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*European journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults* 13 (2022) 3, S. 247-259



Quellenangabe/ Reference:

Larsen, Lene: Work pedagogy as an alternative path to adult life - In: *European journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults* 13 (2022) 3, S. 247-259 - URN: urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-268318 - DOI: 10.25656/01:26831; 10.3384/rela.2000-7426.3511

<https://doi.org/10.25656/01:26831>

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## Work pedagogy as an alternative path to adult life

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### Abstract

*In recent years, much attention has been paid to how young people in the 'not in education, employment or training' group can get education or work, not only to ensure welfare and social mobility but also because education constitutes an important bridge between childhood and adult life. This article discusses the usefulness of work pedagogy for young people in this transition. Theoretically, the article draws on a socialization theory concept of life history and a critical theory concept of work. Methodologically, it is based on a narrative autobiographical interview with a young girl in a Danish 'production school'. This enables a critical analysis of how young people's educational participation is closely linked to life history experiences and transitions from childhood to adult life. These experiences form the basis for the young people's subsequent participation in various forms of (compensatory) adult education.*

**Keywords:** learning processes, life history, transition, work pedagogy

### Practical work as educational motivation?

... I want my life to be like this: I'll have a good home and nice children and a nice husband, and he should also be good at helping, and then I can sit talking to all my friends all the time, and not just sit at home getting bored by myself, and I'll get out and travel, and have some experiences instead of just sitting at home and well, I don't know..... so what's it called..... paid work, well at least I want to help people and things like that.....

This is how Line, a young Danish girl of 16, tells about her plans. A future paid job is what she mentions last and has the least concrete and somewhat diffuse notions and dreams about. Work and husband are 'out there', she is 'at home' and at this point in her life her friends get her out of the home rather than paid work. Education as a concept and activity is not discussed as part of her current future horizon. Line is thus an example of how education and work are felt to be distant by some young people. Therefore, they have difficulty living up to very strict political goals and



demands that all young people must complete upper secondary education. This is often regarded from a deficit perspective as an isolated issue of poor educational motivation and not becoming adults fast enough. The so-called 'Danish Production School' is based on social and work pedagogy to help such young people to return to school and with their transition from childhood to adult life. As this article will argue, this process is a complex relationship between life history, the process of growing up and the notions of education and work. The aim of the article is to show how a course at a production school is part of the complexity between young people's learning, identity formation and notions of a future educational and employment career.

Methodologically, the article is based on Line's life history narrative, and the analysis exemplifies how the path from primary school to education and employment can take shape from a subjective perspective, and the possible significance of special educational offer, the production school, in this process. The interview with Line comes from a previous research project on the production school, its pedagogy and its students, where narrative life history interviews have been used (Schütze, 1983, 1984; Alheit, 1993). This project was part of the larger and broader field of life history research, which is concerned with young people's and adults' everyday lives and the subjective aspects of learning processes (Adults' lives and Learning / Life History project 1997-2004). This choice of empirical method is based on a perception that the person's life history and previous socialization process play an important role in the process of making choices regarding education and work. The total interview data (14 life history interviews) has made it possible to trace and analyse the way in which the individual young person creates coherence in an otherwise often incoherent life. There is a particular emphasis on how themes such as parents, schooling, friends, education and work are linked together and attributed importance in the transition from youth to adult, and the role played by the production school as an educational offer (Larsen, 2003a, 2003b).

The most important characteristics of the Danish production schools are production and practical work as the central pedagogical activity, there is ongoing access, there is no curriculum and the students do not gain formal qualifications. Since the 1970s, the production school has been one of the most important offers for young people who do not go directly from lower to upper secondary school. The target group is young people 'not in education, employment or training' (NEETs) (OECD, 2012). This category was introduced in the UK in the mid-1990s and has been at the heart of the European political agenda since around 2010 (Eurofond, 2016). Although Denmark has a lower number of NEETs than many other European countries, 6.5% in 2018 (Vive, 2019), there are still major challenges in young people's access to ordinary upper secondary education and the labour market (Larsen & Katznelson, 2016).

The NEET group is very heterogeneous and has many different problems and challenges, which is why the category itself can be considered problematic (Eurofond, 2016; Vive, 2019).

