RO (S) 12].

We look at the recognition of prior learning more and more as a product... few adults got a clearer perception of their lives, their competences after concluding this process. Why? Because we adult educators are concerned with outcomes and people do not have the needed profile to join such process... [RO (D) 7].

These comments lead us to believe that adult educators' representations included a generalised appeal to external constraints to justify the multiple simplifications introduced in the 'bilan de compétences'

used for recognising prior learning. These simplifications were removing this process from *critical education* practices. Another angle, but still related to this issue, was related to the continuing education of adult educators. The NGOs studied made some local investment in continuing education courses that somehow made up for the lack of government initiatives in this field. In fact, even where there was the will each year to organise continuing education activities and in spite of the existing National Plan for Training and Monitoring, these initiatives only occurred in 2002, after some recognition and prior learning centres were established. Our research therefore showed that there was a lack of continuing education courses or other initiatives for adult educators in which they could reflect upon what had been achieved. This was one of the most problematic constraints for adult educators in local organisations. Data collected in relation to this situation revealed these tensions:

There is a lack of monitoring and support (...) and of social recognition of our work (...). Continuous education courses provided up until now are empty of content and when we wish to discuss during sessions problems that occurred during the process, there is no place for such discussion [RE (A) 1].

Adult educators were thus facing a 'worrying orphanhood condition' (Melo, 2007: 195). This situation was reflected in the adult educators' mood and professional motivation. They were very often left to self-directed learning, inappropriate to daily problems and challenges that were insufficiently recognised in social terms. On the one hand, some methodological characteristics of the recognition of prior learning practices were problematic, especially for practitioners with short working experience as adult educators, recently socialised in this 'professional mood' centred in an 'ambiguous condition of a professional' as mentioned before. On the other hand, adults involved in this process formed a very heterogeneous group in terms of the basic school education pathways they had previously followed; many of them had dropped out of school early (Barros & Tavares, 2011). This implied greater specialised needs for educational work, making the job more difficult and more problematic as there was a lack of continuing education programmes. In light of the data collected we wonder if answers given by interviewees have not already led to an alteration in the recognition of the prior learning *ethos* that was historically conceived as a 'form of pedagogic work towards appropriation' (Lesne, 1984). According to Lesne, this pedagogic form should be directed towards a horizontal exploration of reality, involving problematising contexts and meanings and searching for social and individual emancipation, clearly linked to *critical education* policies. In fact, if the recognition of prior learning could be theoretically conceived as an emancipatory form of provision, the data collected showed that the constraints imposed by Brussels and Lisbon were indirectly and subtly co-opting the process in the framework of strategies for *education for social conformity*. This seemed to be a very effective trend. Consequently, adult educators tended to use simple procedures, more descriptive than reflective, to promote the access of adults to training courses and afterwards to identify and to validate the competences acquired. Greater importance was seen to be given to professional practices that fostered adaptability according to the key-competences reference. We therefore wondered if the

aim of discovering competences through the recognition of prior learning was educational in itself. According to Honoré (1977), this kind of practice might lead to some kind of gain in the 'descriptive conscience' of adults. But, when there is no place for pedagogical and critical intervention in building a social and political awareness, we with that author that there is a loss in terms of the 'explanation and comprehensive awareness'. Following this reasoning, there seemed to be a tension relative to understanding the (critical and educational) mission assigned today to the recognition, validation and certification of competences; in this context adult educators were 'technicians of lifelong learning' and shared education and training in the interest of competitiveness.

Final remarks

Generally speaking, the adult education and training policy implemented in the last decade introduced changes in educational practices and in the work achieved by adult educators owing to a 'pluriscala governance' (Barros, 2009), in the context of the growing importance of aims related to *education and training for competitiveness* (Guimarães, 2011). In the period when the two studies referred to in this paper were conducted, the emergence of 'new' adult educators involved a conversion of the existing adult educators' communities' practices, since then based on networks of promoters (and no longer on one single organisation's intervention), thanks to partnerships established between these NGOs and the government and funded by EU programmes. Additionally, in relation to continuing education pursued by adult educators, there was a lack of initiatives implemented by the government departments responsible for adopting the adult education and training policy, covered up locally by efforts made by local promoters of forms of provision. At the junction of these contradictory trends, adult education and training policy was the object of a strong extension strategy in terms of access to adults, relying mainly on a significant effort of self-directed learning.

In educational terms, specifically relating to the forms of provision promoted, there was a clear trend towards the technicisation of the practitioners' work. A pedagogical eclecticism and hybridism was noticeable in the AETCs. Traditional school-based methods were combined with non-formal strategies in order to motivate adults and to re-use knowledge acquired throughout life. *Social conformity education* re-gained importance. Within the RVCC programme, educational and meta-cognition issues became less relevant with the imposition of aims, especially the need to certify more and more adults. As a result, adult educators showed an implicit acceptance of rationales inherent to funding applications as well as to financial and management procedures involving the local implementation of the forms of provision. In this context, the humanistic *ethos* of the recognition of prior learning gave way to efficient management of adults' skills, to strategic decision-making, to rational and efficient planning in identifying competences, albeit in the framework of an open relationship between adult educators and learners. The *education and training for competitiveness* approach was more and more dominant in interviewees' discourses.

The research work referred to in this paper made it clear that adult education and training policy was not seen as a *critical education policy*, a transformation process, but as a strategy of social adaptation. This meant that adult education was far from being a 'pedagogy of social production' (Lesne, 1977). The outcomes of such forms of provision did not show a cognitive appropriation of the world, nor did they foster dialogical education and liberation.

In fact, the 'new' political adult education agenda adopted after 1999 contributed to an innovative dynamic in social and educational contexts. It could be seen as a counter-action if we consider the intermittent nature of Portuguese political efforts in the field of adult education. However, practices in existing forms of provision seemed to be still far from critical and humanistic education. Learners on the adult education and training courses and those involved in recognition, validation and certification of competences formed a heterogeneous group. This meant they required more time for developing an effective educational pathway. As for adult educators, they needed to be prepared to do their work (with respect to specific continuing education and consideration of experience) and needed to be engaged in professional tasks that could require a great deal of effort and commitment. Thus, supranational guidance on lifelong learning and the Portuguese/national re-interpretation of lifelong learning reflected in adult education and training policy raised several difficulties for the existence of a pedagogical relationship that fosters social justice and emancipated citizens.

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**Portuguese validation of the
adult's attitudes scale towards
Continuing Education**

Introduction

Traditionally, educational researchers, have focused on adult life transitions, using qualitative methodologies and autobiographical methods, fitting into the hermeneutic, interpretative and ideographic paradigm. This option does not allow the identification of regularities in the phenomena under study or the generalisation of results to other subjects, contexts and points in time. In this sense, it is important to provide the scientific community with assessment tools, relatively short and easily handled with validity guarantee, which can be used by researchers when they want to study phenomena whose nature and objectives require the use of large samples. These instruments are particularly relevant in the study of transitions in adulthood, as exemplified by the adaptation to high education level and integration in the labour market at the end of it.

The transition to higher education involves a broad range of transformations in young adult's life, with social demands for greater autonomy and personal independence. These requirements provide a challenging set of experiments, but potentially stressful, involving the development of new interpersonal relationships and the adaptation to new contexts (Dias & Fontaine, 2001; Santos & Almeida, 2001). Appropriate adaptation requires the students to reconceptualise their experiences and implies a greater academic accountability for own actions, a greater ability to cope with change, to manage the time, to deal adequately with stressful situations and to develop draft plans for the future. Thus, while some students regard the entry into higher education as an opportunity for personal development, reflecting moderate levels of stress, others experience this process as a time of crisis (Beyers & Goossens, 2003).

On the other hand, students who are in the final stage of their higher education and about to join the labour market, also face significant challenges that require the ability to self-exploration and the desire to achieve and emphasise their autonomy and personal independence. This transition also could appear as a stress inductor, due to the uncertainties and ambiguities with respect to the first job and the current challenges of the new organisation of work. So, at times of change some young adults may see adult education as a mean of transforming their lives in a different way. But, the participation in educational activities is necessarily dependent on the adult's attitudes towards education and learning at this stage of life. That's why I would like to present the Portuguese Validation of the Adult's Attitudes towards Continuing Education by Darkenwald & Hayes (1986), which I intend to nominate "Escala de Atitudes face à Educação de Adultos" in portuguese.

Studying people's attitudes makes it possible to predict their behaviour, to the extent that attitudes relate to subjective experiences, and more specifically to evaluations and affects. These specific experiences are shared in social contexts (Lima, 2006) and sustains the crystallisation of values built by people (Zabalza, 2000). Attitudes play a key role in social life and in psychosocial development, allowing, towards different experiences, a lot of possibilities of meaning and action. The attitudes contain internalised values over people's lives. Values, attitudes and actions establish among themselves a sequential interdependence (Pinto, 2000).

The attitude's complexity involves the articulation of the cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions that guide people's behaviour. Considering its developmental nature, they are flexible when subject to environmental influences, because their construction is closely related to the whole socialisation process. Three dimensions are present in the attitudes' formation: the received information about this subject, the reference group and the personal needs. Thus, attitudes can be changed and learned (Lima, 2006a; Preston & Feinstein, 2004; Zabalza, 2000). Rudman et al. (2007) in a study focused on the developmental sources of implicit attitudes (those in which the attitudes and behaviours are congruent), concluded, based on self-reports of subjects, that they are much less influenced by recent life events than explicit attitudes. The implicit attitudes are much more conditioned by early experiences and emotional factors. Thus, many adults have unfavorable attitudes towards lifelong learning because it is associated with negative experiences and unpleasant emotions experienced in early school contexts. Despite their resistance to change, those attitudes are important intervention targets. Based in concrete, rewarding and challenging experiences that contradict the negative expectations of the subject, attitudes can be changed.

Regarding the attitudes on education content, the necessary steps to accomplish any learning process are highlighted, and they are therefore considered to be educational prerequisites (for example, the motivation). Attitudes can be understood as guides to learning and as personal basic structures that sustain progress possibility in learning (Zabalza, 2000).

Method

The original scale published by Darkenwald & Hayes (1986) was submitted to a cultural validation. The instrument's adaptation followed the initial translation procedures. I choose the successive translations strategy, with the help of two translators. I prefer a combination of language skills and expertise, in order to avoid literal translations, a situation that may occur with higher probability when we are using the translation methodology, back translation and retroversion (Santos & Maia, 2003). The translator's work was focused on the detection of inaccuracies, cultural influences and idiosyncratic interpretations. The original version was analysed by those English translators, who were attending a Master of Translation in Anglo-American Studies, at Oporto University.

Subsequently, the instrument was presented to five adults, who were randomly chosen, in order to identify understanding problems. This pre-test served to analyse, in a qualitatively and not standardised way, the level of understanding of instructions and items in the Portuguese version. My aim was to achieve a linguistic equivalence as close as possible to the original one and, simultaneously, a cultural equivalence. With this exercise, I want to anticipate possible problems presented by the instrument, so that individuals in the study would not find real difficulty in answering. There was a discussion item by item with these five adults, considering the intelligibility and ambiguity of the items, clarity of

instructions and the questionnaire design. I did not find any significant differences in relation to the translator's proposal.

From the meaning and semantic point of view, items 2, 4, 5, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19 and 22 are shown in reversal way. The scale includes 22 items and, according to Likert's suggestion, it balances approximately the same number of positive and negative items to avoid stereotypical responses (Morales Vallejo, 2006). The research sample includes 452 adults, selected by convenience criteria, because it was not practical to define a random sampling (Marôco & Bispo, 2005). The mean age was 31 years old, median 28 years old with a 11,8 standard deviation. Almost 70% were female, 55,3% were single and 31,2% were married. Forty five per cent have superior academic qualifications or attend higher education classes. The data was collected in class context and, using the snowball sampling, I asked students to apply the scale within their family members.

Since the original scale did not hold empirical work that would allow to know the multifactorial nature of the scale, leading, in turn, confusion about its structure, I took other authors' work as a reference, namely Hayes & Darkenwald (1990) and Blunt & Yang (2002). Their confirmatory factor analysis suggests a tri-factorial structure of attitudes to adult education (Perceived Importance of Adult Education, Intrinsic Value of Adult Education and Satisfaction with Learning). The preliminary factor analysis carried out by Darkenwald & Hayes (1988) highlights only one factor, which could indicate, at first glance, the unifactorial nature of the scale, but they also have found other factors which did not deserve the description and interpretation by the authors. When topics under analysis don't have a robust research structure focused on them, as occur with the attitudes towards adult education, it is more cautious to do inclusive and not exclusive research options.

Results

My scale's validation was focused on the factorial structure analysis. In fact, the factor analysis is a research tool that allows knowing the underlying traits of human attitudes. The Portuguese validation results of Attitude's Scale towards Adult Education are related with an exploratory and a confirmatory factorial study. The exploratory study included an initial factor analysis and a confirmatory analysis. I started my initial analysis with the construction of a correlation matrix for the scale items. For this analysis, I choose the varimax rotation method, considering the correlations between the items (Pestana & Gagueiro, 2003). In my initial principal components analysis, four factors stand out. They represent an unforced saturation of the items in each factor.

The quadrifactorial structure, resulting from the oblique rotation, points to the following distribution of items:

Factor 1: Items 2, 4, 5, 6, 13, 14, 19.

Factor 2: Items 1, 11, 12, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22.

Factor 3: Items 9, 10, 15 16.

Factor 4: Items 3, 7, 8.

The first factor explains 31.236% of the total variance of the scale, the second factor explains 8.106%, the third factor explains 6.324% and the fourth factor explains 4.759%. In order to assess the factorial structure quality, two adjustment indicators were chosen, in particular:

- KMO: 0.915

- Bartlett's sphericity test ($X^2 = 3040.012$, $df = 231$, $p < 0.001$)

The value of KMO, exceeding 0.9, is an indicator of good factor structure and the Bartlett's sphericity test values have been very significant, allowing the same conclusion. The structure resulting from the confirmatory analysis, obtained in the oblimin rotation method, can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 – Factorial Structure obtained in the Oblimin Rotation Method

Item		Factor	Factor	Factor
13	A educação contínua não me iria trazer nenhum benefício.	0,749	- 0,395	- 0,533
	Continuing education would not be of any benefit for me.			
5	A educação contínua é principalmente dirigida a pessoas com pouco que fazer.	0,733	- 0,236	- 0,437
	Continuing education is mostly for people with little else to do.			
2	As pessoas bem sucedidas não necessitam de educação contínua.	0,684	- 0,209	- 0,303
	Successful people do not need continuing education.			
4	A educação para adultos é menos importante do que a educação para crianças.	0,673	- 0,174	- 0,294
	Education for adults is less important than education for children.			
14	A educação contínua não é necessária para a maior parte dos adultos.	0,653	- 0,356	- 0,344
	Continuing education is not necessary for most adults.			
19	Para mim, a educação contínua é menos importante do que as minhas actividades dos tempos livres.	0,610	- 0,399	- 0,385
	For me, continuing education is less important than my leisure activities.			

6	A necessidade de educação continua a existir ao longo da vida.	- 0,561	0,536	0,282
	The need for education continues throughout one's lifetime.			
22	Consgo aprender sozinho(a) tudo o que preciso sem participar em actividades de educação contínua.	0,532	- 0,300	- 0,383
	I can learn everything I need to know on my own without participating in continuing education.			
20	A educação contínua é um meio importante de ajudar as pessoas a lidar com mudanças nas suas vidas.	- 0,355	0,738	0,297
	Continuing education is an important way to help people cope with changes in their lifes.			
21	A melhor forma dos adultos aprenderem é frequentarem programas de educação contínua.	- 0,139	0,724	0,142
	The best way for adults to learn is to attend continuing education programs.			
8	Participar em actividades de educação contínua é usar bem o tempo livre.	- 0,272	0,625	0,334
	Participating in continuing education is a good use of leisure time.			
17	Gosto de actividades educativas que me permitam aprender com outros.	- 0,470	0,622	0,490
	I enjoy educational activities that allow me to learn with others.			
1	A educação contínua ajuda as pessoas a gerir melhor as suas vidas.	- 0,421	0,606	0,185
	Continuing education helps people make better use of their lifes.			
12	Dar continuidade à minha educação iria fazer-me sentir melhor comigo próprio.	- 0,558	0,588	0,465
	Continuing my education would make me feel better about myself.			
7	Considero que as actividades de aprendizagem são estimulantes.	- 0,285	0,574	0,418
	I find learning activities stimulating.			
18	O dinheiro gasto na educação contínua dos trabalhadores é dinheiro bem gasto.	- 0,434	0,524	0,468
	Money spent in continuing education for employees is monet well spent.			

