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# Learning, Trajectories of Participation and Social Practice

## Summary

This article argues that personal meaning should be considered important when addressing issues of learning. It is claimed that meaningful learning is not primarily intra-psychological, as suggested by humanistic psychologists and parts of cognitive psychology, but is an integrated part of the person's participation in various social practices. Inspired by critical psychology and situated learning, it is suggested that in order to comprehend what people in everyday life experience as meaningful, we have to understand the concerns subjects pursue across different contextual settings and the kind of conduct of everyday life they try to realise. A case example from an ongoing research project about how baker apprentices learn their trade is outlined in order to exemplify some of the theoretical considerations. Two baker apprentices, Peter and Charlotte, are presented to illustrate how they orientate their learning activities in the bakeries according to their future participation in the baking trade and in relation to the conduct of everyday life they wish to pursue.

## Introduction

One of the main distinctions in educational research is between learning as a personal process, focused on meaning and coherence, and learning as a decontextualised, institutionalized process, centred on examination and acquiring knowledge. This distinction is conceptualized in various learning theories, arguing that the spontaneous, unrestricted and personal learning process is more valuable, whereas learning in relation to institutionalized goals is of less value to the subject. This distinction is mainly

found in humanistic and cognitive inspired approaches to learning (see e.g. Colaizzi, 1978; Rogers, 1994; Ausubel, 1963; Marton & Säljö, 1976a, 1976b). However, the distinction between personal and meaningful learning, on the one hand, and learning in everyday institutionalized practice, on the other hand, is problematic for several reasons. It constitutes a dualism whereby the individual's experience of the learning situation is of greater value than the practice in which it discloses itself. This dualism makes us believe that the issue of meaningful learning has its roots in the individual, and not in the social practice in which the individual is located. It seems to indicate that personal and meaningful learning can only be achieved outside societal, institutionalized practice. Furthermore, it has been argued that social practice learning theories altogether tend to ignore issues of person and meaning in relation to the learning process (Elle, 2000; Grønbæk Hansen, 1998).

Inspired by critical psychology and situated learning, this article will discuss the relationship between learning, institutionalized practice and subjectivity. The intention is conceptually to understand personal learning and social practice as constituting each other, and not as separate categories. This article also argues that meaningful learning is not primarily intra-psychological, as suggested by humanistic psychologists and parts of cognitive psychology, but is an integrated part of

the individual's involvement in various social practices. An elaboration will follow on an analytical differentiation between learning in one contextual setting and learning to orientate oneself in various contextual settings while trying to conduct a specific kind of life. The article's empirical section includes examples from an ongoing research project about how baker apprentices learn their trade, and will illustrate and underline some of the above-mentioned issues.

Firstly, a short historical account is outlined of how the notion of meaningful learning is barely addressed in conventional learning theories. Secondly, humanistic and cybernetic perspectives to meaning and learning are introduced. Thirdly, notions of learning in and between contexts are discussed in relation to meaningful learning. Finally, some examples from an empirical study of how apprentices in a bakery learn are introduced to illustrate how issues of learning disclose themselves in social practice.

## The Lack of Meaning in Conventional Learning Theories

Generally, notions of meaning have not played any significant role in conventional theories of learning. Two different schools of thought are central in conventional learning theories: an *empiristic* and a *rationalistic* (Packer, 1985). Neither of these schools conceptualizes social practice or issues of personal learning. The empiristic position is the principal epistemological school of thought that claims that all knowledge of reality is based on sensory experiences. Rationalism applies the epistemological approach by arguing that individuals obtain knowledge of reality solely through the use of reason (Lübcke, 1991; see also Packer, 1985 and Merleau-Ponty, 1981 for further critique). The empiristic position in psychology discloses itself in behavioural psychology, while the rationalistic position is primarily formu-

lated as an information processing theory of human cognition<sup>1</sup>. The information processing theory can be said to be a frame concept that covers many different research programmes, rather than a comprehensive theory. Characteristically, these theories focus on describing how the individual gathers, processes and produces information about the surrounding world (Miller, 1983). Most mainstream definitions of learning have their roots in these two positions. Omrod (1999) argues that learning is commonly defined in relation to these two positions in psychology. Learning from an empiristic point of view is defined as "a relative permanent change in behaviour due to experience", while learning from a cognitive point of view is defined as "a relatively permanent change in mental associations" (p. 3). The first definition focuses on people's change in observable behaviour, while the other focuses on changes in mental associations.

