

## **Teaching in Motion**

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### **Abstract**

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*Many countries are currently attempting to raise their educational level in order to meet the demands of the knowledge society.*

*The aim of the Danish pedagogical project “Teaching in Motion” is to give young men in their twenties a second chance to pass their secondary school exams so that they can afterwards enter into youth education.*

*Among other things, the research carried out in association with this project focuses on the connection between students’ previous experience of school and education and their reactions to and levels of engagement with the project. Moreover, the research deals with the ways in which the project contributes to the students’ biographical learning.*

*The conclusions point in the direction of a clear link between the students’ former school experience and their involvement with the project in the sense that students who have positive experience from previous educational contexts are easy to involve and engage in further educational processes.*

*Regarding the methodology employed, quantitative and qualitative aspects have been combined. For instance, life-historical interviews have been carried out with selected students, inspired by the model proposed by Horsdal (2012).*

*The theoretical foundations are inspired by learning theory, hereby including partly life-biography theory, for instance Alheit (1995), Alheit & Dausien (2002), partly the transformative learning of Mezirow (1978; 1991) and partly the social theory of learning (Wenger, 1999).*

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**Keywords:** Young men, education and life-biography

### **Introduction**

Today, many countries are attempting to raise their educational level in order to meet the demands of the knowledge society. The labour market for unskilled workers has decreased and is expected to decrease even further in the future. In Denmark, a third of all unskilled jobs have disappeared over the past twenty years. Especially young men are facing significant challenges in the present situation. Unskilled jobs within the industrial sector, the construction market and transport industry are disappearing or have become outsourced. Alongside this development, fewer young men than women are entering youth education.

Contributing to the existing labour market with its particular demands is one important aim, but adult education also has other aims, such as personal and social development as well as a greater degree of democratic involvement (Delors, 1996; Dewey 1985). After all, education concerns individualisation, socialisation and qualification in equal measures (Hargreaves, 2005; Biesta, 2011).

The aim of the Danish project “Teaching in Motion” is to give young men between the ages of 18 and 30 a second chance to pass their secondary school exams so that they can afterwards enter into youth education.

The pedagogical ideas behind this project are based not only on traditional school subjects but also on physical training, a combination of theory with practice and corporation between the police, the fire-department and the army.

The project ran from August 2012 till June 2013 in three different cities in the southern part of Denmark and it included a total of 60 students.

The conclusions point very clearly in the direction of a close relationship between the students' former school experience and their level of engagement with the project. Students who have positive experience from previous educational contexts are easy to involve and engage in educational processes, whereas students with no or very little positive experience are more difficult to involve. Some of the major triggers, besides the students' experience of meaningfulness, are close contact between student and teacher, a sense of community among the students and student participation in extra-curricular activities, for instance physical activities.

In terms of the methodology, quantitative as well as qualitative methods have been used. For example life-historical interviews have been carried out with selected students (Horsdal, 2012).

The theoretical foundations take their inspiration from learning theory, hereby such as life biography theory (Alheit 1995; Alheit & Dausien, 2002), transformative learning (Mezirow, 1978; Illeris, 2013), identity and narratives (Bruner, 1990; 1999) and social theory of learning (Wenger & Lave, 1991; Wenger (1999).

### **Research and Methods**

The overall aim of the present article is to analyse the good and bad experience acquired by individuals participating in the project in order to consider possible future developments of the project. In the attempt to achieve this aim, the following three research questions are raised:

- 1) What are the connections between students' earlier school experiences and the experiences they acquire through the project?
- 2) In that way does the project contribute to the students' biographical learning?
- 3) What role does institutional learning play in relation to the students' biographical learning experiences and to the strategies and perspectives they may develop during their participation in the project?

The project involves a variety of methods. During the early part of the project, a questionnaire was put together so as to establish a picture of the students' respective backgrounds, profiles and expectations to the project. Towards the end of the project, another questionnaire-based survey was carried out in order to provide an overall picture of the students' experiences with the project and of their future educational prospects.

On the basis of the first questionnaire, I picked out six individual students with different views and backgrounds in order to bring a variety of student experiences into play. Life historical interviews were carried out with the six students at the beginning as well as at the end of the project. The life historical interviews with students have been supplemented with semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 1999) with the teachers involved in the project.

