



Learning, Experience and the Societal Unconscious: Combining a Materialistic Theory and a Dialectic Methodology

Henning Salling Olesen

INTRODUCTION

We might reserve the term *transformation* for those more comprehensive social changes in which learning plays a significant role—in response to the book title *Learning for Transformation*. This chapter will present a psycho-societal approach to theorizing learning. It will conceptualize individual and collective learning as a potential dimension of social practice, and outline a methodology for empirically tracing learning in everyday life. Change and transformation are first of all *conditio humana*—the individual's life world and ontogenetic development is interwoven with and forcefully accelerated by societal changes seen as permanent aspects of social life—sometimes obvious, sometimes in-transparent—but not generally initiated by learning. More often it is the other way round,

H. Salling Olesen (✉)
Roskilde University, Roskilde, Denmark
e-mail: hso@ruc.dk

learning being forced by change. Having stated that, the relation between changes that deserve the term transformation and subjective processes of learning and reorientation is extremely interesting, both because of scholarly centrality and because of political perspective. Doing that the focus of interest is on the role of learning in its material context and the object-subject-object-dialectic of social practice and consciousness building in which learning may occur. The psycho-societal approach is a theoretical and methodological answer to this interest. Ontologically it is a materialist approach that sees cognitive and emotional dimensions of learning and other subjective processes as embodied in the social practice of concrete living bodies. Epistemologically it is committed to a dialectical analysis that both recognizes historical, material reality and traces endogenous potentials for social dynamics.

The chapter does not focus specifically on educational practice but addresses learning in a wider societal context. I know the theory of transformative learning coined by Jack Mezirow and developed by numerous others and have noticed some of the interesting discussion within the tradition (Alhadeff-Jones, 2012; Brookfield, 2017; Illeris, 2014). But the theoretical background in this chapter is quite different.

SUBJECTIVITY, EXPERIENCE, AND SOCIETY

The most fundamental assumption in the following is that learning is a ubiquitous dimension of all social life. People learn by dealing with the world—about the world, about being in the world, and about acting in the world. The aim is to theorize learning in general, and adult informal learning in particular, as an aspect of social life (Salling Olesen, 2007b). A general concept for the relation of the subject to the world is the concept “Experience” coming from German critical social science *Erfahrung*. With this concept the immediate and situated experience of everyday life is seen as a subjective soup cube, condensing individual life experience and the entire collective and cultural orientation in the world—which is also the framework through which it is perceived (Salling Olesen, 1989; p. 8). The psycho-societal approach to learning aims at understanding the potentials in this soup cube, including contents that are not conscious for the individual, or are even societally unconscious. It draws theoretically on Marxism as well as on psychodynamic theory and combines them into

a psycho-social empirical methodology for studying specific learning situations and/or life historical processes of learning (learning trajectories) with the aim of discovering the potentials in the soup cube.

Everyday life in no way automatically entails substantial learning, mostly practice just involves adaptation within a stable world view and life perspective. But it may at the same time build surplus social experience which is not immediately enacted, and this is important for learning from future experiences. Learning is related to, and to some extent dependent on, changing practices. Not all changes are social transformations, but some are and we want to understand the dynamics of learning in those cases.

THEORIZING LEARNING

Knowledge is not an attribute of individuals, and also not an entity that can be extracted, transferred, and possessed. Learning is social and practical. A general theory of learning must be based on understanding the dependence of learning processes on and significance for the dialectic between societal conditions and individual development. In a logical sense, one can speak of an internal relationship between the one and the other part, and between the whole and the part(s). Everyday language and the organization of scientific discourses generally tend to dichotomize the relationship: It is assumed that “society” constitutes external conditions, independent variables, which set the framework for individual agency. And on the other hand, the individual subject is constructed as a free and rational subject who has the opportunity to think independently, recognize objective conditions (including societal frameworks) and within these act according to completely individual preferences and in his own interest. This is exactly the dichotomy I would like to overcome. When individuals in their life courses meet with societal conditions, they sometimes adapt and learn, other times they resist, for reasons to explore. A psycho-societal approach is a framework of understanding these specific cases and individual processes concretely, without losing sight of their societal nature.