The students in the Danish production schools are of course also a diverse group; they may have academic challenges, psychosocial problems or generally do not fit into the ordinary educational system.

The starting point is therefore that educational courses must be adapted to the individual student's wishes and needs, and they must vary in goals, length and content. The training courses at the production school are not only structurally defined, but also in terms of content and pedagogy, with great flexibility in the tasks and a high degree of inclusiveness to accommodate students' diversity and various challenges.

The production and practical work in workshops have different historical and pedagogical roots. One is different initiatives for combating unemployment, where work in itself is considered healthy and good. Another is reform pedagogical principles of child-centred and practical teaching, and a third is the Danish public information tradition's emphasis on joint activities and the fact that relevant knowledge is not only school-based knowledge (Larsen, 2003b). The recent increased focus on practice learning and situated learning has led to some production schools also drawing theoretical inspiration from Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998). Emphasis is placed on establishing communities of practice that strive for different legitimate participation opportunities for students. Whether the practical and social communities in the production school function as actual communities of practice must be an unanswered question here. The point is that

learning is perceived as a matter of situated participation in social practice, where participation in various everyday practices is highlighted (Colley et al., 2003).

In this way, the production school will contain a duality connected to the individual organization of the courses: On the one hand, the starting point is the participants' experiential world, which is closely linked to a reform pedagogical way of thinking. On the other hand, there is an individualization, division and independence of the activities. For example, practical experience with professional elements in different workshops does not necessarily lead to a desire to learn more, and if the motivation for further learning increases, it may not be primarily the desire for formal qualifications (Larsen & Villumsen 2012; Larsen 2013).

## The production school as an educational policy instrument

Since the early 1990s, the production schools have been an important element in the educational policy strategy of 'education for all young people'. This strategy has in recent years become stricter; it was previously based on motivation and voluntariness, but is now based on orders and requirements. Denmark is one of the Nordic countries that formulates the requirement for education and employment for all, as far as possible. This applies especially to young people in the NEET group. Here, Denmark differs from other Nordic and European countries by having introduced a national target that 95% of a youth cohort must complete upper secondary school (Larsen & Katznelson, 2016; Jørgensen, 2018).

Since the Danish production schools started in the mid-1970s, there have been significant changes in policies, objectives, and in the education's self-understanding. With the latest changes in the law, we see an increasing degree of business direction and goal orientation, and the production school must form a bridge to vocational education in terms of both practical and academic prerequisites. The latest change was to bring together various educational offers for NEETs in 2019 under a common institutional framework called Preparatory Basic Education (FGU). This education has three tracks: general, vocational and production basic education, where the latter builds on the workshop pedagogy in the former production schools, but there has been more focus on systematic teaching in ordinary school subjects. The aim is to motivate young people, whose progress will give them the experience of acquiring new skills and solid work habits that will help them take responsibility for their future adult life (Danish Government, 2017). Through changes in legislation and an increased emphasis on the educational significance of practical work, this program has increasingly acquired the character of an actual educational institution. This further changes the task in the direction of motivating and preparing 'non-academic' students for the ordinary education system, including improving their academic skills. In other words, there is no bridge between childhood and adulthood if a person does not go to school.

## Choice of education as transition and sorting

Compared with other countries, the Danish education system expects young people to choose very early between high school and vocational education (the dual system). This means that about 75% of young people today choose upper secondary school with a view to postponing their final choice for three years. It is considered 'the safe choice' or 'the natural choice' (EVA, 2013), and there is a strong political focus on vocational education and various initiatives on how to make it appear more attractive. This choice can clearly not be seen independently of its link to society, where both social background and the education system itself play a key role and determine the possibilities (Domina et al., 2017). The example of Line below shows how a life history approach provides an understanding of some of the complexity that lies in the relationship between young people's background and their orientations towards education and work. For example, Line primarily makes the production school a space for interactions, whereas it is more difficult to see if and how she qualifies professionally. In this context, life history is conceptualized as a subject-

object dialectic, where the subject is constituted and perceived as a dynamic structure of opposites that lead to ambivalence and lines of consciousness in which the dynamics of learning processes are embedded. A life history approach to qualification, education and learning indicates not only the potentials and resources of the participants, but also the frameworks, structures and conditions that may seem to block these (Salling Olesen, 2004, 2016, 2017a).