11	Deveria encorajar-se mais pessoas a participar em actividades de educação contínua.	- 0,377	0,501	0,461
	More people should be encouraged to participate in continuing education.			
15	Estou farto(a) de professores e aulas.	0,437	- 0,306	- 0,816
	I'm fed up with teachers and classes.			
16	Estar dentro de uma sala de aula faz-me sentir desconfortável.	0,478	- 0,262	- 0,797
	Being in a classroom makes me feel uncomfortable.			
9	Não gosto de estudar.	0,337	- 0,329	- 0,732
	I dislike studying.			
3	Gosto de participar em actividades educacionais.	- 0,271	0,404	0,560
	I enjoy participating in educational activities.			
10	Regressar à escola enquanto adulto é embaraçoso.	0,394	- 0,105	- 0,555
	Going back to school as an adult is embarrassing.			

The choice of a trifactorial structure scale took into account various aspects, in line with the commonly used statistical procedures (Pestana & Gagueiro, 2003). First, I consider the inherent value of each factor to be greater than 1.4. On the other hand, I did not consider factors that addressed three items or less, as it was the case with the fourth factor that resulted from my initial factor analysis. I also had in mind the view of the scree plot. Finally, I take into account previous validation of the scale studies, which are also in line with this three factors structure.

The classification of items in three factors, based on the meaning attached to them, seems to meet trifactorial structure proposed by other authors (Blunt & Yang, 2002; Darkenwald & Hayes, 1990). Thus, I decided to maintain the designation of the factors listed by them:

- » F1: Perceived Importance of Adult Education
- » F2: Intrinsic Value of Adult Education
- » F3: Learning Satisfaction

The first factor reflects the adult's perceived need for education and assesses the degree to which the Adult Education and its results are important for other activities of the person's life. According to Hayes & Darkenwald (1990), this factor translates into a dimension that is not considered by Rokeach (1968) and others researchers studying adult's attitudes towards education, but that seems to be particularly important in understanding behaviour in its relation to Adult Education.

Factor 2 brings together the views of adults about the value of Adult Education. Education is valued per se, as a way of learning and as a coping strategy in the face of change, including use of leisure time, promoting the feeling about the self and increasing the quality of life. In short, education is evaluated in the overall impact it has on people's life and reflects clearly a cognitive dimension of attitudes to adult education.

The third factor indicates the degree to which the person likes to be in learning situations and, as such, reflects the positive or negative feelings associated with learning activities. These attitudes are related to the learning situation and not to the subject of learning / education, and constitute the affective dimension of attitudes towards adult education.

In regard to the variance explained by the factors, the total explained variance is 46.22%, a percentage close to the 49% of explained variance found by Hayes & Darkenwald (1990). The first factor, which I call the "Perceived Importance of Adult Education" explains 31.9% of the scale, the second factor, called "Intrinsic Value assigned to the Adult Education", explains 7.96% of scale and the third factor, referred as "Satisfaction with Learning" explains 6.37% of the full scale.

Based on the factorial weight matrix analysis, I decided not to remove any of the items of the scale, because the lower factorial weight in which the item saturates in the factor was 0.426 (item 11 in factor 2). None of the items saturates under the 0,4 value. The same value was used by Hayes & Darkenwald (1990), who considered equal or superior saturations. In their study, the authors found that only two items (6 and 19) were not saturated in any factor. In my study, these items saturated with values higher than 0.4 on factor 1.

As Blunt & Yang (2002), I perform a confirmatory factorial study, with the use of AMOS, through the structural matrix of oblique rotation. The AMOS is a tool of SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) that allows the built of structural equation models (Marôco, 2010). Structural Equation Models translate into a mixture of factor analysis, regression analysis and analysis of trajectories, allowing to test factorial structures of instruments through confirmatory factor analysis (Pilati & Laros, 2007). Structural Equation Models reproduce the population covariance matrix using sample covariance. The matrix parameters of variable relationships, defined by the investigator, gives it a confirmatory nature. In fact, previously, the researcher defines the type of relationships between the variables tested by the model.

Confirmatory factor analysis allows to accurately test the factor structure, taking into account different levels of overall adjustment of the theoretical model to the collected data. The results of confirmatory factor analysis led me to reiterate the trifactorial structure. Thus, I have adopted this structure, as well as the designation of the factors proposed by other authors of the original scale. After the examination of the convergent validity of the Adult's Attitudes Scale towards Continuing Education, I present the descriptive statistics of its sub-scales (Table 2).

Table 2 – Sub-scales descriptive statistics

sub-scales	M	Maximum	Minimum	Variance	SD	<i>alpha</i>	n Items
Perceived importance of Adult Education	15,5	8	36	21	4,59	0,81	8
Intrinsic value of Adult Education	37,2	17	45	18,09	4,25	0,81	9
Learning Satisfaction	19,75	5	25	10,61	3,26	0,74	5

To assess the internal consistency of items in the Portuguese version scale, I used the Cronbach's *alpha*. According to some author's recommendations (e.g. Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), the considered values must be above 0.80. My values lie around this value and that was the reason why I considered that the levels of internal consistency sub-scales were very satisfactory. The internal consistency of the original scale (Darkenwald & Hayes, 1986), assessed by Cronbach's *alpha*, was 0.90 and the scale reviewed by Blunt & Yang (2002) pointed to an *alpha* value of 0.86. Table 3 presents the scale model analysis. The estimated rates indicate a significant relationship between variables.

Table 3 – Scale Model Analysis

	β	P
Item 5 – F1	0,66	0,000
Item 2 – F1	0,56	0,000
Item 4 – F1	0,55	0,000
Item 13 – F1	0,74	0,000
Item 14 – F1	0,6	0,000
Item 19 – F1	0,59	0,000
Item 6 – F1	0,53	0,000
Item 22 – F1	0,51	0,000
Item 21 – F2	0,5	0,000
Item 20 – F2	0,63	0,000
Item 8 – F2	0,52	0,000
Item 1 – F2	0,52	0,000
Item 17 – F2	0,66	0,000
Item 7 – F2	0,51	0,000
Item 12 – F2	0,65	0,000

	β	P
Item 18 – F2	0,58	0,000
Item 11 – F2	0,54	0,000
Item 15 – F3	0,73	0,000
Item 16 – F3	0,77	0,000
Item 9 – F3	0,62	0,000
Item 10 – F3	0,47	0,000
Item 3 – F3	0,47	0,000
F1 – F2	- 0,75	
F2 – F3	0,64	
F1 – F3	- 0,68	

I note that each of the factors examines a different theoretical construct. In fact, since the covariance coefficients between latent variables are not higher than 0.8 (F1-F2 = - 0,75, F2, F3 = 0,64, F1-F3 = - 0,68), we can conclude that these are different constructs. The Goodness of Fit is confirmed by the statistical results that support the model's validity. To examine how the collected data fit the *a priori* defined model, based on different aspects of quality adjustment, I chose the maximum likelihood procedure, not only because it is frequently used, but because it works very well with samples from 200 to 500 individuals (Pilati & Laros, 2007), as it is the case. There are several methods of analysis to assess the quality of the model. In fact, the structural equation models do not report to a single statistical technique but to a family of procedures, therefore my option was to select indices belonging to different groups or analysis families. The selected adjustments indices are shown in Table 3.

Table 4 – Adjustments Indices of the Scale's Model

χ^2	df	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA	RMR	GFI	AGFI
506,47	206	2,46	0,9	0,06	0,04	0,91	0,88

The results point to a very satisfactory adjustment of the scale model and its tri-factorial structure. The model is graphically presented using the diagram shown in Figure 1.

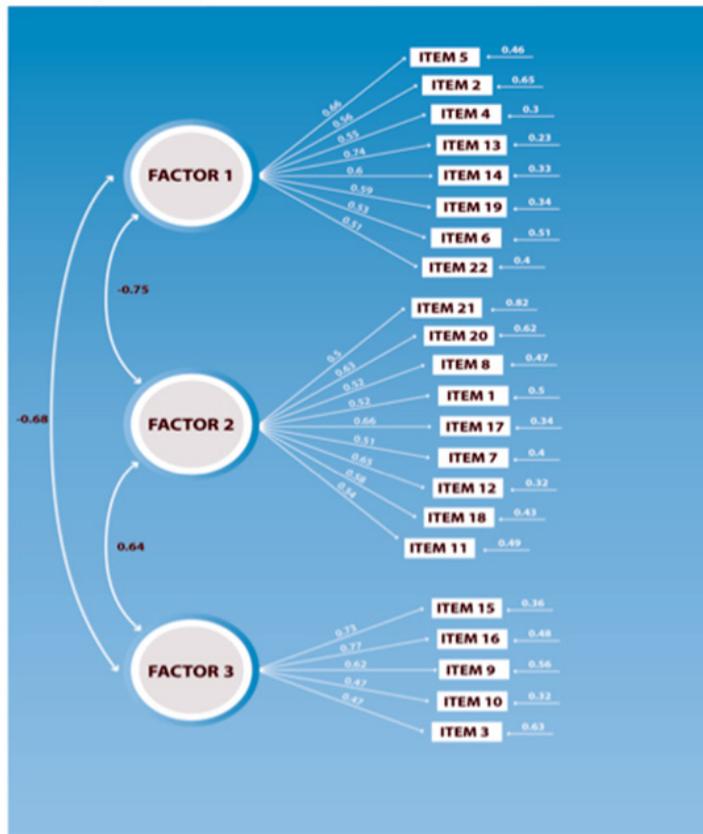


Figure 1 – Scale's Model

Discussion and Conclusion

Although attitudes, understood as the internal state that affects the choices of the person towards an object, affect adult participation in educational programs, its assessment is, according to Darkenwald & Hayes (1988), characterised by a lack of sophistication.

The Adult's Attitudes Scale Towards Continuing Education of Darkenwald & Hayes (1986) was developed in order to bridge a gap in research. It appears as a valid and consistent measure to assess attitudes towards adult education, to determine the relationship between these attitudes and effective participation of adults in educational activities and differentiate sub-populations (Darkenwald & Hayes, 1986, 1988). Further evaluation of the scale held by their authors, led to controversial results, with regard to its structure. In a first analysis, the authors consider the unidimensional scale, sustained in

a clearly dominant factor, which explained most of the variance (Darkenwald & Hayes, 1988). Other less important factors were observed but did not deserved the author's attention. Thus, the authors stated that their analysis did not support the theoretical assumption of Rokeach, who was at the scale's root. Later, Hayes & Darkenwald (1990) re-analysed their data and interpret their re-factorial analysis. Based on orthogonal oblique rotations, they concluded that results supported a tri-factorial structure.

Afterwards, Blunt & Yang's research (2002) aims to analyse the predictive validity of the Adult's Attitudes Scale towards Continuing Education (Darkenwald & Hayes, 1986), with respect to their predictive validity in terms of adult participation in learning activities. Their study presented a revised scale, with only 9 items. The authors also undertook the Structural Equation Model, which reinforced the robustness of this reduced version of the scale and showed that the three dimensions are significantly related to the involvement in learning activities. The results suggested a tri-factorial structure (Satisfaction with Learning, Perceived Importance of Adult Education and Intrinsic Value assigned to the Adult Education), equivalent to that suggested by the authors of the original scale. The internal consistency of the scale proved to be acceptable (0.73) when compared with the value of Cronbach's alpha of the original scale with 22 items.

The results arising from the Portuguese validation of Adult's Attitudes Scale Towards Continuing Education put in evidence its good metric qualities, evaluating precisely what it sets itself and showing a good internal consistency. Items are distributed into three different factors, with equivalent distribution defined in previous studies. The factors in question relate to the perceived importance of Adult Education, the intrinsic value attributed to the Adult Education and also the satisfaction with the learning.

When I compare different factorial analysis results of Adult's Attitudes Scale Towards Continuing Education from other empirical researches, it is clear the parallelism between the items that saturate the three factors. Only items (7 and 17) do not seem to meet this rule. While in my study they saturated in Factor 2 (Intrinsic Value assigned to the Adult Education), in the others' studies they are related to satisfaction with learning (Factor 3). The items in question relate to, respectively, the statements "I believe that learning activities are stimulating" and "I like educational activities that allow me to learn from others." In my sample, adults associate stimulating activities that allow cooperative or collaborative learning with the intrinsic value of Adult Education and not with subsequent satisfaction with the learning. Based on several indicators, the results emphasise the model's fit. It proved to be very satisfactory for both the scale model and its factor structure. Considering attitudes towards adult's education in this triple strand, it is possible to have a broad and integrated perception of the adults' dispositions to engage in learning activities, regardless of its nature, complexity or duration.

Overall, the scale's validation presents itself as a valid and reliable instrument for assessing attitudes towards adult education, which could be recommended as a resource for further investigations in the Portuguese context.

I conclude that the three factors of the scale describe three dimensions of attitudes towards adult education, which are important for the participation in learning activities analysis. The choice for Adult's Attitudes Toward Continuing Education proved to be viable. The attitudes' assessment in times of transition into adulthood gives us information about the degree of adults' involvement, particularly when those adults join the academic higher education context or the labour market context after higher education. The adults' involvement in educational activities is critical to academic and professional success, to face the challenges and requirements that guide our world today.

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**Identity and transition:
conceptual and methodological
foundations**

Introduction

The theme of the ESREA conference in Aveiro – *Transitions and Identity in Learning and Life* – draws attention to two complex and contested concepts. The purpose of this short paper is to explore how scholars of adult education might think about identities and transitions, and how we might go about understanding the identities and transitions experienced by adult learners.

Identity: twelve conceptual propositions

If our goal is to understand adult learners and the transitions they experience in learning and life, then we must explore how adult learners understand themselves, their world, and their relationships with others. The notion of 'identity' has, both in popular culture and the social sciences, become central to such explorations. To assist ESREA participants in their effort to understand this concept, I present twelve basic propositions.

First, identity refers to our sense of who we are, and to our sense of who we understand others to be. Identity thus involves both processes of internalisation, through which we come to see ourselves in certain ways, and processes of characterisation, through which we come to see others in certain ways. As humans are reflexive beings, we also know that other people characterise us in certain ways.

Second, identities are inherently comparative, reflecting boundaries of similarity and difference, of commonality and otherness. Our sense of ourselves, both as individuals and as members of various groupings, categories, or communities, is based largely on what we perceive we share with others, and how we perceive ourselves as distinct from others.

Third, identities are simultaneously subjective (held by and only fully understood by those who bear them) and inter-subjective (attributed to the bearer by others). We have a sense of who we are, but other people also have a sense of who we are. Much of social science revolves around the effort to understand how individual human beings are influenced by, and have influence on, other human beings.

Fourth, no approach to understanding identity would be plausible without recognizing our physical individuality as human beings. We each have a body, biologically distinct and separate from other such bodies. In some way, our sense of ourselves always reflects this inherent individuality.

Fifth, no approach to understanding identity would be plausible without recognising our cultural sociality as human beings. We each live within a web of relationships with other people, and we could not form a conception of ourselves without the linguistic, material, and cultural resources provided by those relationships. In some way, our sense of ourselves always reflects this inherent sociality.

Sixth, the actual nature of human identities is highly contextual, varying tremendously across space and time. From one culture to another, and from one historical era to another, people's sense of who they are may be dramatically different. People from one culture may attribute certain forms of identity to people from other cultures, but it is difficult for us to fully understand how others see themselves.

Seventh, identities are produced and reproduced through all of our experiences in life, although not all experiences carry equal weight in the process. The formation and construction of identities is cumulative; one's sense of oneself and others is grounded in the experience of infancy and early childhood. However, we remain malleable beings, and our ongoing sense of identity reflects the structure and content of experience as we go through life.

