CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Rebekka Celis, Anne Snick, Veerle Stroobants and Danny Wildemeersch
Catholic University, Leuven

1.1 Learning for Active Citizenship and Governance

1.1.1 Contextual Background

In all the countries we are studying, the problems of the welfare state, in which citizens are consumers and customers, provide a key context for governance and citizenship. Social and political developments imply changes in and the reshaping of understandings and practices of governance and active citizenship. Although this is articulated in rather different ways in the different countries, there is a general concern at a rising 'democratic deficit': the sense that established mechanisms of democratic government no longer work effectively, and that in part they fail to work because the people no longer trust them. We find quite a widespread concern to 'remoralise' citizens: the feeling (at least on the part of those who govern) that if citizens have lost confidence in government, ways must be found of regenerating their sense of community spirit and collective responsibility. Linked to this, there is a widespread interest in mechanisms which will decentralise the processes and institutions of government. It emerges in different forms in various countries, but across the countries involved there have been experiments with 'direct' democracy and more open and pluralistic relationships between state and citizens.

Against this background, our research is concerned with the learning of 'active citizenship' and for 'governance'. The first aim of the project is to identify and understand how and where adults learn attitudes, values and behaviour relating to governance and active citizenship. Our working presumption is that the attitudes, skills and behavioural patterns which equip people to participate actively as citizens (and to conduct tasks of governance and social and economic regulation) are not learned simply, or even primarily, through formal or targeted educational provision. They are constructed – learned incidentally – in divers socio-institutional and cultural processes. We also presume that, to a significant extent, these constructions or learning processes occur after childhood. Put simply, active citizenship is learned rather than taught, and it is not learned once and for all, but must be learned again and again.

This presumption clearly parallels the increasing awareness that education and training cannot be achieved solely in childhood, or in formal settings. European and national education policies increasingly stress 'lifelong learning' in the 'learning society', and there has been some – though limited – re-positioning of educational and training policies. The argument, essentially, is that the pace of social change in Europe today tends to make knowledge and skills gained in compulsory, formal education of increasingly transient value.

This applies to learning about active citizenship and governance just as to learning in other areas.[1]

1.1.2 New Approaches to Learning

We believe there are specific reasons for arguing the importance of new approaches to understanding how, when and where active citizenship is learned.

Citizenship education strategies have until recently tended to see agency in active citizenship and governance as being derived chiefly from primary ideological affiliations, such as socialism or religion. However, more recent scholarship in the social sciences has emphasised the importance of more subjective or pragmatic affiliations (related e.g., to gender, ethnicity, migration, pollution) (cf. Lyotard, 1984; Bauman, 1993; Benhabib, 1992). From the perspective of learning, this more diverse understanding of identities raises a number of issues. Three stand out. For any individual, identities are likely to shift over time. No single identity can be assumed to have primacy. Any one individual may have multiple identities, not only over time but simultaneously. To the extent that what a person thinks, feels or does as an active citizen is related to her[2] identity, the nature of active citizenship must itself be regarded as increasingly diverse. And by the same token, what constitutes appropriate learning for active citizenship is likely to vary – perhaps significantly – by individual and context.

When concerned with politics, educational policies and curricula have tended to emphasise narrow definitions of politics. In particular, they have seen politics as related principally to the activities of the state. However, increasingly social scientists have stressed work and civil society as domains of life experience, and explored links between traditional forms of political participation and the personal, private domain (cf. Giddens (1991) on 'life politics'; Beck (1997) on the 'reinvention of politics'). At the same time, learning theorists have emphasised 'situational' or 'contextual' influences on learning (cf. Biggs & Moore, 1993; Jarvis, 1987; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Together, these approaches suggest that attention needs to be given to a more diverse range of contexts within which people may learn active citizenship.

This is related to a third consideration. There is sometimes a tendency to assume that the notion of 'active citizenship' provides a positive linkage between political and social aims on the one hand – European integration on the basis of social inclusion – and international economic competitiveness on the other. Many authors however (cf. Beck, 1992; Beck, Giddens & Lash, 1994), stress the risky character of contemporary social transformations. They argue for identifying new balances between economic aims and social priorities such as active citizenship. Sennett (1998) has argued that the nature of work organisation in contemporary capitalist economies may itself lead to declining levels of social participation and active citizenship. Prima facie, there is cause to consider that the changing nature of the workplace – size, relations between employer and worker, role of trade unions, gender composition of the workforce, pace of change, etc. – may have important implications for how individuals learn active citizenship.

---

[1] This is not the place to rehearse the very substantial literature on lifelong learning and the learning society; for a useful recent overview, see Jarvis (2001).

[2] For the economy of the text, when referring to a generic notion of the subject, the individual or the citizen, the female pronouns (she, her…) are used rather than the awkward double indication.

Finally, there are particularly strong reasons for seeing the learning of 'active citizenship' as a process which involves the active engagement of learners. This is almost tautologically self-evident, but is also lent weight by engagement of the very diverse and shifting meanings given to the notion of active citizenship. Out of our research the potential breadth of notions of citizenship, and the importance of critical engagement in learning to be an active citizen becomes clear.

1.1.3 Making Sense of Learning Active Citizenship

Domains, Dimensions and Modes of Learning

In the light of this, we have developed a model to facilitate understanding of the processes by which active citizenship is learned. Our research has proceeded on this basis. The approach can be summarised as follows.

We assume that learning occurs within four primary domains: *work, the state, civil society, and the private domain*. We have derived these domains from major traditions in social theory (cf. Sociaal en Cultureel Rapport, 1996, p. 538.)

Within each domain, we have investigated learning processes in terms of three key dimensions: identity, responsibility and effectivity. *Identity* refers to the cultural formation of the self, and of social, political and cultural attitudes and allegiances. As discussed above, individuals' identities may be complex and contradictory (related e.g., to work, age, family, schooling, religious, nation, region). Identity comprises the reference groups people relate to and the ideas and opinions they identify with. *Responsibility* refers to the themes and issues one feels challenged by and commits oneself to. It includes the capacity to reflect critically on one's social situation, and to do so in dialogue with appropriate communities. Responsibility underpins broad notions of accountability. Mechanisms of dialogue and deliberation are, of course, essential to effective co-operation both in decision-making and in ensuring workable patterns of responsibility and accountability. *Effectivity* refers to the capacity to make decisions, and to act in pursuit of identified goals. It encompasses the ability to plan, to develop strategy, and to analyse performance in achieving goals, and may be considered the foundation of the capacity to act as an agent of change. Effectivity is about knowing how to make a difference and entails the means, strategies, instruments and possibilities one has to realise one's social commitment.

