

LEARNING AS BECOMING THROUGH THE LIFECOURSE: CONTRASTING & CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS WITH IDENTITY

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Introduction

It will possibly not come as a surprise to people here that the more interviews I hear in the Learning Lives Project the more I see learning as embedded in the whole of life. A number of interviewees have said quite categorically that they are learning all the time, every day of their lives. Anna (66) even said “The day I stop learning, that will be the day I die” Yet sometimes those same interviewees are unable to identify any specific learning incident, or unable to describe how they have learnt anything in particular. Others especially over the period of the research are or have become much more aware of their own learning and some are able to analyse episodes of learning in some detail.

Learning Lives is a project about learning rather than a project about life, but it is a project about learning throughout life. We are therefore seeing learning in many forms, from unplanned learning happening incidentally in daily life and sometimes going unrecognised by the learner, through to planned and purposeful learning which may be in an institutional setting. Sometimes the learner may have a life changing objective. Whether the learning is planned or incidental, it can contribute to what and who they are. Sometimes learning reinforces already established dispositions and identities, sometimes it is part of progressive development, sometimes of more dramatic change. Learning may precede and lead to change or it may follow change – sometimes of necessity. Either way as suggested by Wenger (1998) and by Dominice (2000) learning is a part of an ongoing process of becoming.

The data we have been looking at in the Leeds University part of the project mainly relates to people over 50 and we have been able to look at this process of learning as becoming through changing situations and experiences across these people’s relatively long lives. For many of our people much of the learning they experience is incidental to their identities for much of the time. They are continually learning through family life, through work, through leisure activities, sometimes in college, in fact through most of their life activities. For most, in spite of the fact they are learning to some degree “all the time”, being a learner is not central to their life. There is also however a small but significant group of people for whom being a learner is actually an important part of who they are, at least at some stages of their lives.

We have examples to illustrate many facets of learning, becoming and identity which I have just described, but what I intend to do is to look in detail at the story of just one person, an English working class man now 58 years old. For long periods of his life, learning, although he can and does describe some incidents, was incidental to his life. More recently his relationship with learning has changed and it is now hugely important to him. I will therefore use his story to demonstrate what are some of the characteristics of the learning identity relationship at these contrasting stages of his life, and to show that learning as becoming continues throughout.

First however I will describe our research project, from which his data is drawn.

The Learning Lives Research Project

“Learning Lives: learning, identity, and agency in the life-course” is a three and a half year long project which started in 2004. It involves small teams of researchers at four British universities. The aim is to deepen understanding of the meaning and significance of learning in the lives of adults, particularly in relation to identity and agency. To do this we are examining a range of learning experiences from the perspective of the adult learners themselves, set within the context of their unfolding lives. There are two strands to the data collection, involving the integration of three different methodologies.

The first strand is a qualitative study of 100+ people in Britain, drawn from different walks of life, different parts of the country, and of different ages, genders and ethnicities. The second strand is quantitative but this paper does not use that data. In the qualitative strand, we are combining two methodologies based on interviews: life history research and longitudinal research, where we interview our subjects several times over three years.

Each individual has been interviewed first about their life history, being asked to tell their own story with as little prompting as possible, but in the knowledge that the project was about learning. In later interviews the stories have been further explored, with more intervention from the interviewer where necessary, to build on the earlier interview(s). As well as elaborating the life history, successive interviews have elicited information about ongoing events in people’s lives. Thus we are exploring the temporal context of learning retrospectively and as “present-in-progress”. The life history work encourages people to look back over their lives, whereas the longitudinal research allows them to provide a series of “snapshots” tracking the ways their learning biographies (Dominice 2000, ch 9) are lived over the research period. The longitudinal work provides a continuation of the life story, and the two interpenetrate. Each provides the potential for interviewee and researcher to contextualise and interpret the other.

Life history research is dependant on the ways in which people reconstruct the past through the narration of their life stories. The stories we have are partial and selective “lives interpreted and made textual” (Goodson & Sikes 2001, p16). A life story as told is a story of the past put together at a particular present time. The present (and the teller’s understanding of the present) affect the story of the past. For example, current successes

or failures may colour what went before. The past in turn impacts on the present, and not only in a deterministic way. The past and people's understanding of it enable and restrict present and future opportunities. The past also affects the way the present is understood, and the way it is presented. A person's current learning relates to past learning, building on previous experience or reworking previous understandings. Thus the longitudinal research is important both because of its interaction with the life histories and because it provides the possibility of reviewing learning almost as it happens. When we review the interview data all these factors need to be considered.

This is the background to the collection and interpretation of the interview data. Tony is one individual drawn from the 21 interviewed from Leeds University.

Tony Wilf: learning and identity

Tony grew up in one of the poorer areas of the city where he was born. He has been an unskilled manual worker for much of his life. Seven years ago his wife died leaving two young teenagers still at home. By then an industrial accident had prevented Tony from doing any heavy work and dissatisfied with his job he left to look after his family. This was a traumatic period of change in Tony's life and it required learning (some of which he has described) in order to deal with the new situation. Family had always been important to him but was now a principle focus. The other recent focus is attendance at adult education classes. He has gone through life barely able to read and write but is now totally committed to remedying that situation, provided that the setting is right. The classes have helped him structure his time and provided purpose in life in a difficult period. Learning both for family and for personal satisfaction are central to his life now, and he is conscious of unplanned outcomes such as increased confidence, seeing things in a different way and more varied interests.