Eighth, identities have plural roots. There is no singular, essential, or universal pathway to identity. Identity (re)producing experience may be direct or vicarious, intentional or unintended, and imposed by others or self-directed. Our sense of who we are, and our sense of who we understand others to be, is built and revised through diverse means, many of which we are not aware.

Ninth, identity implies some level of stability over time, but the degree of stability and fluidity is highly variable. Who we think we are today is likely to be related to who we will think we are tomorrow, but it may be quite different from who we thought we were some years ago. The temporal fluidity of identities is likely variable across cultures and between individuals, reflecting the degree to which the identity (re)producing experiences outlined above change over time.

Tenth, identity implies some level of unity, but the degree to which identities are unitary or fragmented, and bounded or porous, is highly variable. Our sense of ourselves as individuals, and our sense of membership in various communities and categories, may or may not be bounded by consistent and distinct markers. We may, in some contexts, see ourselves quite differently than in other contexts. Our sense of commonality and belonging may also shift according to circumstance, along with our definition of 'us' and 'them'.

Eleventh, identities are political and contested. They reflect institutionalised forms of control, formal classificatory schemes (both individualising and aggregating), and highly varied forms of resistance. Struggles over identity can be seen in family relations, popular culture, workplaces, social movements, and the work of agencies linked to the state and public institutions.

Twelfth, and finally, since identities and their (re)production are so highly variable, they can only be truly understood with the aid of empirical research. We must be able to think clearly about the concept of identity, but we cannot pretend to understand actual people's identities in abstract terms. We must organise careful empirical investigation in order to truly understand or explain people's sense of who they are, and their sense of who they understand others to be. Later in this paper, I outline a range of approaches to undertaking such research.

Transition: meaningful change

In contrast to the notion of identity, I have little to offer regarding the conceptualisation of 'transition'. I believe we can understand transitions to refer to meaningful forms or episodes of change. However simple this might seem at first, the notion of transition does evoke difficult questions. Who defines when a 'change' is meaningful, lasting, or significant enough to become a 'transition'? Is there a difference between transitions considered to be regular experiences of the life course (e.g., the transition from youth to adulthood) and those considered to be more exceptional or personal?

Certain forms of transition, such as those relating to educational attainment, employment, marital status, or health conditions, are relatively easy to understand and measure. However, many transitions of interest to adult educators are not. What do people learn from participation in adult education, and how does such learning change their sense of themselves, their world, and their relationships with others? The next section of this paper considers how to study such transitions.

Methodological continua: identities and transitions

How do we, as researchers and educators, enhance our understanding of the identities and transitions experienced by adult learners? There are many approaches to conducting research in this area, and I simply present two continua: categorical – subjective; and cross-sectional – longitudinal.

First, approaches to researching identities and transitions can be placed on a continuum with 'categorical' on the one end, and 'subjective' on the other end. The census would be an example of a categorical approach to measuring identity. Census forms typically ask citizens to identify themselves according to apparently objective categories such as age, gender, occupation, income level, ethnicity, languages spoken, and religion. Many social surveys also use such an approach to sorting respondents according to possessing different attributes according to particular identity variables. On this end of the continuum, quantitative surveys and census forms classify people according to parsimonious but not necessarily subjectively meaningful categories.

At the other end of the continuum, approaches such as psychoanalysis and life history research strive to interpret and understand the subjective meaning of people's identities. Through extended conversations with their subjects, researchers from these traditions endeavor to reconstruct or deconstruct subjects' sense of identity with a relatively high level of ideographic detail. On this end of the continuum, qualitative research methods are used to elicit from people their subjective, and even sometimes sub-conscious, sense of who they are and how they have changed over time.

Second, approaches to researching identities and transitions can be placed on a continuum with ‘cross-sectional’ on the one end, and ‘longitudinal’ on the other end. Cross-sectional studies gather data from research participants at one point in time, while longitudinal studies do so at more than one point in time.

Placing these two continua together, Figure 1 identifies a range of research methods that may be employed in the study of identities and transitions.

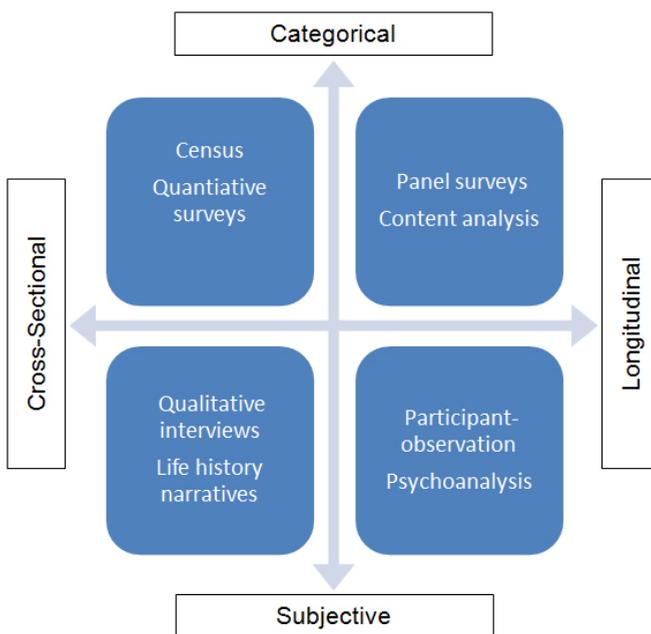


Figure 1 – Methodological continua

Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented a basic conceptual and methodological foundation for the study of identity and transitions among adult learners. This foundation is relevant for researchers with diverse disciplinary backgrounds and political commitments. To construct meaningful understandings of the identities and transitions of adult learners, we must first know what we mean by these terms, and make choices regarding how we plan to learn more about them through empirical research.

In my current research into the influence of self-help literature – in the areas of career success, interpersonal relationships, and health and well-being – I have chosen qualitative interviews and structured journaling as my basic data gathering strategies. Through these strategies, I am organising

conversations with the readers of self-help books in order to explore their sense of who they are, and their sense of how they may have changed as a result of their self-help reading (see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/selfhelp> for more information).

Acknowledgement

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**The promise and disillusion
of education. Perspectives on
gender, agency, education and
the labour market in Finnish
Lapland**

Introduction

In this article I examine university-educated women's positions and experiences in the regional and local labour market in Finnish Lapland. Nationally, Finnish women are better educated than men (Tilastokeskus 2007), holding higher academic degrees and also participating in adult education more often (see e.g. Pohjanpää et al. 2008). This trend applies in Lapland as well (Suikkanen et al. 2001). Women's higher level of education is not reflected in the labour market, however, for they do not benefit from education as much as men in terms of salary, power or nature of employment. Indeed, men in Finland are paid better, hold more leading positions and enjoy more regular employment (Naumanen 2002; Kivinen & Nurmi 2009).

Economic trends have also affected women's position. Lapland lost a large number of jobs during the depression at the beginning of the 1990s. Few were created when the situation eased and there were many more short- and fixed-term jobs than elsewhere in Finland (Haveri & Suikkanen 2003, 177–179). Entrepreneurship has been offered as a solution to this situation, with the present political agenda encouraging women in particular to start their own businesses.

My interviewee Ella describes her situation and Finnish society as follows:

We have built up good educational systems here in Finland, and women's position has always been good. We have been a model society in all ways (...) but now we are in a situation where our good structure has been dismantled.

Here Ella refers to the societal change in Finland that has been examined critically by several researchers. Attention has been paid to the disposition of state property, educational and social policies, and certain phenomena in working life and organisational culture (see e.g. Eräsaari 2002; Filander 2000; Helne & Laatu 2007; Holvas & Vähämäki 2005; Julkunen 2008a and 2008b, Siltala 2007). The broader context of my topic includes issues in life-long learning and discussions of what is known as the new economy, which was launched in Finnish society in the mid-1980s (Helne & Laatu 2007, 20). The new economy has been defined as a transition from a society of affluence to one of competitiveness governed by market mechanisms, readiness to change and individualism (See Heiskala 2006).

In tandem with this transition, the Finnish political elite started to view the world differently than before. Where collectivity, national protectionism and social and regional equality were emphasised in postwar Finland, market mechanisms, free competition and ability to compete in terms of efficiency, innovativeness and economic growth are emphasised in the new economy. (Heiskala 2006, 37)

The context of my research consists of the debates surrounding faith in education, the gendered labour market, a neo-liberalist educational policy that is based on an ethos of the individual, and criticism of the new economy. My data consists of two interviews with unemployed women who hold university

degrees (Ella and Jaana) and two letters to the editor written by women in an identical situation. Temporally, my paper is located in the period from the above-mentioned transition to the present, and geographically in Finnish Lapland. My focus is on the position of women living in Lapland and the perspectives are those of the education and labour market, on the one hand, and gendered cultural assumptions on the other. I ask: what subject positions are available to women in local communities and the local labour market in Lapland? What identities are desired and what kinds of spaces of agency are constructed in the data? By 'available subject positions' I refer to those positions that are offered to women and that they take, and interpret identity as an articulated self-narrative (see Ronkainen 1999). I will use agency to refer mainly to opportunities to take the position of an active subject and small agency to refer to tolerance and coping in certain situations (Honkasalo 2004).

Data and method of analysis

In this paper the data includes two biographical narratives which form part of my more extended research project data¹. I have chosen Ella's and Jaana's narratives, because they are both university educated and unemployed and were hunting for jobs when I was collecting my data in 2008. They were both born in Northern Finland and have chosen to live in Lapland. Both of them took their academic degree at the beginning of the 1990s, when the economic depression had already made itself felt in Finnish society and the labour market. They both have degrees providing them with expertise in public administration and have worked in short-term jobs since graduating. Apart from her degree, Ella has a vocational qualification in healthcare and competence in many educational fields. She has also run her own business in the area of education. Ella lives in a city and Jaana in a rural area near a city. Ella is older, in her fifties, Jaana fifteen years younger.

The other part of my data includes two letters to the editor of a local newspaper in Rovaniemi, the largest city in Lapland. The unemployed university-educated women who have written the letters have signed them "Worthless brains?" and "Worthless education?" The letters were published at the end of August 2011.

I read my data using critical discourse analysis (Jokinen & Juhila 1999, 87–89) and would describe my analysis as discursive reading. This approach presupposes certain power relations in society and focuses on what meanings will be produced in a certain area at a certain time (see e.g. Jokinen 2003, 22). On the other hand, drawing on a post-structural research paradigm, I will pay attention to both the constitutive force of discourse and discourse practices while at the same time recognising that people are capable of exercising choices in relation to those practices (Davies & Harré 2008, 262).

¹ I have interviewed nine women who have participated in the training segments of projects providing entrepreneurial education for women. These projects have been funded by the European Union and the regional labour administration. My research is a sub-project of the larger research project "Enterprising self-education, Subjectivity and the Processes of Inclusion and Exclusion in Late Modern Society ". The project was funded by the Academy of Finland and carried out in the period 2007-2010.

Tenacious faith in education

An unswerving faith in education has prevailed in Finnish society. In general, education has been seen as a collective narrative of enlightenment and progress in which Finnish society has developed itself as a modern welfare state. This national faith in education seems to have been maintained and has even become a faith in the learning of the whole globalising world (see Griffin 1999; Jauhiainen & Alho-Malmelin 2003).

Having a good education has been thought to prevent marginalisation by offering opportunities to improve one's social and economic position. Education is also viewed as having clear economic consequences, for example, comprehensive school pupils' success on the PISA tests have been considered a factor that predicts the growth of the gross national product (GNP) (OECD 2010). In addition, the number of highly educated women has been regarded as a sign of women's good position in the society. Next I will examine my data from this perspective.

Jaana was about to finish her studies in the period when the economic depression struck in Finland. As a young student she had pictured herself working in an administrative job for a municipality or the state, because in the 1980s students in her field found work easily. Even before they had completed their degrees, students were hired, entering the labour market and even being offered well-paid jobs. Jaana says that this situation changed quickly:

But when some years went by - in the beginning of the 1990s - nobody was in a hurry to go anywhere (...) it was not worth taking one's degree, but rather it was better to continue studying. I also went on an exchange programme and all that, because there were no jobs available.

Above Jaana analyses her solution during the depression, which was to continue studying. Here she and other students adjusted their personal lives in keeping with the changes and transitions in society: it was more rational for them to continue studying and hope for better times in the future labour market. In this case, studying can be interpreted as a means to strengthen one's competence while at the same time continuing one's education – rather than taking one's degree – and not entering the labour market. Ella completed her vocational studies in the 1970s and found a regular job in her home region, Lapland, soon after she graduated. She was married and her husband changed his job often, meaning that they had to move around Finland, with Ella having to leave her job with each change of residence. As Ella also had three children, her periods of employment were short. When the family moved back to Lapland in the 1980s, Ella could not get regular employment but only short-term contracts on short notice. Her situation is a typical example of the phenomenon of women moving when their husbands change jobs and then facing unemployment in the new location (Nivalainen 2010). Ella decided to start studying and planned her studies so that her degree would include a broad spectrum of the expertise she imagined she would need in the future local labour market, her logic being, “*this way I can guarantee I will get a job*”.

Faith in education as a regular job provider was also strong in Ella's life when she started studying in the late 1980s. Narratives in lifelong learning also rely on faith in education. According to Karin Filander, lifelong learning has emerged as a salvation programme and strategy for survival in the face of societal change and the uncertainties of the future (Filander 2007, 262). Faith in education is tenacious even though many experiences can be cited that might seemingly shake it. In the other part of my data, the pen name "Worthless brains?" – a woman unemployed after taking two academic degrees - is also pondering the idea of changing her field and starting new studies: *I would not like to leave my home town and my social life only to get a job. Maybe a third university degree will guarantee me a job here?*

Briefcase men and uncoupled women: the gendered labour market in Finnish Lapland

During the 2000s, the new economy gained ground substantially in Finland. In the country's gendered labour market this has meant short-term contracts, especially for women and even university-educated women (SVAL 2011). Jaana describes her situation as follows:

One of my former classmates, a man who had worked for years in leading positions, asked me in one gathering: "Jaana, in which municipality are you going to be a municipal manager?" I have many former student friends who are in leading positions in municipal governments and I did not even get interviewed when applying for the task. (...) How can the labour market be so unequal that those men with their briefcases make careers there and I get maybe a one-year post somewhere? (Jaana)

Jaana has applied for several leading positions in municipal administration and has not even been called for an interview. She describes this as the 'detachment' of women, who are seemingly not given any chance to get a job. A report on leadership in Lapland (Sorro 2011, 5) shows that even though women are the majority of all employees in the municipalities (80%), the proportion of women in leading positions is 40%. Policy researchers in Finland (see e.g. Holli et al 2007) have argued that power in public administration, particularly in municipalities, has moved to ad hoc groups outside of the democratic decision-making process. Ad hoc-groups need not follow the rules, for example, those on gender equality, that are demanded of official bodies.

Ella has also been applying for jobs in educational administration and has encountered episodes such as the following, where she was left out of consideration for the posts and could hear the arguments: *"Oh, girl, you are so young; you still have time to do just about anything!" And I was over thirty at the time, but these are some of the comments those decision makers throw out". (Ella)*

I interpret the episode as gender discrimination. Ella's expertise and competence was disregarded because of her gender. Even though she was over thirty at the time, no matter what her education

and competence she was a little girl to those making the decisions. Ella has sought work in her former vocational field – health care – but at best she was offered only temporary posts, where she also was called a girl: *“Oh, we have a new girl here!” In temporary posts I have had to do relatively menial work. They did not bother to teach me anything more complicated, because they thought that I would only be there for a short period of time, doing a girl's work”.*

Here Ella was again steered into a girl's position, which implies the position of a minor, one who is not an adult or a professional co-worker. But when she applied for regular jobs in health care, her former vocational field, she was told she was “too well educated” for the task because of her university degree. Her extended expertise became unwelcome to employers. A girl's position can be read as that of a minor, one hired only as temporary help, as opposed to an adult, professional, responsible and respectable individual.

