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ABSTRACT

The question of how to theorize the subjective side of work within a life history perspective was explored. The findings of a study on engineers' subjective recognition of their lives, their education and jobs, and their life perspectives and the findings of a study of continuing education within a number of white-collar and semiprofessional work domains were cited as supporting the existence of a close interrelationship between professional learning and personal development. It was argued that, within the theory of modernization, professionalization appears as a moment in rationalization of society. The ongoing professionalization within public human services in the Nordic countries and elsewhere was used to illustrate how professional learning leads to personal development. The evolution of various human service occupations from "craft-like" occupations to professions was shown to parallel the process of development of a new identity during which individuals who had viewed themselves as individuals performing labor for a wage began viewing themselves as individuals in a career or "position." The concept of identity was discussed in relation to Ute Volmerg's conception of basic socialization as a production of identity, Erikson's cultural psychology theory, and Lorenzer's theory of socialization, as well as in relation to the concepts of contradiction and ambivalence. (Contains 27 references.) (MN)

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Professional Identity as Learning Processes in Life Histories
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Professional Identity as Learning Processes in Life Histories

**Paper no. 12
Life History Project
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PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AS LEARNING PROCESSES IN LIFE HISTORIES

This paper considers how to theorize the subjective side of work generally within a life history perspective, practically concentrating on a critical discussion of the notion of professional identity. It refers to professionals' relation to work and learning. A life history theorizing is seen as a complementary contribution with other concepts of knowledge, profession identity and learning. I see a direct connection between a life history approach to learning processes and a critical historical sociology of knowledge. The empirical cases that are included are not fully elaborated analyses, but illustrations of theoretical and methodological ideas.

I have previously studied learning in work life, adult education in relation to work, and vocational training - covering studies into subjective aspects of vocational training, unemployment training, trade union education etc: How are changes and structural contradictions in work subjectively recognized, and how do they influence learning in work life. Lately I have especially studied work domains that you might term professional or semi-professional: Engineers, social workers, nurses, pedagogues, police. It represents an empirical supplement, but it also accentuated that education research must have a broader scope than institutional and intentional teaching.

Why focus on Professionals and Professionalization: Reflexivity and Expert Society

In a couple of specific research projects with slightly different aims we have collected a comprehensive empirical material - partly a number of life history interviews, partly a background knowledge about the development within the corresponding work domains. One project dealt with the labour market of engineering, and with engineers' subjective recognition of their lives, their educational and job career, and their life perspectives. 17 individual life history interviews have been conducted¹. The other project dealt with continuing education within a number of white collar and semipro-

¹ This project was conducted in collaboration with the Union of Engineers in Denmark. Most of the interviews were taken by Tania Christensen, and basically processed in collaboration with Vibeke Andersen, Anders Buch and Henning Salling Olesen. Some of the Engineers are portrayed in Christensen/Buch(1999)

fessional work domains, preferably human services. In this project 20 individual life history interviews were conducted².

These interviews exposed a close interrelation between professional learning and personal development, which may have a more far reaching perspective as a spearhead of a general development. The demand for a lifelong qualifying process for work will include an ever growing demand for/enabling of personal development in the form of a subjective involvement and taking responsibility, at the same time as work will rely ever more on specialized competencies and societal division of labour. More and more people may become professionals and semi-professionals in the double sense of being knowledge based and subjectively involved in their role within the division of labour. At the same time, however, the relation between knowledge and subjectivity, is becoming more delicate. In the classical professionalization the individual subjectivity is more or less entirely integrated in a professional identity, based on unquestioned expertise, and often connected with a great but well defined power. If the trinity of expert status, knowledge, and subjective involvement on the one hand has been spread to a larger part of the population, then the relation within the trinity on the other hand becomes more multiple and fluid.

The political perspective seems obvious. Knowledge and competencies form a societal resource and power base. We are all involved in ever more differentiated division of labour, and we are all dependant on experts and the expertise of others in ever more aspects of life. The challenge to us as adult educators is to rephrase the central ideas about political education and democratisation, so that they catch up this potential for politicization of work life - and additionally to catch up the problems of equity and solidarity which are aggravated by this development.

Catchwords like 'the Knowledge Society' and 'Expert Society' make reifications of knowledge and knowing people with each a specific connotation. 'Reflexivity' generalizes knowing as a quality of the social, and thereby tends to dissolve it from concrete historical processes and persons. If

² This research was conducted with support from FTF, the Danish Confederation of White-collar workers and civil servants. Most interviews and the first steps of the analysis was made by Mette Vestergaard Hansen i collaboration with Henning Salling Olesen. Some interview persons are portrayed in Salling Olesen et.al. 1998

reflexivity shall be a category for democratic consciousness and self regulation it rests on the precondition of a politicization of the way knowledge is produced and circulated in society. To examine 'professionalization' is a way of studying the effects on individuals of trends in work and in society at large - but at the same time a possible point of departure for subjectivity in a historically relevant sense, anchored in collective learning processes.