The learning Tony is doing now inevitably relates to the life that went before. A basically happy childhood but poor experience of schooling has led to most of the learning in his life being participatory, and incidental involving trial and error, observation, and listening to those he respected as having appropriate experience to pass on. I will give a largely chronological account of his life pulling out the learning experiences he himself is now able to describe since being a learner has become an important part of his identity.

Childhood

Tony described his childhood enthusiastically. He started life in a small terraced house with no facilities, but when he was about 4 years old the family was rehoused in a flagship development near the city centre.

...we moved into town and what had been a treat for us to go to town were now a way of life. I lived in town. I were no distance away, you know going into market and I grew up and I knew more back streets and my way round anywhere

In their new accommodation Tony and his brother had a bedroom each, an indoor bathroom, waste shutes, and a communal laundry. He had many friends and got into mischief but families looked out for one another's kids. He learned basic practical

household skills, as he was expected to help with simple jobs like laundry and tea making. He believes he learned good values for life from his early upbringing.

The most important kind of learning. That's learning every day skills, i'n't it, I'd say. You know, learning to cope with things, and with life in general... That – it came from parents and different people that you – like I were saying you were taught values. You wouldn't go out and vandalise something, or you – you wouldn't dare, because you were taught what your limits were.

He remained at home in “Quarry Hill flats” well into his twenties. The flats were condemned in the 1970s to Tony's dismay, and everybody was moved out and rehoused in outlying estates.

Home life was positive but schooling was a bad experience which has affected the rest of his life. He doesn't remember much about primary school but arrived at secondary school with poor literacy skills. He is bitter about his experiences there, and able to analyse them to an extent from his current standpoint.

...all the good, or the clever ones, were sat right at the front... and the rest of us were sat on the back and so every time there was a question asked or you needed to know something, you'd put your hand up, you were told to wait a minute but the minute never came and the more you sat there with your hand up, the more you were ignored. (1)

I was told “you're not like your brother”, “your brother don't do this”, and I was trying to say to them, “but I'm not my brother,” you know, “I'm the one that needs help and I'm asking you for help but you're not giving it to me.” But because I were a kid and I couldn't talk to them on that level it were just hold your hand out and have cane and off you go. (1)

Then it, pfff, diverted from that. I started, with some other lads, that if it came to doing homework, I'd pay somebody a couple of pence to copy theirs and I'd copy their homework and leave a couple of words out. But nobody even picked up and said “well...why are they so [similar]”... so you just got into the stage of “well I'm not bothering”, and I didn't. (1)

the best scam I ever got... I can't remember what I'd done but I was given an appointment for an x-ray and I'd had to go into school and produce this x-ray card “oh off you go, you must keep the appointment” and I thought “this works a treat” and I got somebody to fill another date in for a couple of weeks later and I took it back in and it worked every time. (1)

I think they let me down, because I don't class myself as thick, but I was told time and time again by teachers “you're thick, you don't understand, you're thick”. “If I don't understand explain it to me, probably then I will understand it”...If somebody had said, you know, “Right, what's the problem?”...and if they'd have said “yeh I'll give you 5 minutes...” Or maybe, “I'll explain it to you after class, just sit there and I'll come back and I'll tell you.” Fine if they'd have done that. But to be snubbed and sort of say “no” or “go away, it doesn't matter, you'll never understand that, you're thick.”...But as a kid you couldn't answer back, or if you did answer back you were off marching again to go for the cane...and that's the only thing I remember from school is seeing the man with the cane, you know. There were never no pat on the head “oh you've done well there”.

I can't blame me mum and dad, because me mum and dad were working. Me dad, even when he came home from work through the day, he'd have his tea, get washed and changed and back out to work of a night. And it's a different generation I mean I wouldn't have gone to me dad, or to me mum and said, "I'm having trouble with this and that. I don't understand this". Whereas I think people can do it now.

He believes he started off trying, but received no help when he didn't understand and no help with his reading and writing. To this day he has problems with people who don't take the trouble to listen, to understand what he needs. He learned to distrust teachers, to dislike formal education and that he would not succeed. He learned instead to cheat and skive, to value alternative activities, to gain kudos with his peers from bravado if he suffered a caning. He left school at 15 still struggling to read and write.

Working life

The family expectation was that he would go straight out to work and bring in a wage to support himself. This was another of the 'values' he learnt at home. "If you weren't working you didn't get fed."

I was classed as thick at school so it was expected that I would never get a decent job you know so I mean, all my life I've sort of "ducked and dived". I've had silly little jobs here and there but if I'd have had the education then probably I could have got a decent job. (1)

Initially he had a series of jobs which were either meaningless to him or inappropriate. He learned by and through changing and doing these jobs, but without any commitment to them. One better job, with a rope making company, involved off the job training sessions and he had to leave because he couldn't write adequate notes. However he didn't "duck and dive" all his life.

