Exploring waves of relations between professional practice, education and learning

Illustrated with management professionals

Paper for the OLKC 2011, Hull University, UK (April 12-14)

Bente Elkjaer and Lise Tingleff Nielsen

elkjaer@dpu.dk

Abstract

The point of departure for the research reported in this paper is observations of examples of successful practising professional practice without relevant formal education to do so. This raised the question of whether education matters, and to research work and working life as a source of becoming professional practitioners as well as the relation between education and working life learning. The issues that are dealt with are the 'when' and 'where' of professionals' learning by viewing practice, education and learning in a trajectory of life and subject to certain conditions. The purpose is to provide insights about possible compositions of professionals' learning through working life and participation in education. The focus is upon management biographies, and it is theoretically anchored in research on professionals' practice and working life learning in a pragmatist version focussing on meetings with tensions and ruptures as important for learning. The project is in its initial phase, and is as such mainly oriented towards proposing a framework for which to interpret professionals' learning to practice a profession through biographical data. An example of interpretation is, however, provided and a most tentative conclusion is that for practising management, learning is initiated along the pathway of working life, and that formal education follows from that.

"(...) and promised myself to not let old stories prevent new ones from emerging" (Ramsland, 2005: 47).

Introduction

The idea for this project came to one of the authors more than ten years ago when she was listening to the radio. Here was an interview with a manager from one of the very successful start-up enterprises within the IT industry. When asked about his training for practising management, he answered that he did not have any formalised management skills. She became curious and called him up for an interview in which she tried to get deeper into this phenomenon on practising management without formal education and how he had learned what he practised. It turned out that he had a three year commercial and clerical education and training but without having finished high school but that he, nevertheless, came from a family with long traditions for being academics. This raised this authors' curiosity about practising a profession with success without having learned to do so through formal education. If schools and educational institutions are not the way to become skilled professional practitioners, does education matter at all?

Several years later two things of importance happened to this slowly continuous line of thought. She was asked by one of her former colleagues to write the biography of her father who had founded a very successful enterprise in the 1960's, and she became a middle manager at the university for the second time without having herself had any formal management education. This sent her out on a journey, where she began reading biographies written by former and current in their own eyes successful entrepreneurs and managers. The question of being a competent practitioner without formal education to do so began to form in her mindset as an actual research project. The background is both her role as a teacher and, thus, responsible for educating the practitioners of the future and her many years research in organisational learning, which has directed her attention to work and working life as a source for becoming professional practitioners.

What does participation in formal education mean in order to become a competent professional practitioner? In which ways does learning through education relate to working life learning in this pursuit?

The questions lined up, and this paper is a first attempt to create order in puzzled minds. It is the very initial steps to explore how professional practitioners learn to practise their

profession. We focus upon the 'when' and 'where' of professionals' learning by viewing practice, education and learning in a trajectory of life and subject to certain conditions. We particularly want to open up work and working life as possibilities for learning. We see the purpose with this research to be pointing towards some insights about the composition of professionals' learning through working life and through participation in education.

This composition of professionals learning is with the point of departure in professional management practice as available in management biographies. We are well aware that management is not regarded as a profession in the sense that it is governed by joint professional ethics monitored by institutions and associations like for example medical doctors and chartered psychologists (see e.g. Hjort, 2005: 87ff). Management professionals (and entrepreneurs) have, nevertheless, existed for many years, and we view management professionals as a rapidly emerging professional practice in the sense that management education is on the rise. Thus, there has been a tremendous increase in both numbers of graduates and of educational institutions offering MBAs and executive MBAs worldwide and in the Nordic countries (Tryding, 2008). The majority of managers, however, do not have much formal management education to support their practising management, which makes professional management into a practice 'halfway' between being formalised and not. These considerations combined with the critique of management education for being detached from management practice makes learning by management professionals an interesting profession to look at in terms of the composition of learning from working life and formal education.

We understand work and workplaces as organisings of multiple and conflicting practices that matters for learning. Thus, we understand learning as an aspect of practice, both educational and work practice, rather than attributes of individuals, which makes our focus interactional and relational rather than individual (Elkjaer, 2003; Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Usher & Edwards, 2007). Understanding learning as an aspect of practice needs, however, to be qualified, and we do so inspired by American pragmatism. To learn in a pragmatist sense is to infuse emotional uncertain situations with meaning, which involves defining the situation as a problem and inquire it as such. This involves learning as a process of not only knowledge production but also of constructing identities. Informed by pragmatism, understanding learning as an aspect of practice may be captured in professionals' meetings with tensions and ruptures as opportunities for learning (Elkjaer & Huysman, 2008).