The pen name “Worthless education?” wrote that she had been working in a broad range of short-term jobs for four years since taking her degree. These were outside of her educational competence: child care, cleaning, delivering newspapers and so on. To get experience in her own field, she succeeded in obtaining a position as a trainee for a year, a job provided by the employment office and several employers in her field of expertise. But when the jobs there were advertised, she was bypassed by applicants with more experience or other competences.

Entrepreneurship as an option for women in the new economy?

Contemporary neoliberal policies are largely supplanting the traditional goals of equity, participation, and social welfare, which are upheld in the Nordic countries in particular (see Gordon, Lahelma & Beach 2003). “In Finland, the promotion of entrepreneurship education is the latest manifestation of the restructuring of education in line with the neoliberal spirit.” Although many European countries have a policy commitment to promoting entrepreneurship education, they have not adopted it throughout the school system as Finland has done. (see Komulainen et al. 2011; European Commission 2006.) Entrepreneurship has also been offered in adult education as a general solution for unemployment; encouraging women in particular to start their own businesses is a part of the present political agenda. Moreover, entrepreneurship has also been suggested as an option for groups that are thought to be marginal: women in rural areas, young people and immigrants (Naisrittäjyys 2005) and even as a form of emancipation for both women and rural areas (see Koski & Tedre 2004).

In my data the writers of the letters to the editor do not mention ideas of starting their own business, but this does come up in the narratives of Ella and Jaana. Jaana has thought of that option in her field:

As all my contracts in paid work have been short, I also have had this idea of creating my own job. But I have not found anything that will pay off (...) Because if I start my own business, I should have to sell the knowledge in my head – experience and expertise. (Jaana)

Jaana found it hard to operationalise her expertise into something that could be sold. After taking courses in the entrepreneur education project, she also thought that it was unrealistic to offer entrepreneurship as an option for everybody: *When I saw how many things one has to consider and how one has to calculate whether the business will turn a profit (...), I don't think that just anybody could do it.* Even though entrepreneurship has been offered to all people in general, and especially to special groups such as “those in danger of becoming marginalised” (see Heinonen & Ruuskanen 1998), what taking courses in entrepreneur education taught Jaana is that she had no realistic possibilities to start her own business.

Ella, who had taken courses similar to those Jaana had, had worked for years as an entrepreneur in the 1990s. After taking her degree and working in short-term posts in an educational institute, she was, as she tells it, persuaded to start her own business, in which she was supposed to sell and organise courses. She was supposed to work first as a subcontractor for her former employer but later on she got other ideas as well:

After several short contracts I started to think why is it that no matter how much I study, I have to take short contracts. I started to think what might be the field that would sustain and employ people in Lapland. I figured out that it is tourism and that it might also be nice work (...) and thought that after studying the tourism business, with my vocational competence in health care and a university degree, I would make my living based on this educational competence. This business idea came to me because I was in a situation where I had no choice. (Ella)

Trusting in education, Ella again started to study a new field, tourism. Initially, starting her own business seemed to an interesting option - later on it struck her as the only alternative. This is also part of employment policy in Finland:

One is forced in a way to start one's own business. This is also a statistical gimmick, because they (the employment administration) have plans whereby so and so many thousands of new businesses should be set up, for example this kind of one-woman small enterprise, just to make the statistics look better.

I read Ella's narrative as part of a policy in which institutions and enterprises try to transfer uncertainty and risk to subcontractors (see Miettinen 2007, 113). The educational institute where Ella was working wanted to benefit from her competence but also pass on responsibility and risk to her. This trend is implemented in neoliberalist society through several practices (see e.g. Tuschling and Engemann 2006, 452).

Ella worked hard for seven years as an entrepreneur making her living until she had to leave her business for family reasons². She started to apply for jobs again based on her academic competence, now with two academic degrees, and also started post-graduate studies. She could not get a job and in her latest message last summer she said that she had started her own business again.

2 For ethical reasons I cannot describe this period in Ella's life.

The enterprising self as the aim of neoliberalist education

Entrepreneurship education not only includes professional competences such as marketing and planning a budget, but also reflects a neoliberal governance which aims at transforming passive citizens of a welfare society into active, enterprising selves³ and “operates in terms of an ethic of the self that stresses the maximisation of the self-steering capacities of individuals as vital resources for achieving private profit, the nation’s economic competitiveness and social progress”(Komulainen et al. 2011, 5; Rose 1992). This tendency in educational policy has been defined to include excellence, efficiency and profitability and is called the “ethos of excellence” (Simola 2001). For an individual, this has meant living up to the ideal of an autonomous subject “who negotiates, chooses and succeeds in the array of education” (Walkerdine 2003, 240).

According to my interpretation, Jaana was projecting herself against this ethos, estimating her ability to market and sell herself: *“I am not that self-confident that I would go sell somebody something I have done, that I would believe and trust myself that it is so excellent”*. The neoliberal ethos emphasises personal attitudes and performance instead of professional expertise and competence. In her latest message, Ella, who has returned to entrepreneurship, also ponders her possibilities:

I am an entrepreneur again. I was forced to start my own business because I was not wanted in the job market. Running a small one-woman business I seem to have the same difficulties as I had in looking for a job - a credibility gap. I don't know if this stems from my age, gender or if I am otherwise such an unlikable person. (Ella)

Here Ella concludes that she herself – her personality – might be one reason why she had difficulties attracting business. She refers to age and gender as negative features and even to herself as an unpleasant person. The neoliberal ethos directs people to pay attention to their personalities and blame themselves for possible failures instead of analysing societal factors. “Worthless education?” too, reflects on her personality, in ironic terms: *“I have to be cured of my vices, I mean being non-violent, nice, decent and dutiful; then I will be ready (to stage a demonstration”*, SKF).

In what follows, I will analyse the subject positions that have been available for Ella, Jaana and the writers who signed their names “Worthless brains?” and “Worthless education?”.

Waiting...

In the era of the new economy, people are seen to live many ways in positions of waiting, trying all the time to reach the future (see Holvas & Vähämäki 2005). Barbara Eichenreich (2006) has described middle-class American, white-collar workers’ life as just such a situation. They are losers in the game

³ The term ‘enterprising self’ refers to the ethos shaped in various institutions, such as the school, where an entrepreneur-like course of action and self-relationship is offered as a model for citizens (Rose 1992; Komulainen et al. 2011)

where something great is promised in the future but never given to them. Even though they have done everything right, including studying diligently many years to get a good education, there is no prize in store for them. In Finnish society, too, which believes strongly in education, many people are threatened: they have their backs to the wall economically even though they have a good education. In my data, women with academic degrees have problems finding a job that corresponds to their competence:

I have tried to find a job with five professional competences to offer. For all of these I have studied, I have taken student loans and studied diligently. But I am always told, "Just wait! And I am over fifty years old!" (Ella)

In the communities of Lapland, Ella has been set in the position of 'one who waits'. When young but still over thirty, she was overlooked when filling posts; she was called "a girl who still has time to do anything whatsoever in the world". When she is over fifty, she is still offered the same position: "Just wait until the big age groups⁴ retire, then there will be a lot of jobs. Or let's see what kinds of new EU projects appear!"

Ella talked of EU projects, which were mentioned to her as opportunities but never materialised. According to Ella, young people were recruited for these jobs, and Ella's extensive educational or working competence did not matter. The pen names "Worthless brains?" and "Worthless education" have also been left waiting for a job after applying for one job after another and not getting any.

Supporting...

I have been able to bring this community something that did not exist here, for example the knowledge of how to apply for funding; otherwise nobody would have known how to apply for it. Look, we have got funding for activities in the community and for repairing our village house and together we have organised all kinds of things. (Jaana)

Women are easily offered positions as community maintainers, supporters and developers. Jaana has used her expertise and competence – without salary – to benefit the local community. When considering prospects for the future in Lapland, women's competence is seen as lying largely in the area of community and social relations (see Kontsas 2007); agency in political or economic issues has not been attributed to them as readily as it has been to men.

Women's feelings of belonging to the community can be seen as used to benefit the community also

⁴ In Finland, the age groups born after the war were large. In the years 1941-1950 there were about 100,000 babies born each year; in contrast, in the 2000s the number has been around 50,000-60,000 annually. (Tilastokeskus 2011)

in the letter where “Worthless education?” writes that she would be satisfied if she could get a job and work in her home town. “Worthless brains?” also writes how she thought that her hometown’s labour market would welcome her with open arms after she had taken her degree. She was wrong, and only after writing her one hundred and sixty-fifth job application is she is ready to leave the town.

Fighting...

In my data, Ella and “Worthless education?” are people who are clearly taking, or getting ready for, the position of fighter. Ella has been fighting against the effects of male-dominated policy in filling jobs and tasks. In her view, discrimination based on gender, disregard the Equality Act, and short-term contracts are the worst problems for well-educated women in Lapland.

The pen name “Worthless education?”, who has been seeking work after taking two academic degrees, has been looking for a job that would correspond to her education and has been working in short-term employment in other fields, such as child care and cleaning. After four years of doing this, she is fed up. She refers to the demonstrations by young people in Greece and the riots in England, asking:

Will the young people in Finland who we have been marginalised and labelled as such – perhaps somewhat unintentionally – and who suffer from a low standard of living and lack of respect do the same?

Here the writer equates her situation with that of her peers in Greece and England, even though Finland is often referred to as a model state for socio-economic and gender equality. Here it is suggested that education is not an option, but social unrest is – perhaps even violent unrest – if one wants to get decision makers to listen to her and others in the same situation.

Conclusions

In this paper I have asked what kinds of spaces of agency and subject positions are available for women in local communities and the labour market in Lapland. By ‘available subject positions; I refer to those positions that are offered to women and to those that women take. The positions I have interpreted here are one waiting for a better future, a supporter of the community and a fighter. In Finnish society, the ethos of the new economy has impacted people’s lives for years already. In Finnish Lapland it has meant budget cuts and fewer public-sector jobs. Outright or thinly veiled gender discrimination has also had its impact, especially on women with academic degrees.

In my analysis I have interpreted the positions of student or entrepreneur as respectable positions when one seeks respectable identities in neoliberal culture and society. When studying hard and getting a higher education did not benefit women, these positions were also the only ones available. Neoliberal ideology emphasises individual responsibility and has shifted societal problems to the level of the individual (see e.g. Julkunen 2008a; Tett 2006). According this ideology, individuals have to brand themselves, convince others of their capacities and market themselves. If a person fails to do this, the failure is assumed to be that person's own fault (see e.g. Walkerdine 2003).

Being a student or an entrepreneur also provided spaces for agency where women could be represented and valued as active members of society and maintain hope for the future. On the other hand, "Worthless education?" was looking for agency by strongly resisting the ethos of local recruiting policy and a discriminatory labour market. I also view her actions as a desire to become respectable, to make herself and others heard in the same situation.

Even though many studies (see e.g. Edwards 1993; Merrill 1999; Keskitalo-Foley 2004) have interpreted women's experiences in adult education as empowering, in my latest data it seems that for some women education in general and adult education in particular seem to offer only small agency. I have identified small, or minimalistic, agency, where patiently applying for one job after another or planning new studies sustains women from day to day. Hoping for a better future helps them tolerate the present.

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**Migrant women as mothers
and learners of English: an
exploration of gender and
transitions**

Introduction

English language learning for adult immigrants in the United Kingdom (UK) is provided in public adult and further education centres and colleges through the national Skills for Life framework, and is commonly known as ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages). There is an increasingly tense debate taking place within government circles, in further (post-compulsory institutions) and higher education and broadly within the news media, about its role and purpose (Blackledge 2009, Cooke and Simpson 2009, Rosenberg 2009(a)). In adult education, what was generally regarded as a social and cultural right with an emphasis on tackling inequalities and deprivation has now taken on the mantle of a requirement with business goals and political imperatives (Rosenberg 2009(b) Runnymede 2009). Participation in one's community, such as through work, volunteering or building social relationships is considered not simply beneficial but essential for both migrants and existing residents. Citizenship must be earned, and is granted in stages. To become such a citizen, participating in the work, social and political life of a Western social democracy, it has been recognised that linguistic capital is an essential prerequisite in accessing other forms of capital and therefore advancement within society (Arendt 1958, Bourdieu 1991). Language testing has become more widely used and stringent in deciding asylum and citizenship applications; however this can only measure functional competence in limited circumstances, and is not equivalent to possession of the range of cultural knowledge and connection to the language which is implied by linguistic capital (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998).

Although the possession of English language skills sufficient for socio-economic participation and progress is regarded both by immigrants and the government as essential and significant (Home Office 2002 and 2009, Ward and Spacey 2008), there appears to be little confidence on the part of the latter that this is taken seriously enough by those planning to live in the UK, as evidenced by this recent exchange in the House of Commons:

“Q8. [37426] Kris Hopkins (Keighley) (Con): This week, I met a gathering of ESOL-English for speakers of other languages-students at the Keighley campus of Leeds City college. Sadly, too many children in Keighley start school unable to speak English. Does the Prime Minister agree that there is a responsibility and obligation on parents to make sure that their children speak English?”

The Prime Minister: I completely agree, and the fact is that in too many cases that is not happening. The previous Government did make some progress on making sure people learned English when they came to our country; I think we need to go further. If we look at the number of people who are brought over as husbands and wives, particularly from the Indian sub-continent, we see that we should be putting in place, and we will be putting in place, tougher rules to make sure that they do learn English, so that when they come, if they come, they can be more integrated into our country.”

Prime Minister's Questions (Hansard 2011)

UK immigration law now requires many non-European spouses/partners to pass an English language test in their home country before being granted an entry visa, which is acknowledged by the Home Office to:

impact on more women than men because of the greater number of women who seek to enter or remain in the UK as a spouse or partner. However, the gender of those applying... are (sic) outside our control... [It] will help encourage the integration of women and remove cultural barriers and broaden opportunities for them... Any indirect sex discrimination is justified by these policy objectives including the economic wellbeing of the country' (Home Office 2010).

Here we see one of the relatively few debates in which the gender impact of language policies is overtly stated, in an area of education where '... policies rarely if ever mention gender apart from sex as a variable in participation figures and women migrants tend to be classified and treated solely as either 'women' or 'migrants' or 'ESOL' students (Cuban 2010:186).

In this article I argue that ESOL itself is given agency, to improve the economy, reduce immigration and build social cohesion in a policy context in which the learner is assumed to be male (seeking work) unless they are 'hard to reach' women (for example DIUS 2009); such women are generally positioned as 'Asian' (in 7 of 8 texts in which ethnicity is mentioned); and that this reinforces a stereotype which can be challenged by research which analyses ESOL need and provision through a gender lens. In 2009-2010, 68% of ESOL students enrolled in England and Wales were women (AoC 2011), a proportion reflected in the study area (71%).

Aims of the research

The primary purpose is to investigate the experiences of women with young children as they engage in the process of learning English through adult education, in order to contribute to the field of knowledge of ESOL learners' engagement with, and changing identities and roles in relation to, the use of English in their families. I consider how learning is affected by contemporary socio-economic and political circumstances and by personal journeys. The enquiry is carried out through a survey, questionnaire and detailed interviews and diaries with a group of women attending classes in one area of south east England; early findings and discussion are set out in this paper.

The secondary purpose is to set these findings and knowledge development within a critical analysis of the discourses of ESOL within adult education and its associated influences, as outlined above. Using a background of feminist knowledge, intersectional analysis and insights from post structural theorists, I explore how ideologies such as gender inequalities can be hidden in discourses in ways which lead to continuing discrimination against migrant women, and have a direct impact on their learning opportunities.

Here I briefly describe my theoretical framework and methodologies underpinning the research. Space limitations do not allow for detailed critical discourse analysis nor discussion of, for example, ethical and practical decisions regarding interpreting, boundaries, researcher reflexivity and participant involvement. I hope that my approach to these matters will become clear throughout.

Theoretical and methodological framework

My approach combines critical discourse analysis (CDA) with feminist post structuralism. Critical pedagogy, feminism and CDA have all developed from explicit value bases with the intention of encouraging a dialectical relationship between theory and practice, and of meeting goals of social justice through political or other actions (Freire 1970, Lather 1991, Luke and Gore 1992, van Dijk 1993, Wodak 1997, Pennycook 2004, Luke 2004, Lazar 2007).