I worked on the Highways Department for years and that was a great experience... we used to do road repairs, flagging and curbing. The bunch of lads that you worked with it were brilliant. I mean you could work all over the city and so you always got different surroundings... You never felt hard done by, because you were always laughing and joking.

He learned from and was trained by experienced men that he respected, learning by listening to what they told him and copying what they did and what he was shown, as well as by trying things out for himself.

they used to have like a pothole guy that you used to go round and do – fill the holes in and the other little small jobs. And I got put with this pothole guy... I mean the first day I went, I had no idea. You know, I knew basically how to shovel, or I thought I did, you know. But... you got the people showing me how to make the shovel work for you, not you work for the shovel. And from there you sort of progressed. You could go with another gang where they'd do big road construction or they'd do footpaths.

Much of the learning was on the job, but there was training available back at the depot.

...somebody came along with a JCB. And I knew the lad who were driving it, and I was thinking, '... that's should be me sat in there doing that!' And I applied to do it, to drive the

JCB, and they said, “Oh, before you can do that you’ve got to go on a mobile compressor.” So they got me in an old tractor with a compressor fitted and I used to drive it all over, digging road up and – and they said after so long being on there, and being classed as a plant operator, I could go into yard one morning, and he said, “Oh, you’re not taking compressor this morning, take that 6 ton roller out.”... But you had to have the training, and you know, they’d give the training, and it were brilliant.

And all the training took place in the yard, did it then?

Yeah. Yeah, the – the yard just behind where they would store tarmac...where you did the roller and he’s put the tarmac down then you’d roll the yard.

So the yard was continually being relaid for practice.

Yeah.

and then I – I wanted to be working with the – the masons, the street mason pavers and that. And that were brilliant. You know, I’ve been mostly a masons’ labourer. I still had to have this training of how to cut a flag and how to lay flags.

So you got the training from this old guy in the yard about how to cut the flags.

Yeah. As I say, I cut this perfect square out of the middle of a flag, then he came along – “Do it again.” Well you know, he’d never say, “Oh, you’ve done that great.” It were his way – so you – you would know then to take the measurement properly and do it, and – and so it – it became second nature to me. To work by yourself, you were put with a – a qualified mason first... an old hand who’d been there years, who knew it inside out. I mean like to set pavement wa’n’t an absolute mind-blowing job, you know, you just – but you’d got to get all the bed right, then you’d to set them right

He became good at his job and self-confident in his role as highway worker. He even got to help a supervisor with even worse literacy problems than himself, to write out orders. As part of the group he learned also how to exploit bonus schemes and overtime. Scams reinforced his membership of the group. He is very conscious that he might have progressed further in this job, in two ways in particular. Firstly:

...basic reason I didn’t get proper street mason pavier’s thing, is because you’d to go to college, and you’d to do all the – the measurement and that. *{So you could only be a...}* a mason’s labourer. I could do the job as well the mason... but I didn’t have the qualification.

Secondly:

They offered me a job to work as sort of estimator, you know, when say the gas board’s been, and they dig a hole in the road, and somebody comes round and measures it up so a contractor can go in. I could have done the job falling off a log, it were so easy. But because I couldn’t do the recording bit, I couldn’t – I couldn’t take the job... if I’d been able to do it, then I – I think I’d have still been at the highways and I’d have probably been a street inspector or something like that.

At the time he never seriously considered being anything other than a labourer. Being at the core of the gang of manual workers was central to his identity. At the time he didn’t think about the learning that he did for the job as learning. It was part of the process of becoming and remaining, a roadworkman.

That part of his career ended with an accident where he broke his hip. Cutting corners on safety regulations had been another thing he learned as part of the culture. His city council employers provided him with a sedentary job where he still enjoyed some of the

benefits of being in a team of workmen. He became responsible for arranging night-time emergency callout for repairs to city property, and developed an excellent rapport with the tradesmen who were available for the work. Bending the rules was again part of the culture, but always getting the work done. The job set a challenge for Tony however, as he had to keep records of the work done, not least so that the workmen could be paid.

...we used to get the phone call and I used to write it down in rough... I mean if it was a broken window, you were suppose to put secure broken window, so I'd just "S/W" – secure window - and it worked a treat, you know ...and I used to have like a triplicate sheet and I'd pull the sheets off and attach it to the single sheet of paper that I'd written in rough and at the end of the night when everybody had sort of gone home I'd sit and rewrite them all out and I used to have my favourite little book with me, which were dictionary and if I got something that I couldn't spell I could sit for hours going through dictionary to try and find it.

Unfortunately the requirement for form filling increased. Meanwhile he barely saw his family who were out during the day. He chose to prioritise family, give up the job and go back to "ducking and diving", changing jobs frequently – mainly local delivery driving.