The research on professions has mainly been done in a societal and sociological perspective rather than from the vantage point of work and workplaces. Further, research on the professions appears to be focussed on professionals as occupations oriented towards social cohesion of welfare societies rather than focussing on processes of segmentation and diversification within groups of professionals at work with their profession (Bucher & Strauss, 1961; Podmore, 1980) or boundary work towards other groups of professionals (Fournier, 2000). Focussing upon professionals as occupations makes the formal educational institutions of professionals important to look at as well as the professional associations governing professional bodies of knowledge. These are important in dealing with issues of professionals' learning but they also tend to protect professional practice towards changes (Karseth & Nerland, 2007). Changes are, however, today taking place regarding professional practice and education, e.g. in terms of more cross-disciplinary practice and training, but professionals' learning through working lives may, nevertheless, shed another light on professionals' learning to practice their profession. The point of departure in biographies is both because we want to explore trajectories and conditions for learning a profession as well as emotionality as a driver for development and learning. This may seem strange when having stated a relational understanding of learning but we interpret biographies as not only reflections on own lives and careers, which they naturally are, but they are also about interaction with other people, real places and events (Stounbjerg, 2006).

It is important to stress that this paper reflects the initial phases of a research project, and is as such written with the purpose of developing a framework for understanding professionals' learning to practice their profession. This framework is, however, until now only tried out on a single protagonist to explore its potentials and flaws. The following is first a brief introduction of our reading of research on professionals with the purpose of including professionals' learning through working. This leads to our elaboration of how we understand work, organising hereof and learning. Finally, we introduce biographies as a genre to provide knowledge about professionals' learning, which leads to a presentation of our analytical framework through which we propose to read management professionals' biographies in order to answer the question of how managers learn to practice their profession. We finalise the paper by hinting towards some implications for the future organising of work and education for professionals' learning but, naturally, so far resting on rather fragile grounds.

Research on professions and professionals

Studying the field of professions and professionals, there seems to be three overall takes (Weber, 2004). One is to view professional practice as formed by the changing ways of governing societies including consequences of the different reforms of the welfare states and welfare provisions. Another is to focus upon the rationales and legitimacy with which professional knowledge is established and maintained. This also taps into the question of the legitimacy of societal knowledge bases and what counts as valid professional knowledge. The third take on professionals and professionalism appears to be a focus upon professionals' identity and development hereof. This involves the features of what it means to be and become a specific kind of professional (e.g. management professionals, teachers, nurses, etc.) and how to practice the profession as such. In the following, we elaborate on these takes on research on professionals. We, however, also include a fourth take, which cuts across the above mentioned because it is one that understands professions as a much more varied group of people, and as such with different and changing points of orientation to align with and be aligned with. This does not only include different specialities like for example middle and top management professionals but also what is currently highly rated within a group of professionals like for example attachments to different waves of management fashions and fads.

The changed forms of governance

Several researchers have pointed to the detrimental effects for professionals of New Public Management (NPM), and they have talked about the 'de-professionalisation' of professionals as a result hereof (e.g. Hjort, 2009; Hjort & Weber, 2004). While NPM may be seen as a threat to the autonomy of professionals, other researchers point towards the possible new 'roles' that professionals may take on in their professional practice (Sehested, 2008). This is argued with relation to the democratisation that follows from the integration of users' knowledge into professionals' knowledge. For Denmark in particular, the radical decentralisation in Danish governance structure is stressed along with the internal managerialism of the public sector as well as the modest marketisation and privatisation as important for this development (2002: 1524).

Sehested proposes that the way professionals' deal with the new balance between layman knowledge and professional knowledge illustrates how users' knowledge affects

professionals' roles (2002: 1527). Sehested further argues that professionals' roles are challenged from within themselves as a group because of the rise of the new management professionals. The new management professionals also subscribe to professional values and ethics but combined with management issues. This means that management professionals play a critical boundary role between management and the large group of 'producing' professionals, because they can translate and transform ideas from both sides. As a consequence managerialism and professionalism become intertwined creating new avenues for professional practice (see also Broadbent, Dietrich, & Roberts, 1997).

The changed societal knowledge base

While changed forms of governance change professionals' roles in society through users' influence and challenge what counts as professional knowledge, this is also affected by new ways of using the term 'professionalism'. Evetts (2009) provide a useful framework in her work pointing towards both elements of continuity and change for professional knowledge (see also Hjort, 2005: 87ff). Evetts coins the notions 'organisational professionalism' and 'occupational professionalism' in order to be able to analyse different uses of professionalism in contemporary societies and enterprises. Organisational professionalism is manifested by a discourse of control, used increasingly by managers in workplaces. This discourse of professionalism at work is, on the one hand, used by managers, practitioners and customers as a form of occupational control, motivation for work and expectation of outcome (quality). Occupational professionalism is, on the other hand, manifested by a discourse constructed within professional occupational groups and incorporates collegial authority. Any controls within occupational professionals are within this discourse done by practitioners themselves, guided by codes of professional ethics monitored by professional institutes and associations.