This concept of life history is inspired by the theory of socialization. In continuation of Lorenzer's work, the life story is seen as a series of contradictory interactions between an immediate outside world, which itself is structured by societal contradictions, and an individual, who itself is a contradictory structured product of socialization (Lorenzer, 1972, 1986). Biography is a concept for the synthesizing narrative of life history, which on the one hand contains harmonization of conflicts and contradictions but which on the other hand can contain drafts of utopias in a more or less rudimentary form. The biography represents in principle a 'dynamic life lie', but it is in this dynamic that learning processes take place, and it is through this they become important to the individual (Salling Olesen, 1996, 2016, 2017a). The biography understood as the narrative of the life course contains elements of identity production in that events are reflected, linked and interpreted. The narrative's relationship between the events as they took place then, and as they are told now, contains an important basis for interpretation in relation to the interviewee's self-understanding and the world around her, i.e. the narrated story is perceived as a source of identity processes and analysis of these (Schütze, 1983, 1984; Alheit, 1993, 1994).

In continuation of this, the analysis below takes a socialization-theoretical perspective on young adults. This means that the starting point is youth as a social group that arose in step with the development of capitalist wage labour, and the development of youth is considered as part of the societal individualization process that has been intensified with the separation of production and reproduction, i.e. work and childhood/family. In addition, young people are perceived as a culturally determined phase of life, which includes identity processes, such as the development of gender identity, and the solution of psychological tasks. These processes cannot be understood exclusively in terms of developmental psychological categories but must include an understanding of unconscious processes and dynamics, i.e. they must incorporate concepts and categories from psychoanalysis and socialization theory. Finally, this means that young people's cultural expressions and contexts are seen as spaces for relationships and interactions and as places where conflicts and ambivalence are processed verbally, symbolically and aesthetically (Larsen, 2003b).

The educational imperative implies that educational institutions have become the central and obligatory places for young people to stay, where their psychological tasks must be solved. Transition research states that the path from primary school to employment has become less linear and more complex, and that transitions in general are increasingly changing and will take the form of complex zig-zag movements (Wyn & Dwyer, 2002; Walther, 2006; Cuervo & Wyn, 2014). Life does not go by a string – not even for adults. At the same time, educational policy initiatives are based on targeted, effective and linear transitions, which do not make young people's transitions from youth to adult easier to handle. In addition, young people's lives consist of much more than individual transition and are largely about how the various types of programs manage to create belonging and participation opportunities for different young people (Larsen et al, 2016).

Thus, the sorting function of the types of education is reflected in young people's perception of the programmes offered (Larsen & Thunqvist, 2018). The sorting and thus the question of equality and inequality to enter and within education is a well-known theme in the sociology of education. In parts of classical sociology of education, the question is grounded in functional analyses that show that one of the most important societal functions of the education system (besides qualifying and socializing) is to sort students. This happens e.g. through recruitment to education, through differentiation in education levels and through grade and reward systems within the specific programmes (Masuch, 1974; Bernstein, 2001; Salling Olesen, 2011). Others point out how classifications and categorizations in themselves lead to sorting and thus to inequality (e.g. Bourdieu, 1996.) A newer American study uses the concept of 'category inequality' to show how three significant processes in the education system create inequality: 1) the reproduction of existing social categories, 2) the creation of new categories and 3) the allocation of individuals/students to these categories (Domina et al., 2017). In other words, the education

system reproduces, produces and structures in various ways social inequality through categorizations of young people (Larsen et al, 2020). These categorizations and inequalities pursue young people further into the adult education system.

## School fatigue and practical work

In general, in the Danish educational tradition, practical work is considered as an important pedagogical response to school-weary and non-academic students and a suitable means of supporting this group in choosing education and work. This applies to the production school in particular with the production and work as a focal point for the activities and the students' learning processes.

