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The development of the professionalism of adult educators: a biographical and learning perspective

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Abstract

To investigate the development of the professionalism of adult educators, we compare individuals' narratives of their professional work at different times in their biographies. Using data from a qualitative longitudinal study, the paper includes two case studies through which we show phases of learning in the development of professionalism. We reconstruct forms and meanings of learning in this process. The study allows insights into differences in professional learning during the life course and the influence of institutional and social context in the development of professionalism.

Keywords: lifelong learning; professional learning; professionalism in adult education; development of professionalism; qualitative research

Introduction

This essay deals with the question of the development of the professionalism of adult educators. We are interested in the ways in which they develop their professionalism through a process of learning. Traditionally, the discourse about the professionalism of the adult educator refers to the existence of academic knowledge and the competence to apply this knowledge in concrete pedagogical situations. To support professionalism, experts try to describe all the competences (knowledge, skills, ability) required by the adult educator, e.g. they should acquire knowledge about adult learning, didactical skills and the ability to deal with diversity. Nittel depicts this perspective as a 'competence theoretical approach' to understanding professionalism (cf. Nittel, 2000, p. 74ff.). With regard to this theoretical approach, many studies intend the description of requirements related to the different areas of responsibility (for more information, see Kraft, 2006 for

example; cf. Bechtel, 2008 for a comparison of competence profiles in the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Switzerland).¹ Other research studies focus on the (desired or present/absent) competence-level of further education staff (cf. in particular Peters, 2004 and Hartig, 2008) or on the influence of specific (further) qualification programs and their impact on an increasing professionalism (cf. Harmeier, 2009).

To find out more concerning the question of *how* adult educators learn to become professionals during their life course, we need another theoretical perspective. Nittel calls it a ‘difference theoretical approach’ (Nittel, 2000, p. 80ff.). It refers to the difference between the professional knowledge base (which contains systematic knowledge about learning and teaching) and the requirement of the individual pedagogical situation. As a consequence, he suggests case-related reflection as a necessary competence for the professional adult educator.

Due to the fact that the development of this professional competence is closely connected with personal development (cf. Salling Olesen, 2000), we decided to conceptualize professionalism as a result of a learning process. Referring to a learning approach also means referring to ‘learning processes over the course of one’s life’ (Hof, 2009, p. 31).

To analyze the professional learning processes of adult educators, we follow a qualitative empirical approach. Narrative interviews with people who work in the field of public adult education can tell us how they organize their professional learning and continuously or discontinuously develop their professionalism within and outside pedagogical settings (cf. Maier-Gutheil, Kade & Fischer, 2011).

As we were able to use interviews from a qualitative follow up study², we had the chance to analyze the data from those who were interviewed at two points in their lives: in the midst of the eighties³ and again 25 years later. We describe *professionalism as a result of learning processes [‘Bildungsprozesse’]*⁴ seen from different points in one’s life.

In the following, we briefly present some major concepts and the project background as well as our methodological design. In the main part of the paper, we explain the central phases of the development of professionalism using the example of two case studies. Finally, we discuss the findings with a view to the implications for fostering and supporting professionalism in adult education.

Methodological approach

Dealing with the question of professionalism as a learning process in the course of life requires a methodological design which considers the temporality of those learning processes. As a consequence, research into the learning processes of adults requires a life history approach (cf. Bron et al., 2005; West et al., 2007). In biographical interviews, the adult educators are able to talk about their working situations and requirements, their personal problems, expectations and hopes. As learning is seen as an individual process which involves interaction and communication with others, it is linked with the concept of biographical learning (c.f. Alheit, 1995; Tedder & Biesta, 2009, p. 35). In a biographical perspective it is possible to analyze the social opportunities (institutions, societal movements, pedagogical discourses) in which the individual learning processes are embedded as well as the changing of these opportunities over time. Alheit and Dausien talk of ‘biographic learning’ (cf. Alheit & Dausien, 2002), and point to reflexive learning processes (ibid., p. 16) which can be described ‘as learning about the (trans) formations of experience, knowledge and one’s