This mixed methodology was chosen with the aim of obtaining data both on a broad horizon and on a deep level.

The life-historical interviews that I conducted were inspired by Horsdal (1999; 2012). These interviews focused on the students' upbringing, their experiences with school and learning and their expectations to and experiences with the project and finally also with their considerations regarding the future.

The interviews, however, were not carried out exclusively in accordance with Horsdal's (2012) recommendations on how to conduct life-historical interviews. Instead of casting the net widely in the sense of putting questions that invite responses concerning the informants' entire life-history, as Horsdal recommends, the interviews were rather more theme-oriented, focusing on specific topics relating to the students' previous experiences of school, education and formal learning. Time, resources and the central focus relevant to my research have resulted in a more theme-oriented perspective, although the interviews were still intended to encompass the students' whole life-history.

### **Theory**

The primary theories involved in the project are theories of learning. The research project draws on the one hand on biographical learning (Alheit, 1995; Alheit & Dausien, 2002) and on the other hand on more exclusively social theories about learning (Wegner, 1999). To a minor extent, the theories of Mezirow (1978) and Bruner (1990; 1999) have also played a part. In the following, I will briefly introduce the relevant theories.

Learning and biography are closely intertwined because in the learning process the biography functions as the standpoint from which learning is initially met, but at the same time the biography will inevitably change through the learning processes. Biographical learning can be defined as follows:

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

Alheit (1995) points out that the following five elements define biographical learning:

- 1) Engaging in biographical learning means drawing on your heritage of knowledge, for instance in connection with crises and life-passages. Here, the individual exploits its unknown potential.
- 2) Biographical learning takes place in a social context, in interaction and communication with others.
- 3) The process of biographical learning includes intentions, but not on teleological grounds.
- 4) Biographical learning focuses on both the subject and on social structures.
- 5) Biographical learning includes reflexive identity work as well as social action.

Biographical learning can take place in formal, non-formal and informal learning arenas. Within the relevant project, the interest was directed towards the formal context.

As mentioned, Alheit (1995) argues that biographical learning consists of reflexive identity work and social action. Hallqvist, Ellstöm and Hydén (2012), however, find that this is too imprecise a description of biographical learning and seek to expand the concept. As an alternative, they suggest four different combinations of reflexive identity work and social action, implying, for instance, that a person is able to act in the social world without engaging in reflexive identity work, but is just as able to, vice versa, engage in reflexive identity work without acting in the social world.

Hallqvist, Ellstöm and Hydén (2012) suggest four ideal forms of biographical learning:

- 1) A strong involvement in creative social actions combined with strong reflexive work.
- 2) A weak engagement in social actions alongside strong reflexive work.
- 3) A strong involvement in social action combined with weak reflexive work.
- 4) A weak involvement in social action alongside weak reflexive work.

Alheit’s theories show similarities to Mezirow’s (1978) theories of transformative learning.

Mezirow’s theories concern the ways in which adult educators can confront their students’ habits and in this manner obtain transformative learning under the right circumstances. Mezirow points to the fact that adults involved in education are able to develop new perspectives of meaning and become aware of the personal, social and cultural presumptions that play an important role in their life. In terms of his theory, Mezirow is inspired by Dewey’s (1985) theories on how the individual can obtain growth or intelligent reflection by interacting with the world.

Compared to Alheit, Mezirow describes in greater detail how reflection may be understood and how we can become involved in personal learning processes and he also describes the barriers that prevent us from entering into transformative learning processes.

### **Theories of social learning**

Theories of biographical learning and transformative learning focus on the individual’s subjectivity, even when the theories point to the existence of the social world and the importance of the interaction between the individual and social world.

Other sources of theoretical inspiration for the project are theories on identity and social learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1999, Bruner, 1998). These theories point to and explain in greater detail the role of the social context and the interaction between the social environment and the individual in the sense of offering a more detailed apparatus of notions.

Wenger’s theories about communities of practice focus more directly on the relationship between identity and communities of practice than Lave and Wenger’s (1991) earlier theories on apprenticeship. According to Wenger (1999), we are all members of many different communities of practice. In some of them, we are full members and as such fully competent, while in other communities of practice, we are novices and therefore occupy more peripheral positions. Communities of practice are found in formal, non-formal as well as informal arenas of learning.