Line is, as mentioned initially, 16 years old at the time of the interview and has not made an educational choice, but has some imprecise ideas about a future job. She lives in the small provincial town where she grew up with her parents and two older brothers. She starts 8th grade in a so-called alternative class, which includes practical work. She has gone to several support classes, the last of which contained a number of practical subjects, which meant Line got tired of going to school and found it difficult to get out of bed in the morning:

But then in the end they talked to my mother at the parents' meeting, well then things went better again, because I could see that was a stupid way to do it... .. but what wouldn't you do to get rid of it....?

What 'it' is that Line wants to get rid of remains unspoken and embodied. It is not just about mentally wanting to get rid of it; she physically wants to get rid of it as well. She has particular problems with mathematics, whereas she likes Danish, English and reading books. Line says that you go to school to learn to count, read and write, which she actually wants to learn. Otherwise, she says virtually nothing about her previous schooling, and her other experiences are subordinate to the concept of 'fatigue', and she expresses frustration that the school cannot teach her basic cultural techniques. However, she perceives her school fatigue as her own shortcoming, which she is powerless to prevent.

Primary school has thus not managed to give Line a schooling that contains sufficient closeness, security and peace for her to learn enough literacy, and she has difficulty articulating her previous schooling. She even cites her major school fatigue as the reason she comes to a production school after 9th grade. Here she works in the wood workshop, and finds the work there boring and monotonous:

Well I mean it's okay to be there, but you often do the same thing over and over again.

In Line's view, the production school is good enough, but in her criticism of the work in the workshop, she points out the procedure of constantly having to do what the teacher has noticed a student is good at. What Line likes best in the workshop is to sew the fabric for furniture to be upholstered and to sew it on with '*small, fine, invisible stitches*'. She comforts herself with the thought that she will sew again in a few days, when she has finished all the tedious sandpapering work. In this way, she harmonizes her ambivalence in relation to the work. The interviewer asks if she would not rather go to one of the other workshops. In response, Line formulates one of her longer and more precise passages:

Well, when I was up in the kitchen there, it was just stupid, because there was nothing to it, we just had to cook all the time, and you cried five times a day, because you had to peel onions all the time. Then I went to the media class, and that was nothing too, because you just had to sit there and connect to a computer, so then I came down to the wood workshop, and I found that exciting, so I liked it and so I went there, and so did Charlotte, because it was her place too. She hasn't regretted it, except that she often quarrelled with the teacher,

but well, I don't know, it may well get better if I get to do something different, I just think it's because I've done the same thing almost all the time....

Line has an ambivalent relationship to the work in the wood workshop, but she likes some of the other workshops even less, and she chooses the wood workshop due to her interest in the subject and inspiration from her friend Charlotte. Charlotte has given Line a bad impression of the production school beforehand, but she has not regretted her choice of workshop, only that she quarrels with the teacher. However, she still feels that the production school is a good place, and she thinks it is fun to sew. In other words, the two friends have opposite experiences of the production school and working in the wood workshop. Line tries to harmonize the contradictions she personally experiences with her desire and hope of doing some more varied work in the workshop.

Line expresses her reaction to the different workshops by saying that there is a lot of boring work and that the kitchen and IT are certainly not something for her. In the production school, it is important that students receive recognition for their efforts based on the quality of the goods, which must achieve normal market standards. This is important to Line, as she likes to sew fine neat stitches. Part of her motivation for working in the wood workshop is that chairs are produced for a local nursing home for the benefit of the residents. The point here is that work, in contrast to the school's content and communication of knowledge, is presumed to have subjective significance in the intertwining of the concrete pleasure of doing something and the notion of usefulness and meaning shaped by paid work (Salling Olesen, 1981). However, Line does not mention this aspect of the work.

There is little to suggest that Line is significantly better equipped than when she started at the production school in relation to the school's aim of motivating students for education through practical work and providing a sound basis for completing vocational education. She certainly learns something useful in the wood workshop, but she does not attach importance to it, and her interest in sewing has apparently not been supported by the production school. Line does not show equal enthusiasm for other subjects, nor does she test other areas where the joy of neatness and precision can unfold. Further, Line does not state whether she believes she has become better at mastering cultural techniques. She does not say whether she has joined a class of general subjects, and she does not emphasize the integrated teaching in the workshop (observations in the wood workshop showed that the teacher attaches great importance to this, and the students practice basic arithmetic skills by e.g. measuring materials).