At the same time, it is a framework of understanding that is aware of how subjective conditions and individual choices have societal effects. Theoretically, learning can explain the central dynamic in this subject-object dialectic—understanding subjectivity as socially produced and at

the same time potential source of social change (the political perspective). Eventually, this theoretical mode of defining learning should also contribute to a theoretical bridge-building between the social sciences and the humanities (the metascientific perspective). I think that the theorizing of learning may also contribute to discussions about agency and democracy in a globalizing capitalism, and about the role of knowledge in a late modern society, with a broader resonance to social theory, politics, and epistemology than can be discussed here (Leledakis, 1995; Salling Olesen, 2002).

This way of thinking is for me embedded in a broader materialistic understanding of society (and thus also of individuals), seeing the current capitalist social formation as the preliminary end stage of an evolutionary and civilization history that includes both conflictual reorganization of materiality and extensive learning processes. Such a position also implies a recognition of the natural basis of sociality—both in terms of the ecological dependence of the planet we inhabit, and in terms of human beings themselves whose social life is mediated through individual bodily lives. The German philosophers and social scientists Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge have formulated a materialist framework by combining a holistic historical perspective on evolution and civilization with current details (Negt & Kluge, 2014). It is a Marxism that builds on the critical social theory of the Frankfurt School but at the same time points to an ecological perspective on humanity's way of dealing with itself as nature and with the planet we inhabit. The pivotal connection between the critique of capitalism and the ecological perspective in their analysis is the work as a life activity and the basis of sociality (Negt & Kluge, 1972, 2016; Salling Olesen, 2009). I will come back to the implications of this later.

Originally this concept saw learning as a process of connecting experiences from everyday life and cultural/societal knowledge and saw individual learning as entangled in collective learning—with a debt to Wright Mill's idea of sociological imagination. Many educators adopted Negt's ideas as mainly didactic tools for political education (which they also were [Zeuner, 2013]). But eventually, they paved a way for a scholarly development of an alternative (to) didactic thinking (Salling Olesen, 1989, 2007b). The core of this alternative is to think of individuals' learning, specific learning motives and—resistances in the context of their life world and life experiences—past, present, and future.

INDIVIDUAL LEARNING IN SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION

In order to make the complex and multilayered notion of experience sensitive to subjective specificity (every human subject is a unique result of socialization) and also to the specific context and area of reality in question, we adopted a life history methodology for studying learning as an aspect of subjective participation in social life. I shall give an example.

Quite often (adult) learning is taking place under the coercive conditions of changes in work life. Most of this learning is unintended personal experience. Educational initiatives are often narrowly instrumental attempts to adapt the labor force employability. The following refers to a major Danish government intervention, consisting of vocational training of very marginalized unemployed and unskilled female workers. For foreigners I should note that the all dominant situation in Denmark since 1960s–1970s is that married women also have paid employment, and children are in childcare institutions. But this actual group has had long periods of unemployment and no stable affiliation with a company or just a business area. We conducted a qualitative study of a sample of these women's work career, in order to understand their approach to training and their learning and general life experiences, enabled by narrative interviews. Within societal conditions that were structurally alike—marginal labor position, gender discrimination, precarious work in low paid and unstable jobs, often in cleaning, services, and industrial manufacturing—many suffered low self-esteem. Their identification with wage labor was low and primarily related to the income and/or the need for social contact. But interviews also showed an abundance of life experiences. Many of them had children and had established an everyday life as stay-at-home moms. Traces of a traditional gender role seemed to be subjectively available for many as an idea of a satisfactory life organization once they were made redundant.

What did they learn from training? There were differences depending on their actual internships during the training and on subsequent employment success. But one observation turned out very clearly: A substantial raise in self-esteem for almost all, including a confidence in having relevant skills and employability. Of course, this had to do with course design and social organization of the training, but our analysis primarily observed that objective success (employment and particularly employment in skills demanding jobs) was closely connected with subjective developments

along the training process (new awareness of gender relations, identification with specific work experiences, increasing self-confidence) (Larsen, 1992; Salling Olesen, 1994, 2004).

