

**DEVELOPING IDENTITY AS DRIVING TEACHER  
INTERACTION BETWEEN PRIOR EXPERIENCES, EDUCATION AND  
PROFESSION**

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*An important area in the traffic safety work in Norway is the education of competent driving teachers. This paper will present my ongoing PhD project within the subject of traffic didactics. The education of driving teachers was extended from one to two years, and lifted from upper secondary level to two years at university college level from 2004. My project will explore the new generation of driving teachers, and their process of developing a professional identity during the education, and secondly, their meeting with the established business of “old” driving instructors in real working life settings.*

***The Driving teacher***

The driving teacher plays an important role in the driver training of pupils. Previous research in Norway (Rismark, Sølvsberg, Sitter & Stenøien 2004) shows that driving teachers who taught sixteen year olds in traffic theory had thorough knowledge on traffic subjects. At the same time, they revealed a lack of didactic repertoire to transform their expert knowledge into

a curriculum to fit the target group for the course. There is, in other words, a difference between driving a car, and teaching someone else to drive a car (Shulman 1987).

The teacher's self-understanding, comprehension of learning and subject belief has influence on pedagogical practice and will therefore affect the way learning activities are organized. In different cultures there are differing notions on what learning is, and how learning occurs. While one culture emphasizes results and product, others will have the attention against learning processes (Wahlgren 2004). A common way to present learning theories is by illustrating the development with a historic timeline, where one starts with behaviourism, and shifts to cognitivism, and then over to the sociocultural/situated perspective. (for instance Greeno, Collins & Resnick 1996). To understand what learning is, and how it occurs is crucial for what kind of learning processes the driving teacher presents during the traffic training, both theoretical and practical. My point of interest in this is the development of professional identity amongst the driving teacher students, while attending school, and then, finding out if it is relevant when entering work life.

I will apply a divided focus in my study;

- How will the students develop their professional identity during the two year education?
- When entering working life; is the professional identity relevant to the challenges in the profession?

Obtaining knowledge within these areas is important for continuously develop a better education for driving teachers, and thereby raising the quality on the national driver training.

### ***Theoretical framework***

In a situated perspective learning is a process that takes place in a participation framework, not in an individual mind. Learning is, as it were, distributed among coparticipants, not a one person act (Lave & Wenger 1991). Participation here refers not just to local events of engagement in certain activities with certain people, but a more encompassing process of being active participants in the *practices* of social communities and constructing *identities* in

relation to these communities. Such participation shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do (Wenger 1999:4).

A social theory of learning must therefore integrate the components necessary to characterize social participation as a process of learning and knowing. This is central aspects concerning the socialisation to the profession, and they can also work as theoretical categories in the analyses of the data material (Sitter, 2004). These components, shown in the figure below, include the following:

1. *Meaning*; a way of talking about our (changing) ability – individually and collectively – to experience our life and the world as meaningful.
2. *Practice*; a way of talking about the shared historical and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action.
3. *Community*; a way of talking about the social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognizable as competence.
4. *Identity*; a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities.

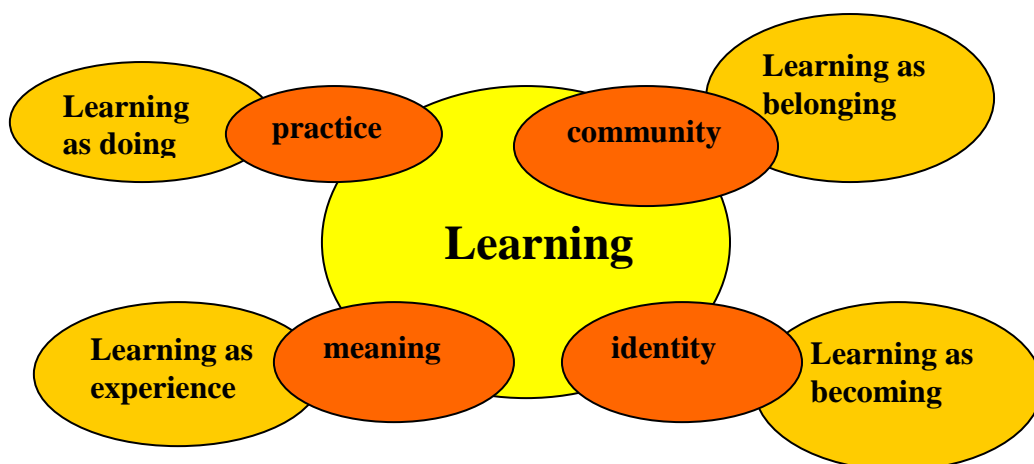


Figure 1: Components of a social theory of learning (Wenger 1999).