Where occupational professionalism emphasises collegial relationships, organisational professionalism is dependent on workplace structures and societal patterns. Evetts points to how public sector managers (i.e. management professionals) and practitioners increasingly use professionalism as a discourse of occupational control, rationalisation and motivation, and, hence, provide a useful context in which to examine changes in and to professionalism. NPM seems to be promoting organisational professionalism and to further undermine occupational professionalism. Evetts talks about the re-creation of professionals

as management professionals as being a way to maintain occupational control in somewhat related ways to Sehested's work (see above).

The changed professional identities

The notion of identity deals with who we are as individuals and as a group, and identity is always historically specific and changing. Identity issues are also about the dynamics that comes into play when the conditions for being self and group changes, and the balance can move both backwards and directs itself to what was, the 'lost identities' of e.g. the authority as a teacher and forwards to the possibilities that new conditions provide. A professional identity always holds both components of 'doings' and 'knowings', and the myth about a professional identity and the unfolding hereof are two sides of the same coin. The myth contributes to the provision of answers to who 'we' are as professionals, and to what it means to be a 'good' teacher, social worker or management professional (Stave, 1996).

Some researchers on professional identity claim that in late modernity, there is a higher level of individualisation that challenges professionals, their practice, and their understanding of themselves (Krejsler, 2005). Professionals as experts and holding monopoly over a professional field belong to yesterday. In contemporary professional practice, professionals also need abilities to engage with clients, stakeholders and consumers, and needs to "develop an inner compass that makes it possible to orient himself/herself within recurring reforms and incessant change within the profession itself" (Krejsler, 2005: 353).

Others talk of professionals as no longer existing and of having lost their exclusivity in the postmodern age due to the increasingly sophisticated regimes of accountability (Dent & Whitehead, 2002). The exclusivity, protection and autonomy of professionals are replaced by a culture of performativity. This means that the construction of professional identities is regulated by the market, and its endless performance appraisals and inspections. Thus, the loss is not really material but the denial of a professional identification. "The 'I' cannot talk with the authority of a professional, cannot give an account of itself as a professional, unless the discursive association is prior held and legitimized in the eyes of others" (Dent & Whitehead, 2002: 5).

We find that the above takes on professionals and professionalism are most valid. They, however, mostly elaborates on professionals as losing their occupational status and not of how work and workplaces may provide arenas for tensions within groups of professionals and in relations to other groups of professionals. This also means that the research on professionals does not include working life as arenas for learning, and tensions as occasions for reconstructing identity and knowledge (see also Czarniawska, 1998). In light of the growing importance of viewing professionals as part of workplaces and some of them even entering the group of management professionals, we wish to introduce a process oriented understanding of professions and professionals.

Different voices within groups of professionals

A process approach to professions focus upon diversity and conflict within a profession resulting in segmentation of different groups of professionals within the same field of profession, e.g. a segmentation of management professionals (Bucher & Strauss, 1961; Podmore, 1980). This approach is different from one that sees a profession as a relative homogeneous community whose members share identity, values, definitions of role, and interests. The latter tends to overlook the different and conflicting interests within a profession, and therefore fail to see how important these are for the development of the professions and its practitioners. An approach appreciating process and emergence of segments within professions see professions as loose amalgamations of segments pursuing different objectives in different manners and held together under a joint name at a particular time in history. This means acknowledging the cleavages that exist along the division of labour in workplaces, and the intellectual and specialist movements that occur from time to time within all professions.

The differences within professions, and the basis for the continuing processes of segmentation runs along the following lines: the sense of mission with a particular profession; the actual work activities performed in the name of a profession or how the core activity of a particular professional practice is perceived; the applied methodology and techniques; the relation to clients; the sense of colleagueship or the circle or alliances of colleagues associated with; the interests and associations bearing in mind that associations typically represent one segment or a particular alliance of segments within a professional association; spurious unity and the control of PR by way of spokesmen for the profession (Bucher & Strauss, 1961; Podmore, 1980).

The notion of segments is not just differentiation amongst professionals but refers to organised identities manifested through 'circles of commitments', and thus a possibility to talk about 'types' or 'groups' of specific professionals within professions. The segmentation processes can be studied within their institutional arrangements like for example workplaces and institutions as arenas. It is within these arenas that new professional roles are initiated and developed. It is from here the segments are moving, work and workplaces changed. It is also possible to follow career patterns because these are tied with the fate of segments. Socialisation and recruitment as well as public images, relations with other professions and leadership are also ways to study the segmentation processes of professions.

In the following, we expand on the notion of work and workplaces as arenas of segmentation through the notion of commitment to social worlds as the organising principles of work and workplaces, which the American pragmatist inspired sociologist Anselm Strauss later developed out of his work with Bucher (see above) on professions and professionals.