Communities of practice consist of the following three elements: joint enterprise which is continually re-negotiated by the participating members; mutual engagement that binds the members together into a social unity; and a shared repertoire understood as common routines and experiences, which members have developed over a period of time (Wenger, 1999).

According to Wenger, meaning and the negotiation of meaning are very central concepts and may be regarded as the telos of learning. The negotiation of meaning is a process through which we experience engagement and meaning, while the process of negotiation can be seen as a combination of participation and reification. Reification, in turn, occurs when thoughts and ideas turn into symbols, artefacts and concrete objects. Participation is the social experience a person develops who is a member of a social community and, in that case, the individual develops an identity of participation.

Apart from participation and negotiation of meaning, Wenger's theory is closely linked to the formation and development of identity. The development of a person's identity must be seen in relation to the communities of practice in which he or she is involved in and to the relations the person in question may have to these communities of practice.

The identity part can be elaborated through the inclusion of Bruner (1990; 1999) who points out that narration and identity are connected in the sense that the development of identity is closely associated with changes in the narratives we tell about ourselves and about our social world.

To sum up, you develop an identity of participation when you take part in the production of meaning and are in a wider sense able to accept and to contribute to the development of the economy of meaning which a community of practice consists of.

### **Life-historical analyses**

In the following, two of the six life-historical inspired analyses, which were carried out, will be presented. The analyses draw on Horsdal's (2012) recommendations for narrative analyses, but alongside this the interviews are also analysed in accordance with the previously mentioned theories of learning.

At the end of the paper, some of the conclusions from the six interviews and the broader investigation will be elaborated further. Before the two life-historical interviews are presented, a short description of the selected participants' respective backgrounds and profiles will be given; these are based on the questionnaires.

A total of 60 students took part in the project and at the end of the project, some 20 out of 60 students had left the project altogether. About half of the students were between 18 and 20 years of age, while the rest of the students were between 21 and 30 years of age.

Approximately 70 % (32) had passed their secondary school exams, either from the compulsory year 9 or the optional year 10 before entering the project, while the remaining *c.* 30 % had left secondary school without passing their exams.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the students involved in the project were trying to refresh their knowledge and skills because they had bad experiences of school and came out with correspondingly poor results.

Prior to entering the project, many of them had become acquainted with other parts of the educational system; about 50 % of the students had attended production school while 50 % had attended vocational school. Some of the students had entered both school forms.

After the project had run its course, many students had changed their future plans in comparison to the expectations they had held at the beginning of the project. In the beginning of the project 50 % were planning to sit the Higher Preparatory Exam, but the then project ends only about 20 % are expecting to go to Higher Preparatory Exam. At the time of writing, some 15 % of the students do not have any plans of taking further education. Other students want to enter vocational school, join the army, find a job or partake in the project once more.

The two out of six cases that will be presented below serve to illustrate some parts of the complex educational interaction, which has taken place, especially the coming together of the students' backgrounds, expectations and the experience they have acquired during the course of the project.

For illustrative reasons, I have chosen to present a student whose experience of the project was relatively positive and a student who was disappointed with the project and found it a waste of time.

The former of these two students explains that he has gone through both personal and social development as a result of the project, or, in the terms of Alheit, as a result of biographical learning processes.

Subsequent to the project, this student has gone on to take his Higher Preparatory Exams. Secondly, I will refer to a student who has been disappointed about the project, his future prospects and plans have not changed at all during the project and he still wants to become a fitness instructor.

The choice of a positively and a negatively slanted story may contribute to a degree of polarization of the collective experiences the students have obtained from participating in the project. Many students actually fall into the fairly broad spectrum that sits between the fully positive and fully negative assessment of the project.

### **The narrative analysis**

#### **Life-history 1: Michael**

Michael (this is not his real name) is 19 years old. He has gone to primary and secondary school for his first eight years of school and afterwards to a boarding school for his ninth year. Many times over he has stayed at home for a full week instead of go to school. According to himself, the last three or four years of his public school, he was absent for about half of the time. He gives no specific reason why he was absent so often; he says he just felt bored and did not really enjoy school.

Half way through his ninth year, he was thrown out of school and went to a boarding school.

Here, he began to do his school work. At the boarding school, he experienced that the teachers paid more attention to each individual student than had been the case at the public school. After boarding school, he went to a production school for a year, which turned out well. Here, he became interested in working with metal.