## The Ideology of Learning Theories

It is no coincidence that conventional theories of learning do not include aspects of social practice and personal learning. Kvale (1976, 1977) makes the case in his analysis of conventional theories of learning that one should focus on the organisation of industrial society as a central, constituting element for conventional psychological learning theories, rather than search the philosophy of science or the history of ideas for a background for these theories. The origin of industrial production and its taylorisation is the basic assumption behind behavioural psychology. Behaviourist theories of learning are shaped by images of the work

1 It must be underlined that my presentation of behavioural psychology and information processing theory is a brief summary and does not claim to be theoretically adequate due to my aim of only discussing central conceptions of learning.

at an assembly line, consisting of mechanical operations on isolated fragments, leaving the worker with no understanding of the totality of which his works are a part. This behaviourist reduction of human action to mechanistic responses is not just scientific prejudice, but an adequate reflection of the dominating form of industrial work (Kvale, 1976, p. 111). The common element is the strict control of behaviour in the factory and the psychological laboratory, the exact measurement and quantification of behaviour. Work is reduced to standardized, repetitive movements dictated by the assembly line, and learning is downgraded to an assembly of chains of responses (Ibids).

Kvale (1977) argues that while behaviourism reflects early industrial society, information process thinking mirrors late industrial thinking whereby complex bureaucracies have become the preferred mode of organizing working life. The information process approach to human cognition and learning reflects the development of organisational bureaucracy in late modernity (Kvale, 1977). Bureaucracy is characterised by fixed structures and stable elements. Written documents constitute a basic element in bureaucratic work, documents that may be stored and retrieved from archives when required for a specific case. A bureaucracy is divided into separate and distinct departments, with formal lines of communication between departments. Bureaucratic processes are impersonal and anonymous. Work in a bureaucracy is regulated by fixed schedules and formal operations. The time of the bureaucracy is clock time – one-dimensional, divisible into the smallest elements, and quantifiable (Kvale, 1977). The same bureaucratic pattern of fixed structures and workflow is found in information process thinking. From an information process perspective, learning is described as a matter of transforming knowledge into memory: focusing on input, information processing in short-term memory with the aim of transferring information into long-term

memory. Long-term memory allows us to store and retrieve important information across an extended time frame. In both industrial production and scientific research, the individual is decontextualized and reified like an object thus, neglecting subjectivity and social practice. By regarding modern industrial society as the dynamic condition for conventional learning theories, aspects of individuality and personal meaning come to play a very limited role.

One consequence of this neglect of meaning is that the subject's perspective in a socio-cultural, historical context is ignored and instead a technological discourse is introduced as central to learning theories (Kvale, 1976). Following the semantics of mass-industrialization, behavioural and information process approaches to learning produce insights into the individual's learning processes in "decontextualised" laboratory settings, which places the individual in a situation where he/she is no longer considered a real person in a concrete life context. The individual is reduced to a torso whose possibilities of experiencing and acting in the real world have been capped in favour of a terminology, which conceptualizes the relation to reality in "organismic" terms (Holzkamp, 1995). The conceptualisation of modern learning psychology consists of several hybrid concepts by both taken human nature for granted and at the same time reproducing social order. The practical consequence of this line of thinking is to technologize human relations in education, by using behaviourist and cognitive learning psychology to develop a decontextualised and de-subjectivized social practice (Kvale, 1976). In other words, rather than attempting to grasp the individual's actions and experience of meaning within a structured and cultural world, only single "items" are selected and related to the individual, allegedly directly determining their behaviour (Holzkamp, 1995). Conventional learning theories systematically ignore how human beings live in a socially structured

world where issues of meaning play a crucial role.

## Re-introducing Meaningful Learning

Two key perspectives on meaningful learning will be presented below. First of all, a humanistic perspective and then a cybernetic perspective to meaningful learning are mentioned. Both perspectives present a breakaway from conventional thinking on learning; however, none of them fully develop a cultural approach to understanding learning.

It has been argued that humanistic psychology's focus on human existence and meaning represents a revolution in psychology and a third force as an alternative to both psychoanalysis and behavioural psychology. It is worth noticing that humanistic psychology's focus on personal meaning in relation to learning to some extent is a break with some of the fundamental concepts emanating from the conventional learning theories mentioned above. Humanistic psychology and parts of cognitive psychology introduce personal meaning as an important alternative to stimuli and response thinking (Rogers, 1994). However, the basic dualistic tenet of learning processes formulated in organistic terms, excluding social practice, is maintained. As argued above, paradoxically, the organistic conceptual framework has its dynamic roots in mass-industrialization. Consequently, when addressing issues of learning, meaning is primarily approached as an intrapsychological process, excluding notions of the social world.