At one point, Line planned to become a furniture upholsterer, but the lack of practice placements means she may risk having to move to another part of the country. She therefore changes her mind: *'And I don't want to, of course, when my friends are here'*. She thus feels she cannot do without her friends, rather than her boyfriend; instead she chooses 'something with people'. Line's narrative exemplifies a general situation where her impending entry into employment can be perceived as a crisis phase, in which young people will have to relate their life story to the demands of the labour market in a way that maintains their identity to some extent. With the transition from school to profession, socio-biography becomes relevant, and the past is involved in young people's choice of profession, where decisions are made based on experiences that are justified biographically and thereby equipped with subjective meaning (Heinz, 2002). 'Something with people' is for Line 'reasonably secure' as she can continue living near her friends. It is realistic in relation to her school knowledge, and it draws back on experiences of closeness, relationships and intimacy. This can be interpreted as Line's belief that it is not the work which is meaningful, but that someone is interested in her and in her future plans that make an impression. The question is whether Line has become more motivated for education, which she knows is a requirement for becoming an adult.

## Absence of education and work

In the process of choosing education and work, including imagining a future paid job, young people often resort to events and relationships in childhood.

The teacher at the production school has given the students a booklet with some questions to answer regarding themselves and their future plans, and Line reads from the booklet, where she has described her future plans:

Well, what's it called, I wrote that I'd like to do, you know, what's it called? Nursery or something, I'd like that, or go to a nursing home, like that....

She also reads:

I want a nice family with two or three children, a nice house, with nice furniture, a dog, a husband who's loving, honest, good at helping at home, I want a nice job that I am happy with, but we'll have to see how things go ...

She elaborates more specifically in the introductory quote to this article, where, as mentioned, work comes last. Her distance to work is expressed with the words '*so what's it called.... paid work...*'. Work is placed within a family horizon, where she formulates a romantic dream for the future. A Danish cultural sociologist (Jørgensen, 1985) talks about 'the culture of the romantic dream' in some girls, which is structured by both patriarchal notions about the subordinate and indispensable role of women in society and the family and by the young girls' own experiences from friendships regarding good female qualities. For most of these girls, work has a secondary place in their future plans, where a defence system of non-planning is built in. Time as a process does not exist, but is formulated as highlights in life in the form of romantic images of husband, children and dog. They also romanticize work and associate it with the positive experiences of the female norm (Jørgensen, 1985, p. 22-24). For Line, work also has a secondary place. She does not make specific plans for her future, but instead has some dreamy ideas about how she would like life to be.

Line wants a 'nice job'. She perceives working in a crèche or nursing home as 'helping', which is linked to the culturally produced female norm and care work:

... I like to talk to people about their problems and so on, so if they ask me for advice, you know, I try to tell them what I would do if I were them, not to tell them to do it, but I'd reckon it was best, then they could think if they could use some of it, you see, or if it was completely stupid, and then work out a plan yourself, like in a hospital or nursing home or crèche, I'd like that, but mostly a crèche ....

From where Line has these images is unclear. It may be from talking to friends, from counselling sessions, and it may be an expression of her perception that she has lacked proper help and guidance herself. It is characteristic she expresses notions of equality in relationships, but does not mention other aspects of care work. Although care work consists of emotions and relationships, including helping, it varies considerably. It can also be tedious routine work of changing many nappies every day, helping old people get dressed, etc., and it is also stressful work. Line has no idea of these dimensions of work, as she has no experience of them. Line imagines her desire to help can be realized in a hospital, a nursing home or in a nursery, but she finds it difficult to decide between young children and elderly people. Therefore, the interviewer asks:

I: 'But there's a big difference between caring for old people and such small children?'



Line: 'Yes...there is, but I think mostly I'd like work with little children...but you know...old people are also, I think there are lots of very nice old people...every time someone comes and talks to them, they brighten up....'

Within Line's horizon, there is not much difference, or at least she cannot formulate it. Her notions of equality in conversations mean something crucially different in relation to children and the elderly; she has apparently not reflected on this and her perception of older people is formulated within the horizon of 'nice', which implies that they will be nice to her too. Nothing in the interview suggests that the 'booklet' works as e.g. log books are supposed to work. She does not reflect on the relationship between herself and her perception of care work or on how this is included in her identity processes.