Finally, learning is conceived as having occurred in terms of three principal modes: formal, non-formal, and informal education. This categorisation, which is a mainstream one within educational literature (cf. Coombs, 1985), also permits the application of mainstream educational theory to such concepts as the learning society and lifelong learning. The terms 'formal', 'non-formal' and 'informal' provide an established and more precise categorisation, less liable to conceptual slippage than 'lifelong learning' and similar terms. *Formal* education refers to formal education and training, in school and post-school institutions. It is typically, though not necessarily, provided within the public sector. Within formal education, the curriculum is relatively centralised, stable and sequential, and there are well-established structures of assessment. It is the major vehicle of public intervention in education in virtually every country, and the main locus of most state 'civic education' policies and expenditure. From a lifespan perspective, however, it is heavily 'front-loaded' to the age range 5-16. *Non-formal* education refers to systematic educational activity outside formal system, such as work-based training, community education programmes in health or co-operation, and adult literacy programmes. Traditionally, in many countries, it has been the main mechanism of state intervention in post-school learning. It is within this category that

much educational and training work conducted by NGOs and the voluntary sector would be placed. *Informal* education refers to unorganised, unsystematic and/or unintended lifelong learning (e.g. from home, work, and the media). It can be considered the source of most learning over a lifetime, but the outcomes of learning are strongly dependent on individuals' learning environments. Recent emphasis on 'lifelong learning' and the 'learning society' has, in theory, brought this into the policy mainstream. However, strategies which operationalise this as a mode of educational intervention are neither well-articulated nor well-understood.

Figure 1 illustrates how the various elements of this approach may be combined.

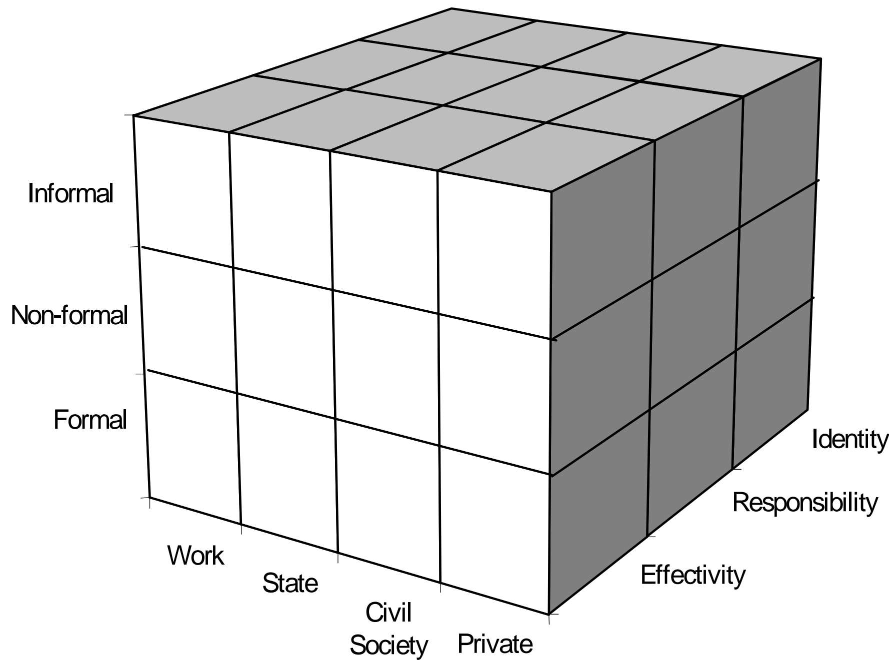

Figure 1. Modes of Intervention, Domains, and Dimensions of Learning in Citizenship & Governance Education

Research Question

We are interested to know why, how, where and when adults have learned notions of governance and active citizenship and attitudes, values and behaviour related to governance and active citizenship. Insight into these learning processes (to become an active citizen and within the experience of being an active citizen) offer ideas for effective intervention strategies and policies to influence the notions, attitudes, skills and behavioural patterns, that are beneficial to the development of a democratic concept of citizenship. This means that we consider as 'active' citizens those people who are committed to a 'democratic' process.

Keeping the above matrix in mind, we obtained insight in the conditions in which people learn to develop (further) participatory competencies which enable them to be actively involved as citizens in issues concerning governance of society and in the effects of these learning processes in terms of effectivity-building, responsibility-building and identity-construction.

Conceptual Framework: Transitional learning

To gain insight in the complex and dynamic learning processes of developing active citizenship however, the presented matrix is too static a model. Looking for a descriptive, heuristic and explanatory framework to make sense of these learning processes and to enhance its interpretation, theories on experiential learning (cf. Kolb, 1984; Jarvis, 1987), biographical learning (cf. Alheit, 1992, 1995) and transitional learning[3] (cf. Stroobants, Jans & Wildemeersch, 2001) gave direction to our research and data-analysis.

The basic assumption is that today individuals are faced with unpredictable changes in the dynamics between their life course and the transforming context and confronted with the necessity to (learn to) anticipate, handle and reorganise these changing aspects in life. This situation triggers a continuous process of constructing meaning, making choices, taking up responsibilities and dealing with the changes in the personal, social and societal context. This lifelong process of developing subjectivity and self through shaping one's own biography and telling one's life story in combination with the (re)construction and transformation of the environment we refer to as a process of transitional learning. It is about creating meaningful connections between one's narrative understanding of the self as an actor in past, present and future on the one side, and one's understanding of the context in which one operates and lives in terms of broader themes and issues at stake in society at that particular time and place on the other.

With respect to our research, the development of active citizenship is not a linear nor a one-dimensional process, but it appears as a series of transitions over life-time. Moreover the learning process itself is continually in transition or changing. It can be seen as the continuous process of 'confrontation' with a personal, social and societal context and relations, (re)constructing meaning and acting upon that (new) meaningful connection, taking up personal and social commitments… This learning is often not intentional or conscious, but accidental, unexpected and ad hoc. People can experience transitions in their life as smooth and easy, but also as more dramatic and extreme. Moreover it is in retrospect that the meaning of certain transitions becomes clear. Individuals define and express meaningful connections between experiences and incidents in their lives on the one hand and themes and issues they felt responsible for, (social) identities they acquired and actions that were effective, giving them a feeling of empowerment,….. on the other hand. Transitions and the meaning people adhere to them are the driving dynamic behind the learning. They can motivate people to take a step towards governance, or to redefine certain aspects (responsibility, identity, effectivity) of their active citizenship.

