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Learning, Work, and Language Games

Kirsten Weber[*]

Abstract: *»Lernen, Arbeit und Sprachspiele«*. The article provides an example of psycho-societal analysis of work related learning. Initially a conceptual framework of learning and life experience is established drawing on Alfred Lorenzer and Oskar Negt, and the interactional development of psychoanalysis. A case of learning experience from research into a retraining program for unskilled workers, exposing a very conflictual subjective experience of a traineeship, is presented and commented. The worker's experience is interpreted focusing on the gender aspects of the conflicts, seeing the learning process in the context of a work identity process, which is related to a career shift enforced by labor market transition requiring male workers to retrain for a social work profession which used to be female, and more widely to a reconfiguration of the societal relation between work and gender. The final section discusses the methodological framework for analyzing learning processes by means of interpreting language use. The notion of language game connects the level of unconscious social engagements and level of formal learning and knowledge, and the opportunity for a deeper understanding of professional learning and identity is indicated by reference to one more example.

Keywords: learning, experience, subjectivity, language game, language use, professional identity, gender relations, career shift, psycho-societal.

1. Learning and Experience

Alfred Lorenzer's theory of socialization and his understanding of the role of linguistic symbolization of life experience have opened new paths for the qualitative research of everyday life. Traditional theoretical dichotomies between body and mind and between individual and society can be overcome when theorizing the societal nature of the individual psyche and the unconscious dimensions of societal agency in one integrated framework. The basic idea is that conscious as well as unconscious dimensions of subjectivity are produced in social interaction, and – though embodied – they are reproduced and changed throughout the life course in communication and social practice. The

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path-breaking consequence is that subjectivity can be studied empirically in the language use of everyday life (Salling Olesen and Weber 2012). These ideas enable new and more comprehensive conceptual frameworks and new methodological approaches in several research fields which have little to do with psychoanalysis in the first place. Conversely, it means that the empirical study of social phenomena in their diversity can add to a historical and material understanding of subjectivity.

In a research group at Roskilde University this inspiration has formed the methodological backbone of empirical research into learning and work life, in which subjective work identities and learning in everyday life are studied in their societal context. Our research is basically seeking to develop this approach into a critical social scientific approach to learning, in opposition to normative traditions in the discipline of education on the one hand, and individualized understanding of learning processes in empirical learning studies on the other hand. We call it a life history approach because learning is conceptualized as moments in individual life courses and subjective life experience. We have found important inspiration in Alfred Lorenzer's socialization theory (1972) and his in-depth hermeneutic cultural analysis (1986).

I shall briefly outline how learning can be theorized in terms of life experience and language, connecting to Lorenzer's theoretical framework. After that I will present an example on the type of interpretation of interview material we are doing. We theorize learning in the context of the subjective life history and its relation to a specific historical reality by adopting a concept of *experience* developed by the Frankfurt School tradition of critical theory (Negt 2001). "Experience is a *subjective* process. ... [It is] also a *collective* process ... through a socially structured consciousness ... finally an *active, critical and creative* process ..." (Salling Olesen 1989, 8). Interesting here is the dialectic between established collective experience (a more or less hegemonic world view in the culture/community) and the multiple subjective experiences of individuals. In Oskar Negt's work on workers' political education (1971) his central point was that the labor movement had neglected the experiential nature of learning, and had thus failed to address the everyday life experience of (contemporary) workers. Learning is a progressive process, which establishes a (dialectic) connection between such collective cultural experiences and individual everyday experience, making meaning of specific perceptions, changing social practices, and constituting an individual subject in doing so (Salling Olesen 2007a). The outcome of learning processes may be located at different levels related to the learner subject: It may be elements of knowledge, skills, or changes in a person's identity – and if talking about a collective subject: the collective experience of a group or an organization.

Lorenzer's theory of socialization is interactional, in line with the revisionist development of psychoanalysis (Ferenczi 1972 [1926]; Belgrad, Görlich, König and Noerr 1987) According to Lorenzer, the first psychic patterns, *inter-*

action forms, are practices and experiences of the early interaction between the infant and caretakers. They are preverbal but in the next phase infants establish the competence to symbolize: to connect the interaction forms with linguistic entities – words – and thereby the wider cultural horizon of meaning. By symbolization the individual obtains a capacity for reflecting his/her own feelings and practice, i.e. consider them independent from the situation and relations in which they were experienced in the first place. The interaction forms, which are in this conception entirely based in interaction experiences, are part of the symbol and its meaning. Symbolization is however also a reversible process – a de-symbolization, i.e. a loss of a once acquired symbolic connection, may take place as result of threatening or painful experiences or expectations. In that case the emotional patterns (interaction forms) remain active and may influence consciousness and learning in other ways.