When we analyze these observations within the context of a subject-object dialectic we can see both their situation and their learning outcome as a societal transformation of gender. These women are caught in the crossing between traditional women's roles and wage labor. The training was at the same time acquisition of real/recognized skills, a challenge of gender role, and an (work) identity process. The training option had quite different significance for each of them. Their relation with the world and their view of themselves changed differently, but for many also ambiguously. Although the purpose of these training programs was to improve employability, many of the women actually were ambivalent and skeptical about the meaningfulness of learning. But during the training they seem to discover new social opportunities—and have the opportunity to try out dimensions of themselves that have had no realistic realization before and maybe were entirely suppressed—in a protected space. In spite of a shared socioeconomic destiny, our analysis reveals both interindividual differences but also intraindividual ambivalences and dynamics. In spite of the structural coercive aspects we can see that many, but not all, of them went through a personal transition which aligns with the gender relations transformation, gaining a new work identity as skilled labor. The concept of “double societalization” of women, coined by one of the feminists in critical theory, helps us see how subjective experiences reflect societal contradictions, but also that subjectivity has its own dynamics so that the subject-object dialectic is in dual, interconnected motion (Becker-Schmidt, 2002; Weber, 2020).

A PSYCHO-SOCIETAL CONCEPT OF SUBJECTIVITY

The data used in the first life history research projects were as point of departure language-based methods, mostly narrative interviews. From this followed very practical methodological questions about data production techniques, interpreting data, and validating interpretations, but also more methodological and theoretical discussions around the linguistic turn in social sciences, centering around the theorizing of subjectivity and subjects (Salling Olesen, 2016; Weber & Salling Olesen, 2002). In interpretation methods, we took inspiration from a “depth hermeneutic” (Lorenzer & König, 1986; Salling Olesen & Weber, 2012). Depth

hermeneutic interprets cultural phenomena (primarily “fine art”) as expressions of not only immediately understandable social meanings but also dimensions of meaning that have been societally repressed or do not have a clear social articulation. In an international research group, we have transposed this type of hermeneutic interpretation to the investigation of social interaction in everyday life and individual mundane agency and meaning making, working with empirical material from work life research, organization studies, education and learning careers, professional experiences—and many more (Salling Olesen & Leithäuser, 2018). The interpretation method is a general intensive qualitative interpretation, building on interview transcripts, field diaries, interaction protocols, etc. This interpretation is immediately a regular hermeneutic procedure, but it pays specific attention to unconscious dimensions in the material as well as in the interpretation process itself. In this respect, it is inspired by and borrows interpretational attitude from a psychoanalytic interpretation, from where Alfred Lorenzer, originally a psychiatrist, had borrowed it. And like any hermeneutic approach it also takes notice of, and benefits from, the involvement of the interpreter subject, but again with a psychodynamic attention—using the concepts of transfer and counter transfer (Devereux, 1967).

Although borrowing the attitude and attention from psychoanalytic interpretation, we have a different objective. Instead of the individual psychic history per se, in the therapeutic interest, the objective here is to trace meanings which are supposed to reveal supra-individual cultural meanings—and again, with a particular interest in those that have been societally repressed or distorted. These interpretations study open and hidden cultural meanings from the way they appear in individuals’ language use, agency and in social interaction, symbolic phenomena etc. (Salling Olesen, 2012, 2020). We have adopted the term *psycho-societal interpretation* in order to avoid a (too) narrow identification with psychoanalysis, and also in order to indicate the practical challenge involved, namely to combine what is normally divided: Psychic and societal analytical frameworks.

A key to understanding this methodological strategy is the theoretical question about the nature of the subject. Instead of getting stuck in a too deterministic theory of classical psychoanalysis, or falling in a culturalistic relativism like many post-structuralists do, this methodology refers to a materialistic theory of socialization, the process in which “the individual enters society and society enters the individual body and psyche.”