Rogers is a key representative of a humanistic approach to learning whereby meaning becomes a central concept, yet he maintains an organistic approach by regarding man as a natural creator of meaning. Learning in Rogers' theory originates from his views on psychotherapy and humanistic approach to psychology (Rogers, 1994). Rogers distinguishes

between two types of learning: cognitive and experiential. Thus, Rogers adds an important dimension to learning discourse by arguing that high order learning has to make sense to the learner. To Rogers, cognitive learning is processes of memorizing, while experiential learning is equivalent to personal change and growth and all human beings have a natural inclination to learn. Significant learning takes place when the subject matter is relevant to the personal interests of the person, is self-initiated, has a quality of personal involvement, is self-directed and evaluated by the learner. This line of thinking has been developed further, especially in relation to empirical research on how university students learn (Marton & Säljö, 1976a, 1976b; Entwistle & Smith, 2002).

Humanistic psychology has made a significant contribution to learning theories as it highlights the importance of personal meaning as a key component in students' learning. However, one of the problems, one could interject, is how do we develop new and still meaningful understandings of the world? Rogers uncritically sees the decontextualized (abstract) individual as the locus of analysis when he wishes to disclose how meaningful learning unfolds. Only when the individual is part of a non-judgmental environment, does genuine and meaningful learning become possible. Social arrangements of any other kind seem only to repress the person's genuine learning process. As argued critically by Holzkamp, meaning related to learning, from a humanistic perspective, seems to indicate a kind of mental idealism and can be considered a kind of epiphenomenon (Holzkamp, 1995).

## Bateson and the Notion of Contextual Learning

The anthropologist Bateson is one of the first to transcend the dualism of surface/cognitive and significant/experiential learning and to recognise the importance of the context to the

notion of meaningful learning (1972/2000). In Bateson's view, meaningful learning is an inherent part of a person's activities in the world and not an epiphenomenon. The contextual issues of learning are neither to be understood as something that disturbs or represses the genuine learning process that happens within the person, nor is the context an accumulation of trivial incidental circumstances. According to Bateson, the context is the dynamic presupposition for learning something. Instead of thinking of processes of learning as different kinds of learning processes formulated in dualistic terms and contrasting person and social practice, he suggests that we conceptualise learning at different levels, differentiated in relation to their pragmatic consequences to the person in his or her real life settings.

By following Bateson's line of thinking, it can be argued that various levels of learning dynamically supplement each other, and especially what he terms processes of "proto-learning" and "deutero-learning". Proto-learning can be defined as a learning process related to problem solving, the kind of processes researched in laboratories and experimental settings. However, deutero-learning is the habits that create a contextual frame for the processes of "proto-learning"<sup>2</sup>. More specifically Bateson argues:

*"(...) we might say that the subject is learning to orient himself to certain types of contexts, or is acquiring "insights" into the contexts of problem solving. In the jargon of this paper, we may say that the subject has acquired a habit of looking for contexts and sequences of one type rather than another, a habit of "punctuating" the stream of events to give repetitions of a certain type of meaningful sequence"* (Bateson, 1972/2000, p. 166).

Bateson terms deutero-learning as the process of learning to learn<sup>3</sup> and defines it operationally. One could argue that deutero-learning is the ways we differentiate various situations from each other in order to orientate our participation. Bateson emphasizes that deutero-learning is a by-product of the simple problem-solving learning process that actually functions as the presupposition for the dynamics of a more fundamental learning process. Incidentally, this could be termed the premise for high order learning. According to Bateson, learning becomes meaningful as part of one's activities in the world. Thereby, meaning is not an intra-psychological category but more closely related to the activities of the world. Meaningful learning is not an epiphenomenon, but a matter of orientating oneself in relation to participating in various contextual settings. Learning is not merely a matter of learning something specific (like learning the skills to solve a mathematical problem), it is also a matter of learning about the contexts in which to apply this kind of activity (e.g. learning where and in relation to whom and which kind of activities, it is relevant to apply the skills to solve a specific mathematical problem). There is a difference between e.g. solving mathematical problems, playing cards with one's friends, adding up the score and then solving mathematical problems in an exam. Following Bateson's differentiation, we can argue that a significant part of the conventional theories of learning have concentrated on "prototypical" processes of learning, but have neglected issues of learning to orientate oneself (Bateson's deuteron-learning).

Bateson introduces the notion of context as crucial to understanding how certain learning activities become meaningful. What is experienced as meaningful to learn depends on

2 It is important to stress that Bateson outlines an analytical framework for understanding the complexity of learning processes.

3 This has been interpreted as a kind of meta-cognitive ability. Hopefully, I have shown that this is not an interpretation in line with Bateson's thinking.

how people orientate their activities as part of certain contexts. We cannot understand an activity as meaningful in itself. This indicates that we need to identify how learning happens in a social practice in which different kinds of activities are called for in different contexts. However, Bateson maintains an understanding of being part of an immediate social setting and does not discuss how a person's activities are part of a larger social practice in which the person needs significant social competences in order to orientate himself in the world.