For learning research the reversibility of the relation and the dynamic is important, but also the fact that earlier life experiences, emotional engagement and patterns of interaction may play a role in adult life, either it is symbolized, i.e. accessible to reflection, or it is not. It means that Lorenzer establishes a link between the level of communication, interaction and learning that is entirely conscious and socially acknowledged in the forms of language use, knowledge and societal practices, and the level which is embodied and situated and carries a long memory of important interactions and relations in the individual's life history – including the expectations and hopes that have been giving sense to past and present practices. Language plays a significant role in the institutional sedimentation of knowledge (knowledge, school subjects, scientific disciplines) – and hence also in learning processes. The perspective in working with language use is partly methodological – we want to be able to understand learning by studying language use in everyday life situations – and partly theoretical – we want to understand the significance of language in learning. Lorenzer adopts Wittgenstein's pragmatic theory of language use where language must be investigated in its specific practice, *the language games* – of which innumerable, similar versions exist in social reality. Any word possesses a number of potential meanings, depending on the context – the use, the habit, the life form that it is embedded in determines its meaning.

Wittgenstein (1953) explicitly defines language use as "public" as opposed to private or individual. This paradoxical definition of the language game – that it emerges only socially and functionally, reproducing culture by means of individual subjective (in the Wittgensteinian dichotomy: private) language use – makes the concept relevant in any research that acknowledges the societal production of subjectivity alongside the unique nature of any subject. Wittgenstein states that language and language games are learned during the life course, that the child in turn habituates itself to the relevant games, and that language games are subject to historical change, but his interest is not in the process

aspect – neither the learning of the individual language user nor the changes of the game. He takes language for given, at the disposition of users.

On this background Lorenzer's application of this concept fills a conceptual void by the theory of symbolization which relates language games to preverbal experiences – the interaction forms – and not least theorizing the dynamics between them. Learning research is particularly interested in how the language use embraces not only referential meanings but are part of situations and social practices with all their social contradictions and ambiguities, and expresses conscious and unconscious subjective engagements, including their ambivalences. On the one hand they represent the emotional and relational dynamic in learning processes, on the other hand because they represent the coupling between individual learning processes and societal or cultural reproduction.

2. Shift in the Labor Market – An Individual Learning Experience

In order to give a direct illustration and reference I will present some interpretations from a quite typical project in the life history project. The material comes from an evaluation research project which monitored a labor market related training program offering unemployed workers training for social work. The two researchers made desktop research on the structural and local circumstances, observed some of the training, and then conducted detailed qualitative interviews with a small sample of the participants (Nielsen and Weber 1997). The text is about learning in a trainee period in social work in a training program. It can be read as an exemplary case within a comprehensive body of texts produced by people in similar situations of societal transformation. The text is a product of a thematic group discussion inspired by Lorenzer (1986; see also Leithäuser and Volmerg 1988), which is more or less similar to focus groups with a particular theme chosen on the basis of a preliminary understanding of the conflicts and challenges the discussion group was exposed to. In the life history project we have also carried out different forms of data production – individual biographical (narrative) interviews, group interviews and thematic group discussions. The interviews or discussions are usually audio-recorded and transcribed, and afterwards interpreted. In the interpretation procedure we seek to take an open-minded and imaginative attitude in order to understand the interview persons. At the same time, we also seek to mobilize all our background acquired knowledge and our multiple and shifting imaginaries. Even when motivation appears one-sided, and when societal demands are well defined, (for example in a labor market training facilitating new employment for the individual), the subjective enterprise of learning is a complex one. Let me give an illustration.