After production school, Michael went to a vocational school, but he did not manage to secure an apprenticeship. He says that he was almost half way through this education when he began again to stay away from school; therefore, his time at the school was expanded with three months to make up for his absence.

Subsequently to vocational school, he was on social benefits for a while. He explains that one time he did not show up to a meeting with his designated social worker and because of this, he had to choose between joining the project or lose his economic benefits from the social welfare system. "Then I thought I might just as well try the project", as he says.

#### **Persons**

During the interview, Michael does not at all refer to any other persons, neither parents nor siblings or friends. A few times he mentions one of his teachers from the vocational school who was supervising him in different welding techniques, just as he refers to the teachers on the present project, but his comments do not go beyond phrases such as: "then at the boarding school the teacher did this", or: "the teachers at vocational school behaved like that".

#### **Communities of practice**

Michael's experiences of school and education are varied. As already mentioned, he was regularly absent from school and his high level of absence had to do with a feeling of not being a participant in the subject-oriented and social communities of the school.

He enjoyed going to boarding school, while his experience of vocational school was mixed. As mentioned, not many persons take part in Michael's narrative. Many of his stories concern things he has done on his own, for instance he often plays computer games.

Regarding his time at vocational school, he explains: "I sat down from morning till school was out and welded. I just sat in the cabin every day and welded the whole time it was just great."

In general, it seems as if Michael has experienced significant challenges when it comes to participating in the different social communities he has been involved in; instead, he has spent much time on his own.

#### **Significant notions and wordings**

It is not easy to identify specific sentences or metaphors in Michael's narrative. One characteristic feature is that he often uses the personal pronoun *you* (with an implied impersonal meaning) when he describes himself: "you have to admit that 80 % of all young people often are lazy" or "I think you do change quite a lot while you are here". The frequent use of the personal pronoun *you* could be interpreted as a technique whereby Michael distances himself from the world that surrounds him.

## Perspective

Although Michael has been more or less forced into the project, he is excited about the first few weeks. As he says:

“I have to say that what they do is genius...the way things are running. The whole time you are moving around and you don't have to sit down with your nose in a book.”

He feels more healthy and comfortable. One of his aims with participating is to become healthier: “If things continue like this, I could run a marathon when we finish”, as he says.

Another goal is to brush up on his school-related skills. After the project, he is considering going on to take the Higher Preparatory Exam, but before he makes his final decision he wants to see how things work out.

## Second interview with Michael

I conduct my second interview with Michael in May.

He says that the project has fully lived up to his expectations, but when wintertime came along, “things began to slow down.” At this point, he found there were fewer activities and the teaching became more traditional.

But all in all he thinks it has been time well spent and he is satisfied.

Michael has been really quite happy with the professional level of the project. He is especially excited about the teachers who have tried to make learning as much fun as possible and he is also very keen on the short daily breaks during which the students have been doing different kinds of physical exercises.

Seen from a professional perspective, Michael has managed to refresh his school-related skills, particularly math where he finds he has learned much.

Michael also thinks he has become more open minded during the year and in this sense he thinks he has developed personally. As he explains: “Normally, I would spend time on my own. I think I have become more open-minded so to speak”.

Previously, he did not really like to meet new people, but this has changed during the course of the year. Through the project he has made new friends and says the following about himself:

“Yes, you have changed and become more energetic. Now I am bored. Let's talk instead of just sit down in the corner. In that way you've changed a bit.”

Following on from the project, he is going to take up studies for the Higher Preparatory Exam.

After that, he has thought about going to university. He does not know exactly what to study, but it has to be something to do with math.

## Conclusions on the interview with Michael

Michael has changed in terms of his professional, personal and social sides during the project. He has engaged in biographical learning and, in relation to the notions of Hallqvist, Ellstöm and Hydén (2012), one might say that strong reflexive learning processes and important social changes have taken place.

Seen through Wenger's theories (1999), Michael has been active with in the various communities of practice offered by the project. The project has been meaningful to Michael and he obviously articulates an identity of participation.

His narrative or self-understanding has changed; he is now a more open-minded person, more self-confident, just as he has developed social skills and greater trust in his own abilities.