actions in lifeworld (lifehistory and lifeworld) connections' (Smilde, 2009, p. 84). A lifehistory approach allows us to reconstruct the decisions and strategies of the individual and the specific social opportunities that govern these, as they change over the period of a lifetime. Furthermore, to understand the development of professionalism, we need to know *what* the adult teachers know (general and specific knowledge) and *how* they know this (skills and abilities). For the latter, we can refer to the concept of (a critical) reflexive practice as discussed previously and currently (cf. Schön, 1983; Cervero, 2006/1989; Bradbury et al., 2010). As West (2010) mentioned, 'really reflexive practice, which includes engaging with the auto/biographical dimensions of professional interactions, can provoke profound questioning of taken for granted norms in working contexts' (p. 66-67). Thus, forms of introspection and self-observation of one's actions and decisions in (working) life become more crucial. Lönnheden & Bron emphasise the significance of story telling for processes of learning in a case study (2006). This was also seen in our interviews when one adult educator (Gruber) discussed his former interventions with the interviewer and reflected on his experiences saying 'It's a lot more clearer to me when I talk to you about that now – I've hardly thought about that yet' while the other adult educator (Kessler) never reflected on his professional identity and he said to himself during the interview 'I've never asked myself before whether I am now an adult educator because of *doing* courses with adults'.

In connection with the mentioned points, our project observes the process of lifelong professional learning following a qualitative longitudinal design. In contrast to singular inquiries, for example, in the form of single biographical interviews which imply the methodological difficulty that one can 'never draw on the antecedent conditions of the learning process [Bildungsprozess] itself without the filter of the learning process [Bildungsprozess]' (Nohl, 2006a, p. 281), longitudinal studies enable the transformation of subjective perspectives to be captured in the course of life.

For the following analysis, we draw on qualitative interviews with the same person at two different points in time. We use the research potential of qualitative methods combined with a longitudinal design. For the 1980s, we have theme-centered narrative interviews with people who worked as adult educators. Twenty-five years later, we interviewed the same people again. These were autobiographic-narrative interviews (cf. Schütze, 1983), thus illustrating almost the whole professional biography of the individual.

To analyze the interviews, we use the Documentary Method (cf. Nohl, 2006b) which follows the principles of qualitative social research (cf. Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Therewith we differentiate between the level of what is said (descriptive interpretation) and the level at which it is said (reflective interpretation). Moreover, the method focuses on comparisons between different pieces of research material. Only by comparing distinct fragments of empirical data are we able to reconstruct specific distinctions (cf. Hof & Fischer, 2010). The categories for comparison and those for distinction emerge from the research data. For example, forms of what we have labelled as 'acquisition' has been identified and constructed from the narratives. With regard to empirical analysis, this means that people are asked how they became engaged in the profession (via experience, participation in further training, exchange with colleagues, work, reading newspapers etc.), how they maintained this (by acquiring knowledge and ability, volition, community) and what led to changes, for instance, how their actions developed. Only with this open approach can we gain an insight into patterns which allow for an empirically obtained definition of the development of professionalism. Therefore, our research process can be divided into four steps. *Step one and two* make

use of the information included in both interviews alike. We extracted all mentioned life events and transitions from the two interviews (timeline) and then focused on the subjective perspective in form of the interpretative frameworks that the interviewees used. Here we rearranged the reconstructed life events – which were temporally ordered within the timeline – in the form of a life history matrix that outlined interrelationships between life events and transitions within different life domains. In this way we are able to reconstruct the meaning of certain life events within the life course. The specific arrangement of life events over the life course – as the narration depicts it – indicates individual biographical formations ('Bildungsgestalten') in social space and time. As our research focus is professional learning, the reconstruction of these biographical formations emphasises the question of what relevance educational experiences have on the individual's professional life course and how this relevance is expressed within the narration. *Step three* then draws a sharp contrast between both narrations, using the summarised information from step one and two as the counterpoint of the comparison. Narration 1 and narration 2 are now analyzed as artefacts which evolve at a specific time of articulation within the life course. Both narrations indicate individual biographical formations of professional learning. The special quality of both formations can only be understood in contrast to the overarching life history matrix. By contrasting the matrix with two of its fragments, we can reconstruct the time-dependency which is inherent to both narrations. The concluding *step four* then asks for the basic scheme which links both narrations as artefacts of a certain individual's life course. Both individual biographical formations of professional learning are related to each other via systematic comparisons (e.g. narratives about the same events in both interviews with their time specific interpretative frameworks). Herein we are theorising the development or learning of professionalism.