Workplaces as social worlds of commitments

Strauss understands workplaces as arenas of social worlds made up by commitments to specific work practices (Strauss, 1978, 1993). The point of departure is work defined as 'coordinated, collective actions'. A workplace is, according to Strauss, the organising of collective, coordinated actions (i.e. work). The workplace is an arena, which indicates that the boundaries of the workplace are open to other social (and natural) worlds. In other words, a workplace does not have walls as determinants of their activities because they are determined by the commitments with its double meaning of 'have to' and 'want to' participate in coordinated, collective actions. The coordinated, collective actions can be traced in their trajectories over time and unfolds in time under specific contextual conditions. It is within the open space of the arena that work organises workplaces through commitments to social worlds, which are defined as follows:

"Groups with shared commitments to certain activities, sharing resources of many kinds to achieve their goals, and building shared ideologies about how to go about their business" (Clarke, 1991: 131; quoted in Strauss, 1993: 212).

In this definition, we find people but in the shape of members, e.g. professionals with certain commitments to work, and not just individuals with their own agendas. Members' features are played out in their commitments, and commitments are both collective and at the same time personal. Thus, 'social worlds' is a concept for an empirical understanding of the organisation of work in an enterprise. This is Strauss' attempt to get away from the idea of *a priori* determined social structures like class, ethnicity, gender, employees, management, etc. as the determinant and decisive variables for working life in an enterprise. Strauss defines structures as the longer (in time) lasting conditions for work. Structures are the taken for granted by workplace members even if they are not always visible to them, but they can, nevertheless, be read into the commitments to work and social worlds. In this way, structures contain both a social-psychological (personal) aspect by the term commitment, and make up the more encompassing social organising of work and enterprises by acting out the features of the workplace members such as management professionals.

The notion of action as the central turning point for participation in a social world is the specifically pragmatist. Actions include interaction to be understood as transaction because action is grounded in situations and events rather than just subjects acting on objects (for elaboration on the difference between inter- and transaction, see Elkjaer & Simpson, 2011). Actions are defined empirically and they can encompass many different forms like negotiations and ways of collaboration and it is within actions that tensions and ruptures may occur due to the different commitments to work. The meanings of actions can be understood through an understanding of the commitments displayed by members. The theory of workplaces as arenas made up by social worlds rests upon an understanding based on organisational theory that seeks to understand and conceptualise the complexity of social organising rather than dismiss it (Clarke, 1991). When it comes to being helpful in an analysis of professionals learning to practice their profession also through their participation in work and workplaces, the theory provides a background for understanding different missions and activities performed in the name of a profession as well as differences in applied methodologies and relations to clients, customers and colleagues. The above was some words on work and the organising hereof, and now we turn to our concept of learning.

Learning from tensions and ruptures

Learning is a term that is often used as if it was a self-explanatory term. This means that learning is often not explicitly defined but implicitly implied. This tends to blur the many connotations and definitions of learning of which some are associated with education and individuals and others with workplaces and relations. Thus, learning can be analysed as cognitive processes in the mind, but learning can also be seen as derived from participation in communities of practice, i.e. the movements of learners within fields of practices (see e.g. Sfard, 1998). These two notions of learning, however, may be encompassed by a pragmatist understanding of learning in which action and thinking, cognition and participation, can never be seen in isolation from each other but only as 'partners' in all enactments of practice. This needs some further explanation, and the American philosopher and educationalist, John Dewey (1859-1952), helps explain this mutuality between action and thinking (for elaboration on this issue, see e.g. Elkjaer, 2009).

In his theories of education and learning, Dewey applied ideas from contemporary theories of functional psychology in which life and learning are understood as social phenomena (Dewey, 1916 [1980]). This means that the intellect is viewed as a 'function' of social life, and that it cannot work in isolation or develop by itself (Dewey, 1896 [1972]). Rather, an intellect develops as an effect of its relations with environments; it is through these continuous encounters that experience is challenged, reshaped and renewed. The sociality of learning pervades Dewey's theoretical development hereof, and individuals and environments are, according to Dewey, merely abstractions when viewed in separation from each other. It is meetings with uncertainties that create tensions and ruptures, at first experienced in its emotional sense and then they may act as input for putting the intellect to work in order to recreate meaning and provide certainty and consummation for a while. Thus, when habitual thinking and action are upset, the foundation for having new experience is laid.

To fully understand the value of Dewey's pragmatism for learning, it is important to note that it is not the individual or the environment that is the point of departure but aspects of a situation in which subjects, objects, action and agency are all a part. The uncertain situation is open to inquiry in the sense that its constituting elements are experienced as unconnected. Dewey describes inquiry as a process that starts with a sense that something is wrong; a problem is felt. The suspicion does not present itself as cognitive until the inquirer(s) begin to define and formulate the problem, and the human ability to reason and

think verbally is activated. Inquirer(s) use previous experience from similar situations, and try to solve the problem by applying different working hypotheses. The initial sense of tension and rupture must, however, be replaced by a sense of consummation before the problem has been resolved. If the inquiry is to lead to learning and new knowledge, it requires thoughts on the relation between the anticipated problem and hypotheses and the resolution of the problem.