A newly employed driving teacher earns acceptance at the workplace by participating in the community of established driving teachers, and learning is an integral and inseparable part of social practice:

[...] there is no activity that is not situated. It implies emphasis on comprehensive understanding involving the whole person rather than “receiving” a body of factual knowledge about the world; on activity in and with the world; and the view that agent, activity, and the world mutually constitute each other. (Lave & Wenger 1991:33)

As a consequence, a crucial factor is thus the individual’s ability to judge the relevance of (i) particular information, (ii) skills and (iii) the understanding of actual situations, and the ability to act according to what is valued by the social world. It follows that much knowledge is relative in character, and skills that are valued in one situation may not be relevant in relation to other social partners. Human action is situated in social practice, and individuals act according to their knowledge and experience and to what is required, appreciated or made possible in a particular social situation (Rismark & Sitter 2003).

### ***Methodological approach***

Within qualitative research the aim is to grasp the informant’s points of view and their own perspectives. In other words, it is their subjective experiences and knowledge that is the focus of attention. By using an explorative approach I wish to gain knowledge and insight in how prior experiences influence the driving teacher students choice of education, and how they develop professional identity during the education, and last, their meeting with the established business of old driving instructors in real working life setting. My choice of method will be life history interviews (Goodson & Sikes 2001). I will conduct interviews with 6-8 students at different stages; first during the last term at school, and then after they have had some experiences in work life practice. I will encourage my informants to tell about different themes or eras in their life (Riessman 1997:34), for instance childhood/upbringing, choice of profession, driving teacher carrier and thoughts about further professional experiences. This opens for the informants own decisions in what they will share with me, what words and definitions they use is determined by themselves, and not in advance by the researcher.

Life history research is a branch within biographical method. Denzin (1989) defines biographical method as studies where one on the basis of documentation and recording describe important/critical incidents in a person's life. Interpretive biography is, according to Denzin, a history where a researcher narrates and analyzes a story told by someone else; "we create the persons we write about, just as they create themselves when they engage in storytelling practices" (1989:82). The researcher reports on an individual(s) life and how it reflects cultural themes of the society, personal themes, institutional themes and social histories. One also places the stories into a broader social context (Cole 1994 in Creswell 1998:49).

### ***Preparation for life history interviews***

#### **1) General Procedural Issues**

There are a range of procedural issues which need to be considered for employing life history methods.<sup>1</sup> They actually cover a spectrum of possibilities, but here they are presented in bi-polar opposition to stress the distinctions:

1. Interviewer's questions **versus** silence
2. Structure **versus** Emergence
3. Prescription **versus** Freedom
4. Interview **versus** Conversation
5. Research **versus** Therapy
6. Coverage **versus** Depth
7. Flow **versus** Focus

There are no interview that will proceed without some explanation, conversation and some questioning. But Goodson pose the issue this way to challenge a common assumption that the life history interviewer should ask a set of questions. In his experience, the best life history interviews are often those with the least interviewer questions in them. Too often, a question leads back to the interviewer and away from the life storyteller's concerns. Questions which are answered as the life story unfolds provide better answers than those given to specific questions. As researcher's, we like to be in control, to feel we are getting the data we want. Paradoxically, this often leads to poorer data; *the more we prescribe our questions, the more*

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.ivorgoodson.com/s-Preparation>

*we structure our enquiries before the interview, the less we learn.* In life history work, the aim is to get the subject talking and above all to listen closely.

## **2) Selecting your informants**

This will, to some extent, depend on whether a full life history, a thematic life history or, as in my case, **an occupational life history** are being undertaken, but normally it is important to establish a spectrum of interviewees. Sometimes this can be achieved by conducting an initial survey to pinpoint the diversity of cases and themes to be examined. An alternative strategy is to conduct a series of pilot interviews in order to establish the spectrum of cases and themes under review. The case in my project is that I already have some knowledge about the students I will ask to participate, as I give lectures to them and see them on a daily, informal basis at school.

It is always important not to simply choose informants who appeal to one's own instinctive story lines or sympathies. There is a fairly common complaint about life history; that the life history interviewer chooses informants who are effectively telling his or her own story.