Teddy, one of the participants in this program, is a skilled carpenter, who has been out of a job for a couple of years. "Construction business is down" he relates pragmatically – so now he is training for the job that is available, one as a social assistant in the local hospital, looking after mental patients in the psychiatric wards. Contributing to the evaluation of the training in a group discussion – thematized on the subjective ups and downs of the learning processes – he describes his practical training as follows (Nielsen and Weber 1997, 88ff.):

> There were quite a few of us who had clashes with the wards, as it is, because they came along and expected things to be done the way we had been taught, or even just the way they felt like, themselves. And then along come the others who say, well we've always done things like this, you know. Take the laundry, just an example. Where I was, the laundry was clearly of a higher importance than the patients. And then I said, like, that goddamn laundry, it's of no bloody importance. Let's go on out for a walk, shall we! [But] it is not [allowed] until the laundry has been looked after, not up there, it isn't! And so I had a clash with them, because I said 'That laundry, it doesn't matter shit! We can look after that when we come back, can't we!' That's what I mean.[1]

Further he says:

> I think that, what really annoys me, that is that the theory that we learn out here, that's how things should be, isn't it. And then, when we come into the wards [in the practical training, KW] then there just isn't time for it. That is something that really, really annoys me. And, well, you know, it's probably also that a man has some kind of a conscience, or whatever it is. And theory that really is an issue and they ... I mean, we really do learn a lot here. And so it's just a pity, that out in the wards ... they tell us that we can go out and change things for the better. But that is really hard when you are a trainee, when you have problems getting listened too ... being a man and all... and yet, I do feel that it is really very, very wrong, according to theory, so, so I do think it's a bit much that they just send us here, and tell us that it is our problem ... instead of actually teaching those things also, around it.

This excerpt is an illustrative text, which has been selected because it seems to be a rich and interesting, and the same time is quite typical. We read it in steps of interpretation: First for its referential information, its realistic reference to situations and its communication to the readers who belong to the same civilization *what this is about*. We proceed to register *how* the text communicates, how it signifies importance, positive or negative connotations and emotions, and thirdly we *confront these two readings*. Thus we not only challenge our own understanding of the referential level of the text – we may be uninformed, we may be intrigued – but we also confront the immanent meaning of the text in both the logic and the emotional dimensions with our own analytic and empathic understanding. We may finally be able to put the question *"why"* Teddy

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[1] This quote and the following I translated from a Danish transcript.

talks in this way about these things – and at least tentatively grasp his deeply personal, yet exemplary historical experience.

On the referential level these passages tell about a well-known conflict between newcomers in a workplace and the workplace routines. Teddy speaks on behalf of the trainees in the hospital wards, and argues that their newly gained knowledge from the theoretical part of the training and the needs of the patients – e.g. to come out for a walk – is clashing against the "way we've always done things." In the next passage we see another configuration of conflict, between "theory," "what we've learned," how things "should be," "having a conscience" versus practice, what there is (not) time for and (implicit allegation) not having a conscience. In this latter passage Teddy becomes explicit in his reference to the duty of changing things for the better and listening to problems – arising from his (implicit) double deviance from staff: a male trainee! – and finally blames the education, the training program as such for not teaching him and his mates the "things around it." The logic of the paragraph is again easy to understand. The work place environment blocks the trainees' possibility to use their professional competences. This is a culturally accepted picture. As readers we also recognize the hierarchical workplace and the idiosyncrasies of the tenure staff.

Our analysis proceeds to ask "how" Teddy is talking: The reference to the agents of the conflict is peculiarly blurred. Though Teddy is logically part of the "we" of male trainees, up against the "them," the staff, this is not immediately visible in the text. "A few of *us*" are the "*they*" of the following sentence, then again "we" in "the way *we*'d been taught," finally becoming "they" in the way they felt like "*themselves*." Teddy's sympathies are represented through the conflict of other members of his group. The tenure staff is verbally "the others," the laundry (important to "them") and finally "I" had a clash over that. Besides it should be observed that the "us" in "Let's go for a walk" refers to Teddy and *the patients*.

In the second paragraph the antagonism is between the theory, represented by Teddy, and the wards and its scarcity of time. Teddy clearly identifies with "theory" (how it should be, having a conscience, really an issue) against the "very, very wrong" practice – which is "a pity" that has proved "hard" to face, that has caused "problems being listened to." Aggression becomes directed against a new "they," namely those who have been teaching him: he moves from "we learn" via the split "they – I mean we really learn a lot here" to "they tell us we can go ...," "they send us here," and they "tell us it is our problem." His position is martyr-like, he is the cannon fodder in the war between professional standards and reality. The good will of Teddy and his mates are consistently signaled in the text: They "came along," they felt things "themselves," Teddy himself heatedly suggested the activity of walking – thus triggering off the institutional power of the department, administered by the nursing staff, whose reaction was the almost parental "not until"! Action versus passive