The potentials for democratization - or the possibility that learning may form the ground for a new rationality - under all circumstances demand a comprehensively revised understanding of the role of knowledge in society, or the 'ontology of knowledge', to substitute a normative and slightly naive epistemology. In a traditional understanding of knowledge and science the authorized scientific knowledge form the core in rationality; and the professional practice is the rational practice which by specialization and institutional control becomes available to society as a whole. I shall not enter into the political and philosophical problems in this mode of thought, it has been put forward in the critique of positivism, in the accelerating critique of technology, in grass-root oriented political strategies, and in postmodern cultural critique

Even in the traditional centres of knowledge the interest into different modes of knowing and a new understanding is coming up, that knowledge is not produced in centres, e.g. elite universities, controlled by scientific norms, and disseminated - but rather that knowledge is produced in a de-centered system of social practices, among which the scientific institutions are hardly the most important (Gibbons et al, 1994). This way of understanding primarily refers to technological knowledge and knowledge dissemination (Wenger, 1997), but I would claim that it applies with at least equal plausibility within a number of social knowledge domains. With a pragmatic concept of knowing the development and now may be also the relativizing of scientific knowledge monopolies as a *historical* product of a specific type of modernization (the capital driven one). And by now the mode of knowing is probably under reconstruction within the core domains of the very same capitalism, technology, due to contradictions in this knowledge production itself (Information and Communication Tech, post fordist production models).

The relativizing of knowledge and science is theoretically integrated in social constructivism and in the post modern critique of modernist rational-

ity and emancipation ideas. This is not the place for entering into a discussion of these positions. But a life history approach may be seen as a practical analytical pendant or alternative to these critiques.

In knowledge sociology especially two models who seem characteristically interesting to relate to. One is the more or less ethno-methodological approach to the concrete social production process of knowledge in a specific context (Latour/Woolgar, 1979). This approach highlights that knowledge is not produced under epistemological control of its reference to reality - rather it is produced *in reality*, through its agents, institutions and social interaction. The limitation in this approach seems to be the tendency to define a micro-perspective on sociology of knowledge, a tour local scope. The opposite may be said about the other approach, discourse analysis, which inspired by Foucault programmatically focus on micro sociology or history (opposite to grand theories), but in fact define discourses as societally general patterns of thought and communication, that delimit what can be known and how.

In spite of difference these two approaches share the absence of a satisfactory definition of the subjective aspect, and the absence of a historical dimension. The ambition with a life history approach to knowledge and competence could be to establish a critical complementary to the knowledge sociology, which can connect the critique of rationalities with the social practices of everyday life. It should ground the idea about social dynamic in concrete identified historical subjects - and thereby also in the question about their learning processes. Professionals are individuals who in a specifically direct way incorporate the societal knowledge, and who on an institutional level stabilize subjective views and practices.

Profession and subjectivity

This is the context that make professional learning and professional identity particularly interesting. With in theory of modernization professionalisation appears as a moment in rationalisation of society - and the professionals therefore as those agents in whom the contradiction between the aspects 'rationality' and 'reification' is directly embodied. In action theory sociology of professions, in the Weber tradition, the interest is directed to the development of common interests of the group and the promotion of them in relation to the rest of society - including the authorization of a knowledge base, setting institutional controls of social practices, and promoting spe-

cific material interests and group power positions. This framework directs the interest towards a deeper understanding of the driving forces in this social practice, than just reducing them to group egoism. In Webers view it goes about understanding society in the light of the action rationality of the individuals. We could also see the individual subjective actions as historically concrete versions of societal rationalities - and so professional practice as one of the forms in which contradictions and dynamics of this rationality is embodied.

The reason that becomes particularly interesting is exactly the briefly outlined development of a reflexive, knowledge based society, which penetrates everything and so to say 'secularize' rationality into a battle field within the social practice and 'somebody's subjective action.

Technological expertise, and thereby engineering, already since long appear as the prototype for the specific role of knowledge and expertise in the modernization process - and therefore also represents some of the contradictions this process is facing today. The capitalist modernization focus on the technological development in commodity production and exchange (industry and transport). The engineering profession is a well defined and well known archetype. By studying the professional learning and identity we will see which shape the crisis and the reconstruction of the role of technological knowledge in society will take historically and subjectively.

The professionalisation of public human services may be even better illustrates that the division of labour and the knowledge based specialisation penetrates ever more comprehensive parts of the life world. Or, to put it differently: Reflexivity as a characteristic of modernity is not an individual, but a societal quality, organized in division of labour and differentiation of individuals' conditions for learning and knowing. This aspect of professionalisation has raised and will probably still continue to raise the quality in human services to a certain level, or in some historical phases, while at other times it may occur to be an obstacle. In all circumstances it has a 'democratic deficit'. Som of the difficulties that the welfare state in the Nordic countries is facing - except radical neo-liberal deregulation - has to do with this built limitation. This is in it self a good reason that a critical examination of the expert society and the knowledge specialisation must be included into life long learning research.

In order to do that we need to establish the study of professional learning and professional identity as something distinct from the work and its knowledge base. The basic theoretical problem is to establish theoretically, and afterwards to link two independent dynamics - social history and life history. There is a tendency in work life research to examine subjective phenomena as attachments to the sociological, technological and economical conception of work. The inner and independent dynamics of subjective development is mostly not accounted for - or if it is: then in entirely psychological concepts, which do not conceptually integrate societal contextual factors - here especially *work*. A life history approach could contribute to the study of those subjective processes, which the professional competence building runs through, and the complex interaction between cultural traditional conditions, day-to-day experiences in the work field, and institutionally mediated knowledges. We are interested in the role of work in two respects: As a part of reality with which you cope, and as a contributor to the socialization process, that produced the subject now coping with this reality.