The refutation of sex as a generally binary distinction in favour of its consideration as a social category opens up, in my view, a more productive and distinctly more complex route to theorising in line with other post-structural thinking. It represents and requires a shift away from lines of enquiry which close down or rely on a single truth or interpretation and offers instead the potential for rich insights into the relationships between gender, context and discourses, particularly across disciplines which I regard as especially apt for this investigation. Although I argue that women cannot be regarded as a homogenous group and may often have more in common with some men than with other women, categorisation by sex nevertheless does take place in both public and private spheres of life; how and why this occurs in relation to learning English and to what political end is a key question.

Jane Sunderland says that gender entails 'any difference between women and men being socially or culturally *learned, mediated or constructed*' (2004:14, original italics); Bonny Norton and Aneta Pavlenko regard it as 'a complex system of social relations and discursive practices differentially constructed in local contexts' (2004:3) whilst gender identities are regarded by Lia Litosseliti as 'a communicative achievement, an effect of discursive practices... multi-layered, variable, diverse, fluid, shifting, fragmented and often contradictory or dilemmatic' (2006:63) and by Judith Butler as a 'doing, an incessant activity performed' (2004:1). In following these theorists, I am mindful of the role of Black feminism as the 'theoretical anchor for a lot of these types of analyses. It insists on the politics of location, insists that we look at how race, class and sexuality and gender work together, to constitute subjects' (Ali et al 2009:647). The interpretation and potential of such an intersectional approach (Crenshaw 1989) has been widely debated; Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix locate some of its insights 'with the disruption of modernist thinking produced by postcolonial and poststructuralist theoretical ideas' (2004:82) particularly in the complexity and multiplicity of power relations and the diverse ways in which these are played out in different locations. Post-structural feminism, in problematising the essentialism of gender and attempting to abandon categories altogether in the

exploration of multiple or hybrid identities, requires political credibility, and needs to demonstrate that it has not forgotten the material reality of women's lives.

For example, the pre-entry visa language test (see Introduction) materially and disproportionately affects women's lives in terms of their gender, racial origin, class or economic circumstances in relation to the capital required to learn English and pass the test in their home country, and also impacts on the family lives of their partners and others in the UK. This is precisely the point at which Lazar argues that the aim of a feminist critical discourse analysis is 'to show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities' (2007: 142) not because this is an interesting academic exercise, but 'from an acknowledgement that the issues dealt with (in view of effecting social change) have material and phenomenological consequences for groups of women and men in specific communities' (ibid:142).

A strength of CDA is that it is 'characterised by its consideration of the relationship between language and society in order to understand "the relations between discourse, power, dominance [and] social inequality' (van Dijk 1993:249 in McKenna 2004). I understand language use as social practice, that is, it both reflects and constructs the social world; language cannot therefore be considered neutral, but must be regarded as socially, politically, and historically situated (Fairclough and Wodak 1997) which is particularly pertinent to the profession of teaching English.

Here, CDA is employed alongside narrative enquiry, drawing on feminist theory and practice, which has contributed much to the disruption of basic ideas about a single Truth (for example Passerini 1989). I have suggested previously (Macdonald 2009) that narrative analysis can be an important resource in this field of inquiry, including to illuminate social context (Griffiths and MacLeod 2008:121); to give voice to the invisible, marginalised or oppressed; to link the life, truth and voice of an individual to society's collective decision-making processes (Arendt 1958, Connelly and Clandinin 1990); and to break down barriers (Sikes and Gale 2006). In relation to adult education, Tedder and Biesta state:

Whereas many such policies only seem to acknowledge the economic function of lifelong learning... biographical and life history approaches have the potential to highlight what learning actually 'means and does' in the lives of adults, also, but not exclusively, in relation to questions of employability (2007:2),

whilst Merrill and West argue that the shift from adult education to lifelong learning in the policy discourse has meant that boundaries between learning and personal experience are becoming harder to draw, and that biographical research can create a 'space in which people feel valued and can experiment with their stories as well as build some narrative coherence and conceptual insight' (2006:6). Somewhat drily, Bruner comments 'Narratives may be the last resort of the economic theorists. But they are probably the life stuff of those whose behaviour they study' (1986: 43), whilst

Oakley criticises academics who ‘... put the pursuit of knowledge through a sanitising process which strips it of its most vital and interesting aspects – where it came from, just how it is mediated by the knower’s own experience and rooting in the material social world’ (2002:2).

This methodology can make particularly stringent demands on the researcher, not only in reflexivity but also in the inter-meshing of relationships, the co-construction of text, the inevitable inter-weaving and exposure of stories on both sides, in the barriers and formalities which become less evident, less significant. This research requires work across languages and cultures, taking account of unequal power relationships between researcher and participants, so that interpretation and construction of meaning becomes particularly challenging.

Research methods and findings

The research consisted of a survey, questionnaire, interviews, language mapping, diaries and calendar recordings. It was conducted in English, a decision taken largely for practical reasons arising from the wide range of languages used and a lack of local interpreters. The limitations of using English only are acknowledged and participants were invited to write diaries in their home language and be translated. The questionnaire was completed by 38 women, followed by interviews with 17 over a period of six months; these were both individual and small group sessions, with an average of 4 hours per participant.

My analysis of enrolments and survey of all ESOL students in adult education centres in east Kent (south-east England) found that 67% were female, compared to a national 68%; 75% of these women had dependent children living with them. Ethnically very diverse, 38 languages were spoken, whilst 36% also used English at home.

The questionnaire confirms previous studies’ findings regarding the heterogeneity of ESOL learners in respect of their ethnic and linguistic backgrounds and previous economic circumstances. It is noticeable that migration decisions were predominantly driven by economic difficulties in countries of origin and that hopes and plans for children’s future wellbeing feature strongly; this is borne out by interview data and is consistent over time despite parental struggles in finding work and developing English language proficiency. Fourteen women made an additional transition into becoming lone parents, either just before or following their migration, an issue which I found to affect language practices amongst other outcomes.

Migration patterns

Of women's 20 countries of origin, 11 are European Union (EU) and 58% moved from the EU to the UK. 85% reported having moved for economic/quality of life reasons or to be with their husbands (own words, not multiple choice). There is an extremely wide range and fairly even spread of both age at time of arrival (from 17 to 42 years) and length of time in UK (from 1 to 20 years).

Children and household

The sample includes 75 children, 50 of school age. 31 of the 38 women are the children's main carer. 28 respondents rely on husbands and school for child care when they attend ESOL class. 14 women live separately from the children's father/partners.

Language practices

21 languages are spoken with children at home in addition to English in 12 homes as a second language. Outside the home, 11 women do not use English every day; the average time spent ranges from zero to all day.

Work and education

26 of the 38 women had previously worked (approximately 50:50 skilled and unskilled) and 12 are currently working outside the home (11 unskilled). Jobs are in cleaning, packhouse (fruit), waitressing, care support workers, one self-employed author. All but one use English to some extent at work. An average of 11 years in school was recorded.

Interview themes

During a series of interviews participants remembered their journeys to the UK and early days of settling, mapped language practices within their families, and explored some of their feelings and experiences about learning English. **Emerging themes include:**

- » Families did not decide either to move permanently or temporarily; migration and settlement decisions are more fluid and complex, both at the outset and as circumstances change (see also Cuban 2010).

Suada: "I was come to stay 3 months, 4 months... and we wait, ..., wait to happen and 7 years I don't see my Mum... I never stop for 4 years, just crying, crying"

- » In common with other first-generation migrants, these parents make sacrifices in the expectation of a better future for their children; here this is access to English as linguistic capital 'crucial in the conversion of other forms of capital into symbolic capital' (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999:101).

- » All the women regard their children's developing bi/multilingualism as a significant asset, reporting that they overtake their parents in English at an early age; some also speak or write more fluently in their home language than their mothers. All ten women speak almost exclusively in their home language with their children, who respond in the same language between 20% and 100% of the time. Between siblings the picture alters and English is used much more frequently. This can affect parental authority, especially for the single parents.

Ana: *"My children ignore me when I try to speak English to them... they don't like it... they tease me... children are cruel"*

Iveta: *"They start laughing... they said you speaking like Pakistani woman" (she is Polish)*

- » Women regard their own language learning as important (to support their children and find employment) but finding time and space to attend class and study is hard for all. They miss family support, especially their mothers.

Beata (on being separated from her older son and mother): *"I missed him so much I cried every night... had to stop breastfeeding from stress... I spoke to my Mum and asked her to come with him"*

- » Emotional wellbeing affects their learning; in addition to physical tiredness, they report emotional exhaustion arising from the grief of separation, the strain of marital breakdown and custody battles, ongoing economic worries, husbands under strain and anxiety about children settling into school.

Family opposition to women's education was not an issue for these participants; however gendered practices within families prioritised their responsibility for childcare and domestic duties even when partners were not at work, or when they were also employed. Although all have achieved success through ESOL exams, they are acutely aware of their limitations.

Sandra (a PhD graduate, age 47): *"I'm doing voluntary work at the grammar school 5 days a week; when you are 22 it's OK, but... it really put me down, I can communicate but I can see the barrier in a professional situation."*

Discussion

Of significance here is that women are the majority student population, and that locally there is a wide range of language use in a relatively small population, which calls into question the gender-neutral discourse referred to above and any picture of large communities of learners from single ethnic or cultural backgrounds being the only reference points for ESOL planning. It is unsurprising that the majority of students are from the EU and that economic reasons are cited as the main driver; both these findings fit with other studies in relation to global movements of labour and the feminisation of

migration (Cuban 2010). However these merit further enquiry; saying 'I was married' for one respondent was revealed to mean that her fiancé was a political exile and that her short visit to him in England turned into 7 years' separation from home and family after war broke out. I also note that 14 women (37% of sample so far) are single parents, exploration of which further illuminates migration decisions and gendered practices, linguistic choices and employment options. Households are small, with only four appearing to live in extended family groups, and only two mentioning a grandmother's role; as there can be an assumption that immigrant families are large and inter-generational, with older relatives sustaining home languages and cultures, this has relevance for both the multiple roles required of the mothers and their capacity to manage them. Employment histories are mixed, although there is overall a clear shift from skilled to unskilled work.

Narratives in a critical discourse framework

Here I focus on three issues arising from these findings in relation to the political and public discourse on ESOL and migrant learners of English:

- » the purpose of ESOL as training for employment or to support women who are isolated at home and need to integrate in the local community
- » the idea of a 'settled community'
- » the concept of transitions

The purpose of ESOL

'Mr Blunkett: "... what resource allocation... are [you] to make to facilitate education for those (i) women and (ii) others identified as requiring additional support in order to ensure their competence in the English language?'

Mr Hayes: "As part of the Government agenda to support unemployed people into work we will fully fund units and full qualifications for people in receipt of jobseekers' allowance and employment support allowance... to help them enter and stay in work... will continue to fund 50% of the cost of English for Speakers of Other Languages training for eligible people who are settled here" (House of Commons 2011).

"It is important that ESOL funds are prioritised for those individuals and communities where lack of English is likely to contribute to a weakening of community cohesion. Many factors influence community cohesion, and by suggesting priority groups we do not imply that those concerned should be held

responsible for any local cohesion problems... We have, however, identified an indicative national list of those groups of long-term residents who are most likely to suffer significant disadvantage because of their lack of English... a high priority group should be excluded women without English as a first language, particularly those from unwaged families who have school age children" (Denham 2008).

These extracts from senior UK politicians show how ESOL is placed within policy and finance frameworks of managing employment, immigration and community cohesion, alongside family poverty and the needs of young children. Cuts to ESOL budgets nationally affect student eligibility for funding, whereby only those on so-called 'active' benefits (applying for work) are supported, denying aid to those either in work and on benefit (such as working tax credit) or not in work and dependent on others (such as spouses of those on jobseekers' allowance). A survey found that only 14% of ESOL students were on active benefits, whilst of the 53% on 'inactive' benefits, 75% were women (AoC 2011). An active campaign by ESOL students and tutors demonstrated the inequitable impact on women, and some reversal of the policy was achieved.

However, these extracts are not unique in portraying migrant women as lacking and excluded, and in need of local, community-based English classes; although such flexibility in relation to local need is welcome and urgently needed, there is a caveat: these are to be informal, discretionary, in partnership with local agencies and with no additional funding. In other words, women with young children are positioned, not as mainstream learners with assumed access to trained teachers and full qualifications, but within family learning programmes where the emphasis is on parental support for children's development, provision, it should be noted, similarly based on a deficit basic skills model related to literacy and numeracy. Women's narratives in my research show that they have a far more nuanced understanding of their need for English than such polemic suggests, investing in learning as part of the gendered responsibilities of their daily lives (Menard-Warwick 2009).

Settled communities

Tailored community provision is expensive, and government interest is directed at those in 'settled' communities, a frequently-used expression to denote difference between us/them, eligible/ineligible, especially in immigration debates regarding non-Europeans. Along with 'transitions', this can be unhelpful in implying a one-directional, completed move. None of the women so far interviewed initially expected to stay in the UK as a long term resident. Learners with insufficient capital to source more appropriate education may find themselves within a Skills for Life curriculum with its homogenising agenda, but continue to sustain loyalties and links, through technological advances and cheap travel, to communities elsewhere, thereby chipping away at traditional notions of borders by the simple expedients of texting, skypeing and watching TV.

Transitions

There is no doubt that immigrant women who are mothers and learners of English can be considered as experiencing a number of transitions; however I argue that this concept has some limitations in this context, partly as transition implies linear progression, a start point and goal, a crossing of time and space boundaries which are expected to result in positive, changed identities. Both my teaching experience and this research lead me to view this as insufficiently layered or directional, not attending to the multiple ways in which they are positioned, and position themselves. By this I mean not only those external, powerful forces of political and economic pressure but also those personal influences which demand constant reappraisal. Boundary becomes less of a physical, geographical fact and more of a state of mind, a place of reflection on who one is and how this changes dynamically; affiliations and allegiances to cultural practice and languages can shift, and are not only defined by residence or nationality. Children can be seen as another aspect of cultural and linguistic boundary. Always a symbol of parental hopes and claims, the child of migrants 'is also reconstituted as a field for competing adult identities' (Anderson 2002:114), the strength of which should not be underestimated. I have noted that mothers who do not speak fluent English can be regarded as stupid by their children, a form of 'othering' within the home which creates a new, unwelcome boundary for these adults to be negotiated at times of vulnerability, the middle of the night, in front of friends.

It is suggested that 'trajectory' is a useful metaphor which 'puts stress on the fact that learners' investments must always be lived out in concrete historical circumstances' and that the circumstances of the trajectory affect and require renegotiation of the investments (Menard-Warwick 2009:179). I agree that this emphasises learners' resources and agency in adapting to new situations, and that the intrinsic energy of this concept applied to the women's stories of their initial migratory impetus but subsequently I detect a shift which requires a more fluid, multi-directional concept. Jocey Quinn suggests that we 'must attend to the imagined and symbolic in learners' lives in order to make material changes' (2011), which opens us to listening to that part of these narratives which is hugely significant in developing a deeper understanding of the meaning and role of English for these women. If English is the language of the future, of economic improvement and family security, how do they express loss and grief for the past and for their present reality? When their toddlers wake in the night and cry out in English for them, how do they feel as mothers? When their teenagers laugh at their inaccuracies, how do they exert parental guidance? Where do they imagine their own futures when their children are grown?

Conclusion

There has been research into motivation, investment, ambivalence in relation to women's second language acquisition, and of barriers and obstacles which must be overcome, but as yet it appears

to me that our knowledge of the relationship between the material and (often embodied) internal, symbolic lives of learners in interaction with the powerful discourses shaping provision are under-explored. Future stages of this research will explore these connections in greater depth and consider their policy and pedagogical implications.