## Learning and Meaning as Part of Social Practice

Even though Bateson makes important distinctions regarding the development of valuable insights into issues of learning, the social and cultural world is, nevertheless, merely depicted as a self-constituting system of communication.

This paragraph aims at transforming Bateson's analytical insight of learning as having different levels into a socio-cultural framework. However, different approaches to learning disclose two different analytical perspectives. One is related to approaching learning as activities that happen in a contextual setting, while the other approach to learning is related to how people are involved in other (future) contextual settings, as well. Aristotle inspired this distinction. Aristotle was one of the first to introduce human agency as an important category (Harré, 1998, p. 120). In terms of agency, Aristotle distinguished between voluntary and involuntary actions. Voluntary actions are used by the actor to aim for the fulfillment of whatever they are directed at, while involuntary actions are driven by impulse. According to Harré (1998, p.121), this distinction does not involve two different kinds of processes (organistic and cognitive), rather two different ways of making sense of one's participation in local contexts. Both are discursive categories

and voluntary actions are related to the future, whereas involuntary actions are related to the present situation (Ibid).

Another version of this analytical distinction between the two approaches can be found in critical psychology. Rather than simply study how people deal with a particular situation (in school or at the workplace), Dreier suggests that we shift focus to how they conduct their lives in a trajectory of participation in and across various social contexts such as home, school, workplace, etc. (Dreier, 2003). As a person moves from one context to another, his or her position varies, and so does the person's possibilities, resources and influence. It therefore takes different personal action potency to participate in different social contexts, and a person participates in different ways and for different reasons in them (Ibid). Faced with this complexity, people must, to some extent, compose and conduct their everyday lives in and across different places in ways that depend on their varying personal scope. One may argue that Dreier expands on Aristotle's view that 'man is the moving principle of actions (...) (Aristotle, Harré, 1998, p. 123), by arguing that in order to develop an understanding of people and personal learning, we need to understand how they move in and between various contexts.

In order to expand our understanding of how people integrate their activities across contexts, the concept of conduct of everyday life (Holzkamp, 1995) has been suggested. Conduct of everyday life can be defined as the process whereby people make active efforts, aimed at integrating the different activities into a coherent whole, a process which is not possible without minor and major conflicts, excuses, deceptions, etc. (Holzkamp, 1995). In other words, subjects actively organize their everyday life by regulating their activities in various contextual settings. According to Holzkamp, people have to establish ways to conduct their everyday lives in relation to the

socially arranged rhythms of activities across social time and places. They have to develop and make sequences of activities routine in order to be able to accomplish what needs to be done. Following this line of thinking, people must come to an understanding with themselves and other co-participants about how to conduct their lives with each other and individually. The ways of living one's ordinary life include inter-subjective reciprocity with other individuals' conduct of life (Holzkamp, 2006, p.45). This changing complexity of personal lives across life trajectories implies that people must attend to the ways they direct, locate and prioritize the pursuit of their various personal concerns across time and places (Dreier, 2003). This involves being aware of the distinctions between their participation in different contexts and the various goals they pursue.

## Learning to Orientate Oneself and Modes of Learning

By integrating Bateson's differentiation between proto-learning and deutero-learning into a situated learning/critical psychological perspective, an analytical differentiation between learning in a specific contextual setting and learning as a process of participation in various contextual settings is suggested. The former will be identified as learning processes in which a person tries to improve his or her premises for participation in a contextual setting by mastering specific techniques. This perspective focuses on modes of learning. The latter term is designated to learning how to orientate oneself in various contexts, aiming at conducting one's life in general. Learning to orientate oneself must be seen as a process of conducting activities in various other contextual settings and relates to making sense of one's specific activities in various contextual settings. As suggested below in the empirical part of this article, the apprentices are *making*

*a living* quite literally in the sense that they actively pursue a specific conduct of everyday life and at the same time they are making sense of their modes of learning. The learning orientations are both related to future participation in different social practice of being a baker and everyday life outside the bakery<sup>4</sup>. As indicated by Bateson, these two approaches are understood as dynamically intertwined by being dialectically interrelated.

If we briefly return to the discussion of learning and meaning, meaningful learning is not primarily intra-psychological but an integrated part of the individual who is part of various social practices. The analytical differentiation between various modes of learning and learning to orientate oneself gives us a framework to understand learning as meaningful, without having to introduce learning solely in an experiential perspective, as suggested by humanistic psychology. Furthermore, we maintain an everyday understanding of learning as related to handle specific, concrete elements. As mentioned before, meaningful learning and individual learning processes are constituted in social practices, and not outside of these. In the empirical section of this article, I pursue the issue of learning to conduct a life as significant for the apprentices in the bakeries.