Processes of transitional learning can be represented in a figure structured by two axes (see figure 2). The horizontal axis relates to action and reflection dealing with tensions between societal demands and personal demands. These demands are needs, values, norms and aspirations which can converge or diverge. Priority may be given to societal criteria or to personal criteria when thinking, acting and taking decisions or, what is more real, appeals to both criteria can be combined. We understand this axis as the responsibility dimension of

---

[3] Theories on 'transitional learning' are being developed and reconstructed by Stroobants, Jans & Wildemeersch (2001) (founded on the theories of biographical and transitional learning of Alheit (1992, 1995)) at the Center of Adult and Continuing Education (KULeuven, Belgium). This theory draws on the findings of two research projects which have recently finished. These research activities have both a fundamental and an applied dimension: a PhD project focusing on biographical learning processes of women making sense of work and a European research project officially called 'Enhancing the participation of young adults in socio-economic processes. Balancing instrumental, biographical and social competencies'.

active citizenship referring to the values, issues and themes people feel responsible for or committed to and which can move between society-oriented and person-oriented. The vertical axis is about the actor's perception of the extent to which the fields in which one operates (e.g. the field of work, training, leisure) can be altered in view of individual or social/societal expectations, plans and projects. In other words, it concerns the subjectively experienced and perceived possibilities and limitations to influence or change arrangements and structures within a particular field of life and within society at large. This axis can be understood as the dimension of effectivity and agency indicating whether people feel empowered or disempowered. The identity dimension of active citizenship can be related to the meaningful connections. In this way the different dimensions of active citizenship are related to each other in the learning processes of individuals.

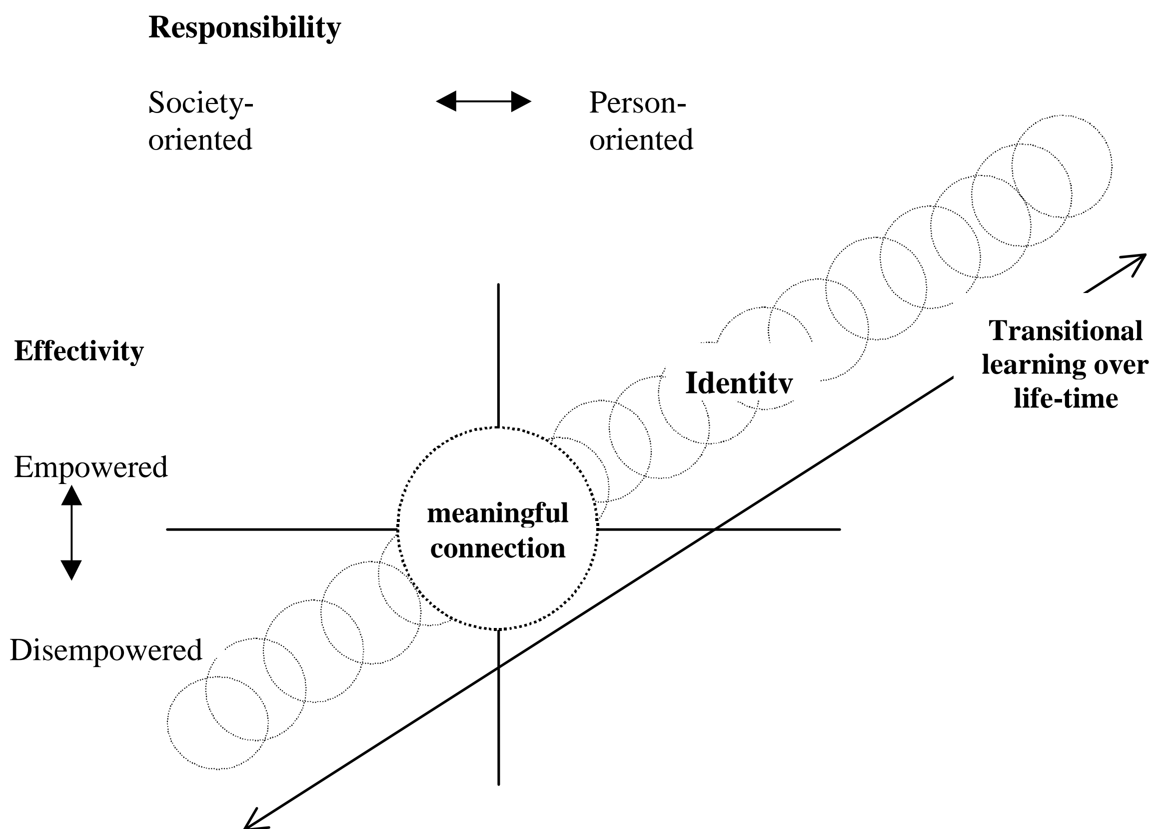

Figure 2 Meaningful connections and transitional learning

1.2 Learning Life Histories

1.2.1 Life History Method: Theoretical background

To gain insight in people's learning processes towards active citizenship the life history (or biographical) method was used. Biographical research has become a major theme in research on adult learning in recent years (Alheit, 1996; Antikainen et al., 1996; Dominicé, 1991; Eriksson-Stjernberg, 1998; Vandenabeele, 1999; West 1996). However, the approach has deeper roots in social theory (cf. Garfinkel, 1967; Goffman, 1959, 1975; Habermas, 1987, 1991; Mead, 1934; Schutz & Luckmann, 1974). These roots are closely related not only to

our view that learning should be seen as contextualised, but also to the idea that in developing their accounts or narratives, interviewees not only provide evidence about the world, but become subjects in the process of knowledge construction.

Today individualisation processes lead to a particular focus on the individual and her life history or biography. Individuals depend less on others, on ideologies and social class, etc. to construct their life history, to develop their life and to deal with changes. Life itself is a learning process in which transitions between several domains have to be anticipated and reorganised (Alheit, 1992, 1995). People have to write their own biography in a reflexive relation with themselves. This biographical reflectivity has to be seen in a dialectical relationship with the societal and social context (socio-historical structures and societal discourses).

Individualised life histories are not mere logical consequences of the current societal processes. Biographies are individual answers to these processes, expressions of biographical agency. There is a dialectical relationship between the actor and the structure she is situated in. One could speak of a mutual dependency between 'agency' and 'structure' (cf. structuration theory (Giddens, 1979)). Individuals are not only determined by the structures they find themselves in, but are also actors in those structures. This way, they (help) constitute the structural and structuring context.