Family

From the beginning of his first interview, Tony stressed how important his family were to him. He married in his late 20s and the marriage was evidently a happy one. He tells stories showing his pride in his wife in her roles at home and work. He personally sees one of the biggest turning points and biggest learning experiences of his life as the birth of his first child, and the realisation of the responsibility this entailed. He'd to stop being "Jack the Lad". Nevertheless in describing his life before his wife's death he said more about work than family. When Liz became terminally ill he asked his employer for leave, unpaid if necessary. This was refused so he went to the doctor hoping for a sick-note on compassionate grounds, but had time off with serious angina instead. When Liz died he was devastated by the loss. Disgusted by his employers he left work to look after home and teenaged children. He had always helped his wife at home, and occasionally gone to meetings about the children with her, but he struggled to take over.

Until it's put on your plate and said "right you do it" and then... I mean I've told a lot of me friends and my brother and that that they want to look round at their situation and think "just what am I doing"... You know because my wife used to work and then she'd come home...and start making the tea, things like that, and I used to think to myself "I've done my fair bit, I've done a bit of washing up, and I've done this and that" but when you've got the job lot! (1)

He learned, with difficulty, by doing, with advice from neighbours and the children themselves, all at the same time as having to come to terms with the loss of his wife.

I sort of like to think that I've sort of taken over from Liz with my kids and sort of say "right, you know, this is what we do and..." but I mean there's times when things go wrong, you know I wanted to make something when she first died and I couldn't remember how to make it and I got myself into such a strop.

Well up until Liz dying, Liz sort of did all the finances. And I never did ... after Liz had died I had to pay the rent and I had to write cheques and that were a work of art for me to write a cheque to spell everything properly.

Back to the reading and writing thing... I wanted to do some home made fish and chips and I couldn't remember how to do batter so I asked one of old ladies next door. I thought "oh she'll tell me how" and she gave me this book, "there you go love it's in there" ... "Thanks!" Do you say to kids "just read us this out and tell me what to do." I spent ages looking at this book... And then to figure out what ounces meant because it was O Z or something and then how you work it out. So that turned into a nightmare... It's hard you know I mean that's where I'd be embarrassed, if I had to say to one of kids or to anybody "what does this say"

He also had to do a lot to help in particular his youngest child, Clare. At the end of primary school she was diagnosed as severely dyslexic. She struggled at school both academically and then after her mother's death, socially. Visiting school to deal with her problems was a thing he came to terms with and he has also helped her with school work at home – giving the sort of help he never had himself.

I got to know...teachers... because when Liz died I had to go in and settle that, tell people, you know, that Clare needs this and that.... And then I were called in for different meetings ... I mean Clare went through a bad stage, you know bullying...

...her handwriting was like mine at school. If I can't read her handwriting then it is really bad ... when she's done homework or work in her school book and she's showed me and I've put a line through it and said, "No, Clare you can do better," and we've sat and we've worked it out. And I've actually written it out on a piece of paper for her, for her to copy back into her book and she's still made mistakes.

He went through a period of drifting through days aimlessly, just about getting the essentials done. He came close to depression and alcoholism but was shocked into realising how it might affect the children.

Erm I started, what, down the road of self destruction in a sense because I started drinking and sort of doing it on quiet. Kids'd gone up to bed and I'd have a couple of cans and have half a bottle of whisky. And then one day Clare came home and said "oh I've missed school bus" and I had to take her to school and I were driving and thought "what if I get pulled now, not only have I got the humiliation of being arrested in front of my daughter I lose my licence, what the hell do I do?" and that was sort of pulled up by the shoelace time... I don't know whether she knew what I was doing... It were my sort of wake up call. I'd do daft things when they were at school. I'd get my car and vanish and then I found myself in Huddersfield one day, what would I want to be in Huddersfield for? I was just supposed to be going to the shop. It were just escape you know, get out of the house. It's still, I mean people might think I'm daft, but I still talk to my wife. When I go to bed tonight I'll tell her exactly what's gone on today... You know there are good things and bad things I talk about... like the first Christmas dinner I did, I had to tell her that I'd achieved that, I mean I was quite proud of myself that it'd all worked out.

7 years on he has become a tolerable househusband, devoted to his daughter, and to his granddaughter [son's child] whom he often collects from school.

The need to help Clare has helped Tony to help himself. It made him act responsibly. It pushed him into returning to formal learning, which has been both a practical and a psychological gain. Also her youth group has provided him with a new outlet for activity.

Returning to college aged 50+.

Throughout his life Tony has tried to hide his reading and writing problem. He has relied on other people or worked out strategies to cope at a low level. It has restricted his career. He knows he could have gone to classes and improved his reading years ago. His wife and his brother's wife had contacts and would have encouraged him, but he never managed to make it a priority, as he was happy with his role as traditional manual worker. In addition his own experience of school was a deterrent. It was the need to help his daughter, struggling with her own schooling, that finally took him back to education.

with Liz dying and Clare's [course work] coming up, er – Clare's handwriting - if I can't decipher it, nobody can decipher it. So I – the idea was to get a computer so she'd be able to do it and print it out. And so that's when it started. And I thought, 'well, what do you do?' ... So I went to "Computers for the Terrified". And it worked.

I got into it, I really enjoyed that, and then something came up - this is how I started back in the English, something came up about "insert so and so after the third paragraph" and I thought, "what's a paragraph?" You know it'd been that long since I'd been at school and nothing like that ever stuck at school... so that's why I started coming back to doing the English because I wanted to know...