In the next section, we show the initial findings from two case examples in which we have reconstructed the change of time-specific forms of the development of professionalism. For this, different phases in which professional learning has occurred/developed can be reconstructed. Moreover, individual versions of the development of professionalism are shown and it becomes clear whether and which professionalisms are acquired (technical and/or pedagogic professionalism).

The development of professionalism

Learning as process of continuous adjustment

Thomas Gruber (all the names are pseudonyms) is 38 years old at the time of the first interview and works in an adult education centre as a head of department.⁵ He describes himself as a person who has specialist knowledge (in foreign languages) as a result of his studies (Latin and Spanish). During his academic studies, he had the chance to work as a teacher in adult education. He primarily acquired the pedagogic knowledge necessary for this in his daily working life. At the beginning, he oriented himself towards teaching/learning settings at the university and tried to vary the experience for participants on the course, but 'to do it in a way I suppose it could be comprehensible'.

He developed his pedagogical competence through experience (learning by doing) and by changing his concepts as result of feedback from participants and colleagues. For example, he used the ritual of drinking a beer after the course with the participants so that they could talk to each other in another way: 'When you can see them simply as humans and not so much as a participant of the course now'. In this regard, the development of professionalism in this phase is embedded in daily work and

additionally influenced by formal teaching training (he trained in Theme Centred Interaction – TCI). Permanent self-observation as well as the exchange with others helped him to deal with different tasks in the Centre.

Within the framework of his professional development, he now describes the teaching and managing of activities as a part of an individual search and learning process which is, not yet completed. This can be seen in the interview for instance when Gruber discusses some of his former interventions in difficult course scenarios with the interviewer. Despite these scenarios, he developed an affinity for pedagogical organization, and confidence in his competence to successfully complete the tasks ahead of him.

At the time of the second interview, Thomas Gruber is 62 years old and three years away from retirement. In this interview, he tells us about his development from a Romance language expert into a pedagogical and organizational expert. The central theme of his story is the *permanence of learning*, necessary as response to organizational transformations and the evolution of teaching subjects and vocational tasks. ‘And every time something different. And every time I’ve learned something as well (...) because of the difficult situations and reactions and so on and group dynamics (...) every time it’s so different’. He refers in particular to difficult situations as challenges for learning. His long-term engagement with work activity in the Centre, he changed his duties/responsibilities several times. This meant that he did not only work as a teacher but as a controller and in the quality management of projects - he had to learn continuously: ‘Because every time something new came along – well, hence I have – uhm uhm marketing is so far away from my university studies. But then I developed a big marketing concept with others and we have always had external experts with us. Thus I’ve always learned as well. It was a permanent learning by doing experience.’

His career also took him to the position of Head of Department of the Centre. Not only is this position described by him as a chance for further learning but he also does not consider his imminent retirement as the end of his professional career. Quite the contrary, in fact, as he says: ‘well I’m very sure that I will learn as much as I’ve done in the past ten years in the future’. Moreover he wants to start working as an advisor for his former employer.

Comparing the two interviews, one can see that he describes his professional biography in both stories as a purposeful and intentional process. One difference is remarkable: besides domain specific knowledge (foreign languages), in the second interview, he also stresses the formal skills of structured thinking and analysis acquired during his studies – a competence on which his current professional activities and self-conception are based.

This means that over time, Gruber’s identity as a teacher based on expert knowledge of Romance languages and literature, is transformed into that of a permanent learner. Due to this, new situations no longer lead to a change of identity (as one who now has to acquire new knowledge). Instead, the task of continuously adapting to new situations by learning is regarded as a part of the person.

This change or transformation one can see by comparing two sequences from the two interviews (bridge sequences) about Gruber's changing understanding of (lifelong) learning.

Learning depending on group dynamics and situative influences

Yes --- it changes continuously (I: Yes? What?) Well, I’ve the feeling that I am the one who is learning the most when I teach and use my practical skills. And --- and I realized

that there are no recipes for adult education. Even if you have methodical skills one cannot assume that the next course will work better than the one before. Something changes at a different level --- every time I have a course I work with another group and therefore I always experience new things.