At the same time individualisation processes imply a renewed interest in biographical research, focusing on the ways in which individuals give meaning to and account for their actions in the social world over time (Alheit, 1997). A distinction between a biographical approach and a biographical method can be made (Kelchtermans, 1994). The biographical approach concerns the global research approach. The central idea is that human actions are partly constituted by former experiences and by meaning giving processes over life-time. Our research is rooted in the conviction that experiences (e.g. critical incidents, significant others, etc.) play an important role in changing action patterns and participatory competencies in the learning of active citizenship. The biographical method refers to methodical-technical issues. It gives researchers a tool with which to gain insight into the sense of reality that people have about their own world, and attempts to give a 'voice' to that reality. It provides a fundamental source of knowledge about how people experience and make sense of themselves and their environments, thus allowing the actors to speak for themselves (Musson, 1998). In our research, 'active' citizens are the actors, the experts that can give us insight into their learning processes. A central role is dedicated to their personal and subjective interpretation of experiences.

In this sense it is obvious that we opt for qualitative-interpretative biographical research, starting from the assumption that people act on the basis of the meaning a certain situation has for them. For a person gives meaning to her relation with the context: the world is not only to be discovered, but also to be (individually and socially) constructed. The life history research method[4] is firmly rooted in an interpretative framework and specifically in the symbolic interactionist paradigm which views human beings as living in a world of 'meaningful objects'. This world is socially produced in that the meanings are fabricated through the process of social interaction (Blumer, 1969). These worlds are not presumed to be static, they are fluid and dynamic, colliding and overlapping, continually being created and recreated, changing as the objects that compose them have changed in meaning (Musson, 1998). The research method is also rooted in the (moderate) social constructionist paradigm.

---

[4] See e.g., Denzin & Lincoln (1994), Fuchs (1984), Kridel (1998), Maynard & Purvis (1994), Plummer (1983), Sparkes (1994) for further discussions of method and significance.

Actors not only construct social reality, they also adapt themselves to the limitations of this socially constructed reality.

1.2.2 Selection of Respondents

The approach has been to reconstruct the life histories of a sample of learners, and to analyse these in terms of the nature, context and periodisation of their learning of active citizenship and governance. We looked for a diversity of respondents who could give us insight into the learning process of becoming an 'active' citizen, aiming to bring into view 'classical' as well as 'innovative' notions of active citizenship, given recent social developments. The samples were selected by the Project Team in each of the participating countries using common criteria and procedures. An Advisory Panel in each country provided guidance on the application of these criteria.[5]

The prime criterion for selection of learners for the sample has been that they are 'agents of change' - people who, in their own social environment, can be considered active as citizens - in one of the domains. They are actors that have a societal commitment and that explicitly pursue objectives aiming at the organisation of society, community and economics in a democratic way. We did not include citizens with an explicit undemocratic agenda, who explicitly do not accept the democratic premises of present day politics. Examples of respondents are trade union representatives and team leaders (work domain), environmental activists, lay members of religious organisations, and club secretaries (civil society), social workers, welfare rights officers and local political party activists (state domain).

However, in order to reveal 'new' definitions and practices of active citizenship, in each learning context in each country, we also selected respondents on the basis that they do not appear to be 'active citizens' according to traditional or dominant definitions. This is designed partly to provide a point of comparison or contrast, but it also serves as a basis for exploration of other, perhaps unrecognised, ways in which men and women may be, or learn to become, agents of change. A total of 96 learners were selected, 16 in each country, following specifications agreed upon by all partners, and the advice of the Advisory Panels in each country.

When selecting the respondents we aimed at purposeful representativity (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). We have not striven after a sample of respondents representing the population empirically. We wanted them to be representative for possible concepts of 'active citizenship'. Purposeful sampling and selection means that the concrete respondents are selected on the basis of characteristics and properties which are important in the light of (the construction) of a theory (in our case the understanding of the learning process of active citizenship). With our selection we wanted to cover a variety and diversity of concepts, practices and learning processes of active citizenship.

The learners were selected within two age cohorts: those aged 25-40 and 55-70. These age cohorts were chosen in order to permit exploration of the hypothesis that patterns of civic commitment and learning of citizenship have changed significantly over the last 2-3 decades. The rationale for this hypothesis stems from a theoretical underpinning of the project: the significance of the late twentieth century transformation from 'classic modern' to 'late-modern' or 'post-modern' social conditions. The 55-70 age cohort underwent its primary and

[5] This is based on a 'co-operative inquiry' methodology (Heron 1996), and is designed in part to maximise the involvement of professionals and other end-users in project design and 'ownership' of the intellectual perspectives and intervention strategies which emerge from the project.

secondary socialisation before 1965, while the 25-40 age-cohort would have been born between 1960 and 1975, and become adults in years from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. The latter may be seen as a ‘post-modern’ or ‘late-modern’ generation, and the age-cohorts were designed to facilitate exploration of the implications of this transition for learning of governance and citizenship.

There is an equal representation of female and male learners in each country. This was designed to permit investigation of the hypothesis that notions of active citizenship are gendered, and that female modes of activity and collaboration may be excluded from definitions of legitimate ‘activity’. For this reason we also were attentive to alternative conceptions and practices of active citizenship and to the private domain.

	Gender	**Female**	**Male**
Age	Domains		
25-40 j.	Politics Economics Socio-cultural	4	4
55-70 j.	Politics Economics Socio- cultural	4	4
Total		8	8

Table 1. Division of the respondents

1.2.3 Methodological Description

Interviews

Within the scope of our research, the comparability of the collected data between different countries was an important point of attention. Therefore we chose for focused thematical semi-structured interviews with our respondents. Our biographical research is thematical, in the sense that we were especially interested in those elements in life which relate to ‘active’ citizenship and not in the biography of a person as such. The life histories of our respondents provided the context for their learning processes. During the semi-structured interviews, we focused especially on the critical moments, incidents, persons and phases in a person’s life which had an important influence on learning processes relating to her life as an active citizen. Those critical elements in a life history were registered as key moments of the learning processes throughout the life history. In this way we prevented the interview from being too open and too general. On the other hand we had to be cautious not to close down the scope of the interview too much, for the intention was to picture a manifold of possibly ambiguous life histories giving space to a multitude of identities of agents and to divers ways of being an active citizen.