He started at his nearest community learning centre for computers but the English course there was not a success, reminding him too much of earlier failures at school.

...it was in like a big workshop and so at the back of me there was somebody learning Maths and there was somebody learning something else and I couldn't concentrate on what I was doing and that was going back to being like at high school.

He actually got thoroughly involved in writing a story but

if I had to write a letter... I'd do it in sort of block capitals, and I've done it for years and years and it is neat but the tutor was saying "no you must use real writing" and I said "well if I did you would never read what I've written" and then it started getting to be the battle again. It was me being a kid again told "you must do this" and I don't know if it's a rebellious side of me... And I know it must have been... two A4 pages full of this "trip to the dentist"... then she threw it back at me because it weren't in real writing... "I've come asking for help and all of a sudden you're the person with a big stick again." (3)

Tony was ready to give up, but his sister-in-law encouraged him to try again at a different centre. This time it was a great success. The tutor, Joan, deals with her students as individuals and does listen! Following a conversation where she was finding out about him, Tony was diagnosed as dyslexic like his daughter. The relatively simple system of using coloured overlays, paper or computer screen, has led to a big improvement in his reading. He is now able for example to make proper sense of official letters that arrive on

his doormat, where before he would have given up after a couple of sentences and sometimes misunderstood. He is keen to be able to read the books he has missed out on up to now, especially novels, autobiographies and history. Joan has recently sourced some simplified classics and he takes them home, turns the TV off and reads. Classroom sessions help Tony to build on the knowledge he already has, for example providing techniques for spelling individual words. He is encouraged to write about things that really interest him. They have free writing sessions on the centre's computers where he "loses himself" for hours writing about his own and his local area's history. Even that first story he wrote about the dentist was a revelation to him.

I got carried away with that and sort of went into pages about it and to me it's as though I've been locked away for years and somebody's said "here you go, here's keys, you're free now".

Joan has encouraged his interest in the history of the area where he grew up.

through doing this history of Quarry Hill, the stuff that's come out of me and the writing - I never knew it were there, you know, and for me to sit and write!...I were buying A4 pads, and I was sort of filling them. You know, for me to go to do something on the computer and if I printed it out I think it's like 47 sheets of A4 paper, that's a hell of a lot of stuff that's been stuck inside me that suddenly has come out.

He brings it to Joan to check the English. But the project has set him learning on his own, researching web sites to find facts which his memories support. Some of the information on the city library web site didn't match his memories. He contacted the library and is now submitting his own work to them.

Apart from improving his basic skills of reading and writing and computing, things he really set out to achieve, the courses have provided a focus for his life. When first he was at home all the time, as well as missing his wife, he was unable to organise his time. Now for 4 years he has organised life around his courses.

It were the best move I ever made... You know I look forward to [it]. Since my wife died it's my little escapism. Nobody can touch me for them couple of hours. I aren't Dad going to shop... I aren't thinking "oh what are we having for tea" ...When I'm at college I can work myself out. I can go to shops and I think "right we're having that for tea" and I can buy stuff in so when I get home I know I don't have to start rushing about. "That's what we're having," and I've got myself organised. But when I'm not there or if I don't go, then it's painful "Oh, I'll have to go to shop" and I'll've been going to the shop day in and day out.

There have been more knock on effects from the courses. One of the first things he told me was that he is aware of having changed, of thinking in different ways, of looking at things in different ways, perhaps having wider horizons. He is more observant and much more aware of what other people might be interested in.

I can explain things more now...now I'll go into detail ...so it's like painting a picture in my mind and if somebody wants to pick up on it or ... if you've never been to the place you can get a rough idea of what it looks like or looked like to me.

This is reflected in his ability to describe so well and to some extent to analyse his earlier life. He is also much more confident both in respect of literacy, and of life more generally. He will do things which he would once have assumed were not for people like him. For example his daughter is a keen sea-scout and he has now become involved with the committee that helps organise the troop. He has found that he has abilities and contacts that compliment those of 'posher' members and are valuable to the group.

With his new learner identity, he regrets he did not make this progress years ago. On the other hand he is clear that he wouldn't have wanted "to be a different person". He has enjoyed his life within male working class culture. He valued highly belonging to a gang of workmen, with its camaraderie and humour. He would hate to be "posh" and despises his brother's occasional tendencies in that direction. He is clear that most of his learning throughout life has been incidental and experiential. Recent changes however made learning to cope an overt necessity, and alongside that his classroom learning has become central to his life. The supportive atmosphere in the literacy class has led him to progress both practically and socially.

Current success has however reinforced his bitterness about his secondary schooling and how it/the teachers failed him. The hangover from that means even now there is a precarious balance between positive learning experiences and withdrawing resentfully from experiences that remind him too much of school and failure. His computer learning was initially very successful and he was over the moon when he gained his first certificate. ('50 odd year old and start dancing round the room showing the kid, you know, "I passed this and I got a distinction."') Later courses have varied.

we have like 2 different tutors. And you can ask one, "I don't understand this." And she'll say, "There you are." And she'll walk away. And the other one'll come across and show you what she's doing, then undo it and say, "Right, you do it." And she'll sit with you til you can get it right. And that works better for me.