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**Making wishes come true: a
methodological design in a multi-
case study with non-traditional
adult students**

Introduction

This article is based on a study¹ which is being carried out at the University of Aveiro (UA), as part of a PhD research project entitled “The plurilingual repertoires in a lifelong learning process: a multi-case study with non-traditional adult students. This study aims to present the non-traditional student adult student perspective on what lifelong learning is, namely, lifelong language learning, focusing on the context of higher education context. It takes into account non-traditional student adult student motivations, expectations and representations, using a biographical approach (Josso, 2002; West & Merrill, 2009), to reveal the process of construction of the students’ plurilingual repertoires during their life course (Molinié, 2006).

Within this theoretical perspective, the study explores how the plurilingual repertoires are built throughout life, namely non-traditional student adult students’ lives. The methodological approach used in order to achieve this main goal is based on documental analysis (institutional documents at the University of Aveiro), questionnaires and interviews. This article focuses on the main methodological design used in the selection process of a small group of non-traditional adult students to be interviewed, taking into account their answers to the previous questionnaire.

1. The Non Traditional Adult Students in a glance

The presence of non-traditional adult students in HE is an increasing reality in European universities. Adult students are named “non-traditional” due to several factors influencing their participation in the educational process. According to various authors, the main features of these adult students, labelled as “non-traditional”, relate to:

- i) age – the majority of the students range from 18 to 21 years old, whereas adult students are above 23/25 years of age;
- ii) formal education – adult students were outside the formal education system for a while and have no university experience, usually being the first family generation to participate in this type of education;
- iii) professional experience – adult students have a greater life experience and so their professional life is, in the majority of cases, far greater than that of traditional students, with little or no professional experience, the latter usually being working class, concurrently working full or part-time;
- iv) students’ attitudes – adult students are more concerned with the practical application of new knowledge, are more self-determined and responsible, since attending HE is very often related with the chance of pursuing a career or updating knowledge for professional advancement (Correia & Mesquita, 2006; Johnson & Merrill, 2004; Lynch, Chickering, & Schlossberg, 1989).

1 Funded by the Foundation for Science and Technology (F.C.T), currently being developed at CIDTFF - Research Centre for Didactics and Technology in Teacher Education/ LALE (Open Laboratory for Foreign Language Learning) <http://www.ua.pt/cidtf> www.ua.pt/cidtf/lale

In Portugal, since 2006, special HE access and admission conditions were created for non-traditional adult students who do not have the level of formal education traditionally required for accessing and attending that level of education, but who possess the knowledge and the necessary competencies acquired during their personal, professional and social pathway, allowing them to test their ability in attending HE (Decree-Law No. 64 of 2006). Another specificity of this new HE public is that, besides not holding a secondary education or an equivalent qualification, they must be over 23 years old, thus making the expression “Over 23” very common when referring to this type of access and admission in HE. Evaluating these students’ ability to attend HE mandatorily entails: a) assessing candidate’s CV and qualifications, b) evaluating motivations (which can be done by means of an interview), and c) submitting the candidate to theoretical and practical tests for evaluation of knowledge and skills related to the course area for which they are applying (Decree-Law No. 64 of 2006). In order to illustrate the pathway of these Non-Traditional Adult Students, Figure 1 presents the Portuguese Educational System, particularly the path these students follow before accessing the Portuguese HE – 3rd Pathway.

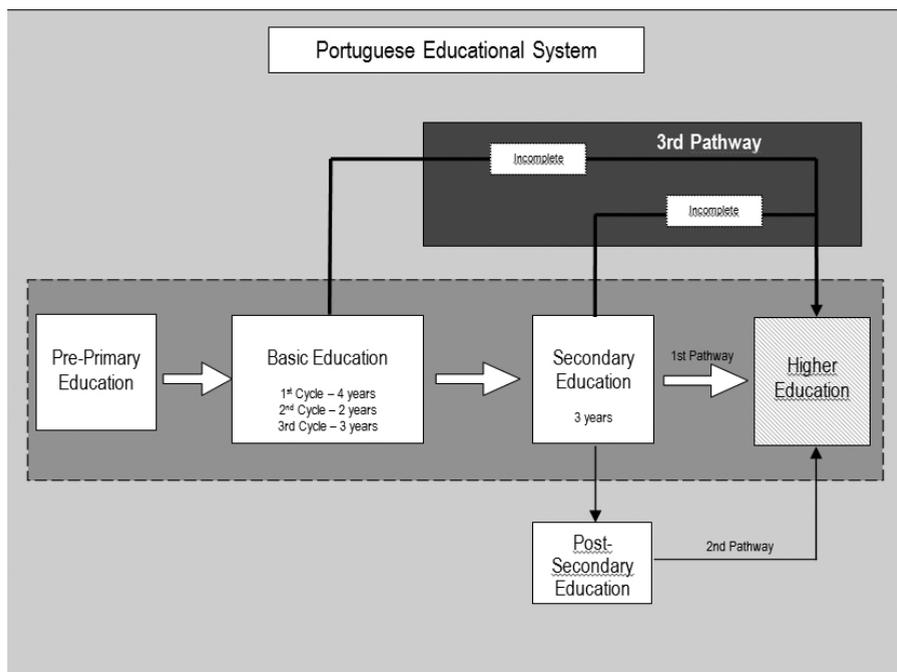


Figure 1 – Portuguese Educational System²
(Higher Education Access and Admissions Pathways)

² Compulsory education in Portugal has now a 12-year duration for all those enrolled on the 1st, 2nd or 3rd Cycle of the Basic Education, in the academic year 2009/10. Before that and for all those that had enrolled on the 2nd and 3rd years of the 3rd Cycle as well as on Secondary Education that same academic year, compulsory education has a 9 year duration (From 1st to 3rd Cycle of the Basic Education) (Law No. 85 of 27th August 2009).

As shown in Figure 1, attending the Portuguese education system begins in pre-primary education and finishes with HE. There are three admission pathways to HE in Portugal. The first one is related to the compulsory 12-year education, which includes basic education (divided into three cycles, a total of nine years) and secondary education (a total of three years). At the end of this last level, students undergo the necessary exams according to the course they wish to enrol on. The second pathway is related to the post-secondary education, consisting of Technology Specialisation Courses which students can complete before being admitted to HE. The third and last pathway, via “Over 23”, relates to those who have not yet completed the secondary or even the basic level of education, but gained knowledge through life experience. This last level is directly related to adult education, lifelong learning and non-traditional adult students.

2. Learning Languages – a process of and for a lifetime

In spite of some resistance, it is increasingly accepted and envisaged that education is not solely limited to school contexts, where so-called formal knowledge is monopolised; the non-formal and informal learning are a crucial part of the competencies acquired throughout life.

Learning languages emerges, according to Mackiewicz as: ‘a lifelong process extending across the entire span of institutional education and training and including learning outside institutional settings. The emphasis on lifelong language learning reflects the facts that it is impossible to predict the practical and personal communicative needs people may have after leaving education and training’ (1998: 4). Gradually, the political agents have assumed that “language learning is for all (...) is for the learner (...) is for intercultural communication (...) is for life: it should develop learner responsibility and independence necessary to respond to the challenges of lifelong language learning.” (CE, 2006:56). Thus, it should be based on the principle whereby each one is able to learn languages according to the emerging needs throughout life, either due to personal, professional or cultural matters, or simply because it is the person’s wish, resisting the hegemony of a single language and promoting the learning capacity, understanding and daring to face what is uncertain and complex (J. C. Beacco, 2008; Semal-Lebleu, 2006). This plural learning process, sustained by the notion of Plurilingualism³, should be envisaged by the individual and his/her inherent learning processes and it culminates in the structuring of plurilingual competence.

Plurilingual competence is understood as an “ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social actor has proficiency,

³ The words Plurilingualism and Multilingualism may be found in literature. The European Council (EC) and the European Union (EU) have solved this terminology dilemma in different ways. The EC considers that the Plurilingualism refers to the individual and Multilingualism to the context. The EU uses the word Multilingualism to refer to the individual and the expression linguistic diversity to refer to the European society.

of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures.” (Coste, Moore, & Zarate, 2009: 11). Considered as “the development of a composite repertoire, original and complex, where the different languages in contact interact and combine” (Stratilaki, 2006:3), plurilingual competence is not a simple juxtaposition of different competencies, but rather a plural, complex, composite and heterogeneous competence, including singular and partial competencies. It is a competence which presents itself as unbalanced on different levels, since the proficiency level may vary depending on the languages, as well as on the fact that linguistic abilities may be different between the various languages. Other features assigned to plurilingual competence include being dynamic and malleable, as it is during the itinerary of the social actor, throughout his/her life, that the competence evolves. Therefore, it is not stable, gaining new elements which transform or complete pre-existing components obtained in various life contexts, considering the necessary adaptation to professional, geographical or family displacements but also to the personal evolution of interests (Lüdi, 2004).

Thus, it is under a lifelong learning process that plurilingual competence (re)constructs itself, even because “Entrant en contact avec divers environnements linguistiques, ces locuteurs se constituent des répertoires langagiers fondés sur compétences aléatoirement distribuées selon les langues en contact, plurilinguismes constamment remodelés selon les circonstances de la vie” (Vigner, 2008 : 42). Therefore, plurilingual competence is seen as a dynamic process of reconstruction which, like a linguistic Identity Card, is influenced by each subject’s life experiences, pathways and stories (Andrade & Araújo e Sá, 2003).

Consequently, we could assume that the (re)construction of the plurilingual repertoire is a lifetime activity, influenced by a subject’s pathway’s plurality and unpredictability. A subject’s plurilingual repertoire is built and remodelled according to his/her life’s circumstances (Andrade & Araújo e Sá, 2003; Beacco, 2008; Beacco & Byram, 2007; Coste et al., 2009; Mackiewicz, 1998; Semal-Lebleu, 2006; Vigner, 2008). Thus, the subject’s awareness of his/her plurilingualism, his/her ability to reflect on it and the responsibility assigned to it throughout the lifelong language learning process play a very important role in plurilingual repertoire development, where the above-mentioned plurilingual competence notion is closely linked to its life history and biographical trajectories (Thamin & Simon, 2010).

2.1. The language biographies

Since the construction and development processes of plurilingual repertoires requires a lifelong learning approach, following the subject in a pathway which covers all his/her experiences in a holistic and transversal way, the language biographies emerge as an adequate research instrument for accessing them, highlighting the plural experience pathways of the subjects, both linguistic and cultural, as well as managing several languages on a personal or professional sphere or at school, in a more generalist, daily and social perspective (Castellotti & Moore, 2006; Josso, 2002; Thamin & Simon, 2010). This instrument comprises a set of features of diverse nature: memories of linguistic

and cultural contacts; testimonials of the evolution of formal and informal learning; and eventual proof of language learning certifications.

The language biographies are equally important for the subjects that produce them, as this “returning to experience” allows for biographical reflexivity (Alheit, Dominicé, Brugger, & Bron, 1995) like a “retour réflexif sur sa vie plurilingue et sur son apprentissage des langues” (Simon & Thamin, 2008: 5) and also the awareness-raising of those subjects of what already constitutes their repertoires, particularly what concerns language learning, thus contributing to the lifelong language repertoire development (Castellotti & Moore, 2006; Molinié, 2006; Perregaux, 2006; Simon & Thamin, 2008), as well as reinforcing the involvement of the subjects themselves in the educational process in which they participate, and underlining the importance of the flexibility in the learning processes (Faure, 1972).

This heuristic dimension, both for the researcher and for the subject (Simon & Thamin, 2008) can be achieved by using different instruments, such as questionnaires or biographical interviews. Although questionnaire technique can give the researcher certain insights into the subjects’ language biographies, biographical interviews offer the researcher deeper access to them, since the themes of discussion chosen are the meaningful moments shared. Biographical interviews also allow the subjects to recount “une période de leur vie, exposent leur situation, anticipent leur avenir” (Demazière, 2007, para.6) in a unique perspective for the researcher and for the subjects themselves. Therefore, the methodological approach of this study uses both instruments, believing they complement each other. First a questionnaire was administered and from its data analysis we proceeded to the biographical interviews, since the data analysis provided criteria for the selection of the non-traditional adult students sample to be interviewed and for the design of the interview guide.

3. Methodological Design – Describing the phases

Taking into account the above theoretical framework, this study intends to understand how the plurilingual repertoires were (re)constructed through life, namely through non-traditional adult students lives. More specifically, the study intends to: i. characterise the non-traditional adult students from the University of Aveiro; ii. understand how the plurilingual repertoires are built through non-traditional adult students lives; iii. identify dynamics of non-traditional adult students plurilingual identity construction and iv. understand how HE attendance contributes or could contribute to the development of non-traditional adult students plurilingual repertoires. In order to achieve these goals a methodological plan was designed based on two phases:

Phase 1 – The analysis of the University of Aveiro institutional data in what non-traditional adult students is concerned and questionnaire design and application

According to the University of Aveiro Integrated Unit for Continued Education⁴ and the University of

4 UINFOC – Unidade Integrada de Formação Continuada

Aveiro Academic Services, from the academic year 2006/2007 to 2010/2011 there were 485 non-traditional adult students with an *active status* attending several degrees at the University of Aveiro.

In our study we designed a questionnaire to be filled in by all the non-traditional adult students attending the University of Aveiro in all those academic years. With this data collection instrument we intended to make a general description of the non-traditional adult students to characterize their language biographies and to access the non-traditional adult students' representations in what lifelong learning (namely lifelong language learning) was concerned with, as well as their representations about how HE attendance contributes to the development of their plurilingual repertoires. Before sending the questionnaire to the non-traditional adult students, we undertook a pre-test with seven other non-traditional adult students who were not in the study, which led us to make some adjustments and changes in the questionnaire structure. The final version of the questionnaire has, in total, 18 questions, some with sub-items, most of them being closed questions. It comprises of three parts:

- i. General characterization (age, gender, nationality, academic qualifications, actual job, course attended);
- ii. Lifelong Learning (Mother tongue, foreign languages learned in formal and informal contexts, for how long, proficiency level then and now, foreign languages learned at the moment or meant to be learned in the future and why, contacts with foreign languages and in which contexts, importance of lifelong language learning and why, how many and which languages are considered important to learn and why, importance of some languages in comparison to others and why, and the role of languages in today's society);
- iii. Higher education degree and languages (the importance of foreign languages in higher education, foreign languages in the study plan, the importance of foreign languages in the plan of studies, influence of foreign language proficiency in academic success in HE).

The questionnaire was sent by email to 485 non-traditional adult students and 195 non-traditional adult students (40.2% of the total number) filled it in. All the collected data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 18. These 195 non-traditional adult students became the sample of this study. The analysis of the first part of the questionnaire showed us that the sample consisted of 103 men (52,8%) and 92 women (47,2%), aged between 23 and 66 years old, most of them in between 26 and 40 years old (69,8%). The majority are Portuguese and two of them are Brazilian. In relation to academic qualifications, the most representative answer is 12 years of schooling indicated by 107 non-traditional adult students (54,9%). Concerning HE attendance, the majority of them are in the first year of their degree. Most are Public Administration, Languages and Business Relations and Information Technology students (Ambrósio, Araújo e Sá, & Simões, 2010a, 2010b).

The second and third parts of the questionnaire are related to non-traditional adult students language biographies, which provide a first approach to their plurilingual repertoires. As explained above, we

intended to choose a small sample to be interviewed from the sample of 195. Therefore, in the final part of the questionnaire, non-traditional adult students were invited to indicate their email/phone contacts if they were available to participate in a further approach to lifelong language learning thematic. 115 of them (58,9% of 195) included their contact, thus expressing their availability to continue participating in the study.

Phase 2 – Selecting the non-traditional adult students sample for interview and do the interviews

Taking into account the above theoretical framework, and after the questionnaire data analysis, the biographical interviews were the next methodological step to take. The main goals were:

- i. To understand how the plurilingual repertoires are built throughout life:
 - a. Understand how plurilingual repertoires are developed (how languages are acquired / “lost” in which contexts and circumstances and with which status, functions and purposes);
 - b. Understand interactions / pathways between the dynamics of subjects’ lives (lived, expected and planned) and their learning (formal and non-formal) language.
- ii. To understand how non-traditional adult students perceive themselves as plurilingual subjects (under construction / “en devenir”) and their own plurilingual repertoire.
- iii. To understand how attendance in higher education contributes or could contribute to the development of non-traditional adult students plurilingual repertoires:
 - a. To identify their opinion concerning the existence of languages in the HE curriculum (which ones and with what purpose).
 - b. To understand the value assigned to languages in the HE context by non-traditional adult students
 - c. To understand how EANT perceive the role of HE institutions, in particular the role of the University of Aveiro in the academic community plurilingual repertoire development (and theirs in particular).