## Methodological Considerations

In this study, two methodological approaches were applied, participant observation and semi-structured interviews. The process of observation was dynamically built around the interview as the centre of rotation giving the participants an opportunity to express themselves thus, making the significance of

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<sup>4</sup> These are the central ones in this material. There might be others, however, the empirical material is used as examples of how learning can be conceptualized as it happens across contexts.

becoming a baker visible. Participant observation was done in three different bakeries for a shorter period of time focusing on verbal and non-verbal learning situations in the bakeries. Seven individual interviews with six men and one woman were carried out for this study. Four of the interviewees were baker apprentices; two were journeymen and one master. Furthermore, three group interviews were conducted with three groups of baker apprentices with four apprentices in each group. Six men and six women were interviewed in these groups. The interviews were designed as semi-structured interviews centred around particular themes, but with the option of exploring specific themes in greater depth (Kvale, 1996). Research questions were formulated to guide the interview. The research questions centred on the following themes: Learning by doing, learning by repetition, learning through making mistakes, learning and responsibility, the role of the social context and learning from the master. As the study progressed the notion of learning by using tools and bodily learning became increasingly important. Tapes were transcribed as verbatim as possible and approved by the interviewees. Analysis of the transcribed interviews followed a modified pattern outlined by Giorgi (1985). The quotes used in this article are the ones which best illustrate the points of research interest and all names mentioned are pseudonyms.

## The Bakeries' Socio-economic Situation

Before introducing examples of the bakers' descriptions of meaningful learning, a short introduction to the social practice of baking will be given. A number of socio-economic contradictions are embedded in the social practice of the bakeries thus, influencing how the baker apprentices orientate themselves in the process of becoming bakers. Therefore, focus will be placed on the introduction of new technology

as one example of the contradictions in the social practice. The socio-economic situation of the bakeries frames the kind of problems the participants are confronted with in their everyday life and sets the agenda for their learning trajectories. In order to survive a significant number of bakeries have introduced new technology in the production, which changes the social practice in the bakeries. One example is the introduction of roll machines<sup>5</sup> in the bakeries, which in some cases has led to a disqualification of the apprentices. A disqualification in the sense that it prevents the apprentices from participating in other contextual settings – finding employment in other bakeries – in a qualified manner. New technology sets the agenda for the trajectories of participation in the social practice and for the pathways that it creates. In a sense, it prevents certain ways of becoming a baker, and yet it opens for new opportunities to work as a baker. Today, it is not necessary for the apprentices to learn to make white loaves, rolls, etc., something that historically has been associated with being a baker. Furthermore, many cakes are industrially prefabricated, so all the apprentices and journeymen need to do is to take the prefabricated dough out of refrigerators, place it on trays and put it in ovens. These activities disqualify the apprentices from working in small bakeries with little or no new technology, and it makes it difficult for them to pass their journeyman examinations.

In the bakeries the apprentices have different learning orientations, which influence how they actually approach issues of learning and validate what they find important to learn. In order to clarify my theoretical points, the next two paragraphs will exemplify two very different conducts of life and learning orientations. The apprentices Peter and Charlotte are examples of how apprentices orientate them-

<sup>5</sup> Roll machines produce a large number of rolls and the baker only needs to add flour, water, etc.



selves differently in order to learn the trade of baking. They were selected because they very clearly described two different ways of participating in the activities in the bakery, and they conducted their lives very differently and, consequently, orientated their future towards participation in different types of bakery practices.

### Peter – Orientated at a Traditional, Craft-orientated Trajectory of Participation

This paragraph is an introduction of the apprentice Peter. Peter cherishes his family life and working as a baker makes it possible for him to integrate his working life and family life. As will be described in the next section, Peter's conduct of everyday life has implications for how he learns in the bakery and how he integrates what he learns at the workplace and at vocational school.

Peter is in his late twenties and is an old apprentice compared to the other baker apprentices. He has previously worked in different unskilled jobs. He is in the middle of his training when he takes part in the interview. His learning trajectory is orientated towards becoming a journeyman in a traditional craft-orientated bakery. Peter argues that life outside the bakery is important and working as a baker, often early morning or late at night, seemingly supports his family life. One could say that we obtain an understanding of how working as a baker is central to Peter's conduct of life in general. This is also a common feature in the interviews with the other apprentices who were orientated at becoming journeymen. They place great importance on life outside the bakery, e.g. being with friends and family. In other words, they see working as baker apprentices as a means of doing something else somewhere else. They do not view their vocational

training as a career move in general, and are basically not interested in any further formal education than what is needed to obtain a job in a bakery. Peter emphasizes how being a baker supports his family life:

*I have two children who actually think it is nice, when they come home from school and there is somebody at home, even though I may be asleep. They can also wake me, if they have a problem or something. So for me, it is fine to work nights (Peter).*

Peter's concern for his family plays a crucial role in how he participates at the workplace. It is important to him to be involved in his family life and his participation in the workplace practice is secondary to that pursuit. Focusing on integrating family life and working life, Peter does not want to pursue further career ambitions. As will be underlined further below, if we wish to understand how and what is meaningful to Peter to learn in the bakery, we need to concentrate on the conduct of life he pursues in other contextual settings outside the bakery.