There was also a problem with work not getting marked and eventually he failed an exam, "which felt like a kick in the teeth." He decided he was wasting his time. He was persuaded to try some desk top publishing the next year, which could have been useful for his Quarry Hill project, but he found the tutor patronising, and that he was waiting half an hour for help. He gave up, blaming the system, but he does recognise the benefits of his computer work overall.

...there are a lot of things that I've done with the computer courses that – I don't know, I don't know if I'll ever go back to work, I – I may do, I may not. But would any of this be any good to me? But that's beside the point. It's got me interested in things again. (2)

A few years down the line his formal learning is focussed firmly around the literacy courses he loves. The attitude of everyone in the group, the relaxed and varied curriculum provided (including outings to museums, theatres, historic sites), the clear progress he has made and the personal interest and encouragement of the tutor are all important.

...what I like about it, you know, everybody works as a group nobody takes the mickey out of anybody. It is like a little family circle... I mean all right I only see 'em once or twice a week but that time that we're in the group together everybody works with each other you know... some of people in my group are worse than me at reading you know, I mean, and they'll sit with me and they'll ask me. (3)

...how can I describe it? It's so relieving that you get to know something and you can then do it, you know you think to yourself "thank God, it weren't that hard, it weren't that bad." You know you can sit there and you can, if you wanted to you could go into group and you could sit there by yourself and not talk to anybody, that'd be fine, they'd accept you, they'd let you do it. You know even if you wanted to face wrong way round. But gradually your confidence builds up. You can start to do this and you can understand it. You know, I mean all right I still have problems with commas and full stops and spelling 'where' and 'were' and you know, I mean, but that hopefully is gonna come with time.(3)

Over the two and a half years of data collection Tony's enthusiasm for his literacy learning remains unabated, but he is far less concerned about periods when there are no classes, as he has learned to organise his family life and to deal with those matters he had to take over from his wife. He is closer to getting over the loss of his wife – looking to buy a memorial bench and managing quite well now without her. His growing confidence in his own abilities, encouraged by the literacy group, means he is branching out in other areas of his life. As well as joining the youth group committee, and writing now for others as well as himself, he is experimenting with healthy cooking and has given up smoking 40 cigarettes a day. Clare may be a worry for a while yet – at 19 she is still trying to gain some basic qualifications at college and not sure what job she might do, but his sons are doing well. Apart from hopes for Clare, he says that one of his greatest ambitions would be to earn himself a GCSE English certificate and go and wave it at his old school and say, "I'm not thick. This is what I can do with the right help".

Theories of learning

The aim in presenting Tony's story is to provide detailed data to relate to ideas about learning more generally.

There is much written about learning, and from the point of view of the Learning Lives project there are some problems within that literature. The essence of the problem is that different people understand learning differently. Sfard (1998) sets out two contrasting metaphors for learning, acquisition and participation. Within psychology literature until very recently it has been normal to view learning as acquisition: that is, learning as centrally concerned with acquiring a known commodity by way of knowledge, skills or understanding. In this view then Tony has recently acquired computer and literacy skills. However, his story demonstrates the reductionist inadequacy of this view of learning, for it omits much of what is centrally important in his story, such as the significance of belonging, first to a work gang and later to a literacy class, and the process of achieving that. It certainly doesn't match Bereiter's (2002) deliberately simplistically described a "folk view" of learning as the filling of an empty vessel. Hager (2005) points out that the acquisition metaphor turns what is learned into a series of commodities, and sees learning

itself as a series of acquisition events. In contrast Hager argues, and Tony's story supports this view, that learning is essentially an on-going process.

The acquisition metaphor separates out the learner, the process of learning and the product which is learned. That is, the product is independent of the way it is learned, or who learns it. The skills of pavement-laying have an independent existence. People like Tony can acquire these skills, but the skills always remain the same. We are left with the currently fashionable technical efficiency view of learning: what matters is (i) knowing which skills matter, and (ii) knowing which is the best (most efficient) way for those skills to be learned. However, in Tony's story, the processes and products of learning are deeply intertwined, and cannot be properly understood without considering the positions, dispositions, and identities of Tony himself, as a learner. Tony's skills with the road gang were part of belonging to that male working class community, membership of which continued, even after injury forced his move into an office job.

One way of extending this metaphor is to see learning as a process of construction by the learner. That is, a learner constructs, say, skills of road mending and pavement laying, that are partly unique for him, as he makes sense of and comes to own what he is learning. (What was termed the constructivist movement was debating a range of positions, juxtaposed by Phillips [1995]).

There are some weaknesses in this version of construction as a metaphor of learning, again shown up in Tony's story. Firstly, this was an almost entirely cognitive view of learning, concerned with the mind, and with propositional knowledge. Construction was seen as a mental process only, albeit often a tacit one. Yet our stories show that even when learning has a clear cognitive focus like Tony's literacy, the process of that learning is embodied. In Tony's case this can be seen in his attempts to manage with very limited literacy skills whilst at work in the office, and the centrality of his later learning of literacy skills as part of belonging to his adult education classes. In both cases, practice was and is central to his learning, as are his emotions – what he felt.

