

**“ADULT LEARNING & COMMUNITIES IN A WORLD ON THE MOVE: BETWEEN NATIONAL TENSIONS AND TRANSNATIONAL CHALLENGES”**

UNIVERSITY OF LOWER SILESIA, FACULTY OF EDUCATION,  
WROCLAW, STRZEGOMSKA ST. 55

25TH – 27TH MAY, 2017

Rob Evans

**Conflicts near and far: young adults' learning biographies and interrupted narratives of civil war, chauvinism and new diasporas.**

One goal of the conference in Wroclaw is to encourage reflection on our research and to ask ourselves how we can integrate social change and community engagement, alongside an interest in the human subject and the nature of learning and education at a more individual level.

Individuals and groups, both in educational institutions and in informal contexts of learning, in their places of work and in their families and communities, face decisions that affect their learning chances: decisions taken often under pressure. Learning biographies, in which the layers of experience of a lived life (as well as of the resources of 'unlived life') are drawn upon, are situated in, and create, very personal storied spaces which do not necessarily reflect or process in an obvious way the historical/physical spaces of learning and change formerly available or passed through by the tellers. This element of incongruence – worked out and understood under pressure - can be central to the construction and re-working of an own biographical narrative. There is always the chance that a part of the lived life can be blocked out, put on "hold", modified.

Biographical knowledge, I propose, is the prerequisite for biographical reflexion, i.e. being able to think your own biography through anew, and form it anew. In times when demands on people come as sudden, often dramatic, changes or when they are loaded with contradictory features, this type of knowledge serves as crucial biographical competence. This competence may also be de-valued, Rabe-Kleberg has argued (1995), should it be separated from expectations and experiences that were hitherto considered to be unquestionably valid.

Taking up the challenges to the hitherto "safe" biographical narrative, this paper will consider the narratives of young Ukrainian adults studying and working in Germany, who are separated from their homes and their recent past lives in an area of Europe which is currently engulfed by a diffused form of civil conflict. The biographical interview spans an arc from the immediate learning situation of the individual to complex and potentially threatening spaces of political, social, and emotional dislocation. Biographical narratives constructed in interview talk become an urgently important place in which the re-construction of identities and the search for individual meaning-making in times of harsh biographical transition can be heard.

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Discursive processes hearable in such biographic narratives involve:

- interaction and relations of reciprocity between individual subjects and their life narratives in transition
- the changes imposed by civil conflict on narrators' own and on others' words, on their very narrative resources, threatening the very language hitherto used to describe themselves and the world
- the relationships the narrators affirm or deny to formerly recognised groups or to recognised values or characteristics, identities or stigmas, be they political, affective, linguistic.

Raymond Williams pointed out the deep penetration of identification processes in the body language of individuals; the rules of society, he concluded, "run very deep". Such rules "are often materialised, and in inheriting them as institutions we inherit a real environment, which shapes us but which we also change. We learn this environment in our bodies, and we are taught the conventions" (Williams: 1965). Interpellation of these lived rules in biographical interviews, which means directly questioning everyday lived routines and life in the present, encounters the difficulty individuals have of verbalising the meaning of 'here' and 'now', all the more when the here and now fall apart.

This paper wishes to explore in the language of life histories the possibility of identifying the crucial relationship between destruction and narration, between the dismantling of the human being (and their past by the re-writing of history through war) perpetrated by the civil conflict, and the potential of life stories to 'explain' a difficult world and develop meaningful responses to it.