As mentioned above there were 115 non-traditional adult students who were available to take part in the interviews. We decided to interview 10% of the students, making a sample of 12. The sample selection process was based on the analysis of non-traditional adult students responses to the questionnaire. This selection process is related to the intention of identifying the subjects who had lived more and less plurilingual experiences (and if they intended to experience more of it in the future). The first step was to choose the questions of the questionnaire (second and third part) that would enable us to identify the subjects’ plurilingual experiences:

- Q. 9.2 – Are either of your parents foreigners?
- Q. 9.3 - If you have a partner is he / she a foreigner?
- Q. 9.4 - If you have children, what language(s) do you speak with them?

- Q. 9.5 – Do you speak with someone of your family and/or friends in another language other than your mother tongue?
- Q. 9.6 – Do you use language in a professional context?
- Q. 9.7 – Did you learn languages in your formal educational path?
- Q. 9.8 – Did you learn languages outside your formal educational path?
- Q. 9.9 – Are you learning languages at this moment?
- Q. 9.10 –Would you like to learn languages in the future?
- Q. 16 – Does the University of Aveiro degree that you are attending have languages courses?

Although it was important, the question of the mother tongue (Q.9.1) was not considered, since all the 115 subjects identified Portuguese as their mother tongue. After the selection of these questions, we organized them into three contexts and into 10 plurilingual experience indicators (Ind):

- 1 - Personal Context: Foreign Parents (Ind1), Foreign Partner (Ind2), Languages spoken with the children (in addition to Portuguese) (Ind3), Languages spoken with family/ friends (apart from Portuguese) (Ind4), Language learning in a non-formal/ informal context (Ind5);
- 2 - Professional Context: Languages in professional context (Ind6);
- 3 - School Context / language projects: - Language Learning in formal context (pre-HE) (Ind7), Language Learning in formal context (HE) (Ind8), Learning languages presently (Ind9) and Intention to learn languages in the future (Ind10) (See Table 1).

Table 1 – Plurilingual Experiences' Indicators

Contexts	Plurilingual Experiences' Indicators	Questions
Personal Context	1 - Foreign Parents	Q.9.2 –Are either of your parents foreigners?
	2 - Foreign Partner	Q.9.3 – If you have a partner is he / she a foreigner?
	3 - Languages spoken with the children (in addition to Portuguese)	Q.9.4 – If you have children, what language(s) do you speak with them?
	4 - Languages spoken with family/ friends (apart from Portuguese)	Q.9.5 – Do you speak with someone of your family and/or friends in another language other than your mother tongue?
	5 - Language learning in a non-formal/ informal context	Q.9.8 – Did you learn languages outside your formal educational path?
Professional Context	6 - Languages in professional context	Q.9.6 – Do you use language in a professional context?
School Context / Language Projects	7 - Language Learning in formal context (pre-HE)	Q.9.7 – Did you learn languages in your formal educational path?
	8 - Language Learning in formal context (HE)	Q.16 – Does the UA degree that you are attending have/ offer languages courses?
	9 - Learning languages presently	Q.9.9 – Are you learning languages at this moment?
	10 - Intention to learn languages in the future	Q.9.10– Would you like to learn languages in the future?

We then analysed all the answers from the 115 non-traditional adult students concerning the ten plurilingual experience indicators explained above and we concluded that the minimum number of indicators evidenced by them was one and the maximum number was eight. This conclusion allowed us to create two different groups, the first one - Group A - with all the non-traditional adult students who showed only one or two indicators (n=23, 20%) and a second one – Group B – with all the non-traditional adult students who had six, seven and eight plurilingual experience indicators (n=22, 19.1%). Since we intend to identify the subjects who had lived more and less varied plurilingual experiences (and if they intend to experience more of it in the future) the sample was made up of six subjects from Group A and six from Group B, as can be seen in the table below (See Table 2):

Table 2 – Selection process design

Total number of the indicators variety identified	1		2			3			4			5			6			7			8		
	A (-)		B (+)																				
Groups	A (-)		B (+)																				
Number of NTAS	6	17	20	23	27	16	4	2	Total 115 NTAS														
Total per Group	23		70			22																	
Total per Group %	20%		60,9%			19,1%																	
Sample	6		0			6			Total - Sample 12 NTAS														

Relating to Group A, the criteria used to select the six individuals out from the 23 non-traditional adult students was primarily the age, choosing the older ones, since this study fits in a lifelong learning approach. Gender was then considered to be the second criteria, so that we would have a heterogeneous sample. Regarding those who showed two indicators, we took into account different combination of indicators presented by them. In relation to Group B, the selection criteria relate to the larger variety of indicators shown and age (the older ones), meaning that non-traditional adult students with seven and eight indicators of plurilingual experience were immediately selected.

In the end, the 12 non-traditional adult students sample was composed of six individuals from Group A and other six from Group B, aged between 25 and 48, and concerning gender there are six men and six women (See Table 3).

Table 3 – NTAS sample

Selection of the NTAS to be interview			
NTAS	Age	Gender	Group
NTAS 17	39	Fem.	B
NTAS 57	47	Fem.	B
NTAS 64	48	Masc.	A
NTAS 69	42	Fem.	A
NTAS 112	34	Masc.	B
NTAS 115	37	Fem.	B
NTAS 131	47	Fem.	A
NTAS 163	26	Masc.	A
NTAS 164	25	Masc.	A
NTAS 165	35	Masc.	B
NTAS 178	28	Masc.	B
NTAS 193	42	Fem.	A
Total	12 NTAS	[25-48]	6 M, 6 W

After we identified these 12 students we designed the biographical interview guide. Although we had a common guide with eight open questions, once again we took into account the non-traditional adult students particular plurilingual life course, evidenced in their questionnaire answers, by adjusting some questions of the interview to better understand the plurilingual experiences of each of them. At this stage, four interviews have been carried out and the next step, besides doing the other eight interviews and transcribing them, will be to design a device to analyse the transcribed interviews. We expect that all the collected data analysis will enable us to understand how the plurilingual repertoires were built throughout their lives.

4. Final remarks

Learning languages is not confined to classrooms. The school may encourage learning how to learn, promoting the research process and discovery, but it is necessary to recognise and value the knowledge acquired both in and outside of school, which entails accepting to learn languages as a lifelong project mirrored on each one's personal and social pathways (Coste *et al.*, 2009; Semal-Lebleu, 2006).

As stated in the call for papers for the ESREA Access, Learning Careers and Identities Network Conference, the use of biographical methods in adult education “captures a person's experiences of

transitions across a lifecourse”. Since the plurilingual repertoire construction is a lifelong process, the language biographies allow researchers to have a deeper access to non-traditional adult students plurilingual experiences across their life and at the same time are equally important for the subjects who produce them, as this “returning to experience” allows for biographical reflexivity (Alheit et al., 1995). The non-traditional adult students selection process presented in this article emphasises the importance of the use of biographical methods in adult education and the importance of taking into account the subjects’ experiences to design the methodological research plan.

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ROUNTABLE

**Learning foreign languages:
individual competitive advantage
or base for a counter-hegemonic
globalization?**

When an adult decides to learn a foreign language, several needs, aspirations, interests and aims can be at the origin of this decision, but also several factors can influence an adult's motivation for her/ his learning.

In concrete terms, the resources of time and money are assumed as fundamental personal factors when we know that attending private classes at the end of a working day can mean losing resting moments or alternatives to satisfy any whim or caprice.

But there is also an influence from the external world which is reinforced by the status and image given by the proficiency in foreign languages, as well as social motivations that correspond to the need of success which is only the adults' wish of overcoming obstacles usually originating from an unsuccessful past in foreign languages learning terms.

In this sense, the learning of one or more foreign languages can be associated to an interesting perspective of lifelong learning, named "biographical learning" by Alheit and Dausien (2002) which is seen as a motor of (trans)formation of experience, of knowledge and individual structures. This learning is also completed by the concept of "societal curriculum" which is defined in terms of norms and expectations constantly renegotiated and submitted to changes.

Based on these concepts, we can say that the success in learning could be the result of a motivational strategy anchored on the individual search for knowledge, with the aim of satisfying personal needs, as well as with the wider aim of achieving a mutual learning in a social context. Beyond the motivational factors mentioned before, we must also call your attention to the forces of globalization which belong to the group of powerful forces which surround the individuals and influence their motivation towards learning. As far as foreign languages are concerned, the competitive structures and the fast changes they imply put employees and jobs at a permanent risk. The globalization is favorable to all those who control the information technologies, those ones who can think and act in a flexible and adaptable way and, why not saying it, those who can speak foreign languages, or at least, English.

So if we admit the existence of a goal of adaptation and adjustment of individuals to the economic and social needs for constant job changes and not exactly to the need of concienzialization and critical thinking through the political and educational mobilization for the modernization of society conducted by foreign languages, we recognize a current tendency to favour training instead of education in the field of adults' language learning. And although there is a certain consensus that the individuals' qualification implies the knowledge of at least one foreign language as a way to make them less vulnerable to the risks that are associated to the imperatives of the economic competition, the foreign languages in the ambit of Adult Education in Portugal have never meant a pedagogical or political priority.

On the other hand, the opening of the world economy has favoured new forms of consumption promoted by a marketing based on lifestyle resulting in selling and buying almost everything, including

Adult Education and the learning of foreign languages. In this ambit, the learning of languages can be seen as a private and merchandised good directed to the employability and the competition of the individual and, consequently, as a need that can be seen as a subtle imposition orientated by the job offers which usually ask for the written and speaking proficiency of one or more foreign languages in 97% of the profiles asked by the employing entities.

We should also admit the existence of a linguistic market which has the task to regulate the offer and the search according to the prestige and value that the language has at a world level – which explains the proliferation of private language schools in Portugal and all around the world. In this perspective, the learning of foreign languages is offered on the market, which implies giving a price to the product (i.e. the language course) fixed according to what the buyers (i.e. learners) are ready to pay, which proves that the sector of language learning is seen as a potential investment, commerce and profit and transforms a public good into a private one, subjugated to the market forces.

According to this idea, the learning of a foreign language is seen as an instrument for a professional activity, also known as “active life” in which “the consumer is the commercial substitute of the citizen” (Bourdieu, 1998). For the individuals, the perspective of a language learning seen as the consumption of a product can put serious constraints on social groups who do not possess any buying power, resulting in less education and training for poor and needy adults or those living far from the urban centres and consequently it leads to lower job perspectives for those sectors of society.

If we also consider that the contribution of foreign languages is essential for a reinforced participation of citizens in cultural institutions and for a better knowledge of the different cultures to increase the capacity of dialogue, negotiation, mutual recognition and respect for the cultural diversity, then learning a language can be understood as a social and individual phenomenon. The social point of view refers to a number of values, rules and meanings that are shared by the members of a community. From an individual point of view, culture is a learning process of symbols and meanings influenced by conceptions and previous experiences and this conception of culture as a social practice is based on the acquisition of ideas through communication and always a different perspective of reality.

Language learning assumes, consequently, an emanipatory perspective when it points to adult learners who, in the frame of globalizations in which the asymmetries are bigger, are seen as agents of transformation. The proficiency in one or more languages is thus part of a process of empowerment which enables the expression of the self, articulated with the worry of the universal ethic of the human being. So, after all that we have said, we can accept the thinking that the contact with languages allows adults to develop themselves as individuals and provide them with communication skills divided into new forms of expression. Learning foreign languages can help individuals to transform their lives, providing them with an opportunity for self-development, changing cultural identity, transforming them into more tolerant and competitive adults, which can imply future educational, social and economic benefits when associated with the job market.

This emancipatory perspective is as optimistic as utopist because in practical terms, the learning of foreign languages is not available to every adult in the same way and the learning opportunities are not the same for the whole society so, let's just believe that, in late modernity, languages can be one of the interconnecting instruments between learning and lifecourse to reinforce a differential citizenship without being unequal, an active and participated citizenship and that learning adults can be seen as social and historical subjects, i.e. stimulated beings who know how to assume a relevant role in their own reality and biographical processes.

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ROUNDTABLE

**Lifelong education and learning,
biographical itineraries of
transition and reflexivity:
observations and interrogations¹**

¹ This paper has been discussed in the Roundtable “Lifelong education and learning, biographical itineraries of transition and reflexivity: experiences, ambivalences and blockages”. The other communicants were Béatrice Ribas, Sandrina Vieira and Vera Carvalho.

Introduction

Late modernity is characterised since the 1990's as a societal configuration marked by de-traditionalisation, by (individual, institutional and structural) reflexivity and individualisation/societalisation of biographical trajectories. In this context, some trends have pointed to the biographical expression and resolution of system blockages, contradictions, paradoxes and dilemmas (Giddens, 1992; Beck, 1992). It has been reported as phenomena seized as the epistemological fallacy and the ambivalence of late modernity, associated with the processes of construction of biographies as a reflexive project (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; Field, 2000; Hake, 2006). Some questions were also raised regarding the structural conditions of reflexivity, as well as interrogations about how are the winners and the losers of reflexivity constituted (Lash, 1997). Lifelong education and learning appears in this scenario as an existential condition (the centrality of learning in social relations) and a structural need (learning as a precondition for reflexive participation in social changes), and like facets driven by socio-political context of late modernity and intensified by the societal framework of risks and knowledge society/economy (Field, 2000; Hake, 2006; Beck, 1992).

It is assumed that the (transition) biographical itineraries are constituted in the interaction of: (i) the subject (families and social categories) options and strategies; the institutional opportunities (formed in the education/training and employment systems) and the emerging constraints and resources of the existence conditions (Casal, 2003). This perspective allows, based on a set of empirical research (Antunes, 2004 and the papers of Béatrice Ribas, Sandrina Vieira; Vera Carvalho at this roundtable in the Conference), to interrogate what blockages and opportunities do the subjects confront when building their transition itineraries configured by the involvement in processes of lifelong learning. Or, put it another way: with what systemic or structural paradoxes, blockages, contradictions and dilemmas are subjects faced when building these itineraries of transition and do they are urged to resolve them through a learning-based biographical solution?

Biographical itineraries of transition and learning: some explorations on Branca's testimony

Branca is a woman of 23 years, interviewed at the beginning of the decade within the framework of a research on identities and transitions between education and work. Branca is a finalist of a Vocational Course in Electronics where, since the first year, she was the only woman. At the time of the interview, she worked in an estate agency, was attending a training course in a security company in the area of surveillance and was planning to apply in the future for a degree in sociology (Antunes, 2004). The testimony and the story of Branca are interesting because they illustrate and suggest several processes by which the itineraries of transition (in this case, between education and work) are built and narrated. On the other hand, they are also suggestive regarding the ambivalences of late modernity and lifelong

education (Hake, 2006), as well as the opportunities and obstacles faced by subjects, in this context.

Thus, the dimensions of action and of the strategies of the subject are very present in Branca's capacity to persist in her determination to confront representations, expectations, pressures and blockages in the institutional opportunities open for its frequency and certification as a technician of electronics. Similarly, the institutional constraints, especially as regards employment market opportunities, become patent when she finds that, despite her multiple attempts she does not find a firm who will hire a woman as this is not a possibility. Arriving at this moment, at the end of a journey in which she feels successful, because she gets the desired professional qualification, Branca assumes that she has made a difficult choice, with negative consequences for her present and future life chances and prospects, and that she is the one who must get out of the situation. In this testimony, training is at the centre of two routes, medium-and long-term, envisaging to circumvent the dead end to which its option has brought: on the one hand, she intends to use training as a strategy of rapprochement to a possible job; on the other hand, she states to envisage a change of route (which may involve identity reconstructions), also through training, now at the level of Higher Education and in a more consistent area with dominant representations of women's work (in social areas) (Antunes, 2004).