## Life history 2: Dennis

I interview Dennis 3 weeks after he joins the project. Dennis (this is not his real name) is 18 years old and lives in the countryside in the place where he has grown up. He still lives at home with his parents, but he is on his way to getting his own place. Dennis has been through a number of school-shifts, especially in the latter part of his school-years. He thinks school has been a waste of time, because he has not learned anything.

Until his sixth year of school, Dennis went to school close to where he lived. He says it did not work out well because he suffers from dyslexia. After his sixth year, he moved to a bigger school where he stayed until his eighth year, but, in his own words, these two years were a complete waste of time: “I did nothing, it was really just a question of sitting there and getting older.”

After his eighth year, he went to a boarding school for three months. <sup>ii</sup> Here, he felt, he had a good time and was accepted, but after a few months he nonetheless dropped out because something happened, which he does not want to discuss in any detail.

He then stayed at home for a long time, subsequently went to a production school and then to EUC (preparation to vocational school).

### **Persons**

Not many persons play a part in Dennis' story. Sometimes he refers to his mother and father and during the interview he quotes them a few times. Until now, Dennis has lived with his parents, except for the few months he spent at boarding school. It seems as if the parents play quite significant parts in his life. Besides his parents, he also refers to some of the other students who are involved in the project; one of them is a person he knew beforehand.

### **Significant notions and wordings**

A central phrase, which Dennis comes back to many times during the interview, is the notion of a "waste of time". When he talks about his time at EUC, he says: "that was also a waste of time" while his year at boarding school is described thus: "it was also a kind of wasted year". Dennis is not satisfied with the way in which the project has been planned so far. "I believe in this project... but if it goes on like this, then it will just be a waste of time."

The recurring phrase, "waste of time", could be interpreted as an expression of Dennis' experience with school and education in general. Most of the time, he has found school and education to be without relevance and meaning. He is now worried that the same experience will rear its head once again with regards to the project he is currently taking part in.

### **Communities of practice**

During most of his life, he has lived in the countryside and without many friends. He says that he often encounters problems with large groups of people. When he is in a large group, he regularly feels like a mouse: "I am not the type who likes to be in the spot-light".

In contrast to the other life-stories involved in the project, Dennis has not had the experience that school and education can work as a *turning point*. Instead, Dennis has felt that he has been marginalized in almost all of the communities of practice that he has taken part in.

### **Expectations**

Dennis has mixed expectations to the project. On the one hand, he thinks it goes well with his future educational plans; on the other hand, he is skeptical about it with regards to the way it has been planned structured so far.

He finds it confusing that students often have to change class rooms during the school day, just as he is confused about a number of other issues concerning the project. For example, he has misunderstood that the project only continues until January, but after that nobody knows what will happen: "Now I am just feeling as if nobody knows anything".

Or, as he describes his feelings further:

"For once in my life, I would like to go to a school where I can learn something and where people are in control of things. That would be fantastic because I have never tried that before."

### **Second interview with Dennis**

I meet with Dennis in the middle of May, just before the exam is about to begin. Dennis says that his expectations have not been fulfilled. He thinks that the project has to a large extent been just like ordinary school. "The only difference is athletics", as he says. He explains that they have occasionally done a few things that were different from ordinary school activities, but overall things have not at all turned out as he expected.

During the past year, Dennis has been absent from school quite frequently. He says the reason for this is that he has not learned anything; he does not remember particularly well and when he learns something, he tends to forget it again fairly quickly. Instead of being at school, he has been at home.

In connection with the notions of *lesser* or *greater school fatigue*, where lesser school fatigue refers to a minor and temporary feeling whereas greater fatigue refers to a stronger, more substantial and longer lasting feeling, Dennis has suffered from greater school fatigue, which is characterized by the experience of failure.

His involvement in the project has not had the effect of motivating him for further education. “It has just been something I had to go through”, as he says.

Then I ask Dennis whether he has not received any kind of help from the teachers and he says that he has been helped quite well in math lessons, but apart from that he has not received much in the way of help.

In general, he has been happy about athletics and refers to the social aspects of the athletics lessons as great.

During the project, he has gained new friends and he sees one of them outside of school.

Dennis does not think the project has contributed to his personal and social development: “It is not something the school has done do me”, as he puts it.