Line is also an example of how a lack of practice placements can support segmentation in the labour market. If there had been a local placement in the upholstery profession, she might have maintained this interest, and a positive connection between the production school and vocational education could have been created.

Work for Line remains something involving emotions and relationships, and her somewhat diffuse notions of helping are generally far removed from the conditions of care work. Similarly, her notions of husband and children are far from what many women achieve in reality and probably from what she and her current boyfriend will be able to achieve too. In other words, Line makes a biographical construction that creates continuity and coherence in her life, where her future plans can be seen as a continuation of childhood family life and indifferent intimate relationships, which are a central element in her identity work towards becoming an adult (Larsen, 2010).

In this way, Line shows that it is not through the practical work in the production school that she becomes (much) better at academic work, as the work has little subjective significance for her. She expresses a need to work with e.g. jewellery and clay across the workshops, which can be interpreted as a need to work aesthetically and symbolically and to mediate between unconscious meanings and symbolic forms of expression and thus open her horizon. She also expresses an interest and need for social interaction; here, the challenge for the production school is to establish work situations where Line connects as subject to object and which contain a social element and interaction context in connection with work (Negt, 1984).

## School as a space for emotions and relationships

For Line, going to production school is not (only) a matter of progressing in the education system. Importantly, it is also a space for social relations inside and outside school, both as compensation for lack of sociality in primary school and as part of the transition from child to adult. Line has a close relationship with her mother, and she remembers her childhood as good and safe and it is her mother she talks to about the production school and her future plans:

'Well, I think at least she's a good mother, and she's also the one I tell the most to, so you might kind of say she's like my best friend too'.

She makes a comparison and a series of arguments, where her mother is the one she tells the most to, therefore her mother is good, and the person you tell the most to is your best friend. In an attempt to maintain intimacy with her mother, Line establishes a friendly relationship, which apparently makes it difficult for Line to break away from childhood relationships and to establish adult relationships, and her mother reportedly has difficulty giving up her youngest child.

Efforts at autonomy in puberty often take place in close relationships between girls, where a new form of dependence and intimacy is established. The friendships provide opportunities for independence and demarcation in relation to adults, but at the same time, the fundamental conflict between autonomy and love also appears in the friendships (Nielsen & Rudberg, 1991, 1993). Central to Line's orientations in relation to the production school are also relationships with other girls. Line and Charlotte have been friends for many years, and at one point, the 'classic' conflict

between female friends and boyfriends occurs. The close friendship ends when Charlotte gets a boyfriend:

We also knew each other since school, and then three and a half years ago, we were every day all the time, and ... either I was at her house or she was at my house, we were always together, but then she started going out with someone called Jens, so then it ended, because then she had him to care about, and then I also had other friends, you know...

The female friend seeks autonomy through her boyfriend and the intimate relationship between Line and Charlotte ends. The phrase *'then she had him to care about'* expresses Line's blurring of a painful separation and contempt, while also containing the inevitability of separation. For example, she does not say that Charlotte would now rather be with her boyfriend, but instead more generally that boyfriends require attention, and Line also mentions her own *'other friends'*.

Occasionally they met in town, and kept in touch, and at some point, Charlotte begins at the production school and they become good friends again. Charlotte has dropped her boyfriend, and Line says Charlotte later went back to him, but in the meantime, she has a boyfriend herself, and the harmony is restored.

At a late stage in the interview Line introduces her boyfriend and in a context where he helps to support and maintain the relationship between Line and Charlotte. The interviewer tries to get Line to talk about her boyfriend, who also goes to the production school. This succeeds only in the form of very short answers to precise questions:

In: 'And your boyfriend is.....?'

Line: 'Kim'

I: 'Do you talk to each other during the day ...?'

Line: 'Me and Kim?'

I: 'Yeah'

Line: 'Yes, yes, we talk during breaks and after school and so on...'

Kim started at the production school before Line, but Line does not mention that in connection with her previous impression of the production school. She only says he had recommended the kitchen because he himself liked it, and because then they could be in the same class. However, Line opted out of the kitchen, regardless of her boyfriend. After that, she only talks about her boyfriend twice, in both cases when asked directly if they have gone to school together:

In: 'Were you in the same class as Kim?'