Professional Learning as a Personal Development in the Human Services

Let me take some examples from our empirical material. The ongoing professionalisation within public human services comprise quite a proportion of the labour force - not least in the Nordic countries, where the welfare state development has been synonymous with enhance public services. A number of large new areas of employment and new professions have been developing, and the professional qualifying withing each of those already existing has been in a tremendous change of content and level. There has been a net mobility of labour force from other sectors of the formal economy, but not least a rapid incline in the employment rate of women, including transfer of women from informal into formal labour markets. For some persons this is a move within their individual career - for others the shift is between two generations, where the life history dimension deals with the relation between fundamental socialization and later choice of vocation and career. Professions have obtained a more distinct profile, and in many areas this profile has changed substantially.

A number of professions are originally developed as practical 'craft like' functional specialisation in relation to specific practices within this service. They have within a few years been upgraded to more or less theoretically

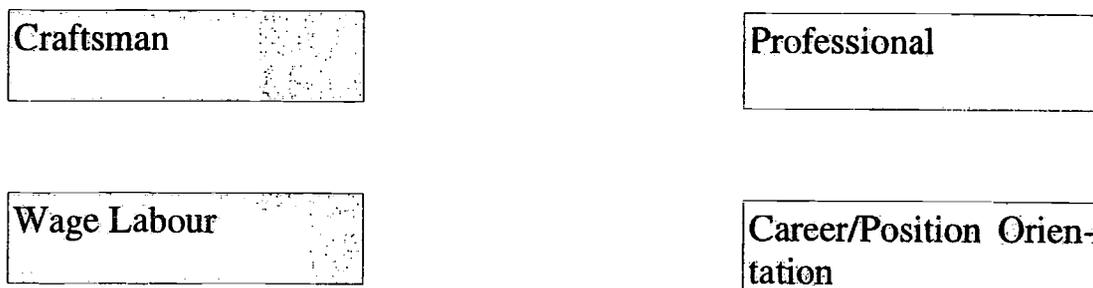
based (semi)professional level. Demands on quality and expectations in these domains have been going up rapidly. People who work in these domains are in continuous situation of change and learning - partly in continuing education, partly in their everyday work situation.

We have been very interested to find out which emphases people put on work relatively, how their life spheres interact, how they themselves define their relation to work. Work identity and professional identity are ways of apprehending meaning to work in general and to specific contents of the work - of course it reflects what the work offers/demands - but it is primarily a subjective assigning of meaning. The subjective relation to the profession and to specific contents of the job is grounded in a life history context, and therefore very individual. They are however not individual case stories - there are gender, generation and cultural systems interacting with educational system and labour market structures.

The people we have interviewed within human services are deeply involved in their professional development - most often it is not possible to distinguish clearly a professionally oriented learning and a personal development - they interfere and together form a life history with learning, blockings and leaps. The professional development in relation to each individual has the character of a strong pressure for development in the definition of the profession, and it also quite often takes the character of a generational relation between old and new members of the profession, and the new members carrying the new shape.

On the surface we have been able to recognize 4 different work and professional identities.

FIG 1:



The two on the top refer mainly to an engagement in the content of the work, and the two lower ones mainly to some form of instrumental outcome - and you may also more or less distinguish a dimension of historical development in the sectors. Since the sectors are extremely different in the quality of the work, in work organization, in recruitment and career structure - and finally in gender composition, these labels do mean something different in each sector or profession.

For some the interaction between developments in the life spheres is a conscious life strategy. A pedagogue, who took regular university degree programmes going far beyond the profession and at the same time continued her work career, at the same time had arranged her life course so that she would pause and have children - having scheduled when she could continue - like she had previously interrupted studies in order to take a job as an institution head. To her the challenges of the job and professional education were subjective development options, not just meaningful in relation to the work sphere - however recognizing that you cannot do everything all the time.

A nurse who was trained in a traditional practise oriented nursing and had been professionally active throughout her career, including taking specialist courses. At the time of the interview she had moved the emphasis in her involvement from work into interesting and challenging leisure activities. In her presentation it appears that this choice has to do with a certain alienation to the latest development of her concrete job - she has consequently defined a professional role and a leisure activity who complement each others, arranging her life differently from previously.

It is characteristic for several nurses that they feel professionalisation and the 'academizing' of their domain as a threat to what they see as the core content. They have become nurses at a time where the core function was practical caring and the human contact with the patients. Their professional competence is communicatively rooted in practical experience. This appears to be a gendered work socialisation, however we have observed the same approach to the profession from male nurses. The common label 'crafts-(wo)man' covers the rooting in concrete work processes, even if the female nurses may have imported it from their general gender socialisation and their house mother competences. The present development in the profession puts demands on them that they are not able to or do not want to honour. It introduces within the scope of the individual job a social technology rela-

tion between practice and knowledge base. Formal knowledge substitute or dominate the knowledge they have acquired during their work experience. Nursing is a good example because the influence from the very traditional scientific ideals and institutional control is strong. But it is in principle a general pattern. Other nurses experience the professional developments as enrichment - high continuing education activity, specialisations and learning to use new technical stuff. They run through a development from left to right in fig. 1, but not necessarily in one dimension.