laundry routine, qualification versus power, humane involvement versus petty housewifely routine, parental professional authority against the not-so-young pupil or rebel! However "manly" this conflict is sketched, it is finally "being a man and all" that sums up the *powerlessness* of the experience. The emotional involvement is obvious in different ways. Firstly – when talking about the laundry – Teddy swears. The laundry (a clinical problem of hygiene) is an absurd formality, almost an act directed against the patients so Teddy's defamation of it, the "goddamn" laundry is clearly also directed against the female staff, it is – also – the staff who is "of no bloody importance," who "doesn't matter shit!." Secondly, when talking about theory, Teddy stumbles over the words, he repeats the words signaling his involvement: "really annoys me," "really, really annoys me," "really hard," "really very, very wrong" – the blame on the teaching authorities being slightly more balanced: what they do is "a bit much."

3.   Work and Gender – Interpretation

We do not see Teddy's line of argument as primarily driven by the workplace relation of a newcomer. The emotional engagement together with a changing use in personal pronouns make us look out for engagements, most likely unconscious, which try to come forward to be articulated, and influences his orientations. We could see the shifting pronouns as a search for a position in the work place, may be a "we," but he only defines it negatively, by its many opponent positions. The gender dimension seems more obvious. It surfaces now and then in the text. During the school based education we had observed a substantial resistance and distance between the predominantly male unskilled workers who attended the course and the predominantly female middle class professionals who were the teachers in the course. We had preliminarily related this gender conflict to the fact that most of the participants were not attending by choice or by strong motivation for education, but because it was an offer you could not refuse when receiving unemployment benefit. We had noticed aggressive comments about the teachers, sometimes actually in sexist categories, but this might substitute anything else in a male group. But Teddy now relates his workplace difficulty with being a man, i.e. a minority or subordinate. We may, referring to Lorenzer's notions, see this shifting gender articulation as a result of an ongoing dissolution of the symbolized interaction forms related to gender, which at first are intact as a collective reference in the male group, but become more problematic during the education, while at the same time a new language game of the marginal male emerges. Interesting is his relation to professional knowledge. He first identifies with a position as lay and common sense, empathic newcomer, sensitive to the patients, but having to subordinate under a (professional?) workplace regime. Later he defines his own position as

the one of bringing theoretical knowledge and professional standards, acquired in the formal education, into the work situation.

Let us trace his positions in the somewhat over-dramatized example of *the laundry* in this perspective: Culturally laundry is a woman's domain, but in hospitals laundry is an issue of hygiene – a task that should immediately be attended to for risk of infection and represented by nursing staff, in whose profession it is a historical core. That is something Teddy should have learned from his supervisors, but Teddy obviously does not hold it in high esteem. Actually, Teddy did learn something to this effect earlier – when, for identical reasons, he refused to give time priority to changing the bandage of an old lady's leg when he was practicing in district health and being taught by the district nurse. Teddy thought the *lady* in question was more in need of a chat, and he failed to recognize her clinical "*patient's* needs." So the laundry consistently represents an otherwise plausible conflict between meeting clinical or psychological and social needs.

As pointed to above the laundry is a woman's thing – which Teddy, the man, puts himself above. But in his arguments he takes the position of the responsible professional, who – in the interest of the patients and on the basis of his education – wants to do things differently and better in the workplace. We can see this – new – positioning as a displacement of his craftsman identity as a carpenter, who also knows about and stands up for quality in work performance. Paradoxically, this positioning leads him to fight the enemy with her own weapons. The communicative and empathic qualities, that Teddy wants to install, culturally speaking belong to a traditional female repertoire – but speaks for it in the name of professional quality. Becoming like (the female) staff is threatening, and this is what Teddy's emotional enterprise is about, only he must make them part of himself, not just do like the woman – let alone blankly accept her instructions. It is a subjectively necessary detour.

When we combine the questions into "*how* is Teddy talking *about what*," his sympathies are signaled in the personal pronouns of the text: He attaches to his peer-group of fellow trainees, to the patients *and* to the authority of theoretical expertise – i.e. to one group which he currently is *equal to*, one which he is currently *above* and one which he is currently *subordinate to*, respectively. He distances himself from the staff – which is the position he is about to take himself. These orientations may be analyzed as steps in an identification-process – and the conflict thus as the core of his learning potential. Teddy is with resistance and some ambivalences identifying with the professional role in the institution.