Line: 'No but we knew each other before I started there, because that class was just below ours, there was me, and then a girl called Rikke, who I was good friends with at the time, then she started to go out with him, and then I started talking to him and his friends, so in the end it was just that whole big gang that got together somewhere and just sat and talked ....'

Line's talk (again) moves away from her boyfriend and to a larger group of friends. In other words, her boyfriend acts here as access to a larger youth community, which is important to Line and her transition processes.

When the interviewer finally tries to get Line to be specific about her general and abstract future ideas about her husband and children, she says:

Line: '... I'll marry him someday and have lots of children. He's already said we'll have 13 children ....'

In: 'Really, and then?'

Line: 'I just think I'll set a limit there.'

She says this with a smile on her face. Line refers to her boyfriend more as access to friends and family life than as access to an adult, sexual relationship. Line seeks intimacy and a sense of community with her friends, whereas her boyfriend is less involved in her attempts to gain autonomy even though she thinks marriage and children are an important part of her adult life.

Line is thus busy solving the youth task of going from child to adult with the psychological and social processes this entails, such as liberation from her parents, profiling of a gender identity, participation in youth communities. Ziehe (1999, 2005) underlines that development of individuality and identity is far from an individual project, social recognition is important and it is together with others that one sees oneself. Individualization is neither a psychological fact nor a way of life, but a historical social unit, where having to find one's way through life has become a normal expectation and a socializing framework within which one must make some decisions regarding one's life. It is a 'permanent biographical issue' to relate to who one is and whom one identifies with.

The students' emphasis on the social communities (Larsen, 2003b) can be seen as an expression of their need to be part of 'normal' youth life as well as for a sense of intimacy and community that supports the development of adult relationships and allows for the fact that the contradictory situation the young people are in can be processed concretely and symbolically. The working communities in the production school are not necessarily sufficient, as they follow the logic of paid work and only rarely form the basis for collective learning processes. In addition, some of the work done might in principle connect young people with society, but this does not always happen in real life. Nor does it necessarily allow them to connect with themselves and the immediate object of interest. This problem becomes even clearer in relation to the closer connection to vocational programmes which follows from the latest education reforms in the field.

## Time for being an adult

In conclusion, the analysis of Line shows that she is in a workshop that is scarcely relevant to her vocational wishes, and there is no clear, targeted preparation for a vocational education. A key factor in this connection is that a narrower and more targeted connection to vocational education does not necessarily create greater educational motivation. This refers to research on lifelong learning that shows different kinds of barriers and defence against the contradictory imperative of learning and competence development (Salling Olesen, 2013, 2017b). Further, it emphasizes the transformation of lifelong learning from a right to a duty (Biesta, 2006).

The analysis also shows that young people are not easily challenged by changes in laws and reforms. With these changes, some completely different rationales and processes emerge, such as Line's search for emotions and relationships and the difficult process from child to adult. Young people who form part of NEET statistics often have very complicated life situations with challenging transitions from youth to adulthood with high human, social and economic costs (Olsen et al., 2016). The life history angle clearly shows how young people express themselves and the driving forces in their learning processes. This example reveals that Line most of all lacks help and support to become an adult, as a prerequisite for an upper secondary education and a job. Lack of educational motivation and 'academic difficulties' are thus not only external parameters in relation to starting and completing an upper secondary education, but are involved in a complex school and life history (Salling Olesen, 2004; Olsen et al., 2016). In addition, the education system is far from monolithic, but a hierarchical field of power that is both complex and differentiated. For young adults, it is therefore of great importance where they are in the education system and how their path through it appears. Hierarchies within and between educational programmes constitute in themselves a differentiating factor, which means that education offers different opportunities for young people who are at different places in the education system

(Jørgensen, 2018) On the one hand, education has hegemonic status as a central part of the normal biography and the notion of a good life, but on the other hand, education in practice is not available to everyone. The experiences people bring into different kinds of adult education are essential prerequisites for opportunities to participate, and these experiences are reactivated as dynamics in learning processes as adults.

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