In a number of cases we see interrelations with the co-incidental matching of a certain person with a certain background, and specific changes in the work situation following from the historical development of the profession, that we have observed as a general trend in the field. The 'professional identities' fit to some extent with some of the persons interviewed and their view of their own situation and aspiration. But only to a certain extent, and in most cases you could find aspects of several 'identities' within the individual person. So in the end it raises a number questions for interpretation, how individuals come to subscribe to specific work identities. It seems likely to assume that the same person might in different circumstances assume one or another prevailing identity, and the same definition of a professional identity seems to have different subjective qualities to different people. If we interpret this complicated interrelation in with life history approach we will see the historical dynamic as a concrete learning and action process of these people, i.e. their interpretation of the circumstances as mediated by their own life experience.

A teacher who seemed to be strongly professionally involved and who had been very fond with his job, at present felt disappointment and blocked in his job. He himself pointed to changes in the regulation of work hours as direct cause of his dissatisfaction. Consequently he had withdrawn from collegial work and co-determination in order to concentrate entirely on his own teaching. You could say that he has chosen to concentrate on the genuine content of teachers' work - but also that he made a delimitation in his involvement.

I will present a little more detailed case, another teacher, who herself emphasize a high level of identification with the teaching profession. Never the less she feels that she has to reduce her professional involvement because she has had children after several years of work career - which was on the

other side very easy because the children and her family offered new opportunities for her. She also, however, reports about disappointments in her job.

Vibeke

Vibeke is married, 39 years, and has two children (3/7 years). She has a strong identification with her profession - she 'thinks as a teacher all the time'. What ever she experiences and sees, is considered as a potential contribution to her teaching. As a teacher she has an engagement far beyond normal work hours. And, as she thinks, in teaching you are always working with your entire personality - it is difficult to see yourself as wage earner.

She gives glimpses of a childhood experience with her father who was a 'literate worker' and who has strongly influenced her curiosity and interest into learning. She has internalized this attitude as a part of a general attitude. To be a teacher is a part of Vibeke's personal identity, and she has been very devoted to the profession ever since she finished studying. She has been working most of the time in a private school with a quite high ambition and responsibility.

Working conditions for teachers have changed quite a bit during the latest few years, she feels. New regulations of duties, more detailed than previous ones, have influenced notably in everyday life in the school. This way of counting the minutes does not comply with Vibeke's conception of an involved teacher, because she thinks it strangles the involvement and initiative from the side of the teachers. Also a change in the educational tasks has taken place, influencing the working conditions. The mission of the school today is comprehensive, it is expected to manage all the problems of the pupils, at the same time as the proportion of 'problematic kids' is inclining. The result is a reduction in time for what Vibeke sees as *the core of teaching, the solid teaching of school subjects*. Altogether it has influence her experience of work conditions, which now seem to be uncertain and contradictory to her professional identity. The structural requirements towards the work cannot comply with her professional identity, and the job satisfaction is severely reduced.

Vibeke has always devoted much energy to her work, but as she raised a family with husband and children she began to prioritize family life. It has become more difficult to identify with the role as a teacher to the same degree as before. The dilemma also appears to Vibeke to be partly gendered

- as children arrive one of the partners will have to reduce professional and educational activities for some years, and most often the woman will do that.

Vibeke sees now in a situation where working conditions as well as her own life course imply a shift in her professional ambition. A high level of professionalism is difficult to maintain during a whole life, and Vibeke is facing a shift where her professional orientation is influenced by other circumstances, that seems to drive her in the direction of a more wage labour like orientation - in spite of her feeling of a high degree of identification with the profession.

We cannot know how her professional life would have developed had she not had her children now - may be she has already earlier in her career encountered equally big difficulties, but handled them or tolerated them because she was not in a position to chose the children - or may be she would at that time have changed job in stead of resigning a little bit, as now.

The subjective dynamic in this work identification is certainly strong. The positive image of 'the good teacher' is nourished from her memory of a childhood with a father - a memory which qualifies the professional identity into an autonomous expression.

Where did real Engineering go? - The Vanishing Professional Identity

The Engineering profession is - differing from human services - a well established profession. It has settled a strong, though not necessarily very distinct, image of 'real engineering' with the professionals. The most striking with the engineers is that they tend to see their own job as not real engineering. Standard engineering work with technical problem solving and construction based on specialised knowledge and within a differentiated organisation is actually disappearing - following from technology development and new organization of production - but never the less the image of it is still there. Engineers relation to their specific jobs is thus mediated through this image, and its subjective meaning in it self. Beside of course, they relate immediately to the concrete qualities of their work.

The image of the profession seems in it self to have a double meaning: It implies the idea about exciting and challenging tasks with good opportunities for self realization - the opportunity of the expert to do something im-

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portant - and at the same time it guarantees social security and a social position.

We have observed with the engineers a substantial element of security orientation - many seem to have chosen the career because it contains 'adventurous' expectations together with security. Even with some of the women we interviewed, who in one sense have made a daring and unusual career choice, we find that they are in other important respects playing safe with this career.