Learning as an ongoing/permanent matter of course

Because every time something new came along then – well, hence I have – uhm uhm marketing is so far away from my university studies. But then I developed a big marketing concept with others with - we have always had external experts with us. Thus I’ve always learned as well. It was a permanent learning by doing experience. [...] It’s a lifelong learning experience and that was what I liked the most in my job and why I didn’t change it even though I thought about it a few times in the past. But it was always so fascinating because of the ongoing changes which meant that there were always new things to do.

While at the first interview Gruber had talked about his need to deal with his (failed) assumption that he only needed methodical techniques and knowledge, at the second interview he outlined the positive effect of his efforts in permanent learning in keeping his work interesting enough. He described himself over time as an individual integrated in an organization, but open-minded to proposals and challenges which might come along. Instead of emphasising the search process, as he had in the first interview, he reflected on the competence and success he had gained by working in different roles within the educational organization. Since Gruber gives a new meaning to his original scientific-classical knowledge base⁶, the experience of discontinuity, related to the changes of tasks within the organization can be described as an experience of continuity.

For Thomas Gruber, the development of professionalism takes place via three central phases:

Table 1. Phases of the development of professionalism as a continuous adjustment

Phase 1	Search process	Entrance into an adult pedagogical field of action
		Testing professional measures on the basis of technical and casually acquired pedagogical and practical knowledge
		Handling course experiences and reflecting on these supported by feedback from others
		Participation in additional formal courses
Phase 2	Self-assurance process	Self-observation and reflection as to whether the field of action is the right one and whether the competences required are held
		Transformation of a Romance language identity into the identity of a permanent learner
Phase 3	Demonstration of competence	Result of the identity transformation based on ongoing self-assurance/self-observation

The first phase which – as already mentioned – can only be reconstructed with the first interview, can be characterised as a long-term search process. First of all, entry to public adult education (at the adult education centre) takes place accidentally. Both expert knowledge gained through qualification and casually acquired pedagogical knowledge are tested through teaching activity. This experience is then reflected on by means of self-observation and observation by others. From this, knowledge and ability

are (have to be) further developed – as it is the case here – in the form of additional formal further education.

The following phase overlaps or lies alongside the two other phases to the extent that even in the first interview Gruber had developed some certainty and confidence of his pedagogical ability and knowledge and knows that he wanted to continue to work in the field. But the glance into the future, however, could not give him certainty (for action) since future challenges were uncertain. In the second interview, professional learning seemed to be a continuous process which is based on academic knowledge. Here we can see the transformation of his identity from a teacher of Romance languages and literature into a permanent learner. During the last phase, the demonstration of competence, in the versatile professional, experienced over a complete professional life, supports Gruber in knowing who he is and acting on the basis of this knowledge and ability.

Learning as a biographical process of personal fulfilment

Klaus Kessler is 40 years old at the time of the first interview. He studied philosophy and physics at university. During his studies he found a job in a city planning office where he worked for ten years until he lost his job. At the time of the first interview, he was mainly writing his doctoral thesis on a socio-psychological topic. He came across the topic for his doctoral thesis in the context of private themes (relationship problems) while working at the office. ‘And then I was looking for a subject for my thesis because I was thinking of doing this and then again by chance in a love life situation (...) there was a colleague who told me to read a special book about socio-psychological issues. And then I read that and I found things in there which affected me a great deal and so I said that I wanted to read a bit more about that’. In addition, he offered classes in the adult education centre and he started a psychoanalytic apprenticeship in order to better understand socio-psychology. These life events show that he pursued a new interest as a consequence of current interests.

His study for his doctoral thesis and his work as an adult educator were both part of his life. By teaching – and discussions with the participants – he was able to acquire new knowledge and thus further develop his individual interests – the topic of his doctoral thesis in this case. ‘Actually, I appreciated the course teaching in the beginning for strictly personal reasons. Firstly, I needed the money somewhat, secondly, it was my subject area (...) and then I realized that other people were so interested that they gave me feedback and that I finally had a personal interest in conveying something to people’. In this way, the new knowledge is both deepened and tested and has to prove itself in (the teacher’s) daily life (learning on the job). As a consequence, the central point for him was not to impart knowledge to others but to acquire knowledge himself.

