

Learning Lives

Learning, Identity and Agency in the Life Course



Welcome to the first issue of our project Newsletter!

What's the project about?

"Learning Lives: Learning, Identity and Agency in the Life Course" is the first large-scale longitudinal study of its kind into the learning biographies of adults. The aim of the project is to deepen understanding of the meaning and significance of formal and informal learning in the lives of adults and to identify ways in which their learning can be supported and enhanced. We are particularly interested in relationships between learning, identity and agency.

The project began in **June 2004** and will run until the end of **January 2008**. Four UK universities are partnered in the project: the University of Exeter (lead applicant), the University of Brighton, the University of Leeds and the University of Stirling.

The study is based on repeated **interviews with a large group of adults** from 25 years upwards over a period of three years. In the interviews we explore the life history of our participants and their ongoing experiences.



We are particularly interested in the role of formal and informal learning in relation to experiences of **migration** (the focus of the work in Brighton), **family and community** (the focus of the Exeter team), **older learners** (the focus of the Leeds team) and **work and unemployment** (the focus of the Stirling team). Alongside the interviews, we will conduct a systematic analysis of large survey data-sets (including data from the British Household Panel Survey) in order to get a better understanding of trends and patterns over time.

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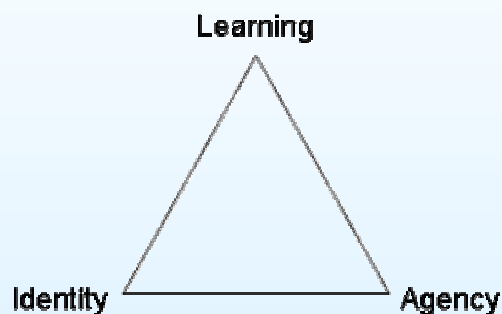
Our Aims

- To deepen understanding of the complexities of learning in the life course, with a special focus on the relationships between learning, identity and agency.
- To identify and evaluate learning, teaching and guidance strategies and the nature of their impact on learning opportunities and outcomes and upon the empowerment of the adult learners.

The Key Questions

The main aim of the project is to understand what learning ‘means’ and ‘does’ in the lives of adults. This forms the basis for understanding and developing ways in which learning might be supported and enhanced.

In the project we take a very broad and open definition of learning. While it includes learning in formal settings and particularly settings where the main purpose is learning (such as schools, colleges, universities, courses), we are also interested in everyday learning, tacit learning, biographical learning, learning in work situations, learning from others, learning through community involvement – in short: learning from all aspects of one’s life.



We are particularly interested in the relationships between learning, identity and agency. We want to understand how learning influences one’s sense of self (identity), but also how one’s sense of self influences learning and dispositions towards learning. Similarly we want to understand how learning influences people’s agency (the ability to give direction to one’s life) and how agency in turn impacts on learning and dispositions towards learning.

We want to understand how these processes develop over time, which is why we both conduct life-history interviews (in which we explore experiences in the past) and follow-up interviews (in which we explore the current trajectories of the ‘learning lives’ of our participants). We also want to understand these processes against the background of wider changes in society and the ways in which structural conditions and resources impact upon learning, identity and agency.

The Interviews

We started our data-collection in the summer of 2004 and since then have held regular interviews with a group of about 100 adults, discussing their life and the role of learning in it. The interviews are providing a wealth of information about the role and significance of learning in the lives of our participants. We are also developing some more imaginative ways to document and explore our participants' learning lives, including the use of poetry and photography. Some of our participants have also started to write their own story of their lives.

Analysis of Survey Data

At the same time, we have made a start with the analysis of large data-sets from survey research in order to explore our research interests and find answers to our questions on the basis of statistical information, including data from the British Household Panel Survey.

Project Meetings

All researchers are meeting on a regular basis to discuss progress and further planning of the project. We have made a start with ongoing analysis of our data and will be presenting initial findings at upcoming conferences in 2006.

Further Information

More details about the project and its progress can be found on the learning lives website: <http://www.learninglives.org>

Recent Publications/Presentations

An interview with Gert Biesta was published in the NIACE journal "Adults Learning" (Sept 2004, pp.18-19).

We presented the following papers at national conferences:

- **Researching Learning/Working Lives: Issues of Identity, Agency and Changing Experiences of Work** - Malcolm, I. and J. Field (2005).
- **Combining Life-History and Life-Course Approaches in Researching Life-long Learning: Methodological Observations from the 'Learning Lives' Project** - Biesta, G.J.J., Hodkinson, Ph. & Goodson, I. (2005).
- **Talking about my Generation: Learning, Identity and Agency - The Role of Historical Time and Generational Time over the Life Course** - Field, J. and I. Malcolm (2005).

For copies of these publications please contact the Learning Lives Project Office (see overleaf).



Picture of the whole team at a recent meeting in Exeter. Left to right: F.Macleod, H.Hodkinson, N.Adair, G.Biesta, K.Wilmer-Becker, H.Olek, I.Malcolm, J.Field, P.Hodkinson, R.Hawthorn, G.Ford, P.Lambe, I.Goodson, M.Tedder

Project Directors

Prof. Gert Biesta	Lead-applicant and overall co-ordinator, University of Exeter
Prof. John Field	Co-director, University of Stirling
Prof. Ivor Goodson	Co-director, University of Brighton
Prof. Phil Hodkinson	Co-director, University of Leeds
Dr Flora Macleod	Co-director, University of Exeter

Research Fellows

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See www.tlrp.org