There are of course a rich variety in the material - e.g. the son of a gründer entrepreneur, i.e. a craftsman who developed an industry - who more or less by fate takes over the profession as well as the family industry. Or the young female engineer who had been inspired by her fathers work as an independent (engineering) consultant, an who was herself good at math and physics. She plays safe - but in the end she leaves the profession in order to establish her own design enterprise because her dynamic and creativity can not find a way within the (masculine) division of labour of engineering.

The individual engineers do not necessarily complain for the fact they are not doing 'real engineering' - they find their ways - I shall only for explaining the variety and the dimensions mention a few if them.

Peter is a classical engineer by life history - son of a craftsman, not very interested in school except in science subjects - leaves school for an apprenticeship - and later finds out that he wants to know more. In the meantime much of his energy was structured by the liberation movements of youth in the early seventies, and he remains an antiauthoritarian person - which is an obstacle to the developments in his work life: He is expected not to be 'tinker technician' but to become a manager or consulting collaborator. His concrete life history in very much influenced from private life and family.

Carsten is a quite young engineer - who chose the profession due to fascination of technical work, and gets employed in a development unit of a market oriented enterprise. However, he appreciates the social aspects of work life, and feels a little lonely in this job, but finds his way in some technical support work, mediating between technical and market organization. In the meanwhile he devotes much energy to private life and local community - and coincidentally a biker club and a Harley Davidson. By the time of the

interview he was oriented to travelling around the world on his bike - work was OK but subordinate.

Lotte enters engineering because of concern with the environment, and after graduation she gets involved in administrative jobs, dealing with environment safeguarding. Like most women in engineering she meets some difficulties, but after a while she is very satisfied with her present job. The content of the job seems to be mainly social, and Lotte feels her original motivation with the engineering fulfilled - though the technical content of the job seems to be very modest. She likes to work in dialogue with the people she has to control.

The vanishing positive background for the 'real engineering' takes the engineers in different directions. One might say that the way of handling it is digressive in the sense that they tend to dislocate their interest from the profession and the technical qualification in it - it is problematic to say in which sense the ways engineers find their way is also producing a new professional identity. Maybe the complexity and differentiation has since long made it impossible to define this dialectic relation between basic knowledge base and profession, and individual experience and career. The historical-normative reference is definitely not able to organize learning processes for a professional identity - the question is there is one. Lotte seems more than the others on track to a new professional identity by integrating a professional responsibility with her own political or civil involvement. Her identification with the opportunities of the profession in a moral or political context seems to organize her professional learning in everyday work..

Theoretical approaches - The Identity Concept

I will explore a little further this very problematic and yet unavoidable key concept, the concept of *identity* by exploring the somewhat ambivalent grounding of the notion. This notion of identity has been used to signify the subjective component of a structural nexus of the work society (mutually interrelated structures and processes). Let us assume that it is only a preliminary and indicative concept, covering a contradictory and dynamic subjective process, coping with a contradictory and complex reality of the societal work.

The everyday language of identity assumes a successful accordance between a coherent individual and a social reality (incl work) which is at least from the point of view of the individual, integral. This is of course in many respects an ideological and false perception. Especially for adult education it removes the potential for understanding the dynamics of learning as a result of the dynamic and conflictual interaction with reality, performed by a subject with its own inner dynamics and conflicts.

Why speak about 'work identity' when it seems awkward to our interest? - Mainly exactly because it is *ideological in a Marxist sense*: It delimits the right problem in a wrong way that is produced by real human practice. So a critical elaboration of it may serve a theory building purpose.

The best - though not unproblematic - point of departure I found in Ute Volmerg's proposal for a social psychology of work (or may be '..of Labour'?) based on a synthesis of Marxist concepts of capitalism and psychoanalytic theory of socialization. Her key concept is the notion of 'identity'. It goes directly for a theoretical synthesis of a framework for empirical interpretation, and it has at least in Denmark also been broadly used in empirical research on labour processes.

On the one side Ute Volmerg develops a conception of basic socialization as a production of identity. On the other side she examines, how capitalist wage labour in its societal and concrete material forms disturbs and threatens this identity. In relation to work the identity once produced becomes a psychic ballast, that can be mobilized against pressures from wage labour in adulthood.

The concrete quality of Wage labour processes is analysed in three dimensions defined by the producers relation to his product (Disposition), relation to other producers (Cooperation) and the relation to him-/herself as human labour (Qualification) - but not directly with the relation to the means of production (machinery, tools), which seems puzzling. Volmerg relates this analysis of labour process forms and characteristics to a basic psychoanalytic model of subjective reactions against pressure, defined in the classic concepts of defence mechanisms. Volmerg herself only refers to (traditional) industrial work, which exposes the poverty and constraints of work. At first you could say that this goes 'too well' with a reductionist marxism. However, industrial work in fordist capitalism is also in real life a type of

'benchmark' for a historical understanding of work processes as well as for the reproduction of labour (cf above) - from which we will have to go deeper into the contradictions and qualitative developments in work.

The identity concept refers to Erikson's cultural psychology theory of the identity, however with a couple of fundamental critical reservations:

First, she criticizes Erikson for assuming that the mediation between drive and societal conditions succeeds - that the individual is not exposed to insoluble strains. Instead of this optimistic (American) assumption, Volmerg assumes a contradictory socialization and sees the social reality as a source of psychic strains. She thus reserves it for the empirical analyse to examine, whether and when industrial work transcends the range of possible adaptation, or - in her own empirical cases - the identity is able to defend itself against the strains - using the defence mechanisms, and with the consequent forming influence on work behaviour and consciousness.