In contrast to Gruber who sees the knowledge acquired during his studies as the basis for his activity as a teacher, Kessler is oriented by the respective current possibilities (student’s job) and individual (relationship) problems and/or interests (doctoral thesis) within the frame of his professional actions. He only acquires the knowledge and ability necessary for these respective situations.

His activity as a teacher is thus not embedded in the context of professionalism but in an individual learning process which is oriented towards matching the manifold offers of the world and the current ‘topic’ of the subject (e.g. doctoral thesis or relationship problems). Kessler describes the world as the space of possibilities where one moves according to situational interests so that neither seems to be stagnant or limited. Situational opportunities are seized if they can be coupled with a current

individual interest which means that, for example, institutionalised procedures and patterns of expectation do not play any role.

For him, learning is not geared towards obtaining a certificate, as he wants to pursue his own subjects according to his interests and the respective situation. Thus, volition is directed towards to realization of self-interest although depending on the structures that make some actions more possible than others. Knowledge and ability are further developed but they remain bound to finding the answers to personally relevant questions.

At the time of the second interview, Kessler is 65 years old and has been officially retired for one year. Now he explains that he had studied philosophy, physics and psychology not for a specific occupation but for his future options. 'At the time I didn't know what I wanted to be so I first of all started to study to pick up the right thing for later. And some day I will earn money from it. And it worked like that, yes. If you can do anything well, some day you will earn money with it'. After a job in a city planning office where he developed a number of interests (socio-psychology, politics), he started to work as a teacher. He explains that he explicitly used the latter to escape unemployment but also used the job and the psychoanalytical apprenticeship as a possibility to orient himself towards new things and an opportunity for personal development and learning. After this period of about five years, he explains that he decided against becoming a therapist. He didn't 'dare to be a therapist and to tell clients how to live their life in the right way'. He instead wanted to bring his interest in photography to fruition. 'And then I told myself I needed to do something for myself first, something which is a concern of mine, photography'. This is a change of the professional main thread 'and then an occupation developed from this like learning by doing'. As he says, he then continued with photography, an old hobby. His further vocational life was built around photography, whereby he offers photography classes at the adult education centre. Finally, he independently works his way into the area of digital photography, works in several companies and creates his own company afterwards. At the same time, he holds classes at the adult education centre based on his previous academic subjects as well as new subjects related to photography now and again. In addition to this, he attends seminars at his old university. One year before he officially retires, he leaves the company but continues his activity as teacher.

While in the first interview Kessler describes his activities against the background of individual interests and situational opportunities, in the second interview, he presents the story of a form of the development of professionalism which is embedded in a biographical process of experience.

By comparing two sequences out of the two interviews (bridge sequences) about Kessler's different ways of describing (lifelong) learning, we can see the (dis)connection between interest, learning and occupation.

Learning as continuation of new things

I started working as a teacher when Mr. X [head of department in an adult education centre] asked me if I would like to do so. But actually it became a kind of a problematic self-dynamic process because I have a 'following' now, and this effects non-learning. They are not interested in new issues or contents. They're satisfied listening to the old stuff. If this goes on I would say I have to get out of the job.

Lifelong Learning as dichotomy of social commitment and personal interests

Lifelong learning means to me to actually try to be interested forever, to be open and fascinated. I see something new and say to myself that I'm interested in that and that I want to know that. And that's lifelong learning, it doesn't mean that I must do something to further my job prospects. This is necessary and sensible too but I think for me it's important to rejoice in the new thing that I want to learn.

Whilst during the first interview Kessler focused on learning as an ongoing individual and group process for which new content was required, at the second interview he also understood learning as an ongoing process, but now in examination between his own wishes and social requirements. Differences between the interviews mainly refer to the question of whether and how certain partially identical results are referred to and/or omitted at the different points in time. At time t_1 , his central activity is the writing of his doctoral thesis while his job as a photographer is not mentioned. With a retrospective view on his (successful) professional path at time t_2 , this job becomes the key moment of the beginning of a professional career which results in the founding of his own company via different levels of acquisition. Compared to this, the started doctoral thesis does not have any meaning anymore and is reinterpreted as 'studies' in psychology, since the related path to become a therapist is not further pursued. The striving for independence and non-determination only becomes clear in the second interview, while in the first the continuous consolidation and expansion of the respectively current topic (socio-psychology) is in focus.