After the project, Dennis wants to go to vocational school and try to become a fitness-instructor, but if he does not pass, he wants to take the Higher Preparatory Exam. As he says:

”It is a little difficult with fitness; it is a new thing. There are not many places that want you.“

### **Conclusions on the interview with Dennis**

As has been illustrated above, the project has been a disappointment to Dennis. Dennis’ focus of interest is directed at athletics, sports and fitness whereas his attitude towards traditional school-subjects is negative, especially the native language subject, also because he has difficulties reading and writing.

He has developed neither personally nor socially, even if he has made new friends. It is difficult to say whether Dennis has gained anything in terms of educational benefits from the project. According to himself, he has learned athletics and math.

The project has not had the effect of involving Dennis in biographical learning processes.

When examined through the notions of Wenger (1999), it does not seem as if the project has made sense or been in any way meaningful to Dennis. Instead, he has developed an identity of non-participation.

Only to a limited degree has he involved himself in the project. Apparently, he has engaged in the social community with his classmates and the athletics community since the latter has played a part in his plans to become a fitness-instructor. These two communities, wherein he has felt an identity of participation, constitute the reason why he is still part of the project and has not dropped out.

Dennis seems to have a fixed identity or narrative with regards to education: Education is pretty much a waste of time. At present, it has not had any effect on his situation and his understanding of himself or of the social world. Dennis is wasting his time and maybe he is even wasting his life.

### **Discussion**

Dennis represents the group of young people, which Katznelson (2013) in her report on young people receiving social benefits refers to as *late starters*. They are often insecure when it comes to education and future plans as they frequently have many personal and school-oriented challenges. For these reasons, they often experience problems with the educational system. Michael, however, represents the group, which Katznelson (2013) refers to as *young people on stand-by*. Usually, individuals of this group are a little older compared to the first group because they have secondary school as their highest educational level and, apart from this, many of them also have experience of vocational education or the job market. In general, the *late starters* face greater challenges in relation to obtaining education than do the *young people on stand-by*.

During the project, the two students discussed here have developed different strategies. The notion of strategy is inspired by Dewey (1985) and Mezirow (1978) and it refers to the ways in which a person interacts with their surroundings. On the one hand, you can interact with the world in such a way that transformative learning takes place and you acquire new experiences and perspectives. On the other hand, you can interact with world in a manner so that new experiences and transformative learning do not take place or only do so to a minor extent.

The notion of strategy should be understood as a specific, not necessarily conscious, way of reacting that students develop in order to handle the educational demands and expectations they are facing.

Seen from this angle, it may be said that Michael has developed a strategy wherein transformative learning has taken place. His understanding of himself has changed and he is now a person in possession of more and better personal and social skills compared to what he used to be before entering the project, just as he has gained a more positive view on education. The project has functioned as a *turning point* for Michael. In contrast to this, Dennis has developed a strategy wherein transformative learning has not occurred. His understanding of himself and of the world around him is pretty much the same as it was before he entered the project.



It seems possible to find explanations why the students have developed such different experiences and strategies. Michael stresses the positive relations to his teachers as important to his experience of the project. The development of good relations to teachers and significant others (Mead, 1967) is an aspect that has been emphasized in a number of studies on young peoples' relation to education in general. It is a significant factor in the attempt to involve young people in education and establish good learning processes (Hermansen, 2007; Pless, 2009; Hattie, 2010).

Dennis has not in the same way been able to develop positive relations to his teachers. From the beginning, he has remained skeptical of the project and at least one of his teachers. That position has been reinforced during the year.

Another detail that makes Michael's story different from Dennis' is that Michael does not have solely negative previous experience of school and education. Instead, he has already discovered that school can contribute to his development in a positive way. In contrast, Dennis has almost exclusively negative experience of school and has only to a very limited extent discovered that school and education can work as a turning point in his life.

Research in general is pointing to a clear link between students' feeling of being secure in the early school years and their ability to feel secure later on in the educational system. In many ways, experiences from early school years form the foundations for the strategies that young people develop later on in the educational system (Pless, 2009). This relation must not be understood in any deterministic way, but, in a sense, previous experiences form a person's strategies while also impacting significantly on personal identity and narratives (Bruner, 1990) as well as involvement with various communities of practice (Wenger, 1999) within the educational context.