Peter emphasizes the significance of a good atmosphere at the workplace and he values certainty and predictability in the environment as important conditions for learning. In relation to learning from others at the workplace, Peter appreciates a horizontal structure, i.e. it is mostly the other apprentices or the journeymen he turns to in his training, rather than his master. He states:

*Actually, I believe the work environment is of great importance, I believe one learns more when we are all working well together, and we are not mad at each other or feeling uncomfortable (Peter).*

A humorous interaction between the participants in the bakery and receiving positive feedback and acceptance is important to Peter, not criticism or explanations. He perceives the

other participants in the bakeries as potential colleagues or friends, not as rivals.

Peter sees industrialization as a potential threat to the traditional craft-orientated community of practice in the bakeries, and in his personal learning trajectory he tries to establish a position in which he learns the skills of the craft. He more or less wants to maintain the same position in the bakery as he already has as an apprentice, though with a larger degree of responsibility for the production than presently.

In short, in conducting his life, Peter finds that being a baker makes it possible for him to cherish his family life. He is orientated at participating in future social practices in bakeries as a journeyman, living a life quite similar to his present life. It is important to underline the complexity in his learning orientation. How and what Peter learns is not merely a matter of the tasks at hand, it is closely related to the ongoing activities in other contextual settings and in relation to his conduct of life in general.

## Charlotte – Opening her own Bakery – Becoming a Master

Charlotte is in her early twenties, and at the end of her training as a baker. She is orientated at becoming independent and to become a master of her own shop. This orientation causes her to relate differently to her education than Peter and to what she finds relevant to learn, both when it comes to learning at the workplace and at vocational school. Charlotte did well in secondary school and decided at a very early age to become a baker. She loves baking and feels strongly that baking has a future as a craft. She sees the industrialization of the bakeries as a challenge, and perceives the introduction of new technology as an opportunity to improve the craft even more. She says:

*They (the craft-orientated bakeries – KN) are developing all the time. They now bake till late after-*

*noon, they used to stop baking in the morning, and they have started using special ovens (hærdeovne), which is the same as the bake-off system, something we have started to work with in our bakery, as well (Charlotte).*

In contrast to some of the other apprentices interviewed, Charlotte envisions a great future for the baking trade. Several other interviewees are skeptical of the future of the bakeries, imagining the craft-orientated bakeries replaced by small bread factories. As I will return to later, this skepticism influences their motivation and involvement in learning the trade.

Another tendency in Charlotte's conduct of life is that she pays little attention to what happens in other parts of her life. More specifically, her life with friends and her potential family life are of less importance to her than her working life ambitions. She is ready to give up having children in order to pursue her ambitions of having her own shop. She says directly:

*You know, I am pretty convinced that I will not have any children (...). This is really a job I feel passionate about, it is really all I want and to have children is not something I care enough about. It takes a lot of time, and I would rather put that time into developing my own business (bakery – KN) (Charlotte).*

Compared to Peter, Charlotte gives less priority to her private life in order to pursue her career ambitions. This is in contrast to the choices made by the other female apprentices who work in bakeries, and often take the opposite standpoint. They give up pursuing a working career in the bakeries because they want to have children and a family. Working in a bakery is not compatible with family life for the female apprentices because child-minding facilities are not open at three o'clock in the morning.

To sum up briefly, Charlotte conducts her

everyday life in a manner that makes it possible for her to pursue a career as a future master in a bakery. As in Peter's case, what happens in other contextual settings is of importance to what happens at the workplace. Charlotte is ready to give up the kind of family life many of her peers pursue. Again this points to the complexity of the learning process, pursuing something in one social practice means that other kinds of activities in others parts of the person's life need to be adjusted accordingly. However, in this case the relationship between working and family life is especially difficult for the female apprentices.

## Modes and Focus of Learning

This paragraph focuses on how the apprentices' conduct of their everyday lives make them orientate themselves differently according to what is meaningful to learn in the bakeries. Peter and Charlotte are again examples of how modes of learning are different when it comes to the actual everyday life in the bakery. Their modes of learning are both part of their trajectories of participation in the bakeries and part of their conduct of life.