The life history method thus offers the possibility of identifying and exploring issues and perspectives not foreseen within the theoretical framework, nor within the traditional definition of active citizenship and governance. The analysis of the data aimed at revealing insight into these new, alternative definitions and interpretations of the notions ‘active

citizenship' and 'governance' and into the learning processes that lay at the basis of the respondent's enactment of active citizenship. In the analysis of the data, special attention was given to those elements that can be extrapolated to citizens who do not distinguish themselves in the traditional structures of social activity, but who can be regarded as critical and conscious citizens.

Each respondent was interviewed twice. Every interview was tape-recorded and transcribed. These transcripts of the respondent's life stories formed the basis for the analyses.

The first interview was rather unstructured and explorative and approached inductively. The respondents were asked to reflect on their own lives as active citizens along the lines of critical moments which occurred (e.g. influential people, critical incidents, confrontations…). Every transition in the life history was further explored by the researcher by asking after the changes in the personal, social and societal context which preceded the learning process and after the learned changes in action patterns and perceptions of the context.

This first interview was analysed and resulted in a profile of the respondent. In this profile, preliminary answers to the major research questions were formulated (influential inputs and environments, dimensions of active citizenship – identity, responsibility and effectivity – and the relationship between these dimensions, the learning process of citizenship, domains and ways of learning). This first analysis was mainly vertical, with the individual respondent as the research unit (within-site-analysis)[6]. From this analysis hypotheses were drawn which were further investigated in the follow-up interview.

The follow-up interview was more structured and guided by the analysis (hypotheses) of the first interview. In the second interview, the interviewer looked for more in-depth knowledge by going deeply into the critical elements, indicated in the first interview and the hypotheses – stemming from the first vertical analysis – about the learning process of the respondent and the transitions in the respondent's social identity, responsibility and effectivity. After this second interview another analysis was undertaken to re-adjust (if necessary) the profile of the respondent. This analysis was both vertical, going into the life history of one respondent and completing the respondent's profile, and horizontal, comparing between the different respondents. In this second analysis of the data, a broad definition and interpretation of the notions of 'active citizenship' and 'activity' was handled and examined to make way for broad, gender-sensitive (and new) interpretations of 'active citizenship'.

Data Analysis: Noticing, collecting and thinking

The general approach of the data analysis can be described as an iterative and progressive, recursive and holographic process of noticing, collecting and thinking (Seidel, 1998). This process is an ongoing cycle, where at any time one can go back to a previous step and where each step in the process contains the entire process.

The step of *noticing* the data entailed the making of observations, the writing of field notes, and in our research the tape recording of the interviews. The focus of attention was on the content of that recording and on the coding of the content. "Analysis is a breaking up, separating, or disassembling of research materials into pieces, parts, elements or units" (Seidel, 1998, p. E8). Attention was paid not to lose the interactions between the units and the whole out of sight. The *collecting* and sorting of the coded parts of the data was the next step. The data broken down into discrete parts and manageable pieces, the researcher sorts, sifts

[6] The distinction between vertical and horizontal analysis is introduced by Kelchtermans (1994).

and categorises them. These categories were based upon the central notions of the research project (learning contexts, learning domain, life phases, dimensions of citizenship…). In the *thinking* process, the collected and categorised data were examined to make sense of them, to look for patterns and relationships and to make general discoveries about the researched phenomena.

The aim of this process is to assemble or reconstruct the data in a meaningful or comprehensible way. In our research this meant formulating hypotheses about the learning process of the respondent, about what prompted the learning and what the outcome of it was in terms of social identity, effectivity or responsibility.

In figure 3 we illustrate the analysis approach against the backdrop of the research questions and –objectives and the theoretical framework concerning the learning process. At every transitional moment we distinguish the key notions (social identity, responsibility and effectivity), the modes of intervention (informal, non-formal or formal) and the domains of learning (work, state, civil society and/or private domain). This means that at every turning point within the life history we explore the research matrix (see above). With respect to the learning process, we look at the respondent's transitional learning process and the (re)construction of meaningful connections within her life history.