'Tensional tales' and 'wrestling voices' or a few words on methodology

To sum up, the question that we are dealing with is how professionals learn to practice their professional practice with an emphasis upon learning through working life. This has taken us to an understanding of the segmentation processes of professionals in workplaces understood as commitments to social worlds. Commitments to specific work activities, ways of doing the work, the understanding of the mission of the profession as well as its clients, customers and colleagues act as points of segmentation and diversification. These processes do not run smoothly amongst professionals in isolation from other members of the workplace and societal development but influenced by and in interaction with other workplace members. The processes can through our pragmatist understanding of learning be analysed as learning opportunities, and as points of reconstruction identity and production of knowledge for individuals, groups, workplaces, even societies due to them all being points of tensions and ruptures.

Our empirical point of departure is managers' biographies, i.e. their descriptions of lived lives in time and space. We believe that what is written down in a biography is what was remembered as empirically meaningful and as such occasions for potential development and learning. Further. in our experience it is difficult to research into learning when e.g. using interviews or observations because direct questions about learning is often related to education or to some deliberate activity like reading or practising in order to learn something (see also Hager, 2004). The above emphasis on emotion and to not only equate learning with education is also our background for reading biographies in which the purpose is to tell about lived lives rather than learning. We, nevertheless, read these biographies as narratives about learning to become managers. Turning to biographies, however, took us into different understandings of what biographies are, and what they can tell us because there are different ways to read biographies stemming from different fields of inquiry. Here we only mention two ways, education and literature studies.

Within education studies there is a discussion between the use of the notion of biography versus life-history in research, and an apparent distinction seems to be that of a narrative production of self (biography) and an emphasis upon the production of subjectivity as also body and not only verbal language (life-history) (West, Merrill, Andersen, Weber, & Olesen, 2007). Within educational research, there also appear on emphasis on life-history in order to underline the viewpoint of the individual rather than relations (Hodkinson, et al., 2004; West, Alheit, Andersen, & Merrill, 2007). In our paper, we aim for the analysis of relations and encounters with the world in order to trace 'tensional tales' and 'wrestling voices' in commitments to work and workplaces.

In literary studies reading biographies is also a somewhat contested field in the sense what they can and cannot tell (Kjerkegaard, Nielsen, & Ørjasæter, 2006; Kondrup, 2008). But it is a genre, which is not anonymous and through reading texts, it is possible to, in concrete ways, illustrate connections between tensions and ruptures in working life and the potential learning opportunities in enterprises with names. We read the biographies as performative texts produced as reflections on the practice, education and learning of management professionals (Hansen, 2009; Kondrup, 2008; Stounbjerg, 2006). Biographies reflect not only the story of subjects, in this case management professionals, as they want to present themselves, they are also stories of a lived past in an enterprise and of the transactions with other people, places, situations and events. Through the biographies, we describe and interpret these relations with a focus upon the protagonist' presentation and reflection with the aim of interpreting opportunities for learning through working life.

Concretely, we first read the biography to get an overview of the life, education and work of the protagonist. In a second reading notes are made in order to create a trajectory by a timeline and to note specific conditions for the meetings with tensions and ruptures as described by the manager (or his or her biographer). Finally, we order the notes following the theoretical sources of inspiration, these being descriptions of commitments to mission for work and core activity, methodology, relation to clients, customers and colleagues. The following table summarises our analytical reference points, and below our way of interpreting illustrated with an example.

Learning a profession as identity construction and knowledge production

In time	Trajectory ('life vertical')
In space	Conditions ('workplace horisontal')
Meetings with tensions and ruptures due to	
	Different missions and activities (what is e.g. management?)
	Different methods (how is management done?)
	Relations to CCC (clients, customers and colleagues)

"My curiosity has been my navigator in life"

Susanne Larsen (b. 1949) (SL) was the CEO for SAS Scandinavian Airlines Denmark A/S from 2003-2009 (Rohweder, 2009). SL went to business and enterprise college when she was doing her apprenticeship as a clerk and has also participated in some internal and external management training. Other than that, SL has no formal management education.

SL did not like school and left it early because she felt some tensions between the norms between school and her home. She becomes an apprentice as a clerk in a shipping company and joins SAS soon after her being skilled because it was situated nearby her home, and with her being a single mother, it was convenient. After a year in SAS, SL becomes a union activist, which she really likes and is good at, and at 21 she feels maybe for the first time that she has value for the labour market. The union is a good 'school', and although SL is used to discussions about societal issues, politics and culture from her childhood home, her curiosity and engagement in these issues becomes rooted through her work in the union.

SL meets her husband through union work, and leaves SAS. In her new job, SL becomes involved in research on new technology and meets a student environment and communal living. These people think differently from the people she normally socialises with, and SL goes back to school to become a student and later to enter social science studies at the university. During her studies SL works as a temp in SAS but soon ends up as a HR consultant from which position she moves up the career ladder and becomes the HR manager for SAS Denmark, and, finally, the CEO for SAS Denmark for six years until she herself chooses to stop.