A central feature of Peter's orientation, in terms of specific learning modes, is that he sees the baking trade as a quite well defined area. Given that Peter has this perception of the baking trade, his modes of learning are closely related to his understanding of the 'given' nature of the trade. What is important for Peter to learn is not open for discussion. Consequently, the baking trade is best learned in the bakery, according to Peter, through imitation, observation and trial and error. Basically, he does not question what is important to learn – at least not in the bakery.

*The way you learn is when somebody shows you how to do it, and then you do it. And you might be corrected, and develop your own way of doing things, and then you are off. Theory happens at*

*school. In school the theoretical stuff is presented to you, but in the bakery, there is no time and nobody wants to deal with theory (Peter).*

As the quote indicates, modes of learning in the bakeries happen through imitation and trial and error as the fundamentals for mastering the activities in the bakery. Furthermore, Peter disconnects to a large degree what happens at the vocational school as irrelevant to what he learns in the bakery. He is very skeptical of the issues he is confronted with at the vocational school. The tendency to disconnect learning in the bakery from what happens in vocational schools is found in most of the interviews with the apprentices who are orientated at working in the craft-orientated bakeries as journeymen. They focus on learning in the bakeries and disconnect this to what is taught at the vocational schools. According to them, it has no or little relevance to becoming a baker. Peter perceives what happens at school and in the bakery as two very different worlds. According to Peter, there is too much waste of time at the vocational school, too slow a work pace, too much time wasted on details and too many courses on subjects of no direct relevance to the workplace. However, in my interpretation, the vocational school itself is not necessarily the problem. A good worker in the bakery is able to move his hands (work fast), not spend too much time on details (an issue which in other interviews is indicated as something female apprentices and journeymen are good at), whereas theoretical matters are related to an academic lifestyle.

*And there (at school – KN) we have all kinds of subjects that have absolutely nothing to do with anything – English, information technology, etc. (Peter).*

The only extenuating circumstance at the vocational school is that Peter sometimes finds himself confronted with aspects of the baking

trade, that he does not work with every day, and which he thinks might come in handy in his later work as a journeyman, but generally he is very skeptical as to how he benefits from attending vocational school.

Charlotte's mode of learning is quite different to Peter's. Charlotte is active and outgoing generally, and her approach is more explorative and comparative. Compared to Peter, she questions whether the particular modes of learning she experiences in the bakery are the best or most appropriate or whether there might be other ways of doing things. It is important to add that Charlotte is an apprentice in a bakery along with several journeymen and apprentices, so she actually has the opportunity to compare methods. She says about learning in general:

*So I choose the best way of doing it, that is the way I have learnt to do things, because in our bakery, there are ten different ways of kneading white bread, so you choose the one you think is the best and easiest (Charlotte).*

This comparative approach to learning at the workplace seems to be in line with her general orientation and conduct of everyday life, as she is orientated at independence and becoming a bakery master. She does not see the trade of baking as a delimited subject matter defined once and for all by the practice in the bakery, as Peter more or less does. She still imitates and observes, but she is much more reflective about what she learns in the bakery than Peter.

Additionally, Charlotte is more direct than Peter, and than the majority of the apprentices interviewed. With her ambitions of having her own bakery, she needs to learn more, and she tries to set the pace for her own training in the bakery. She does not accept the pace set by the journeymen and master for her learning trajectory. She keeps urging them to show her more:

*It is also because I kept saying: when will you teach me that, when do I learn to do this and that. But no, (they responded) 'we don't have time right now'. Then somebody is on holiday, then the other apprentice is at school, we are always one man short, and looking at the calendar, there is not a single day or single week when we are not one man short. It was not right, and they admitted it wasn't right. So they began to teach me how to do things (Charlotte).*

This is incidentally a fully acceptable behaviour in the bakeries. To ask for more instruction and more training, asking to learn more tricks of the trade is something apprentices often have to do in order to be taught. To be passive or to wait for somebody to show you is more problematic. Similarly, like learning to answer back, the apprentices need to learn to speak a certain workplace jargon. It is not so much what they say, but simply that they answer back.

Charlotte is far more open to learning at the vocational school than Peter. She is orientated towards what might come in handy when she has her own shop, so she is far more interested, also in the more theoretical part of the education at school than Peter, for example. However, she is critical – as most of the interviewed apprentices – of the slow pace at school. In general, the apprentices are used to a very fast working pace in their 'home' bakeries so the pace at vocational schools is experienced as slow. Charlotte perceives the school part of her vocational training as a supplement to her learning in the bakery, and she sees the possibilities of integrating these aspects in her everyday working life and in her later and independent work in her own shop. What is learned at school is potentially important for Charlotte in her future activities. She finds the theory gives her more potential opportunities as the master of her own shop and, with theory she has the opportunity to develop new aspects of working practices. She says more specifically:

*At school I would like to have some more theoretical lessons and all that stuff from the bakery could be cut back because a lot of that we already learn in our bakeries (Charlotte).*

In the quote and in her interview, Charlotte describes how she connects what she learns at school with her future activity as a master. Unlike Peter, she tries constructively and actively to connect the activities of the two very different contexts to learning the trade of baking.