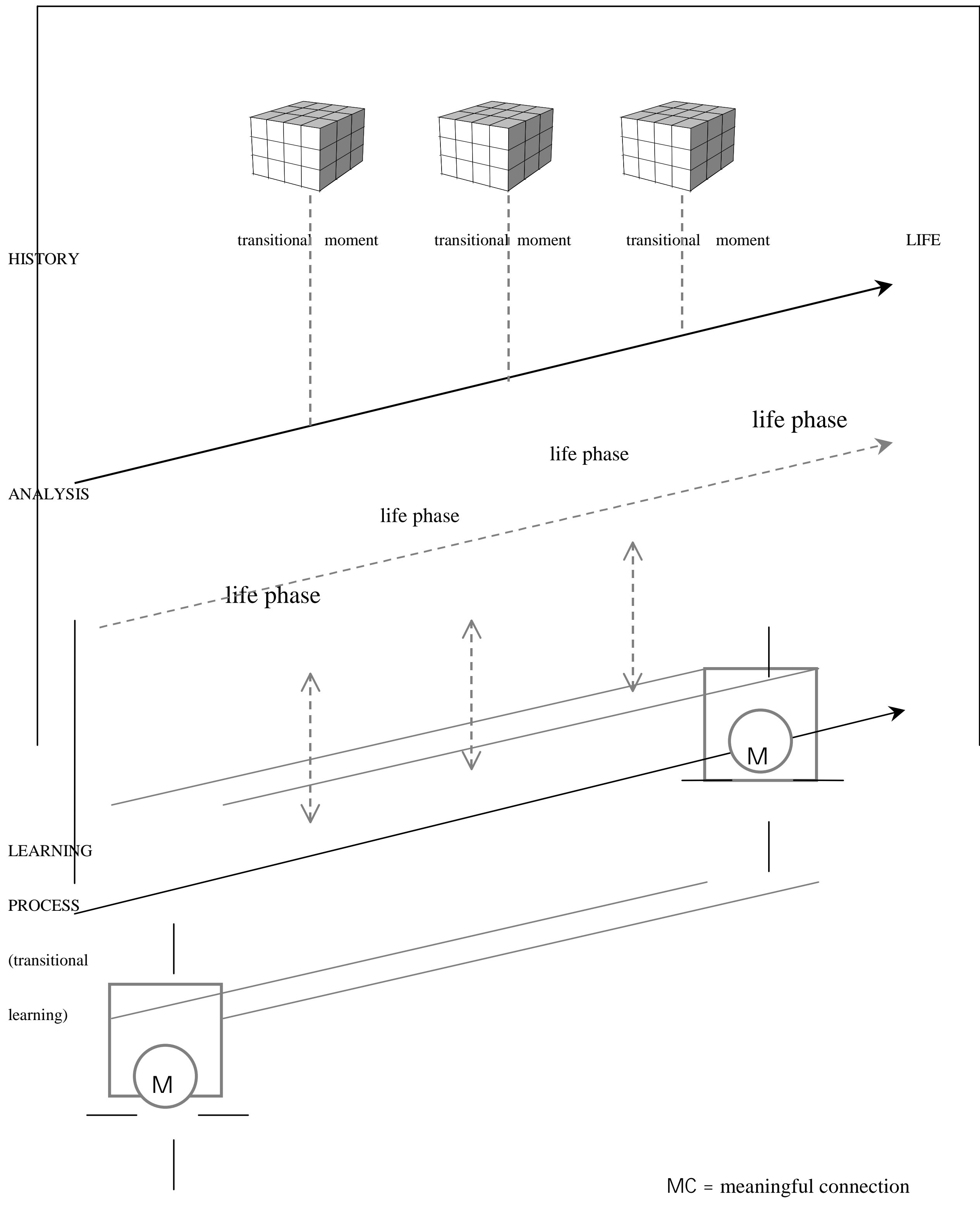

Figure 3 Visual representation of the analysis approach

1.2.4 Methodological Accountability

The *reliability* of the research method refers to the imitability and replicability of the research. There is a distintion between internal reliability (i.e. the extent to which colleague researchers can come to the same results within the same area of research and using the same

research method = replicability of the research process), and external reliability (i.e. the extent to which the research results are independent of the research execution = replicability of the research product or result) (Janssens, 1985).

The *internal reliability* in our research can be seen in terms of argumentative reliability (Van Ijzendoorn & Miedema, 1986). The argumentative power of empirical research resides in the systematic way in which the results are produced and reported. “Good empirical research is like a trap from which there is no return. Step by step the reader of an empirical study is guided towards an almost un-escapable conclusion” (Van Ijzendoorn, 1988, p. 281 (our translation)).

Another important means of enhancing internal reliability is the application of the triangulation principle. This principle refers to the application of several research methods or techniques to the same phenomenon. In our research we used data triangulation in time (i.e. different interviews over time with the same respondent) and in person (i.e. interviews with different respondents). The first allows for vertical analysis (within-site-analysis, the individual respondent is the research unit) and the second for horizontal analysis (cross-site-analysis, comparison between respondents).

Internal validity of the research method refers to the extent to which the collected data and the insights (drawn from the data) are an authentic reproduction of the social reality (Miedema, 1986; Janssens, 1985). In our research this requires an answer to the following question: do we succeed adequately in providing a fuller understanding of the input (situations or events entailing learning processes) and outcomes (in terms of social identity, responsibility and effectivity) in the learning of ‘active citizenship and governance’ within the four domains of life? Amongst others we pursued communicative validity; by giving the respondents the opportunity to give feedback on the analysis of the first interview by means of a second and more in depth interview.

The *transferability or external validity* is a criterion for the quality of the research. To what extent can the results of the group of respondents be transferred to a broader population? We selected the respondents on the basis of purposeful representativity instead of on empirical representativity. In the first place we wanted to attain valid notions of active citizenship (by taking ‘exemplary’ respondents, i.e. who are representative for possible conceptions and practices of active citizenship), but not to investigate in how far these concepts of active citizenship were actually present in the population in general. Consequently our findings cannot be generalised as a description of a population, but can only reveal concepts and relations between learning experiences and outcomes in terms of active citizenship (= theoretical transferability).

1.3 The Report

1.3.1 General Remarks

Our first, and most general, observation is that the learning of democratic active citizenship is deeply embedded in individuals’ biographies and in the socio-cultural and political context they live in. In an important sense, people do not learn a common active citizenship. What they learn is their own citizenship, shaped in an interaction between themselves and the various contexts within which they have lived their lives.

We stress that our results are not representative, fixed, generalisable and universal findings. We rather present a divers sample-card of possible influential factors and learning processes

concerning active citizenship in a variety of biographical and societal contexts. We do not categorise active citizens nor their learning processes, but give a framework to understand their different ways to commit themselves to and to learn active citizenship in a fast evolving society. This diversity is the strength of new conceptions and practices of governance and active citizenship.

To do justice to this diversity of contexts and plurality of conceptions of governance and active citizenship, learning of active citizenship will be discussed seperately in each country involved in the research. Moreover this allows for the specific points of attention, preoccupations, scientific traditions… of the different research teams to become visible. So, next to this introductory chapter, this report comprises seven chapters: six chapters for the six participating countries and a last chapter on general observations. For, having emphasised the biographical and contextual embeddedness of active citizenship, we would not wish to imply that there are no patterns or commonalities to be found.

1.3.2 Gender

A central requirement throughout the research process has been to remain sensitive to gender dimensions in people's lives. The literature review indicated that active citizenship and governance are often considered as male dominated and male defined. Moreover, certain domains, (for example the private domain) where women are frequently more visible, are often made invisible in descriptions of active citizenship. For the life history interviews each country was asked to consider two issues. Firstly, the issue of gender power relations during the interviews. Secondly, the issue of whether people's personal biographies revealed gender specific experiences that influenced their role as active citizens.

A number of practical constraints affected how the data gathering process would be conducted in this respect. A number of countries, for instance, attempted to use only female interviewers when interviewing women. It was felt that women might feel more comfortable telling sensitive experiences to another woman. Other countries used women only when it was already known that the interviewee might withhold information if interviewed by a man.

During the analysis stage all countries were asked to look specifically for experiences within the biographies that might differentiate between the way men and women both learned to become citizens, and the choices they made in terms of how they enacted their role as citizens. As a result of preliminary discussions during the data analysis it became clear that the private domain was an important place of learning for both citizenship and governance. It was also a gender-specific source of awareness for certain forms of citizenship. Consequently the analysis includes the private domain alongside the state, work and civil domains as a reference point for how people give both form and content to active citizenship.

The gender issue will be treated of in each chapter and in the general conclusions.

1.3.3 National Reports

The following six chapters are the national reports of the life history research in each of the participating countries. A common framework was used to structure these chapters.