We can see the individual identification process in the context of a societal reconfiguration of the relation between gender and work. Teddy is a traditional male worker who is being trained to a (traditionally female) occupation. The skilled worker's work identity as a craftsman and bread-winner is a subjective state in individuals and a dynamic societal prerequisite even in present late

modern societies – as empirically researched by e.g. Willis (1977), Brock (1987, 1990) and Weber (1996). It is a cornerstone in the societal gender system, structurally integrated with the organization of societal labor (Becker-Schmidt and Knapp 1987; Weber 1998) which is rocking here. Post-structural masculinity studies tend to deconstruct the gendered societal order as an essentialist myth (e.g. Connell 1995; Collinson and Hearn 1996) or to analyze it in terms of power relations/hegemony (e.g. Edley and Wetherell 1995) and hereby reveal the historical and changeable nature of the gender relations. Teddy's account in the quotation describes some of the everyday life, subjective experiences of a dynamic and ambivalent process, in which an embodied societal relation of masculinity and work is being challenged by an alternative one. It means that certain learning processes are basically structured by this societal re-molding of (gendered) subjectivity. Some of Teddy's skilled labor standards of quality – a product of his life long, formal and in-formal learning – are an obstacle to his learning in the new workplace. In a psychoanalytic framework identification is a process that develops through approach, imitation, affiliation, fight for possession of the desired object and finally internalization of it: a set of positively cathexed ideas that contribute to the consistent experience of self. So we can see the verbalization of the conflict as a representation of the subjective appropriation of the material situation that he lives in. In gender identity terms Teddy's story may be seen in the perspective of masculine identifications moving via autonomy towards intimacy (Nielsen and Rudberg 1994). Only when the object is won and possessed can the balanced realistic interpersonal communication take on board intimacy and empathy, and "relational competence" can be experienced (Weber 1996). The gendered identification process determines, or at least structures his relation to interaction partners in the process and the knowledge and professional standards they represent (in interaction) and/or are assigned (in Teddy's gendered imagination), and thereby the content of the learning process. Some of Teddy's skilled labor standards of quality are an obstacle to his learning – but they are a product of his life long, formal and in-formal learning. Becoming like or becoming "a social assistant" is no "natural" orientation for a skilled worker of Teddy's generation. Accordingly, distinguishing his own feelings of pain and pleasure, his attribution of the sensations to specific elements in the situation, and his attaching the perceptions to more general standards of right and wrong is essential for his ability to learn just the more superficial skills and orientations of the job.

At first glance it is simply a story about troublesome re-training – and about a well-known stereotype in the discourse of adult education, namely that of the adult, skilled male, who is not easily letting go of his well-established craftsman's virtues.

A sociological elaboration of the various conflicts falls without the scope of this article, but none of them are incidental (Salling Olesen and Weber 2001; Filander 2003; Salling Olesen 2005). However, this societal framework is

important in order to understand the nature of his subjective experience. The example deals with over-all structural transformations and shifts in the gendered division of labor in the caring professions, and it demonstrates deeply rooted subjective involvement in transgressing gendered qualities in work and education.

We approach the dynamic of professional learning by looking at the language use in the group discussion. The learning of a new profession involves learning of new practices and discourses. In the interpretation briefly sketched we understand Teddy's conscious and communicative way of dealing with life history experiences and present engagements as ambivalent and dynamic forms of gendered work identity that are mediated by and articulated during his participation in the thematic group situation. In Lorenzer's terms we look for the conscious as well as unconscious meanings of the language game(s) to which the group discussion belongs i.e. reconfigurations of interaction forms that have been symbolized in the traditional masculine work identity. The challenging situation elicits partly defensive actions and splitting in relation to the staff of the hospital, partly attempts to define a new symbolization of work identity by means of the professional responsibility and the theoretical education (Weber 2010). To trace a person's identification with the new profession is probably anticipating a process which is individually still very open. But the unconscious dimensions of this process are not particularly related to Teddy, they are at least basically collective class and work experiences. So the societal framework enables an interpretation of the individual case and this interpretation of an individual account also gives us a better understanding of the nature of the societal transition.