Over the years in SAS, SL experiences hard times with layoffs and changes, which she tries to handle in a responsible and involving way but she, nevertheless, feels a need for some personal development and becomes a certified consultant within gestalt therapy. SL's insights into herself and in her relations at work help her become a better manager. SL's strength is her empathy and her ability to keep her ear to the ground and sense the atmosphere and tensions between people in a room. Through her many years as a temp, SL gets a good knowledge of most functions in SAS but her anchorage is within HR and the work with humans. SL is very interested in and curious of human relations, and she tries to be inclusive and to correct the errors she finds out about. Fairness and decency is important for SL when dealing with people. In her work with people SL has her heart with her and she grows with the task.

During her time as the HR manager of SAS, there are many changes that she is deeply involved in. She is like a duck to water in times of change, and she is good at turning people on the changes through involvement and influence. She feels that she manages to have the necessary changes be experienced less negative than they would if people had not had a say. SL slowly grows as a top manager in the system, and she experiences that doors are opening and that she is let in on many issues. It is fun and exciting to have influence, and SL finds that she has a large experience to draw from and that she has the qualifications to and is competent at what she engages in.

Changes never stops in the aviation industry, and from 2001 and 'nine-eleven' changes happens worldwide, and SAS decides to organise the management in country specific CEO's, and most surprisingly for SL, she is asked to be the CEO for SAS Denmark. SL cannot say 'no', and the six years as a CEO are the most fantastic times in SL's life and career. There are, nevertheless, many power struggles and a billion deficits that need to be turned into a surplus. SL particularly experiences resistance from sales and marketing who had wanted a candidate from their own field, whilst operation and production likes what she does. SL decides to fight her way into the commercial part of the business even if it is not the most rationale decision but she finds that if she is going to survive as a CEO, she needs to know something about everything. She is, in other words, seriously challenged in her position as a CEO but she never even considers giving up but decides which battles to fight and when in order to not lose focus and overview.

The attitude towards SL as a CEO was in the beginning very tough because she came from HR, and what did she know about business? Even if SL had almost 30 years experience from

the industry, there were many who thought it a risky choice for the position. While developing the business, SL also works to enhance the internal communication, the working climate, the involvement of employees, to show them respect, and provide them with influence upon their workplace. SL succeeds really well particular in SL's final years as a CEO. In aviation industry personnel is a very important focal point because it is employees who are selling the product.

In 2009 SL stops, and the most difficult was to say goodbye to all the people she had been through so many things with. But the decision felt just right, and SL gets more and more engaged in voluntary work.

Learning trajectories and conditions in SL's working life

Tensions in SL's life were first between home and school, which made her in the first place leave school early in order to become an apprentice. Later when she joins the union as an activist, she finds that here is something she likes and is good at. She becomes even more interested in societal matters than she was before. The interest is, however, grounded in her home where these discussions flourished.

SL leaves SAS when she meets her husband but only to meet new challenges through a research project and communal living. That takes her back to school where she thrives much unlike what she did as a child. She becomes a student and enters university studies in social science.

While studying SL works as a temp in SAS and begin climbing the ladder in her work with HR and people. This work makes her feel that she needs more knowledge about self and enters a gestalt training program to become a certified gestalt consultant.

When she becomes the CEO of SAS Denmark she meets resistance because she comes from HR and not from the commercial part of the business. This send her out on a mission to learn this part of the business tough as it may be for her. Even if aviation industry lives on its people and service, SL, nevertheless, assess the resistance towards her and embarks on learning the hard core business matters.

SL quits after six years and enters voluntary work, and the story ends. Put into the table, it looks like the following:

In *time*: SL left school early because she did not feel that her norms fitted with the school but later she learned in other 'schools' like the union, and she actually went back to school to first get a high school diploma and then to study social science at the university out of an interest to learn more. This interest to learn was also decisive for her choices of traing as a gestalt therapist as personal development.

Conditions: SL becomes a management professional by 'accident', the layer above asks her, and she cannot say 'no'. She does not have any formal management education but general education and training related to personal development. This alongside her many years in the enterprise carries her into top management.

Tensions: SL comes from the 'soft' side of the enterprise having worked her way up through personnel and HR and is therefore challenged by others who see management as having more to do with sales and marketing. SL, however, understands aviation industry as relying on its people and service. SL's long history with SAS may account for her methods for change being involving and taking a long time in order to be so. Others may want to challenge her on that. Also, her HR background makes her stay on the internal relations with colleagues and she sees her dealing with customers through a service-minded industry.

SL's way to become a management professional is not described as carried by management professional education but rather coincidence and choice of education when she felt she needed it and for both knowledge and personal development. The resistance that SL feels toward her as a CEO takes her into wanting to know what she knows least about, namely the commercial part of the business. This is how she chooses to deal with these tensions in SAS.