In both stories, entrance to the activity as a teacher takes place accidentally, is unplanned and mainly serves as a means to additional financial earnings. It is an activity, however, that makes it possible for him to retest his current knowledge and develop it further, if necessary. From this point of view, activity as a teacher promotes his individual learning more than professional learning. Although Kessler constantly carries out this activity, pedagogic knowledge and ability are not explicit topics. The competence of teaching (ability) appears quasi naturally as the consequence of an interested and skilled teacher. If there is interest (volition), the required knowledge is gained through informal and non-formal contexts and used in the concrete (professional) action without any transfer losses. Self-observation centrally aspires to match individual interests with the available possibilities. It does not serve for the further development of a pedagogic professionalism.

For Klaus Kessler, the development of professionalism takes place via three central phases:

Table 2. Phases of the development of professionalism as a biographical process of personal fulfilment

Phase 1	Search and testing process	Arbitrary entrance into an adult pedagogical field of action
		Activity as a teacher as a possibility of earning money, individual learning and testing of own knowledge and ability
		Parallel to this: beginning a therapeutic apprenticeship and doctoral thesis
		Continuation of activity as a teacher but no explicit (further) development of pedagogical professionalism
Phase 2	Finding process	Assumption of previous 'profession' as a photographer, interruption of the doctoral thesis and termination of a therapeutic career
		Extension of knowledge and ability in the area of photography by carrying out different professional activities
Phase 3	Demonstration of competence	Presentation of the professional way as a continuous biographical process of competence development (i.e. as a close link between knowledge, volition and ability)
		No authentication with certificates but with successful actions (practical legitimisations which create a continuity line)

The first phase seems to be a longer search process.⁷ The arbitrary entrance to the activity of teaching is part of a search for an appropriate (professional) occupation and is oriented towards individual interests. The current action in each case, whether in the class, in the form of the doctoral thesis or psychoanalytical apprenticeship, serves for testing and further developing existing knowledge and ability. Pedagogical content is not an explicit topic.

In the second phase which can be called a professional finding process, previous (financially) successful skills are consolidated. These are related to positive professional experience and in addition can be coupled with an individual interest (hobby). During this phase, knowledge and ability are acquired by learning on the job/learning by doing, for instance, in the form of concrete professional activities (also as a teacher). Self-assurance derived from successful selection from options in the past, allows Kessler to select from options for the future and make a move from an academic world to a technical one.

In the third phase, in retrospect, the demonstration of competence, the professional way, can be presented as a continuous learning process. This process is not narrated to be as the result of certified formal knowledge, but as the result of successful actions that are closely linked to biographical development and individual well-being.

Although Kessler's teaching goes on for over 25 years it is not explicitly linked to his acquisition of new knowledge or abilities or his reflection on actions. Thus, the analysis shows the continuity of his teaching activity as well as the development of his professional competence as a photographer, but not the development of an explicit pedagogical professionalism which links knowledge, ability and reflection to pedagogical questions. Instead, this case refers to professionalism as biographical personal fulfilment.

Conclusion

From our point of view, professionalism proves to be an ongoing project. The reconstruction of the development of professionalism covering two different points in time makes it clear that the usually ‘hidden’ way of individual learning processes’ (cf. Kade & Seitter, 2007, p. 138) can be empirically captured. In case of Kessler, this way is an individual learning process which depends on individual volition and situational possibilities. The world is permanently looked at with a perspective on possible points of contact for the realization of individual interests. His reflection of the link between his own actions/ability, knowledge and volition is thus placed in the context of coping with life and thus on the biographical level. His way of professional learning – without acquisition of any systematic professional knowledge in adult education – means that no explicit pedagogical professionalism is developed. Professional learning is accordingly realized in the context of a biographical personal fulfilment process. According to Alheit, the term of ‘biographicity’ (2003) can be used here: ‘Biographicity means that we can always reinterpret our lives in the contexts where we (have to) live it and that we get to know these contexts themselves as ‘formable’ and shapeable’ (ibid., p. 16).