A first paragraph gives a concise description of the main characteristics of social life and of the major changes in the socio-political context each national research team refers to when interpreting the data gathered during the interviews. Next, the question 'why do people become active citizens' is addressed. This section describes the reasons why people take up the challenge of governance by becoming active citizens, the factors which influence their

decision to become active and to care about and shape social relations in a changing society. The third paragraph discusses how people give shape to their commitment as active citizens. In order to do this the three dimensions of active citizenship - identity, responsibility and effectivity - are elaborated. The fourth paragraph deals with where active citizens learn in what way and what they learn in the different domains of state, work, civil society and private life. The fifth paragraph on the learning processes describes the complex connection between all these factors embedded in a socio-cultural context and personal biography. Sixth the differences between the two age cohorts are addressed. The gender issue is central in the seventh section. Each chapter ends with an overview of the interviewed respondents.

1.3.4 General Conclusions

The last chapter highlights the general conclusions coming out of all the material in the different countries. The main conclusions of which a synopsis is provided in the Executive Summary, are also given here:

General Political Context

a) Problems of the welfare state, in which citizens are consumers and customers, provide a key context for changing understandings of governance and citizenship.

b) Concern is widespread at a rising ‘democratic deficit’: that established mechanisms of democratic government no longer work effectively, in part because the people no longer trust them.

c) Widespread concern to ‘remoralise’ citizens: the feeling (at least on the part of those who govern) that if citizens have lost confidence in government, ways must be found of regenerating their sense of community spirit and collective responsibility.

d) Widespread interest in mechanisms which will decentralise the processes and institutions of government, e.g. citizens’ forums, encouraging the voluntary sector and NGOs to play an active part in welfare provision.

Biographical Embeddedness of Citizenship Learning

e) Our first, and most general, observation is to emphasise that the learning of citizenship is deeply embedded in individuals’ biographies. In an important sense, people do not learn a common citizenship; what they learn is their own citizenship.

Governance: Changing Contexts for Active Citizenship

f) Social and political developments *can* open ways to a more dynamic and participative relationship. However national contexts provide different meanings and realities for governance and active citizenship. Specific contexts are very important in how citizenship is learned.

g) Where democracy is relatively long-established, established political structures in each country appear to have been eroding in recent years. Active citizens appear to be reacting to challenges by seeking responsibility for diverse issues (e.g., food safety, sustainable development, sexuality, workers’ rights, charities).

h) Where democracy is more recently established, understandings of active citizenship are framed by awareness that citizens were a moving force in establishing democracy.

i) Inequalities of access to new/changing contexts of governance and participation constrain and shape ability to learn citizenship, as well as to be active citizens. New forms of governance will (almost inevitably) produce their own forms of inclusion and exclusion, and this will be expressed in learning of citizenship.

j) Each context has its own internal diversity (culture, lifestyle). These may have a significant impact on what is learned, and how, about citizenship.

Learning Active Citizenship: Identity, Responsibility and Effectivity

k) Learning active citizenship is neither linear nor one-dimensional. Learning active citizenship can be continuous or 'smooth' (e.g. involving strong socialisation in the family), or 'jagged' (e.g. from critical or frustrating experience).The process may be conscious, but is more often accidental, unexpected and *ad hoc.*

l) In the 'established democracies' there seems to be less 'common ground of experiences'. The focus is more on the multiplicity of individuals' identities. Becoming an active citizen seems to be more 'individualised'.

m) In certain countries (the Netherlands, Belgium, perhaps the UK) individuals' sense of identity and responsibility seems increasingly located in the self. This is *not* to say they are becoming more 'selfish'. It can be seen in terms of 'authenticity' and 'lifestyle'. This suggests people's learning of citizenship may become increasingly diverse and personal.

n) Changing identities may be interpreted as 'project identities', i.e., they are having periodically to reconstruct their identities to build a new position in a changing society – but starting from the cultural material they possess.

Domains and Modes of Learning

o) The interviews confirmed that the attributes necessary to become active citizens are, above all, constructed – learned incidentally – in socio-institutional and cultural processes.

p) Active citizenship relates to the public, work, socio-cultural (civil society) and private domains. All contribute to learning active citizenship. Active citizens seem often if not always related to more than one domain. What they learn in one domain can lead to participation in and commitment to another – perhaps for a different purpose.

q) The private domain is too seldom recognised as an important location for learning about, and the practice of, citizenship.

r) Informal modes of learning seem most important. However, not all informal learning of citizenship is equally valued. We need to re-examine and revalue in particular skills which can play a crucial role in developing active citizenship among traditionally excluded groups.

Do Generations Differ?

s) Active citizenship is a strong learning process in itself, and older people who are active have continually learned to re-interpret and re-learn aspects of citizenship activities. At any one time, therefore, the differences between older and younger active citizens are less marked.

t) Younger active citizens may be encountering more significant transitions than former generations did at the same stage of life.

u) Biography now seems to play a larger role in the formation of active citizens – it seems that, in former periods, the structures of political and citizenship activity were more prescribed.

v) There is some evidence that people may be less willing today than formerly to be active citizens against their own feelings – i.e., that people today are less able to feel a sense of duty on the basis of an imposed or externally-derived sense of responsibility. This suggests a stronger role for authenticity in active citizenship.

The Role of Gender

w) Women active citizens in all countries have a tendency to be connected to care and family responsibilities; these roles are central to their active citizenship.

x) Women's role within families and societal expectation about motherhood influence their sense of agency and career development. For many women, career breaks for family reasons are a feature.

y) In most countries, younger women perceive themselves as having better chances for equality in work and family relationships.

z) Higher education, both formal and nonformal, has helped some women to resist normative images of themselves and to extend their identities beyond the constraints of the private domain. Education has also helped them to find new skills and to take new and active citizenship roles.

Bibliography

Alheit, P. (1992). The biographical approach to Adult Education. In W. Mader (ed.), *Adult education in the federal republic of Germany. Scholarly approaches and professional practice*, (pp. 186-221). Vancouver: Center for Continuing Education.

Alheit, P. (1995). Biographical learning. Theoretical outlines, challenges and contradictions of a new approach in adult education. In P. Alheit, A. Bron-Wojciechowska, E. Brugger, & P. Dominicé (eds.), *The biographical approach in European adult education*, (pp. 57-74). Wien: Verband Wiener Volksbildung.