Second, the cultural theorist Erikson falls back on biological black box-explanation on the genesis of it all - how the ability of the individual to develop through crises is innately present, before society comes in and becomes the lucid condition of socialization.

As an alternative frame of understanding Volmerg refers to Lorenzer's materialist, though not biologically reductive, theory of socialization (Lorenzer, 1972): The biological development and the (necessary) social interaction around the needs of the child gradually produces the individual subjectivity. The Mother-Child-Dyade is the first 'common subject' for this production of patterns of practice. Later, through the gradual separation of the child from the mother, the interaction becomes the production process of the *interaction patterns* of the child and acquisition of language. Or: Through the separation and the interaction with physical and social reality the child gradually build up its individual subjectivity. Subjectivity in this theory is a societally produced, culturally mediated way of coping, which is specific for each individual. Contradictions of societal structure are built into a systematically contradictory, though individual, subjectivity. In opposition to Erikson's cultural concept of society, leaning on Lorenzer's very basic definition of the material character of the social, Volmerg sees the societal work as the basic identity building factor, in the mediated form in which it appears in the interaction of the individual child with its primary rela-

tives/relation persons. When the individual later interact with and in work, he/she draws on interaction patterns produced in the early socialization.

So we have at least an outline of a psychoanalytic psychology of work, which specifies human labour as a produced subject, and work as a societal reality. I have some reservations against the theory, which go together with the limitations in the definition of the work processes mentioned above. Work and its subjective quality is simply too one dimensionally linked to a 'frozen' picture of industrial work and wage labour.

With Lorenzer Volmerg assumes that socialization is incorporating all societal contradictions. But the successful establishment of 'identity' seems to be a 'psychological food package', a resource which enables each individual to resist and stand strains in industrial work. While Volmerg criticizes Erikson for separating the individual and society, she herself in practice sees the (early) socialization as building this food package, and fails to examine whether work might later contribute to an identity production. Her focus in the study of work experience is on the identity threats exerted by industrial work.

It must not necessarily be quite wrong. It is a consequence of capitalist societal structure, that each individual must be fully produced, ready for use, to be transferable in the labour market. And industrial work in practical terms is often identity threatening in its form. So the picture has a truth. However, critical theory should not (only) be a fixative which elucidates and preserves this epochal picture of the relation work identity/industrial work. It must conceive how individual subjects and societal work is produced by each others, and detect the historical genesis and changeability of this interaction. Identity is a delimitation of a field of interaction and conflict. Societal displacements and shifts on the one side, and individual life histories, with their experiences of society, are different registers and rhythms. But identity must be conceived as a field for an ongoing production of subjectivity.

Contradiction and Ambivalence

Lorenzer's theory of socialization see the individual psychological development as an acquisition of an individual variant of society and culture, a concrete mediation of societal structures and contradictions in subjective orientations and meanings - in this perspective 'identity' makes sense as an indi-

vidual ability to (re)produce and differentiate this subjective experience in relating to the actual reality and its new phenomena. In this context you could see the work subjectivity as an ongoing elaboration and modification of the individual way of interpreting the world, coping with contradictions - instead of seeing identity as a finished platform from which you can fight against the enemies in the social milieu can be fought. It is essential that the subjective meanings acquired are links between a real life course event, the individual's (bodily and emotional) relation to it, and collective/cultural meanings attached to it. Language is essential - the relation between discursive language, symbols and individual experiences form the dynamic potential for experience and learning throughout life, and are them selves reorganized..

Ute Volmerg does elucidate also the active, subjective shaping of the work reality in concrete work processes, but mainly under the perspective that it shows the active maintenance of the identity by the Ego, i.e. as an appearance of (pro-active) defence mechanisms. This analysis has little sensitivity to possible identity production in the work experience - it seems more healthy not to work.

Other and later works based on the combination of psychoanalytic and Marxist theory are more differentiated in the analysis of the interaction between societal contradictions and and subjective conflicts and meanings (Becker-Schmidt et al 1984, Morgenroth 1990). Analysing the relation of unemployed people to work Christine Morgenroth focuses distinctly on the loss of work in the sense of an object relation theory. The absent work seems to acquire the psychological status of a love object you have lost. But its subjective quality is ambivalent, connected with the contradictory societal status of work: On the one side the experience of being liberated from a work that was in fact not very good, on the other side the sudden exposition of its meaning in the social identity. Regina Becker-Schmidt et al researched the subjective relation to work of female industrial workers - especially the double work as house wives and workers in industrial jobs with lousy conditions and very limited space for subjective action. This analysis assigns work a much more complex and multiple meaning, without in any way to idealize the industrial work. On the one side it analyses the concrete and societal contradictions in work, focussing on the experience of time. On the other side it searches traces of subjective conflicts of meaning - ambitudencies and ambivalences - in the way of handling these conditions

of every day life. Objective contradictions are mediated through their subjective meaning. Ambitendency and ambivalence are rooted in objective contradictions.

The theoretical point in these modifications is - beside the analytical differentiation - that it opens up the concepts to the complexity and changeability of real history. On the one side a life history dimension - subjective meanings must be interpreted as possessions through life history, that are structured by initial socialization, but are also dynamic potentials throughout life - or in this context: Learning potentials. On the other side to study the objective dynamic in its own right - an open examination of the new developments of work, and the subjective appreciation of objective trends.