Both the de-traditionalisation and the individualisation of biographical paths or societalisation/standardisation of pathways, by the opportunities open and/or denied by the institutions, are well marked by this account. Once more, even when the formal institutional routes authorise and subjects persist with success in challenging crystalized structural relations, by the side of the education system, the divergence of social practices with the formal order, by the side of job market, makes visible the biographical dimension and individualisation of social reproduction. This one takes place through social relations expressed in differentiated pathways through the choices of the subject (see Antunes, 2004). The epistemological fallacy of late modernity has an ambiguous translation in Branca's testimony: she identifies structural social relationships that condition her situation, as she identifies herself as the author of the challenges brought by their options and she considers that it is required to her to take the responsibility of the consequences and to confront them. So, we are not facing a vision of the reality that overstates the experience of the primacy of individual choices in the configuration of pathways, but we are offered a testimony that assumes full responsibility of the consequences of those options and the necessary reaction to them, even if that's a situation of systemic blockages and contradictions recognised by the subject.

Transition itineraries and lifelong learning: observations and interrogations

Accordingly, if we take the concept of reflexivity to interrogate Branca's testimony, the course of action that she intends to take suggests an orientation that we could see as conformist but not resigned realism, in the sense that she doesn't seem to rebel, nor also to resign with how the world works. On

the other hand, her narrative does not integrate any kind of discourse identifying with some collective reference (women or others). It highlights lifelong education as a central vector of a biographical solution for the contradictions of the system, which passes through a double strategy of action, in the medium and long term.

In the same sense, adults looking for learning foreign languages, or lifelong education and learning, can do so for multiple reasons, including his/her personal (trans)formation, the reorientation of their professional and personal trajectories, in situations of uncertainty, risk and individual and social crisis, or even as an anxious search, or a last resort, when facing competitive pressures or threats of exclusion; in this context, again, we see policies and orientations for individual responsibility and employability that involves education and training. In a sharply contradictory option, at the same time as learning foreign languages is a precondition for the individual competitiveness when searching employment in a growing number of sectors (and, in this sense, an expression of a structural necessity), the Portuguese State remains distant from the obligation to ensure a public system of foreign language education for adults (Béatrice Ribas' paper in a roundtable at the Conference).

On the other hand, for adults who have completed a process of recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) and apply to higher education, involvement in education/training can appear as a challenge to the reconstruction of identity and of their biographical itineraries, in the framework of individual constraints and economic change. Apparently, for these adults who experience now success in terms of their academic pathways, the biographical solution represented by education/training, can be not just one (so often last) resort to handle blocked professional situations as an experience of generating changes in their personal, professional and social trajectories. In this context, the very meaning of education/training for their lives can be changed (Sandrina Vieira's paper at this roundtable at the Conference).

The research that involves unemployed adults doing a basic-level Education and Training Course has observed the situations that most radically challenge the sense of training for biographies: on the one hand, about 40% of the adults drop-out of training during the first months because of economic difficulties, as they do not receive the payment of their allowance in time. In this case, given the heavy issue of survival, training is a failed substitute for the essential breadwinning. On the other hand, the conditions of existence of those adults, including a blocked job market, seem to hamper some visible successes in terms of employability. In this context, the observations made pointed to certain personal and professional gains, whether resulting from certification or learning (Vera Carvalho's paper at this roundtable at the Conference).

In this context, that underlines the facet of involvement in education and training as an attempt of confronting blocked biographical trajectories by systemic constraints, the version of lifelong education and learning as a structural need is closer to an answer to the injunction directed to the individual for

taking the responsibility when facing social risks and life insecurity, than the benign side of a precondition for participation in social change. It is assumed, then, that the injunction to construct a biographical solution based on learning for blocked professional trajectories, life chances and situations and conditions of existence corresponds to the social expectation and the individual experience that can be generated by the conjunction of policies and perspectives that advance educational responses to socio-economic crises and problems with the individualisation of responsibility for welfare.

Some remarks for more careful discussion

So, in these situations we observed transition trajectories that include the search of biographical solutions and responses to systemic contradictions and blockages and socio-economic changes, which individuals must mobilise and manipulate; in some cases. Such involvement seems to provide challenges and opportunities for processes of reconstruction of identity and biographical paths. The question that we are faced with and want to leave is: in the end, do the individuals acquire, by these ways, greater control over their lives? These processes of reconstruction, when experienced, are accompanied by the expansion of the range of options available to the subjects, in their professional and personal lives and to participate in and influence decisions that affect their communities? Under what conditions this empowerment may or may not occur? In other words, what are the structural and biographical conditions that constitute the winners and losers of reflexivity?

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ROUNTABLE

**The recognition, validation
and certification of acquired
experiences model on the higher
education path: biographies in
search of an identity**

Introduction

The fast and intense rhythm of the social changes and transformation that make contemporary societies remarkable has drawn new forms for education and training, with consequences on the construction of individuals' biographical trajectories. From that new approach the concepts of *learning and skills* emerged, with the endeavour of *lifelong learning* regarded as a *conditio sine qua non* to face the demands and potentialities of the *learning societies*, in which learning often implies developing, in an interdependent relationship, the necessary (key and transversal) competences in the different spheres of life in society. In that context, individuals are given responsibilities for their lifelong education and training acting, in the field, according to the "neo-liberal assumptions on the individual who governs himself" (Robertson & Dale, 2001:129).

This scenario emphasises the social inequality issue, in so far as they result not only from the individual action and responsibility, as Field (2006) adds, this tendency to hold individuals responsible for the management of their learning opportunities may trigger the aggravation of existing inequalities and may legitimise in-opportunities. The reproduction of social inequalities, interwoven in biographies with processes of social reproduction linked to class, family and field *habitus* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979), has spread to other processes, spaces and contexts, with the affirmation of lifelong learning. Thus, we are witnessing biographical paths and trajectories characterised by plurality, diversity and uncertainty, in which the ideal of a safe traditional collective trajectory has moved to an individualised practice; and it's up to the individual to make choices and accept the risks of those options. This process of 'individualization of biographies' is outlined by Fátima Antunes as the one in which:

the individuals are confronted with situations in life where they see themselves compelled to plan and organize their biographical paths, inevitably making choices, with terms and limits that are beyond their control, but with meaning and consequences which are for them to take fully (cf. Antunes 2004:350).

In the context of a *knowledge-based economy*, lifelong learning enhanced "the erosion of the qualifications model and its substitution, for the moment still partial, by the competences model" (Barros, 2009:142), shaping the contemporary life in society, which is becoming more destandardised, individualised and in constant climate of uncertainty and risk (Beck, 1992). This growing centrality on competence, understood as an "instrument for measuring the individual performance" (CCE, 1995:4), equally gives the subject individual responsibility on learning "in a space which also is collective and social" (Pires, 2005:67). Thus, besides the issues of social inequities, individuals also face themselves with equal opportunities.

This rupture in the way of understanding education and training was mostly led by the European regional block, along with other international organisms, with the ground goal of qualifying for global economic productivity, pressing and shaping (educational and social) policies implemented nationwide.

Among others, one of the significant changes that this new approach points out is the fact that the learning processes are not limited only to one age group. On the contrary, they are extended to all ages. In this context, education no longer ensures a specific level of competence and certification, understood as being resources or tools, durable for life, mostly for the work life. Education and training, that is, schooling and learning, are now present throughout a person's life, regardless of their social condition, and adult population assumes centrality.

This last circumstance has contributed to focusing the debate, in Portugal, around the lifelong learning mostly on the qualifications and on the skills of the adult population. So the New Opportunities Initiative (NOI) appears; its main mission is to stimulate the Long Life Learning through a plan for the qualification of the Portuguese population, aiming for the 12th school year as the minimum qualification level.

Scope of investigation

Many questions around the NOI applicability have been guiding discussions in the academic world, in the political debate and, through a projection spread by the media, in the public sphere. The centre of those discussions has as main target the adult axis of the mentioned qualification project and the underlying dynamics of one of the training and education models. Such a model breaks with the pedagogical and curricular structure behind the regular and traditional school model; it rewards the experiences acquired throughout life, capitalising those experiences in non-formal and informal learning outcomes with the right to a school and/or professional qualification, going against the social function of school and its model of formal education.

From the echoes of those discussions, which allowed us to set a research problem is related with certain assumptions linked to the role of school and of education in the last decades. In a dialectical relationship, school is considered: (i) generator of social inequities mostly through the dissimulation of meritocratic ideology, neglecting the equal opportunities between individuals and the principle of equal opportunities for all in school; and (ii) generator of potentialities, such as social mobility, reducing social inequity, social integration, and democratic participation.

From our point of view, the social policy on qualification of the Portuguese makes a contribution towards that debate, taking on poles of tensions and contradictions, which equally reconsider the revalorisation and the reconceptualisation of school and democracy roles. The problem that arises from that scenario and which we intend to discuss is the following: to what extent does the model of recognition, validation and certification of acquired experiences prepare individuals who wish to continue studying at a higher level? and does it assure social integration, equal opportunities and active citizenship enabled by Life Long Learning? We are, according to Ozga (2001), using this research in search of social justice. However, our intention is to understand the processes that trigger injustice and

inequity, that reproduce or maintain it, emerging from the adult education policy operated by the NOI, or, as Ozga suggests (2001: 113), emerging from the “new processes of formation of public policies”.

Thus, we sought to understand the ways in which the biographical trajectories of individuals who had contact with the model of recognition, validation and certification of acquired experiences and who enrolled for higher education are shaped and redefined by personal choice, by social and familiar constraints and by institutional opportunities (Casal, 2003), in the context of long-life learning.

Research methods and techniques

For the empirical study we turned to case study as our research method, to interviews as research techniques and to content analysis as data processing. The case study focused on the detailed observation of a specific group of people that had the following features combined: i) they had enrolled in a New Opportunities Centre (NOC); ii) they interacted with the recognition, validation and certification of acquired experiences, more precisely the recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) process; and iii) applied for a higher education institution.

Ten subjects were interviewed: they all belong to the NUT II (6 from the sub-region Minho-Lima, 3 from the sub-region Cávado and 1 from the sub-region Ave); 5 are male and 5 are female. They are between 27 and 61 years old, 2 of them are between 23 and 30, 2 are between 30 and 40, 3 are between 40 and 50 and are between 50 and 60 or older. This proportionality between sexes and age diversity was not intended, it was random, since the first contact with the interviewees was established by the respective NOC of origin, enquiring the subjects' availability and interest in the interview.

Presentation of the interpretative proposals

The interpretative proposals presented next are still under construction; therefore the reflection and thoughts pointed out are still exploratory. At this stage, we've defined three analysis dimensions we intend to cross and discuss later on to trace successful or unsuccessful biographical itineraries accessing higher education.

The dimension *skills for acting in a social world: the family role, the school role and the role of social relations*, explores how the habitus acquired throughout the primary socialisation process within the family and other agents individuals interact with in everyday life was constituted. For some of the subjects, school appeared only as a secondary accessory of that socialisation process. The factors that have contributed for that 'secondarisation' of the school role were related to the presence of certain social characteristics with patriarchal (and gender) features, where school was considered

utopia or short experience, without continuity, opposing to the value attributed to work. Both for these subjects and for those in whom school naturally inscribed in the socialisation process, for the large part, capital, starting *habitus* and then engraved by pedagogical action have determined the position in the working world after dropping out of school (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). This transition became evident specially after attending compulsory schooling at that time.

I was a girl from the countryside [...] I studied until the 6th grade and started working [...]. We are 4 sisters, all girls [...] when there are men around, they soon start working, bringing money home [...], and then our mother really wanted us working in the field, [...] and by that time, when I finished the 6th grade, I completed the 6th grade at the “telescola” [a kind of schooling, part of the national school system, that used video with educational content to approach certain areas of the curriculum] [...], that was like... hmm..., it was a leap towards Town [...], and by that time, coming to Town, according to what people were saying, meant strolling with your books closed under your armpit.

Interviewee 1

More than representing the transition from the school context to the work context, the dimension *relationship school-life project: searching for a professional identity* explores the representations linked to integration into working life, a moment when “a set of changes, not just in the working field, affects the individual, transforming him or her and turning him or her into adult” (Alves, 1998:136). That moment also reveals the affirmation of the individuals’ ability to occupy a position in the working world and in society, in a “process that implies and transforms identities changing meaningful categories of social identification” (ibidem). For the interviewed subjects, this transition and respective integration has been marked by moments of crisis and of restructuration connected with the definition of their professional identities, provoked by personal constraints and, in great measure, by structural (economic) changes of modern societies. Before this scenario, the dimensions education/training and work/employment came up as new identity challenges, propelling the search for vocational training, the social-communitarian participation and the “return to school”, enabled by the NOI.

The discussion about the life-project and professional identities may raise some questions mainly because they are concepts associated with youth. However, as discussed earlier, the current context of social change, which, as Beck (1992) says, is becoming more destandardised, individualistic and in a climate of uncertainty and risk, changes individuals’ transition processes, concerning education/training and world of work, throughout their lives, dragging the design of the life-project and the definition of professional identities. This causes a permanent identity reconstruction and education and training appears as an option in the redefinition of the individual trajectories.

I started my career as an “Exactor”, [...], I then applied for a residence in Guimarães, [...], I worked for 20 years, always in search of a philosophy; meanwhile I hadn’t managed to finish secondary school, [...] as far as my CV was concerned I was losing because many people were coming forward to the heads of the company with secondary level, also with a university degree and I had to compete against those people. That was becoming harder, the opportunity of the CNO, the RVCC, turned up, that was something I had been waiting for years, I knew I would get a degree.

Interviewee 6

The dimension *relationship life project-school: new opportunities for reconstruction of personal, professional and social identities* exposes, at first, the effects of the regular contact with the RVCC process (impacts felt in relation to the education and training model, the direction of the public policies on adult education and the inherent contributions) in the identity definition of the interviewed subjects. Subsequently, this dimension reveals the changes in personal, professional and social trajectories, especially the decision making in relation to the application for higher education. At a third moment, it explores the way the expansion of higher education has matched the promotion of access by a non-traditional public. Among the interviewed subjects, 8 have submitted applications through “Over 23” [an extraordinary admission process for ‘mature applicants’, people over 23 years old; in Portuguese: “Maiores de 23”], 5 were approved and enrolled, 3 didn’t pass the academic exams for the evaluation of knowledge and competences, an indispensable pre-requisite for enrolment and progression on the course; 1 filled an application for a Technological Specialization Course² [in Portuguese: “Curso de Especialização Tecnológica”, also known by the acronym ‘CET’] and was admitted; and 2 applied via regular national admission procedures and were admitted as well.

As we have confirmed, the option “Over 23”, was the route most considered. However, most candidates undergo a selection process that involves academic exams, interviews and curricular analysis. They point out some criteria as the main barriers to enrolment: the number of places available, the absence of monitoring and support for the academic performance in the exams, anxiety in the academic performance in the exams, and there is no second chance, similar to those that exist in the regular access to higher education. In general, they confirm that the interaction with the recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) process contributes positively not only to their relation to learning, but also to the development of personal and social skills necessary to overcome the difficulties encountered during the process of entrance into higher education.

1 Decreto-Lei n.º 64/2006, de 21 de Março

2 Decreto-Lei n.º 88/2006, de 23 de Maio

In that case only 5% of us would get in, it's very competitive, the process, the "Over 23" process...., my wife is doing it..., I sometimes joke and say "you don't even sleep anymore", she's there studying and getting ready; I did it in 15 days, I went to the mountain 15 days; it's a fact, taking into account the number of students that apply for the "Over 23" and number of places available, it is very competitive, it's just for the good ones, not for everybody.

Interviewee 6

By way of conclusion

The recognition, validation and certification of acquired experiences model breaks with the traditional paradigm of the school's function and attributes value to the role learning plays outside school (non-formal and informal learning). This break, despite of its tensions and contradictions, proves it makes a contribution to cause changes in the biographical itineraries, arising a permanent reflection on the role education and training may play in their lives.

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