Conclusion and discussion

We sat out to research the question whether education matter for practising professional management because we experienced that successful management was thriving with no formal management training. We situated the research in studies on profession and professionalism of which we saw three takes focussing each on change of professions due to governance structures, societal knowledge base and questions on identity. Although valid takes we proposed a closer look that involves processes of segmentation and diversification with work and working life at its centre. An important term here is

commitments to certain missions and activities, methods and relations to clients, customers and colleagues. A further development of this take on professions and professionals is to view commitments to social worlds as the organising principle of workplaces and as such also what creates tensions and ruptures, which in turn is in our understanding opportunities for learning. These opportunities for learning may be viewed in time and space, as trajectories and conditions, and this is how we went about researching relations between learning through formal education and working life.

The empirical point of departure is narratives about managers' lives with all the problems of using these data but because they include emotions and that learning often when directly asked will be equated with formal education. With the help of the above theoretical reference points we developed a framework through which to read managers' biographies. We have so far only interpreted one manager's biography but the framework seems adequate to get to the when and where of management learning to practice their profession through focussing on tensions and ruptures that changed the trajectory and the conditions for learning.

To conclude anything on these fragile empirical grounds are risky but doing so, it appears as if education for learning to practice management is sought when needed. This one biography also shows that reaching the top in an international industry can be made without much initial schooling. In fact, this protagonist worked her way up through working life rather than education and participated in education when needed and when chances were offered to her. In this particular case, these most preliminary conclusion confirms that management education is most useful when it appears as a combination of learning knowledge about business and at the same time is a process of personal development and identity construction (Tryding, 2008). We may also tentatively conclude that working life tensions does initiate learning processes for management in both the direction of personal development and hard core business knowledge.

These very initial interpretations may be used to make an argument for a flexible system between education and working life, and to work more deliberate with learning opportunities at work. This will have implications for the organisation of management professionals' education and of the way schools of management education organise for this flexible learning trajectories and conditions.

The future research will be to analyse more biographies of management professionals in order to elaborate on different learning trajectories and conditions for learning through work.

References

Broadbent, J., Dietrich, M., & Roberts, J. (1997). The end of the professions? In J. Broadbent, M. Dietrich & J. Roberts (Eds.), *The end of the professions? The restructuring of professional work* (pp. 1-13). London and New York: Routledge.

Bucher, R., & Strauss, A. (1961). Professions in Process. *The American Journal of Sociology, 66*(4), 325-334.

Clarke, A. E. (1991). Social Worlds/Arenas Theory as Organizational Theory. In D. R. Maines (Ed.), *Social Organization and Social Process. Essays in the Honor of Anselm Strauss* (pp. 119-158). New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Czarniawska, B. (1998). *A Narrative Approach to Organization Studies*. Thousands Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Dent, M., & Whitehead, S. (Eds.). (2002). *Managing Professional Identities. Knowledge, performativity and the 'new' professional*. London and New York: Routledge. Taylor & Francis Group.

Dewey, J. (1896 [1972]). The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology. In J. A. Boydston (Ed.), *Early Works 5* (pp. 96-109). Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.

Dewey, J. (1916 [1980]). Democracy and Education. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education. In J. A. Boydston (Ed.), *Middle Works 9* (pp. 1-370). Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.

Elkjaer, B. (2003). Social Learning Theory: Learning as Participation in Social Processes. In M. Easterby-Smith & M. Lyles (Eds.), *The Blackwell Handbook of Organizational Learning and Knowledge Management* (pp. 38-53). Malden, Oxford, Melbourne, Berlin: Blackwell Publishing.

Elkjaer, B. (2009). Pragmatism. A learning theory for the future. In K. Illeris (Ed.), *Contemporary theories of learning. Learning theorists ... in their own words* (pp. 74-89). Abingdon, New York: Routledge.

Elkjaer, B., & Huysman, M. (2008). Social Worlds Theory and the Power of Tension. In D. Barry & H. Hansen (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of New Approaches in Management and Organisation* (pp. 170-177). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Elkjaer, B., & Simpson, B. (2011). Pragmatism: A lived and living philosophy. What can it offer to contemporary organization theory? *Research in the Sociology of Organizations, 32*, 55-84.

Evetts, J. (2009). New Professionalism and New Public Managament: Changes, Continuities and Consequences. *Comparative Sociology, 8*, 247-266.

Fenwick, T., & Edwards, R. (2010). *Actor-Network Theory in Education*. London and New York: Routledge. Taylor and Francis Group.

Fournier, V. (2000). Boundary work and the (un)making of the professions. In M. Nigel (Ed.), *Professionalism, Boundaries and Workplace* (pp. 78-97). Florence, KY, USA: Routledge.

Hager, P. (2004). Conceptions of learning and understanding learning at work. *Studies in Continuing Education, 26*(1), 3-17.