In the social reinterpretation of psychoanalysis, the biological drive theory is reconstructed into an interactional theory according to which the individual psychodynamics is strongly influenced by the early life interaction experiences. The deterministic stereotype in many perceptions of psychoanalysis is overcome by an assumption and empirical validation of an embodied learning of culture from social interaction between mother (primary caregiver) and child (Hollway, 2019; Lorenzer, 1972; Stern, 1985). The individual builds a social world experience in the form of interaction forms, starting early in a prelinguistic phase but continuing all along the life trajectory (Salling Olesen, 2012). With language acquisition and the ability to symbolize the child becomes emotionally more independent of the here and now and gains access to connect individual sensory experiences with a social world, mediated by language, but the interaction forms remain active. If and when the connection of symbolization gets broken or blocked because of problematic/painful relational experiences and/or because of societal taboos that are present in the child's immediate life world, it leaves a non-integrated piece of emotional experience that cannot be articulated very well but may nevertheless be of immense importance for the individual. It may also leave language use without emotional resonance. Such a breach can be seriously damaging to the subject (Lorenzer was originally psychiatrist). But we use it here for understanding that individual life experiences include a latent unconscious level beyond immediate articulation, and also that this level is reflecting meanings that are not articulated in social language but form a societal unconscious. The individual mind may reconfigure these relational experiences throughout the entire life, conceptualized in psychodynamic theory as "deferred action" (Becker-Schmidt, 1993; Weber, 2020). For learning theory, this helps us to understand the psychic (emotional) dimension of the interplay between conscious and unconscious but also reminds us to recognize that this interplay is an individual and situated process. For the purpose of learning theory, it is important to remember that although studying individual life histories, the methodology is primarily suited to reveal societal relations and meanings. The individual is a unique embodiment of a society and a position within it—and what we usually characterize sociologically as e.g., class, gender, ethnicity is in reality in principle an embodied individual and unique version of social experience.

The theory of language acquisition and symbolization, the ability to connect individual sensory experiences (bodily social experiences), and the participation in cultural meaning making (using Wittgenstein's concept

of language games) is of pivotal significance for learning, and especially learning regarding basic world views and self-image (Lorenzer, 1972; Salling Olesen & Weber, 2012). In a wider learning perspective, the difficult questions about relation between intellectual and bodily learning may possibly be reconceptualized, with great perspectives for the understanding of professional knowledge, tacit knowledge, and intuitive judgment (“gut feeling”) (Salling Olesen, 2007a, 2014). This is one of the important reasons for adopting a materialist (bodily) perspective on learning.

LEARNING FOR TRANSFORMATION—THE SOCIETAL LEVEL

The premise of the previous theorizing of subjectivity is a materialistic ontology: man as a social animal. Conversely, this materialistic ontology implies that societal dynamics are endogenous, and depends on the dynamics of our embodied world experience. Allow me to quote from a recent book presenting the psycho-societal approach:

With this material theory of the subject the methodology is a preliminary—procedural—opposition to an exclusively or primarily cultural understanding of the societal nature of subjectivity as we know it from the linguistic turn in the social sciences, in positioning theory, and in discourse analytical criticisms; each of these approaches problematizes the modern understanding of the subject without taking the step out of Cartesian idealism. It is a core aspect of this opposition that the materiality in terms of bodily life, dependence, historical temporality and social practice precedes the culture of the idea and language both in individual life and social development (Negt & Kluge, 2014). But it is not an ‘undialectical materialism’ (unfortunately the corresponding positive concept is so politically compromised that it can hardly be used to express the opposite). The optimistic experience is that the socially unconscious in a given society contains resources for a dynamics that is not easily predictable, c.f. #metoo. On the societal level, one does not understand revolutions until they have happened, but they could not have happened without unfolding unconscious psychodynamics and social agency that was not transparent at the time. On the individual level, learning processes and identity development take place in unpredictable directions and leaps. Therefore, understanding the socially unconscious must have the nature of a negative theory and a methodology fit for carving out the future of mundane present everyday life. (Salling Olesen, 2020)