Lorenzer uses the term "in-depth hermeneutics." Our method is also a hermeneutic procedure, but since the point of this interpretation methodology is to inter-relate the psychic and the societal level, and understand both in their own right, it seems more appropriate to use the term psycho-societal interpretation.

4. Researching Learning by Means of Interpreting Language Use

For analysis of learning processes one of the great achievements in the Lorenzerian tradition is that it offers a framework for understanding the practical knowledge and language use in everyday life as a cognitive as well as emotional mediation of societal experiences, and draws attention to the open and contradictory nature of these processes. Lorenzer's dialectic theory of socialization provides the foundation for empirical methods based on theoretically informed interpretation of everyday life language use. Practically we analyze language use in its "frozen form," as transcribed text, which is a research artifact. To further explore strategy for extracting meaning of texts produced in everyday

life, I shall discuss Lorenzer's use of the concept of language game, which he borrows from Wittgenstein, and the developments of this concept which his theory enables.

Everyday life language use is practiced in social situations, often in functional or natural groups in families and work life. Individual patterns of subjectivity will be activated and change in group dynamics in the social context, while individuals and groups administer complex and contradictory situations pragmatically along generally accepted lines – both mediated in language and in action. Interaction is running smoothly on the basis of shared understanding, and there is a close intertwining between agency and language use. Most every day situations comprise simultaneous elements of pleasure and unpleasure embedded in complex situations. An ordinary everyday life requires a certain tolerance of ambivalence, but the automatic confirmation of accepted cultural practices also includes defense mechanisms that reduce anxiety and shield from unpleasure. Some defenses are individual but mostly they are embedded in collective social practices and part of the shared interpretation of the world, established norms etc. Lorenzer's understanding of this culturally active function of the relation between the unconscious and conscious levels of experience and communication has been further developed by Thomas Leithäuser and colleagues. They developed a concept of a specific interplay between individual subjectivity, its activation in groups and the cultural context producing a *consciousness of everyday life* (Leithäuser, Senghaas-Knobloch and Volmerg 1977). The interpretation of psychodynamic aspects of the consciousness building in everyday life provides an important complement to a rationalistic way of understanding cognition and learning, at the same time as it points to the societal genesis of the anxieties and unpleasure that elicit defenses. However it also shows the collective productivity in dealing with them in social life – when we run into questions or problems it may elicit defensive reactions, confirming existing ideas and practices – but it may also contribute to a creative and mostly collective reshaping of consciousness. We have used this concept to understand not only defensive aspects of identity building, but also to understand the dynamics of learning and resistance to learning (Salling Olesen 2007a).

Lorenzer (1977, 30; my translation) adopts the language game concept because it offers the "dialectical unity of language use, life practice, and idea of the world" [*Sprachgebrauch, Lebenspraxis und Weltverständnis*, quoting K.-O. Apel], which can embrace the role of language in the psychoanalytical practice. The fact that language use follows social practice means at the same time that it reveals outlines of unrealized but potential or imagined social agency.

In the first place Lorenzer established his language socialization theory, which forms a bridge between the understanding of the interaction forms as an embodied psychic capacity and its social (interactive) origin and social changeability. His theory operates with models of interaction and equilibrium, which

does not deny biological aspects of development and interaction but integrates them in an interactional framework.

The language game concept gives the possibility to conceptualize the interactive aspect of "interaction forms" in a way which is in line with psychotherapy, namely the possibility to restore an emotional capacity that has been disturbed by a social interaction in the past. But it also broadens the language socialization theory into a theory of social reproduction – a language and culture link to the insights from Marxist theory of society which in Lorenzer's theory formed the societal end of the conceptual bridge. This is in a way the hub for the entire Lorenzer contribution to cultural analysis which he himself developed later. And in the context of learning research it is the starting point for analyzing the dynamics in the cultural reproduction – the individual acquisition of culture and the emotional aspects of cognitive operation.

With Lorenzer's amendments the harmony or the discrepancies between situational language with its special grammatical features, emotional and creative qualities and socially accepted language can be investigated and social patterns of experience can be exposed.