If we go back to the critical comments to Volmerg's work process analyses, they left out the identity producing and hence also learning potential of the work process - which seemed plausible because of the poverty of this work. In Volmerg's cases we see an identity interpretation of a work relation which is similar to the instrumentalism thesis of Industrial Sociology. However, f.i. Becker-Schmidt et al show the subjective meaning for the workers of even lousy work. Alheit/Dausien have in a broader context shown the central role of work in (auto)biographies of workers (1985). The question - related to transformations of work - is of course: How is the contribution of work to identity influenced by more fundamental changes in the quality of work?

The preliminary answer must be: Work is one of the essential activities in which the work capacity and the capacities in general of the individual is produced, enhanced and developed. Each of the subjectively meaningful experiences in work has aspects of threat, aspects of consolidation, and aspects of learning. The identity process comprehends them all.

This should - and could with the opening inspired by Becker-Schmidt et al - however be correlated with the question of the potential developments of work processes and societal work in general. If we want to find out the part of the workers and of learning in shaping the objective work process - say societal alternatives at large - we have to connect the identity concept with the learning potential. The 'General Qualification' model mentioned above is intending to do this - connecting on the one side the competence needs set by societal, technological developments as such and on the other side the subjective capacity building which is united by an identity process. The

dimensions of work processes developed by Ute Volmerg, that characterize the very limiting qualities of industrial work, could of course also be used to characterize the changes in work taking place after the post-fordist turn, the growth in service sectors, and the development of new product qualities.

Expert knowledge - having been an instrumentalized and reified vehicle of capitalist modernization and social control - may now be positioned in a context of modernization and democracy. It depends on the politicization of work, and on the learning processes of professional workers.

But we need a theory which can search for and contain a learning aspect as well as an active and shaping involvement in work. We need to include a more anticipating aspect in the concept of identity, a concept like *self regulation* could be such a complementary or comprehending perspective. The development of new types of work could be examined in the perspective of their potentials for learning, and the subjective involvement in the perspective of enhanced self regulation. *Self regulation* may have a voluntaristic connotation, or it may be perceived as a regulation within and controlled by a capitalist structure. The intention on the contrary is to emphasize the utopian and dynamic perspective involved in a learning process³. New types of work have new potentials, but there is of course no automatique in this learning process. The defence mechanisms observed by Ute Volmerg as very limited versions of self regulation in a specific and extremely blocked version of work, related historically to the traditional fordist industry. What we need is a critical-reflexive theory, mainly oriented to study knowledge and professional practice in an experiential context. It goes about validities of knowledge, producing alternative conceptions and images from the 'unlived actions' of everyday practice. In other words, it must sort out learning potentials in everyday practice and help communicate them.

³ Negt and Kluge (1981) have offered a link back to a critical acquisition of marxist theory with the concept of Political Economy of Labour. They analyze comprehensively the evolutionary and civilisation history of the development of human labour as a collective learning process, developing the quality and level of self regulation, which is the real core element in economy and society. And they position this theoretical outline as a critical theory of societal development complementary to the marxian concept Political Economy of Capital. I have elaborated a little on this theoretical aspect in (Salling Olesen 1999).

Collective Experience and Institutional Discourse - A Subject-Object Dialectic

Let us try briefly and preliminarily to apply these concepts on professional identity. I think we could see the identity *process* as an ongoing concern of the professional in a field with two main *objective* elements: The practice of his/her work, with its more or less contradictory and coercive conditions, and with social interactions with other people (colleagues and clients), missions and changes to which the professional has to and wants to relate. And a cultural institution consisting of the profession as an institution (with legal or moral bands) and a professional discourse (academic or habitual). Having simplified this way it's clear that those objective conditions are historically twisted. In this field he/she has to define him/herself as an acting and able professional, adapting to the profession, solving the work tasks. I would then be looking for the subjective dynamic in this orientation as a possible learning process, enabling more self regulation. It is a process in history - the field is there in its own right and it changes, and the discourse and institutional context is historically variable. The specifically interesting for us is to find out how the existence of these cultural circumstances influence the way in which the professional defines and handles the practical challenges of this field. And on the other side how his or her way of learning from social practice produces and reproduces the profession as a social institution and discursive knowledge base. The theoretical point would be that this life history is the framework and his life experience the base of his identity process. A life history *approach* applies in order to 'see the social institutions and discourses from below and in social practice' - but also in order to see the subjective contribution of the learning persons to the profession and its development. This is quite simple, yet I think it has fundamental implications, that could be specified in relation to well known, important theoretical positions.