The individual is an embodied version of society, with a version of experience of its social order and culture, its contradictions, opportunities, and taboos. Learning means a motion in the subject-object-relation which may be a result of objective conditions as well as subjective dynamics. The subject increases its insights and capability but it happens in practices in the objective world. From birth onwards, it is often objective dynamics (biological development; societal changes) which brings the relation in motion. When the subject produces ideas, phantasies, and desires for changing practices which translate into changes in practice—as experiments which are immediately in dialogue with an entire social life world—these ideas and desires have an experiential base which is material. Theorizing an inner dynamic consequently, including the unconscious, as an embodiment of social experience enables us to understand the potential for eruptive changes in learning processes without voluntarist assumptions. Emerging subjective impulses may be influenced by, but it may also reconfigure, the unconscious dimension of individual life experience depending on social interaction. What was societally unconscious—repressed or not culturally articulated—may emerge in the subject's conscious relation to the world, and it may transcend conscious culture and societal structure. This is not good or bad in itself. That is an empirical and political question. The recent Trump era in the United States certainly mobilized subjective forces that were societally unconscious but gained societal impact as an alternative societal reality—potentially restoring racism and xenophobia, for the benefit of already wealthy and powerful people. In this case, social learning would mean a collective recognition across the dual reality of the United States of those until recently societally repressed frustrations and challenges that Trump manage(d) to mobilize. But apart from the outrageous practical challenges that are handled in political processes, this case also conceals an intricate theoretical question how to distinguish different types of subjective dynamics. Can they be distinguished simply by their sense of reality: fed by fake or realistic information? Or can they be distinguished by their psychodynamic nature: regressive and projective or social and integrative? Or by their outcome: aggressivity or social recognition?

With the perspective of this very complicated and not yet researched and fully reflected process, I will return to work life. I will sketchily show how critical materialistic learning research could trace potentials for transformations which may be emerging from or submerged in work life reality, and may be recognized by means of theoretical awareness.

LEARNING AND WORK LIFE TRANSFORMATION

The societal organization of work is the immediate determinant for survival and well-being and the most important factor of societal relations in modern societies (in premodern societies violent and mythological power relations ensured the elites' control over the work of others). Researching work and learning is fascinating because it enables insight into micro-processes, in the immediate life world, that instantly shape demands and opportunities, and at the same time points to their perspectives for historical change processes—the possible transformation of capitalist work life—and ultimately for human life conditions, the ecological relationships between society and the natural basis for human life.

Very often, but not exclusively, major transitions that appear in the individual life world are changes and conflicts related to work and employment. They include situations of technological shifts, new forms of work organization and management, or of redundancy (or not obtaining access to the labor market at all). But also the specific types of pressure and workload in everyday life which hardly can be noticed—the intensification, alienation, the double work for women, environmental problems, etc.—are part of it. There is an intense interrelation between these social conditions and subjective processes, each of them having its own logic, but they are ultimately part of a societal order. However, most recent research of work life and work related learning is confined to the concrete work processes. Either in the affirmative sense of trying to work out what is needed for adapting human labor to the changing requirements of the work process, and how these competences can be acquired—researchers may produce sophisticated analyses that take the societal development of work for granted as an independent variable (Nicoll & Olesen, 2013; Salling Olesen, 2013). Or, more interesting in this context: The study of how learning takes place in the interaction with the workplace, and the affordances of concrete work situations. In this type of engagement, you may theorize learning as a more comprehensive and interactive process of adaptation, a subjective process of identity building and negotiation. One important paradigm of workplace learning research is based in a combination of an anthropological concept of cultural transmission and a cultural psychology inherited from Russian psychology (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). These approaches give valuable insights in the interactions and relations that facilitate the learning and the (dynamic) reproduction of work processes and culture around work. But they

tend to be conservative, or affirmative in relation to the overarching societal work organization. They fail to raise the question of how endogenous dynamics like learning and political articulation of interests may be precursors for fundamental transformation of work. And conversely, they neglect or downplay how external societal dynamics shape the workplace, affecting the living workers and their relations.

A critical research must analyze the concrete phenomena (*in casu*: the work process) with a view to its historical nature, reflecting contextual origins as well as imagining its possible future. A psycho-societal approach to work related learning aims at relating the concrete and specific life world, including the subjective dynamics in the living work, with the central characteristics of the societal order. Its most important aim is to establish a realistic recognition of the dynamics in the field which may enable transformations of work and reflect the wider political and ethical significance of such potential transformations.