Hansen, L. (2009). Private mænd og offentlige kvinder? Køn som perfomance på danske politikeres personlige hjemmesider. In C. L. Christensen & A. Jerslev (Eds.), *Hvor går*

grænsen? Brudflader i den moderne mediekultur (pp. 150-176). København: Tiderne Skifter.

Hjort, K. (2005). *Professionaliseringen i den offentlige sektor*. Frederiksberg: Roskilde Universitetsforlag.

Hjort, K. (2009). Competence development in the public sector. Development, or dismantling of professionalism? In K. Illeris (Ed.), *International Perspectives on Competence Development* (pp. 112-123). London and New York: Routledge. Taylor & Francis Group.

Hjort, K., & Weber, K. (2004). Hvad er værd at vide om professioner? En indledning. In K. Hjort (Ed.), *De professionelle. Forskning i professioner og professionsuddannelser* (pp. 7-20). Frederiksberg: Roskilde Universitetsforlag/Samfundslitteratur.

Hodkinson, P., Hodkinson, H., Evans, K., Kersh, N., Fuller, A., Unwin, L., et al. (Eds.). (2004). *The significance of individual biography in workplace learning* (Vol. 36). Leeds: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education.

Karseth, B., & Nerland, M. (2007). Building professionalism in a knowledge society: examining discourses of knowledge in four professional associations. *Journal of Education and Work, 20*(4), 335-355.

Kjerkegaard, S., Nielsen, H. S., & Ørjasæter, K. (Eds.). (2006). *Selvskreven - om litterær selvfremstilling*. Århus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag.

Kondrup, J. (2008). Biografisk metode. In J. Fibiger, G. v. B. Lütken & N. Mølgaard (Eds.), *Litteraturens tilgange* (2. ed., pp. 57-75). København: Academica.

Krejsler, J. (2005). Professions and their Identities: How to explore professional development among (semi-)professions. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 49*(4), 335-357.

Podmore, D. (1980). Bucher and Strauss Revisited: The Case of the Solicitors' Profession. *British Journal of Law and Society, 7*(1), 1-21.

Ramsland, M. (2005) Hundehoved. København: Gyldendals Bogklubber.

Rohweder, M. S. (2009). *Luft under vingerne. En biografi om Susanne Larsen*. København: Børsens Forlag.

Sehested, K. (2002). How New Public Management Reforms Challenge the Roles of Professionals. *International Journal of Public Administration, 25*(12), 1513-1537.

Sehested, K. (2008). Nye lederroller til institutionsledere i kommunerne. In J. Thorfing (Ed.), *Ledelse efter kommunalreformen. Sådan tackles de nye udfordringer* (pp. 63-84). København: Jurist- og Økonomforbundets Forlag.

Sfard, A. (1998). On Two Metaphors for Learning and the Dangers of Choosing Just One. *Educational Researcher, 27*(2), 4-13.

Stave, G. (1996). Yrkesidentiteten i historisk perspektiv. In V. m. f. Bunkholdt (Ed.), *Kunnskap og omsorg. Sosialisering og skikkethet i profesjonsutdanningene* (pp. 17-32). Lillehammer: Tano.

Stounbjerg, P. (2006). Notater om ærligheden. Selvbiografien, referencen og *Det uperfekte menneske*. In S. Kjerkegaard, H. S. Nielsen & K. Ørjasæter (Eds.), *Selvskreven - om litterær selvfremstilling* (pp. 19-34). Århus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag.

Strauss, A. L. (1978). A Social World Perspective. *Studies in Symbolic Interaction, 1*, 119-128.

Strauss, A. L. (1993). *Continual Permutations of Action*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Tryding, P. (2008). *On the Value of Executive Management Education.* Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Aarhus, Copenhagen.

Usher, R., & Edwards, R. (2007). *Lifelong Learning - Signs, Discourses, Practices*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

Weber, K. (2004). Videnskab eller hverdagsbevidsthed? Et kritisk blik på professions(selv)forståelser. In K. Hjort (Ed.), *De professionelle. Forskning i professioner og professionsuddannelser*. Frederiksberg: Roskilde Universitetsforlag/Samfundslitteratur.

West, L., Alheit, P., Andersen, A. S., & Merrill, B. (Eds.). (2007). *Using Biographical and Life History Approaches in the Study of Adult and Lifelong Learning: European Perspectives* (Vol. 2). Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang. Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften.

West, L., Merrill, B., Andersen, A. S., Weber, K., & Olesen, H. S. (2007). Biograhical and Life History Approaches: Commonalities and Differences in the Study of Adult and Lifelong Learning. In L. West, P. Alheit, A. S. Andersen & B. Merrill (Eds.), *Using Biographical and Life History Approaches in the Study of Adult and Lifelong Learning: European Perspectives* (pp. 279-294). Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

BE; 26.02.2011

App. 8.000 words incl. references.