## **3) Setting the scene**

Often little thought is given to the scene in which the life history interview will be conducted, but it is of enormous importance. Lawrence Stenhouse, an early English ethnographer, once argued that the best way to conduct interviews was driving in a car (!). This way, the interviewer again is looking out of the window ahead and only occasionally turns to make eye contact with the interviewee – likewise, the interviewee is freed from the immediate, interrogative eye of the interviewer. But setting the scene for the interviewer is a highly personal decision that has great impact on the subsequent interview. It relates to the next stage of the process.

## **4) Building trust with each other**

Building trust with the interviewee is an incredibly complicated process and has to be established fairly quickly if the interview is to be successfully conducted. There is no programmatic way for establishing intimacy and trust: it is a question of human chemistry and, as such, there is no procedural formula. What is clear, however, is that the more one explains the process and use of life history interview, the better this is in building early trust.

One should always make a point of explaining what is going to happen to the interview when it is completed, and explaining what it is for. Often this transaction can be conducted around the signing of an 'informed consent' protocol.

### **5) Using a tape recorder, video or notes**

It is strongly recommended to use a tape recorder. If you do not use it, you constantly are breaking eye contact, and if you have worked hard to establish intimacy and trust, this puts you back to starting point each time. It is also crucial to jot down notes as the interview proceeds. For instance, when bigger ideas emerge, it is important to note them down, for they may not come back to you when do the subsequent transcriptions.

Video adds new dimensions – showing so many other responses. But it can be more intrusive and there is the problem of a wider range of data that can make analysis more complex. Sometimes the image can tell more than the discourse.

### **6) Transcription**

A common procedure is to put out transcription to a research assistant or secretarial assistant. In general, Goodson argues that this is a bad move. His experience is that doing transcriptions himself and doing it fairly quickly after the interview, recreates the scene of the interview very adequately and causes a flow of complimentary ideas to come up as you transcribe.

### **7) Describing the scene**

Often when interview material is presented in reports, the scene of the interview is not fully described. It is important to describe the situation for instance that while the interview is being conducted, you were, sitting in front of a picture, and at this stage in the afternoon. So you have to allow the reader the opportunity to imagine the setting. This is imperative in life history work because full contextual picture is part of the textual material being presented.

### **8) Analysing transcripts**

There are a number of strategies for analysing life history interviews. Noblit & Hare (1998) describe a process of translation and synthesis in developing meta-ethnographics that pursue general topics and concepts; Glaser & Strauss (1967) describe the process of emerging

thematising, as do Strauss and Corbin (1990); Patton (1980); Denzin & Lincoln (1994) talks of saturation as a preferred analytic strategy.

In developing a detailed analysis, Goodson adopts a process of immersion, or what he calls 'bathing in the data'. One reads and re-reads the transcripts nothing emergent and then recurrent themes; organizing the quotes into clusters. Then the clustered quotes on particular topics analysed again and an initial report is prepared. From this, a fuller and more final text can be developed. A hermeneutic approach to the analyses of the data material is appropriate (Gadamer 2004).

### *Pauses and silence*

The absolutely crucial importance of **pauses** must be represented in the transcript. What they indicate is that 'this is a difficult question'; 'something important is being asked here'; 'I have got something important to say, but I may not want to say it'. How you indicate pauses in the transcripts is that you should actually time pauses and along the side of the transcript, there should be a timeline indicating the scale of the pause. The question of pauses is in some senses related to the issue of silences. What Goodson means by **silence** is the parts of life and work that are omitted in the descriptions given by the life history teller. For instance, many men talk primarily about their work when given a life history interview. What is often silent is any discussion of their emotional or family life. Here the 'silence' is saying something very important about the way that the man is storying his life, or at least is choosing to present that story to a wider audience. It is important for the life history interviewer to note and respect the 'silence' before possibly asking questions about it.

### ***Concluding arguments***

At this stage in my work I want to focus this paper on methodological issues because I am just about to start my interviews. I have chosen to use life history interviews as the principal method in my thesis because it is a useful tool when I shall try to grasp how the driving teacher students develop their professional identity. And furthermore how, and if, they make use of it in meeting with the work community. In this way I get to elucidate several sides of this development in a "whole life perspective", defined and told by the students themselves. I have also briefly shown my theoretical framework in the paper. Within this special field this



will be the first work in Norway on driving teacher student's professional development, and my aim is to bring a fresh approach to the field and hopefully contribute to continuously improving the education of driving teachers in Norway.

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