



WHAT'S THE POINT OF LIFELONG LEARNING?

NARRATIVES FROM THE UNSKILLED ON DRIVERS AND BARRIERS OF LEARNING

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NARRATIVES OF LEARNING FROM THE UNSKILLED

- ▶ Commissioned by CEDEFOP (2013-2014)
- ▶ Individual biographies of 100+ workers, aged 25-40, as they moved in and through the labour market
- ▶ Probes how learning can support workers' transitions on the labour market.
- ▶ Generating a deeper understanding of the multiple dimensions underlying individual career transitions and lifelong learning



EUROPEAN RESEARCH

Narrative approach:

- ▶ Focuses on the need to learn for labour market participation and progression,
- ▶ Examines what happens when individuals do not engage with learning
- ▶ Explores the role of careers guidance and counselling for supporting low skilled workers

OVERALL PURPOSE OF STUDY

To identify common themes, approaches and ways of representing how low-skilled workers can be supported in their learning activities, career development, employability and career transitions



THE CASE OF DENMARK

- ▶ 7 women, 8 men
- ▶ Aged: 26-40
- ▶ Mixture of single and married
- ▶ Mostly employed and/or studying
- ▶ All finished compulsory school + upper secondary/basic vocational training/none
- ▶ Highest level of qualification: 4 EQF
- ▶ 8 located in urban environments, 7 in rural
- ▶ Some aspirations: better job possibilities/security, better income, better quality of life, becoming a professional, opening SME



ATTITUDES TO LEARNING: BARRIERS

- ▶ Disinterest: does education matter to prosper in life?
- ▶ Previous learning environment during education and training: bullying
- ▶ Lack of parental support/interest
- ▶ Structural barriers: availability of apprenticeship, economic compensation, time



DOES EDUCATION MATTER?

- ▶ **Henrik:** *“If the qualification does not lead to greater responsibility and added value to an institution it may be of little value”*
- ▶ **Søren:** *“To me it is about the future ... well, the long-term prospect of being a kindergarten teacher. If I look at the kindergarten teachers today, I don't want to be a kindergarten teacher, and it has to do [...] with their working environment, i.e. the working conditions, you just have to be more and more effective.”*

With regards to the financial perspective, Søren says:

- ▶ *“And then I have to spend three and a half years of my life on the state grant, to earn 1000 DKK more per month than what I earn now, because I'm fairly well paid due to my length of service. [...] We live the life we have now, two kids, and a house and we have to have something to live off”*



LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- ▶ **Susanne:** ... *I have been a victim of bullying in school. One day I snapped and got in a fight with the three boys who had been the worst. One broke an arm, and the other broke his nose. I even ended up with a broken hand*



LACK OF PARENTAL SUPPORT

- ▶ **Jeanette:** *It was because I did not know what I wanted to do. I've always felt like a 'late developer'....In 10th grade when I had to say what I would like to do now, I had no idea. Support from home, it has not been there, plus my parents have never asked for anything either. They've never said what to do. It has always been up to me. But there are some things at that age which are difficult to decide on*



STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

- ▶ Availability of apprenticeships
 - ▶ Ellinor: *“I think it was sad, but after 100 job applications I don’t feel like going after this anymore. I was plodding up and down the streets of Copenhagen and other towns [in order to find an apprenticeship]. And in the end, I didn’t feel for it. If it has to be that tough, you lose heart.*”



ATTITUDES TO LEARNING: MOTIVATORS

- ▶ Proof one-self/to be challenged
- ▶ Positive learning experiences / support from managers
- ▶ Gain professional identity
- ▶ Future investment

PROOF ONE SELF

- ▶ **Laura:** *I have always had a drive. I have always had a need to prove myself - to my mother and to myself.*



POSITIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

► Jeanette about role of adult education:

I think that I have gained a lot of confidence . There are people who have ... finally there is someone who has said that you are good at something. I didn't get that at home



GAIN PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Martin: *I am excited about returning with all my new professional knowledge I have acquired in this education in such a short time.[...] I am happy about the 8-month programme I have been given. If it was reduced even more I wouldn't learn anything. I see this as perfect. And it has been a long time since I have been to school, so I needed a soft start and I can manage to study a little less than a year.*



SUPPORT STRUCTURES

- ▶ Lack of support for adult dropouts
- ▶ Few interviewees have experience with career guidance as adults
- ▶ Several interviewees have experiences with career guidance as youths; both positive and negative
- ▶ Those, who have had managers that encouraged participation in adult education perceive this as a motivator



ROLE OF LEARNING/FORMAL LEARNING IN RELATION TO CAREER PLANNING

- ▶ 9 IP's: education is part of their future career planning
- ▶ 3 IP's : education is absent from thoughts of future career
- ▶ 4 IP's : entrepreneurial the future



ATTITUDE TO ADULT EDUCATION

- ▶ Widespread awareness of role of education in
 - ▶ achieving a more secure position in the labour market
 - ▶ Improving financial conditions
 - ▶ Achieving higher esteem (internal/external)
 - ▶ Improving business opportunities

RESULTS

- ▶ General willingness to participate in formal learning for different reasons (self, work, life)
- ▶ Barriers are often structural (funding/time)
- ▶ Review: employers more willing to further educate skilled employees than low/non skilled



PARADOX?

BARRIERS

Review:

- Employers are more willing to further educate skilled employees than low/non skilled

DRIVERS

Interview:

- Encouraged by management
- Recognition of value of education (despite structural barriers such as funding/time)

FURTHER PERSPECTIVES

- ▶ Managers choice: sending the skilled or the non skilled on courses/education?
- ▶ Accessibility to/knowledge of support structures as job centres, Centres for Adult Education and Continuing Training
- ▶ Role of unions
- ▶ Government subsidized financial support for SME's



FURTHER PERSPECTIVES TO BE LOOKED IN TO – IN ARTICLES FOR NOW

1. *'Left to your own devices' – the missed potential of adult career guidance in Denmark.* (In press in British Journal of Guidance & Counselling)
2. *Motivational issues in adult education* (Abstract accepted for BJGC)
3. *What's the problem of 'unskilled' represented to be? Between political discourse and individual narrative*

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Thank you for your attention



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