In doing so, researchers must invest not only theoretical concepts but also our context knowledge and subjective desires as epistemic tools—directing the attention in empirical investigation, but always confronting findings and interpretations with reality. The idea of transformation as an endogenous process also means that theory must sensitize to this reality. From Marxist theory, we learn to explore the inherent contradictions in capitalist societal organization. But there is an obvious gap in Marxist thinking about the subjective aspects of basic societal relations. This has both implications for understanding the concrete relations in work life—and for political thinking about what a “revolutionary” change might mean. A contemporary concept of revolution is about social learning. Our minds, rationality, and desires are shaped by capitalism in variable forms of competitive individualism, submissive authoritarianism and desire for growth and material wealth, which corresponds very well with the classical industrial society. But the capitalist modernity has also fostered obvious resources, more or less conscious: self-consciousness, desire for recognition, solidarity, social empathy, sense of product quality and usefulness, caring for nature and local community. Such resources that are socially learned may have more or less space in different forms of work life, and also in family and intimate life. *Learning for Transformation* should seek to reconfigure these ideas to a new reality of work, and particularly it should be open to contemporary ongoing and future formation of themes and directions of policy. Departing from the reality of everyday life, the issue of interest would be exploring the potential learning processes

departing from the traces of the character masks formed by capitalism to something that would include the classical Marxism notion of class consciousness. This would now be something new, yet unknown form of collective autonomy and solidarity.

Actual developments in capitalist work, formed by technology and societal forces, may well lend more space—and the challenge for learning will be how far this humanizing of work can elude a capitalist control. This will be a matter of political struggle on many levels. There is no systemic transformation which does not include minds.

But there are also within capitalist societal formation work domains which are only partly influenced by capitalist organization. Generally, we are aware of the politically organized domain of the state, for instance, in the discussion about disembedding (Polanyi, 1968). But I would also point out self-organized forms of work organization which transgresses limitations, injustices, and ecological damages of capitalism, and unfold human autonomy and democratic control in the form of cooperatives of different types, nonprofit enterprises and social enterprises with alternative criteria for growth and usefulness. Experiences from cooperative work organizations and autonomous work organizations can be seen as learning arenas for societal transformation (Salling Olesen & Fragoso, 2017). They are extremely diverse, only a minority of them has a direct mission of overcoming capitalism, but they are based in noncapitalist interests, and they produce experiences of other ways of organizing work. But the learning is not only about adapting to the requirements of work, or learning how to run a work organization, but rather the gradual recognition of irrationalities built in the present economic regulation of work, and forming of imaginations for different developments.

It will take us too far to discuss in terms of political economy how the relation between capital ownership, political governance, and human learning within a capitalist political economy may develop potentials for transformation into a different political economy. There are several terms to indicate alternatives—social economy, solidarity economy—I have from an early phase used the term “a political economy of working people” (Salling Olesen & Forrester, 1999), referring to the fundamental dialectic between exchange value and use value by Marx and defining the political economy of working people as an economic organization in which workers’ sense of use values direct the production.

The joint underlying point is that a transformation of capitalism must develop from inside and is first and foremost dependent on learning, and

there is no fixed destination of such learning from experience. Personally, I see the most essential challenge in the contradiction related to economic growth and the inequalities of the world. On the one hand, some 50 years delayed recognition of "Limits to growth," the title of one of the first alerts about the contradiction between (capitalist) economic growth and natural environment. On the other hand, a growing recognition of the contradictions in the nature of wealth which is obtained on the cost of overload of workers and destruction of social relations. That is the material dependency on nature planet and nature man.

Ernst Bloch, one of the philosophers of the Frankfurt School, who became known for emphasizing the necessity of hope, argued that utopian imaginations of a different reality could only emerge from unconscious or not yet conscious presentiments. He maintains that the dialectic between material reality and alternative imagination is based in a potentiality in material reality itself.

I think we could translate this theoretical idea into an empirical attention to learning processes in and in relation to work, looking for their utopian or just transcending potential. The transformation that we can abstractly describe as a transition from a political economy of capital to a socially and environmentally sustainable political economy is non-determined learning which eventually manifests itself in new practices. From this point of view, a psycho-social theorizing of learning should enable an explorative investigation of the open question of what a Marxist vision for sustainability could actually be today.