The concept of the language game has been subject to some reservations in other contexts. Its cultural relativism is generally accepted – and even celebrated in an epoch where social science diagnoses post-tradition and postmodern culture and economy. However the implicit *cognitive relativism* of the concept may be disputed. Wittgenstein's new definition of language (1953) is as absolutely relative as was his early one absolutely absolute. In his attempts to define satisfactorily the object of his philosophy, it seems Wittgenstein threw out the baby with the bathwater! However, Lorenzer's application of the language game notion enables a kind of dialectic realism. In the interpretation procedures the development from earlier to the later Wittgenstein can be put into an operational procedure with similar steps of analysis, each one standing on and complementing the previous one. The referential meaning must always be exhausted, the text interpretation procedure sharing the general ambition of psychoanalysis that reality and the orientation towards reality holds first priority in the analysis, second the understanding of language as a formal system qualifies our attention to the original, unorthodox, creative – and often incorrect – language use that opens the meaning of the text. Both these levels, however inadequate if they stand alone, contributes to a qualified wondering and questioning what the text is about and how communication is formed in the specific contexts. Finally the concept of the language game allows us to fully accept the language at work in situations of everyday life, in the case quoted earlier e.g. in the workplace.

These three dimensions of language should all be included in analyzing concrete language use, but the mediating subject and the communication context must be reflected in the analysis. This has a wider methodological consequence: It also takes a researching subject to react to them. The researcher

subject may be able to understand unconscious aspects of the communication by identifying and reflecting his/her own reactions to the language use. The deep hermeneutic interpretation draws on psychoanalytic experience in identifying the mechanisms of transference and counter transference – as necessary elements in analyzing communication in an appropriate way – on the top of the referential, linguistic and pragmatic understanding. Practically, this is a precondition for the use of the transcribed group discussion as empirical material, and in the procedure for interpreting texts in a group.

In the example briefly presented I illustrated how we were able, by attending to the ambiguities in the oral account, to show that the learning of professional knowledge and the relation to the professional work was embedded in a more complex and ambivalent identity process which had both work identity and gender aspects. So interpreting Teddy's shifting engagement in different language games opened a window to the complex subjective meaning of relatively simple learning processes in a retraining situation. In the original analysis (Salling Olesen and Weber 2002) we also indicated a productive aspect of the self-assertiveness of the skilled carpenter when trying to make his way in a new, female occupation. This perspective points very directly to subjective aspects of knowledge in everyday work life. This is a key issue in researching professionals and professional learning. In a study of general practitioners based on transcribed individual interviews we studied professional identities in the medical profession, but the interpretation also revealed how discourses of the profession related to the routines of everyday life provided natural framework understanding of the "necessary" practice, in a way which for the individual doctor could be seen as a defense against the uncomfortable experiences of insufficiency and uncertainty, against the anxiety provoking experience of dealing with life and death. The concurrent relation between the established language games and the institutional organization of work produces a collective closed circuit of practice and consciousness – which then on the other hand formed the framework of discovering situations of learning or just wondering in individual accounts of everyday situations. Analyzing these accounts of experiences which transcends or problematizes the – in this case institutionally given – societal discourse shows how an analysis of the subjective aspects of the language game can be helpful for understanding learning, learning potential and also resistance to learning in everyday life (Salling Olesen 2007b).

So the concept of language game is in fact eminently suitable to grasp the cultural, social and historical relativity of subjectivity, expressed in various kinds of language use, which we research in the social sciences. The context of the language game can be sociologically and societally substantiated. Wittgenstein did not deal much with the societal dimensions of language games. But the concept acknowledges the function of general historical and economic structures alongside the recognition of the role of human beings in the maintenance of structures. It is easily mediated with the concept of "situation" in

everyday life sociology (Lefebvre 1991-2005 [1968/1972]) and on a societal level with sociology of knowledge (see Salling Olesen 2012).

5.   Conclusion

Text based analysis of language use may give new types of insight in workplace learning and the constitution of (individual and collective) professional identities. Specific professional identities may be seen in their dialectic unity of defensive and realistic responses to contradictions and changes, and the potential for learning may be explored in the subjective experience of complex reality instead of normative or instrumental interventions.

   A mostly voluntaristic notion of subjectivity can be replaced by an interactionist theory of the societal production of the subject – the dichotomy of mind and body can be replaced by a theory of the embodying of interaction experiences, and the role of embodied interaction forms in learning and interaction. The way lies open for an empirical study of the way in which societal conditions which are experienced individually gain impact into the subject. And also, *mutatis mutandis*, by adopting the language game notion this concept of subjectivity gains perspective into the social construction of relations in everyday life and thereby how the development of the subject has societal and practical implications – making it a fundamentally political action and learning oriented theory.

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