In short: As argued above, it is important to focus on the conduct of everyday life that the apprentices would like to live in order to understand what they find meaningful to learn. In order to understand why Peter and Charlotte approach the baking trade as they do, and in order to understand their modes of learning, one has to understand the conduct of life they would like to pursue. Or to put it differently, to understand learning in one context, we also need to understand how subjects make priorities in their lives in other contextual settings.

## Discussion

This article argues that meaning must be addressed as important when dealing with learning. Furthermore, it has been emphasized that it is not sufficient to focus on meaning as an intra-psychological phenomenon. Instead it has been suggested to approach meaning as something related to how people in general participate in social practice. Following this line of thinking, it has been mentioned that in order to comprehend what people in everyday life experience as meaningful, we have to understand the concerns they pursue across different contextual settings and the kind of conduct of life they try to realise. Two baker apprentices, Peter and Charlotte, illustrated how they orientate their learning activities in the bakeries according to their future participa-

tion in the baking trade and to the conduct of life they wish to pursue.

In order to understand what is experienced as meaningful, we have to research the kinds of social practices that are accessible for the apprentices to approach, how present and future social practices are organised in relation to each other and the kinds of pathways that exist between current and future social practices. In Peter's case, to become a journeyman in a bakery involves a process of minimal change between current and future social practices. This is exactly the point for Peter, to maintain a status quo in order to be able to have more possibilities in other contextual settings. It is important to note that Peter is not unaware of the potential possibilities present to him in other social practices (e.g. to become a master). He is well aware of his options in other areas. If we want to understand what makes sense to Peter to learn, it is not sufficient to focus on lack of knowledge or cognitive incapacities. Furthermore, it is not a matter of rational choice whereby Peter's efforts to change his trajectory of participation exceeds his current resources. To understand Peter and what he finds important to learn requires looking at his conduct of everyday life in and across different contextual settings.

The case of Charlotte points to another important issue. She wants to change her participation more radically than Peter. The kind of participation needed in her future social practice is very different from the present one and the pathway between the present and future social practice is narrow (changing from being an apprentice to becoming a master). One could argue that in Charlotte's case, she has to separate a part of her life (to have family and children) in order to pursue a specific conduct of life in another contextual setting. It could be said that in order to develop a certain kind of life, one needs in some cases to separate other parts of one's life.

The theoretical ambition of this article was to develop theoretical concepts thus, making it possible to approach learning as meaningful without losing sight of the contextual fundament for processes of learning. Inspired by Bateson's differentiation between proto-learning and deutero-learning, the article has tried to combine two different perspectives on learning. One perspective, the humanistic perspective, focuses on analyzing how participants experience learning situations as relevant to their own lives. Another perspective, a situated learning and critical psychological perspective, emphasizes how processes of learning are embedded in social practice. Central to this endeavor, the article has suggested conceptualizing learning as processes of orientation, which changes and is being changed in everyday social practice and in relation to the participants' everyday conduct of life. Rather than focusing on learning as processes of internalization as in information process thinking, the notion of learning as orientation is sensitive to a person's participation in a multi-contextual practice, where scope and mode of learning is embedded in social practice.

Crucial to an understanding of what is meaningful for the apprentices to learn is an awareness of the structure of the various social practices of which they are part. Only by describing concretely how the apprentices' activities in various contextual settings are intertwined, do we begin to obtain an understanding of structure. The social structure does not exist beforehand as fixed and unchangeable, maintained by macro societal interests; rather it unfolds in the apprentices' everyday life in and across various contextual settings. To decode what the apprentices find important to learn and how they learn it, we need to focus on more than just one concrete context. We need to understand which kinds of social practices they pursue to participate in and which kinds of demands and pathways lead to these future

social practices. Furthermore, it requires an understanding of the conduct of life they want to pursue in general, by focusing on their lives outside their working life. Finally, it is important to address the premises the apprentices have for participating in the workplace context – something that has not been sufficiently elaborated in this article.

Basically, by focusing on conduct of everyday life, we move closer to an understanding of why people act as they do in different contextual settings. We do not find answers only by focusing on what they do in one context. We need to examine the complexity of the different kinds of learning activities. In order to understand, we need to understand the role of human relationships. Significant changes in one part of a persons' life means changes in other parts as well.

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