Alheit, P. (1996). Changing Basic Rules of Biographical Construction: Modern biographies at the end of the 20th Century. In A. Weymann & W. Heinz (eds), *Society and Biography. Interrelationships between social structure, institutions and life course* (pp. 111-128). Weinheim: Juventa.

Alheit, P. (1997). *Theoretically founded applied biographical research*. Bremen: Universität Bremen, IBL.

Antikainen, A., Houtsonen, J., Kauppila, J., & Huotelin, H. (1996). *Living in a learning society: Life histories, identities and education.* London: Falmer.

Bauman, Z. (1993). *Postmodern Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Beck, U. (1992). Risk society: towards a new modernity. London: Sage.

Beck, U. (1997). The reinvention of politics: Rethinking modernity in the global social order. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Beck, U., Giddens, A., & Lash, S. (1994). Reflexive modernization: politics, tradition and aesthetics in the modern social order. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Benhabib, S. (1992). Situating the Self: Gender community and postmodernism in contemporary ethics. Oxford: Polity.

Blumer, H. (1969). Symbolic interactionism. New York: Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs.

Biggs, J., & Moore, P. (1993). The process of learning. Sydney: Prentice-Hall Australia.

Commission of the European Communities (1997). Accomplishing Europe through education and training. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

Coombs, P. (1985). The world crisis in education. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.). (1994). Handbook of Qualitative Research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dominicé, P. (1991). Composing education biographies: group reflection through life histories. In J. Mezirow (ed.), Fostering critical reflection in adulthood (pp. 194-212). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Eriksson-Stjernberg, I. (1998). Emotions in life-long learning. Nordisk Pedagogik, 18 (2), 65-76.

Fuchs, W. (1984). Biographische Forschung. Eine Einführung in Praxis und Methoden. Opladen.

Garfinkel, H. (1967). Studies in ethnomethodology. Englewood-Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Giddens, A. (1991). Modernity and self-identity. Self and society in late modern age.

Cambridge: Polity Press.

Goffman, E. (1959). The presentation of self in everyday life. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Goffman, E. (1975). Frame analysis. Harmondaworth: Penguin Books.

Habermas, J. (1987). The theory of communicative action. Vol.2. Lifeworld and system. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Habermas, J. (1991). The theory of communicative action. Vol. 1. Reason and the rationalisation of society. Oxford: Polity Press.

Heron, J. (1996). Co-operative inquiry: Research into the human condition. London: Sage.

Janssens, S. (1985). Betrouwbaarheid en validiteit in interpretatief onderzoek (Reliability and validity in interpretative research). Pedagogisch Tijdschrift, 10 (3), 149-161.

Jarvis, P. (1987). Adult learning in the social context. New York: Croom Helm.

Jarvis, P. (ed.). (2001). The age of learning. Education and the knowledge society. London: Kogan Page.

Kelchtermans, G. (1994). De professionele ontwikkeling van leerkrachten basisonderwijs vanuit het biografisch perspectief (The professional development of teachers in primary schools, from a biographical perspective). Doctoral dissertation. Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven.

Kolb, D.A. (1984). Experiential learning. Experience as the source of learning and

Development. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Kridel, C. (ed). (1998). Writing educational biography: Explorations in qualitative research. New York: Garland.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lyotard, J-F. (1984). The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Maynard, M., & Purvis, J. (eds.). (1994). Researching women's lives from a feminist perspective. London: Taylor & Francis.

Mead, G.H. (1934). Mind, Self and Society. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Merriam, S.B., & Caffarella, R.S. (1999). Learning in adulthood: a comprehensive guide. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Musson, G. (1998). Life Histories. In G. Symon & C. Cassell (eds.), Qualitative methods and analysis in organizational research (pp. 10-27). London: Sage.

Plummer, K. (1983). Documents of life: An introduction to the problems and literature of a humanistic method. London: Allen & Unwin.

Schutz, A., & Luckmann, T. (1974). The structures of the life-world. London: Heinemann.

Seidel, J.V. (1998). Qualitative Data Analysis. In J.V. Seidel (ed.), The Ethnograph v5.0: A User's Guide, (pp. E1-E18). Thousand Oaks: Socolari, Sage Publications.

Sennett, R. (1998). The corrosion of character: The personal consequences of work in the new capitalism. New York: Norton.

Sociaal en Cultureel Rapport 1996 (1996). Rijswijk NL: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau.

Sparkes, A. (1994). Life histories and the issue of voice. International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 7, 253-70.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). Basics of qualitative research. Grounded theory procedures and techniques. London: Sage Publications.

Stroobants, V., Jans, M., & Wildemeersch, D. (2001). Making sense of learning for work. Towards a framework of transitional learning. International Journal of Lifelong Education, 20 (1-2), 114-126.

Stroobants, V., & Wildemeersch, D. (2000). Een biografisch perspectief op werk, leren en leven... meer dan een verhaal (A biographical perspective on work, learning and life ... more than just a story). Pedagogisch Tijdchrift, 25(1), 7-34. (Thematic number: Wildemeersch, D., & Kamp van der, M. (eds). Onderzoek en debat in de volwasseneneducatie (Research and debate about adult education)).

Usher, R., Bryant, I., & Johnston, R. (1997). Adult education and the postmodern challenge. Learning beyond the limits. London: Routledge.

Van Ijzendoorn, M. (1988). De navolgbaarheid van kwalitatief onderzoek (The imitability of qualitative research). Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Opvoeding, Vorming en Onderwijs, 4 (5), 280-288.

Van Ijzendoorn, M., & Miedema, S. (1986). De kwaliteit van kwalitatief onderzoek (The quality of qualitative research). Pedagogische Studiën, 63 (12), 498-505.

Vandenabeele, J. (1999). Sociale verantwoording en het debat over landbouw, milieu en natuur (Social responsibility and the debate on agriculture, environment and nature). Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Leuven: KULeuven, Faculteit Psychologie en Pedagogische Wetenschappen.

Versteijnen, J. (1985). Onderzoek kan ook anders.Over het gebruik van persoonlijke documenten en levensverhalen in sociologisch onderzoek.Een inleiding in de biografische methode (Research can be different. On the use of personal documents and life stories in sociological research. An introduction in the biographical method). Lisse: Swets & Zeitlinger.

Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of practice. Learning, meaning and identity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

West, L. (1996). Beyond fragments: adults, motivation, and higher education: a biographical analysis. Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis.

Wildemeersch, D. & Berkers, F. (1997). Leren is participeren (Learning is participating). Vorming, 12 (3),161–171).