The second problem with constructivism was that it mainly dealt with formal learning, such as science or mathematics. As Tony's early story shows, it is quite possible to live a fulfilled life with lots of learning that is almost entirely informal.

However, both these criticisms of construction as a metaphor for learning can be overcome if, like Hager (2005) we understand construction in a Deweyan sense. In this view the process of construction is an embodied process. We can now see someone like Tony constructing himself through his learning, and this also fits with Dominice's view of "formation". At all stages of his life - the experiences of secondary school, learning at work, learning in the family and his later adult education courses - for Tony, learning has been a process of becoming.

There is another way in which constructivism does not fit with our complex data. Like other accounts of learning grouped together by Sfard as 'acquisition', constructivism still sees learning as occurring in a context which is separate to that learning. One reason for

the decline of constructivist learning theories was a series of texts written in the 1980s/90s, which undermined that separation. Brown et al. (1989), Lave and Wenger (1991) and a number of post-Vygotskian writers (eg Engestrom, 1999; Wertsch, 1998) argued that learning is situated, and that it is part of the situation. Thus, for example, Lave and Wenger, 1991, p35) argue that “learning is not merely situated in practice as if it were some independently reifiable process that just happened to be located somewhere; learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world.” In Tony’s case, his work-based learning in the earlier period of his adult life was centred within the participatory practices of the various jobs he did. Perhaps unsurprisingly, most of this academic work on situated learning was based outside the worlds of formal education and schooling, in third world communities or the workplace. The central concern was with informal learning. Rather than seeing learning as either acquisition or construction, these writers saw learning primarily as participation (Rogoff, 2003: Sfard, 1998).

Tony’s learning as work was participatory, and involved developing values and identity as part of a community of male manual workers, as well as the technical skills of the job. He later learned to be a housekeeper and carer, through doing what was necessary for his family, after his wife died - learning by participating.

It is also possible to see the participatory nature of learning in Tony’s formal classes. He has a strong sense of belonging in his adult literacy classes, and is learning more than just reading and writing through engagement with and participation in those classes, with the tutor, others students, and the varied activities and practices in the class.

By the start of this century, there were two principle views of learning: learning as a cognitive process of construction/acquisition (Anderson, et al., 1996); and situated participatory learning (Greeno, 1997). The literature on learning as participation also had a problem, of direct concern in relation to our research. The significance of the individual learner was often overlooked in detailed studies of learning situations, such as workplaces, be they seen as communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) or activity systems (Engestrom, 1999). It would be as if we studied in detail the workplaces or classrooms where Tony learned without thinking about Tony as an individual subjective being. Individual identity and agency may be hidden.

There are then elements of both learning as construction, in the Deweyan sense, and of learning as participation, which help make sense of our data. We can understand Tony’s learning as the on-going construction of the person, through participation in a wide variety of activities, in a wide variety of settings, over time. For the Learning Lives Project we can also try to build on these insights, in ways that help us understand the interrelationships between learning, identity and agency.

Learning as becoming, and learning as being

For Tony's story the view of learning as a process of becoming through participation makes sense. In his early adult life, learning for Tony was incidental. In his case, it happened that through living and working, through becoming a member of his group of valued peers, learning took place. Throughout his life Tony has learned through becoming and become 'someone' as a result of learning. For much of his life, learning has been peripheral to his sense of identity. However since his wife's death and his decision to attend adult education classes, his attitude to learning has changed, and it has become a central part of his being. What began as learning to meet an instrumental need – to help his daughter, has gradually become a central part of his newly found sense of self in life. He now attends classes because going to classes is important to him. His on-going attendance has brought structure to his life plus increased self-awareness, greater self-confidence, and a changing sense of who Tony Wilf is. Tony is not only someone who can cook, use a computer, read simple books and write local history. He is someone who organises his life around weekly literacy classes and is discovering progressively more things that he can tackle and achieve.

Learning and Identity Change

For Tony we can identify a key period of transformation in his relationships with learning. A significant change in his lived circumstances triggered needs that had to be met and engagement with adult education. This was a complex and multi-faceted process, where relations with other family members were of great significance. Specifically he had to be able to support his daughter. The engagement with adult education proved to be a catalyst for a further personal change. Tony grew as an individual, gaining confidence, new abilities and a progressively changing sense of who he was and what he could do.

It is through participation in a number of different learning cultures – at home, at work, in the local community, in leisure, in formal education, etc. that people learn (Hodkinson et al., forthcoming). Their learning can be understood as something akin to a Deweyan notion of embodied construction. One way of understanding Tony's story is that he becomes through learning, and learns through becoming.

It is also possible to see that sometimes he "unbecomes". In his schooling he became a person who distrusted formal education, was suspicious of teachers, and knew how to gain a different sort of kudos from his classmates as he learnt how to dodge schoolwork. It might also be said that he 'unbecame' a good pupil. It may be the same process, but using 'unbecoming' reminds us to avoid assumptions about learning being always a positive or constructive process. As people develop, they can become something and cease to be something else. Simplistically, elsewhere Tony became the family carer and ceased to be an employed breadwinner. However a completely fresh start is unlikely. Something of the past is carried within. Thus, even in his new persona as enthusiastic adult student, Tony's resentments of schooling frequently resurface, and his class identity is of huge importance.