In contrast to this, an individual intentional process of professional learning which is directed towards qualification and enlightenment can be observed with Gruber. This results from experience of discrepancies between his knowledge and ability and the requirements of a changed world. The discrepancy between subject and world is compensated by subject changes. At the beginning of his pedagogical professional learning, formal acquisition via courses of skills and lacking knowledge is in the foreground. Afterwards, Gruber transforms his identity into that of a permanent learner, so that the acquisition of contents can be decoupled and new situations (changes of the world) do no longer have to lead to a subjective experience of discrepancy. The new identity can thus be used in any situation, as a targeted process for overcoming specific problematic situations, since it is adjusted to a world that is continuously changing.

Scientific positions usually assume that professionalism is based on academic education and that professional actions (abilities) are linked to related knowledge (cf. Dewe, 2002). In the context of the expert-novice model (cf. Bromme, 1992), it is furthermore found that experts are characterised in that conscious reflection steps back and a ‘reflection in action’ becomes relevant instead of a ‘reflection on action’ (Schön, 1983). We show here empirically that teachers develop their competence in close relation to their biography and that learning through experience plays a central role in practice – as found by Kraft and Seitter (2009, p. 189). In addition, the analysis of two biographical narrations of the same person at two different points in time shows that professional learning takes place through a search process. In this process, two forms of professional learning can be differentiated through these examples: first, the development of professionalism as the continuous adjustment to professional requirements by acquiring knowledge and ability and second, the development of professionalism as a realization of individual interests and competence because of available possibilities. In addition to this, the evaluations of the interviews make it clear that the dimension of self-observation decisively influences the professional learning and therefore the development of professionalism.⁸ Thus, to develop professionalism it is necessary that the individual move from phases – in which knowledge and skills could have been gained – to phases where knowledge and ability can be tested and reflected upon. ‘There is a great need for transparency and for learning from each other to improve one’s own practice.’ (Lattke, 2008, p. 163).

However, there are many professional training programs for people working in the field of adult education, and there is the danger of deprofessionalisation – as Bron and Jarvis (2008) found for the Anglo-Saxon area for example, the question is how the development of pedagogical professionalism can be supported. Here, one must think about the institutionalisation of moments for reflection where not only pedagogical knowledge and ability can be acquired, but where biographical self-reflection can be combined with pedagogical professional (self-)observation (e.g. with forms of consultation among colleagues). In the words of Linden West: ‘research (...) can provide space for really reflexive learning’ (West, 2010, p. 79).

Notes

¹ For the development of a reference model within the frame of the national framework of qualification for the development of professionalism in Germany, see. Kraft, Seitter & Kollwe 2009.

² In the DFG (main German Research Association) funded research project, with the title “Precarious Formations of Lifelong Learning (original german title: ”Prekäre Kontinuitäten. Der Wandel von Bildungsgestalten im großstädtischen Raum unter den Bedingungen der forcierten Durchsetzung des Lebenslangen Lernens“) we analyze the ways in which lifelong learning and individual biographies interact and how they change over a lifetime. The data base consists of 30 narrative interviews with individuals (participants and teachers of adult education) living in German urban centers who were first questioned 1980s on the subject of “Learning and Teaching” and again between 2007 and 2009. As a qualitative longitudinal study, we have two interviews which were conducted with the same person at two different times. (Project Leader: Prof. Dr. Jochen Kade und Prof. Dr. Christiane Hof, Frankfurt University; Project workers: Sascha Benedetti, Monika Fischer, Ulrike Funk, Dr. Cornelia Maier-Gutheil, Heike Breckle.)

³ These interviews have been analyzed and previously published (cf. Kade 1989).

⁴ We follow a broad understanding of the term “Bildung“ and understand “Bildung” as acquisition and constitution of world” (cf. Humboldt, 1793/1969). In this way, not only processes of learning but also other forms of acquisition may be researched (cf. Fischer, Kade & Benedetti, 2010).

⁵ This information is however not explicitly mentioned in the interview but can only be concluded from a written remark of the interview.

⁶ The basic knowledge of Latin is re-formulated as a skill of “logically structured thinking”.

⁷ This can, however, only be reconstructed in detail with the first interview.

⁸ However, we can only speak of a pedagogical development of professionalism if the self-observation is as well-linked to professional educational knowledge as it is directed towards concrete tasks and problems within the framework of adult education.

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