OUTLOOK TO THE WIDER SOCIETY

The sketchy comments above are based in comprehensive theoretical and empirical research. Contemporary experiences of social change in work seem to indicate major societal and historical change. The development of a post-industrial and service producing society is relativizing the old lines of dispute in work life and has changed workers' relations to work. It does not mean that the defense of working conditions, unionizing etc., has become obsolete, but many workers in the most developed and rich parts of the world have overcome alienated positions of paid labor and relate to work as a subjective meaningful activity. The consciousness of environmental issues and limits to growth have opened a Pandora's box of dilemmas between wealth, employment, and sustainability. In the many forms of social enterprises (many more than we mostly assume)

are illustrations of the complicated learning process of making a livelihood without profitability as a driver. We need to understand the everyday work life and work identity of a majority of workers and trace the ongoing and potential learning processes taking place. Especially, the overall recognized climate change and the necessities for a green transition will depend on what we might term a collective learning process which is full of conflicts and open questions.

However, work life is not the only domain that displays fundamental societal issues and conflicts in everyday life, and in every individual body. The #MeToo movement has exposed how a widespread gender experience, submitted to patriarchal structures and practices, and for long time kept in mainly women's bodies as a submerged suffering under sexist repression and discrimination, can break through and in a flashing process illuminate the demand and the possibility for new gender relations. For the moment it has the nature of a tsunami and it will be a learning process for all (!) genders to sort out the muddy stream of sexual harassment, gender discrimination, and power exercise. It is no coincidence that this breakthrough comes as a subjective reorientation tailing societal changes in socio-material basis for gender relations. But a transformation with new practices, culture and institutions based in (more) equal and respectful gender relations will require a long and conflictual learning process for all.

REFERENCES

- Alhadeff-Jones, M. (2012). Transformative learning and the challenges of complexity. In E. W. Taylor & P. Cranton (Eds.), *Handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research and practice* (pp. 178–194). Jossey-Bass.
- Becker-Schmidt, R. (1993). Ambivalenz und Nachträglichkeit. Perspektiven einer feministischen Biographieforschung. In M. Krüger (Ed.), *Was heisst hier eigentlich feministisch? Zur theoretischen Diskussion in der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften*. Donat Verlag.
- Becker-Schmidt, R. (2002). Theorizing gender arrangements. In R. Becker-Schmidt (Ed.), *Gender and work in transition: Globalization in Western, Middle and Eastern Europe* (pp. 25–48). Opladen.
- Brockfield, S. (2017). Critical adult education theory: Traditions and influence. In *The Palgrave International handbook on adult and lifelong education and learning* (pp. 53–74). Palgrave MacMillan.
- Devereux, G. (1967). *From anxiety to method in the social sciences*. Mouton.
- Hollway, W. (2019). *Knowing mothers*. Palgrave MacMillan.