Let us for a moment go back to the case of Vibeke. By content her professional identity is relating to a normative definition of the core of the teachers work: The solid teaching in school subjects. This profession model can be identified as one out of two dominant profession definitions of teachers, that have accompanied the modernization of school. The other one is an academically based technical definition of a pedagogue. During a historical process where teachers have lost their traditional aura, and have resigned from the personification of moral and cultural values, teacher have (had to)

become professional pedagogues or competent subject teachers. It seems likely that this professional identity has organized a great endeavour and a strong involvement in teaching in the case of Vibeke - and probably still do in spite of her feeling of inclining difficulties. This identity has been in accordance with a specific school and situation, but has left her more vulnerable to 'social work aspects' of education and to changes in the tasks. Her professional identity has guided and encouraged her, but also restricted her learning potential. The way she now see the pupils as increasingly problematic indicate an exclusive aspect of this discourse. You could see this double sided quality in line with a Foucault-inspired discussion of the professionalization of education like Popkewitz&Simola (1996). Beside the critical quality of a foucauldian approach, which reveals the repressive aspects of discourses, and the specific social interest constellation behind in this case Finnish academization of education, Popkewitz and Simola also have an awareness of the empowering aspects. This is not just a triviality - we do know of alternatives to professionalization of teaching when traditional structures of moral and cultural fail: dissolution and anomia, or authoritarian mechanisms. So the professionalization as en empowerment is highly political, and depend on the learning process of teachers.

The discourse of teaching and teacher identity seems to be an obstacle to meeting new demands. But let us look at the subjective side. A subject oriented definition of teaching is also way of handling the modern loss of auratic status of the teacher and the school. For Vibeke it is synthesized with the life history identification with her father who was a role model very similar to the 'traditional' teacher - a personalization of thirst for knowledge and a caring authority - and the professional devotion to subjects becomes a legitimate position which enables a shield against a generally excessive burden on a teachers consciousness, that is becoming impossible for Vibeke with the shift in her own family situation. To depart from the ambitions of being a personally involved teacher would not be bearable - to realize that the new duty regulation and the new quality of children does not allow her to reach her ideal teacher's image is more bearable. Vibeke's explanation is clearly one of defence - not against any management demand or formal requirement, but against her own demand on herself. There is a vision or a utopian drive inherited in the professional identity, against which Vibeke has to defend her position - exactly when she resigns in her professional self definition.

The amalgamation between loving and caring father, 'literate worker', and school subjects could possibly have been differentiated by class, history, relation etc - and then something else might have happened. We do not know enough to evaluate it, but we may interpret that right now Vibeke needs to get relieved of some burdens or feeling of responsibility, that she might have taken up in another situation of her life.

The relation of the individual to developments in work, to learning and to continuing education is deeply interwoven in meaning universes of life history. Ambivalences and the tension between defence reactions and learning potentials are interwoven with meanings of life history, which may assign specific meanings to the experience. This is the subjective dynamic of identity.

Volmerg's way of theorizing the life history dimension of identity as a competence to defend against strains of the work, commented earlier, had the quality to establish an analytical link between objective qualities of industrial work, and identity processes, however leaving little space for learning and identity production in work. A similar quality you find in a theoretical approach to organization psychology in human service work (i.e. hospitals, see Menzies Lyth, 1988). It focuses on the life history link between early and fundamental anxiety, and the routines and bureaucracies of a hospital, providing a social psychological dimension beyond the formal rationality of the organization. The organization is seen as a social accomodation against these fundamental anxieties. Also this approach, I think, excludes the potential for learning and identity development in work - which are crucial to the them as professionals.

In a life history approach I would focus more on the ambivalences of the practical consciousness in everyday work life, resulting from contradictory conditions and the heavy involvement of the worker in it. This is particularly so when the work consists of a direct interaction with the 'object of the work task', as is the case in all human services - and often includes heavy emotional burdens and/or dissatisfying conditions to solve the tasks. Such a situation produces a practical consciousness, rooted in psychodynamic processes - I call it everyday life consciousness (Salling Olesen, 1989, referring to Leithäuser). It is a practical consciousness closely connected with social practice - and its relation to professional discourses and academic knowledge bases is mediated through individual and collective de-

fence mechanisms. So professional identity might be seen as a participation in a collective defence mechanism. However, as such it is a synthesis of practical experience, action paradigms, latent awareness of unsolved problems, and may be embryonic utopian ideas. In a professional field routinized practices tend to neglect or 'forget' more or less recognized failures and sub-optimal solutions. However, if they are supported by a 'conservative' defence we may assume that this defence also refers to a subjective experience of suffering - which is, mutatis mutandis, the potential for learning and identity process.

A life history approach to professional learning provides one way - among others - to enter into the historical and subjective process of professions' crossroads of development, with the implications drawn in the introduction of this paper.

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12. Henning Salling Olesen
Professional Identity as Learning Processes in Life Histories



The Life History Project at Roskilde University is a long term research project, dealing with the importance of life history and everyday life for participation and learning in adult education. The project combines current European theoretical discourse on work, gender, adulthood and learning with a broad scope of empirical experience. The project is mainly funded by the Danish Research Council for the Humanities.

Departing from recent developments in Sociology of Knowledge which emphasizes the social embeddedness of knowledge production the papers point out professions as a key societal domain for the study of the subjective and dynamic aspects of the (re)production of knowledge discourses in social life. On the background of ongoing research into learning and professional identity within a number of professions (engineers, social workers, teachers, nurses etc) the papers offers a life history approach to the examination of professional identities as the individual and collective subjectivity of societal knowledge - and so also an pivotal for democracy in a knowledge based society.

The paper has been presented at the conference of ESREAs Biography and Life History Research Network in March 2000, and a brief version will be presented at the Working Knowledge Conference in Sydney December 2000.



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09/17/2003 01:59 PM

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