Another feature highlighted by the project is the fact that athletics lessons have functioned as a method for developing social relations. Many of the students refer to the athletics lessons as something that has allowed them to use different parts of themselves and have described this as a good way to handle social processes and develop relations. Here, we have a community of practice that in many ways corresponds to the one the students know from activities in which they take part in their spare-time.

One thing that characterizes almost all the students with in the project is the fact that they have fewer social skills than young people typically do. For example, Michael often spends time by himself and Dennis has often felt that he was not accepted by others and says he does not like to be 'in the spot light', as he expresses it. During their year on the project, however, both Michael and Dennis have developed good relations to many of the other students taking part in the project, so they do have social skills after all and can bring these into action. Non-curricular activities, such as athletics lessons, can work as a vehicle for the development of social skills and for a greater involvement in education as such.

In general, many of the students have felt included with in the different communities of practice in the project, as in the case of Michael, and have on account of that developed an identity of participation. On the other hand, there are also students like Dennis, who has not developed an identity of participation within the subject-oriented community that the project has offered. The subject-oriented community is the most school-like community and for individuals on the periphery of this it is difficult to develop a more substantial identity of participation.

## **Conclusion**

In the following, the research questions, introduced at the beginning of the paper, will be discussed.

There seems to be a connection between students' early experience of school and education and the experience they acquire during the project. Broadly speaking, the worse the experience people have of school and education, the greater the challenge to get them to commit to and become involved in educational processes later on.

Even though many of the participating students have suffered in a number of the schools and educational sessions they have taken part in, many of them also carry positive experiences with them or have discovered *turnings points* while attending for example boarding school or production school.

They have a repertoire and a range of resources that can be used in constructive manners. Put into the terminology of learning theories, there is a scaffold to build on in the further elaboration of new narratives (Bruner, 1996).

Some of the students do carry in their baggage many and almost exclusively negative experiences of school and education. In that respect, it is a tremendous challenge for them to get involved in adult education. The project has contributed to the biographical learning of many of the students, where biographical learning is understood as reflexive learning processes and social change (Alheit, 1995).

During the year, a number of students have obtained greater self-confidence, have become more mature and open-minded and have become more aware of what their own personal future educational plans might be.

In the vocabulary of Mezirow, transformative learning has taken place wherein new meaningful perspectives have been developed.

As in the case of Dennis, however, there are also students for whom biographical learning has not taken place.

The project offers different institutional learning trajectories or, in the words of Wenger (1999), different communities of practice. The analyses of the life-historical interviews have shown great variety in terms of the roles that different communities of practice play in the students' life.

Close relations between students and teachers, the social community in the classroom, the subject-oriented community and extra-curricular activities, for example sports activities, all of which have been provided by the project, have contributed to the development of biographical learning processes.

If the students do not engage in the different communities of practice or are not able to see a direction and a meaning with the different educational settings, then they are unlikely to develop an identity of participation and, as a result, biographical learning processes will be obstructed.

Contrastingly, the institutional learning will stimulate students' biographical learning if they are able to perceive prospects and meaning as part of the communities of practice, which the institution offers.

### **Perspectives**

We currently find ourselves in a period of history where many Western countries are going through a process of changing their labour markets. There is still some need for people with no or little formal education, but such people are at much greater risk of unemployment and marginalization than is the case for people who have a formal education. For this reason, we have to develop new educational offers that enable us to attract especially young men with no or little education. Some of these individuals have very bad school experiences, which means that they are not particularly motivated towards adult education at all.

The project described here has not been able to fully solve this challenge, but has contributed to the development of knowledge on how we may design new educational settings or new institutional trajectories that will better enable us to engage young men in adult education.

We have to realize that adult education has to do with both employment and personal and social development. The knowledge obtained by means of this project shows that there are many challenges to overcome before young people who possess only few resources can be reached. If we are to reach students such as Dennis for whom school and education are considered "a waste of time" it may be necessary to pay more attention to personal and social development or to processes of individualization and socialization (Biesta, 2011).

Close relations between students and teachers, a sense of social community among students, supervision, extra-curricular activities, as for example sport, could be some of the triggers, which contribute to the development of biographical learning processes and make it possible for young people like Michael and Dennis to progress in terms of handling educational processes and obtaining formal qualifications.

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1) In Denmark you are in school nine or ten years before you are entering youth education.

2) Boarding school is a specific Danish form of school. The pupils are between 14-18 years old. The pupils are living at the school.