- Illeris, K. (2014). Transformative learning and identity. *Journal of Transformative Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344614548423>
- Larsen, K. (1992). *Een uddannelse - tre historier*. Roskilde University.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Leledakis, K. (1995). *Society and psyche*. Berg Publishers.
- Lorenzer, A. (1972). *Zur Begründung einer materialistischen Sozialisierungstheorie*. Suhrkamp-Verlag.
- Lorenzer, A., & König, H.-D. (1986). Tiefenhermeneutische Kulturanalyse. In *Kultur-analysen* (Vol. 7334, pp. 11–98). Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag.
- Negt, O., & Kluge, A. (1972). *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung. Zur Organisationsanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit*. Frankfurt.
- Negt, O., & Kluge, A. (2014). *History and obstinacy*. Zone Books.
- Negt, O., & Kluge, A. (2016). *Public sphere and experience toward an analysis of the bourgeois and proletarian public Sphere*. Verso.
- Nicoll, K., & Olesen, H. S. (2013). Editorial: What's new in a new competence regime? *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, 4, 103–109. <https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.relae7>
- Polanyi, K. (1968). The economy as instituted process. In E. LeClair & H. Schneider (Eds.), *Economic anthropology*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Salling Olesen, H. (1989). *Adult education and everyday life*. Roskilde University.
- Salling Olesen, H. (1994). Qualifying adult women for employment. In T. V. Klenovšek & H. S. Salling Olesen (Eds.), *Adult education and the labour market*. Slovene Adult Education Centre.
- Salling Olesen, H., & Forrester, K. (eds). (1999). Political economy of labour - or: Die (Selbst?)Aufhebung des Proletariats als kollektiver Lernprozess. In K. Salling Olesen, Henning; Forrester (Ed.), *Adult education and the labour market V* (pp. 11–24). Roskilde University Press.
- Salling Olesen, H. (2002). *Experience language and subjectivity in life history approaches—biography research as a bridge between the humanities and the social sciences?* Roskilde University: Adult Education Research Group.
- Salling Olesen, H. (2004). The learning subject in life history—A Qualitative research approach to learning. In M. H. Menne Abrahão Barreto (Ed.), *A Aventura (Auto)biografico. Theoria & Empiria*. (pp. 419–464). EDIPUCRS.
- Salling Olesen, H. (2007a). Be(com)ing a general practitioner: Professional identities, subjectivity and learning. In L. West (Ed.), *Using biographical and life history approaches in the study of adult and lifelong learning: European perspectives*. P. Lang.
- Salling Olesen, H. (2007). Theorising learning in life history: A psychosocietal approach. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 39(1), 38–53.
- Salling Olesen, H. (2009). *Oskar Negt and a few other Germans* [Video]. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQrlcFXYgcQ&feature=youtu.be>

- Salling Olesen, H. (2012). The societal nature of subjectivity: An interdisciplinary methodological challenge. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 13(3).
- Salling Olesen, H. (2013). Beyond the current political economy of competence development. *RELA European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, 4(2). http://www.rela.ep.liu.se/issues/10.3384_rela.2000-7426.201342/rela9013/rela9013.pdf
- Salling Olesen, H. (2014). Learning and the psycho-societal nature of social practice: Tracing the invisible social dimension in work and learning. *Forum Oswiatowe*, 52(2), 11–27. <http://forumoswiatowe.pl/index.php/czasopismo/article/view/159>
- Salling Olesen, H. (2016). A psycho-societal approach to life histories. In I. Goodson, A. Antikainen, P. Sikes, & M. Andrews (Eds.), *The Routledge International handbook on narrative and life history* (pp. 214–125). Routledge.
- Salling Olesen, H. (2020). The societal unconscious. In H. Salling Olesen (Ed.), *Psychosocial perspectives on adult learning*. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004420274>
- Salling Olesen, H., & Fragoso, A. (2017). Social economy and learning for a political economy of solidarity. *RELA European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, 8(2).
- Salling Olesen, H., & Leithäuser, T. (2018). Psycho-societal interpretation of the unconscious dimensions in everyday life. In K. Stamenova & R. D. Hinshelwood (Eds.), *Methods of research into the unconscious: Applying psychoanalytic Ideas to Social Science* (pp. 70–86). Routledge.
- Salling Olesen, H., & Weber, K. (2012). Socialization, language, and scenic understanding. Alfred Lorenzer's contribution to a psycho-societal methodology. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research Sozialforschung*, 13(3), Art. 22.
- Stern, D. N. (1985). *The interpersonal world of the infant: A view from psychoanalysis and developmental psychology*. Basic Books.
- Weber, K. (2020). Ambivalence and experience. Un-conscious dimensions of working women's social learning women's lives and experiences. In H. Salling Olesen (Ed.), *The societal unconscious*. Brill/Sense.
- Weber, K., & Salling Olesen, H. (2002). Chasing potentials for adult learning: Lifelong learning in a life history perspective. In *Zeitschrift für Qualitative Bildungs-, Beratungs- und Sozialforschung* (pp. 283–300).
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press.
- Zeuner, C. (2013). From workers education to societal competencies: Approaches to a critical, emancipatory education for democracy. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*. <https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.rela9011>