The other thing that these stories show is that learning is a ubiquitous part of life – of being a social, human being. As another of our respondents told us 'learning' and

becoming' only ends with death (or possibly dementia). This does not imply that life is always in flux. Much learning for all of our sample subjects was often undramatic, and took place as part of routine living. Change could be very gradual, and often learning was more about confirmation and consolidation than change. However, in most of the lives, we can see periods of significant turbulence, sometimes associated with life changing events, or what Strauss (1962) termed 'turning points'. Sometimes before, but certainly during and after such life changing events, learning is more evident.

Learning as being

Tony was chosen as the case study for this paper because he demonstrates how learning became part of his identity, who he is and how he organises his life. The fact that, for much of his life learning was mainly incidental and experiential, further emphasises the on-going processual nature of learning and becoming. His story also demonstrates the significance of informal learning in that sense of learner identity, in that he is now aware of and able to articulate some of his earlier and ongoing learning.

Tony, and several of our other respondents are the sorts of adult education class attender who are sometimes looked down upon in audit-driven policy discourses. They are seen as 'education junkies', who fail to recognise that, according to the acquisition hegemony, learning should only be about attaining measurable outcomes. In fact, all of our subjects value learning outcomes, and would probably not engage with learning if the outcomes did not seem worthwhile. However, what they see as desirable outcomes may not match dominant policy assumptions about what they should be, and they may not be outcomes that were planned in advance. Thus, Tony values his qualifications, but they are certainly not the main or only reasons why he wants to learn. Initially he did have an aim - to learn to use a computer well enough to be able to help his daughter. He achieved that and much more, and wants yet more of the same. He doesn't see learning and outcomes as separate, with one leading to the other. He wants to improve his literacy, particularly to be able to deal with official letters and forms better, and to be able to read proper books, but he also wants to be working in the supportive and friendly atmosphere of his class. The "aim for a target" model is only one variation of a much more complex story.

Just as learning may or may not be focussed on preselected outcomes, so learning as becoming may or may not be associated with a person striving to change in a particular way. Tony both wanted to be different – more literate - but also just wanted to cope with the difficult situations he already found himself in... and he doesn't want to be 'posh'.

In several of the Leeds case studies being a learner is part of their identity. Learning is not only about becoming, it is also about being. Learning is an important part of some people's sense of who they are. There is no clear distinction between learning as becoming, and learning as being. Tony has been learning all his life, and much of his learning, for example in the family and at work, has always been important and beneficial, if sometimes tacit. Though we are arguing that there is a difference between his engagement with learning before and after his enrolment for adult education classes, the difference is one of degree.

Acknowledgements

“Learning Lives” is a collaborative project funded by the ESRC under its Teaching and Learning Research Programme. The award number is RES-139- 25-0111. The partners are Gert Biesta, Flora McLeod, Paul Lambe and Mike Tedder (University of Exeter), Ivor Goodson and Norma Adair (University of Brighton), Phil Hodgkinson, Heather Hodgkinson, Geoff Ford and Ruth Hawthorn (University of Leeds), John Field, Irene Malcolm and Heather Lynch (University of Stirling). Further details of Learning Lives can be found on the project website: <http://www.learninglives.org>

This paper is based on information which can be found in the 6th project working paper: Phil Hodgkinson, Geoff Ford, Ruth Hawthorn & Heather Hodgkinson, (January 2007) *Learning as being*. <http://www.learninglives.org>

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Learning outcomes. Describe changes in self-concept and identity development during adolescence. Explain Marcia's four identity statuses. Identity development is a stage in the adolescent life cycle. For most, the search for identity begins in the adolescent years. In contrast to friendships (which are reciprocal dyadic relationships) and cliques (which refer to groups of individuals who interact frequently), crowds are characterized more by shared reputations or images than actual interactions (Brown & Larson, 2009)[14] These crowds reflect different prototypic identities (such as jocks or brains) and are often linked with adolescents' social status and peers' perceptions of their values. Learning as becoming through the lifecourse: contrasting & changing relationships with identity. Heather Hodkinson, Senior Research Officer, Lifelong Learning Institute, School of Education, Room 7.44, E.C.Stoner Building, University of Leeds, LS2 9JT tel:0113 3433598 Email: H.D.Hodkinson@Leeds.ac.uk. Introduction. It will possibly not come as a surprise to people here that the more interviews I hear in the Learning Lives Project the more I see learning as embedded in the whole of life. A number of interviewees have said quite categorically that they are learning all the time, every day of the Life-course theory defines a common domain of inquiry with a framework that guides research in terms of problem identification and formulation, variable selection and rationales, and strategies of design and analysis. Beginning in the 1960s, this theoretical orientation has diffused across substantive domains and disciplinary boundaries in the social and behavioral science. Major transitions in the life course typically involve multiple life changes, from entry into the diverse roles of adulthood (Modell 1989) to later-life changes in work, residence, and family (Hareven 1978; Kohli 1986). The social meanings of age give structure to the life course through age norms, sanctions, and age-graded relationships.