A farmer becomes a social pedagogue: A psycho-societal approach

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In Denmark various non-traditional students are mature-age students who already have some kind of a vocational background. When applying to do a professional degree, most of them fall outside the traditional admission requirements, which is why individual assessment of applicants is necessary for bachelor programmes. This article examines the case of a woman named Amy, a mature, non-traditional university college student who becomes a social pedagogue. Because of severe allergies, Amy had to quit her job as a farmer and began to study to become a social pedagogue. Becoming a social pedagogue is a tremendously complex process that involves taking on a new professional identity and acquiring new skills. In order to ascertain the extent of this complexity, this article uses a psycho-societal approach derived from a Danish/German life history research approach. This article offers a brief presentation of the theoretical and methodological framework applied before analysing the process Amy undergoes to become a social pedagogue. The analysis demonstrates that this type of significant career change is demanding and, for Amy, filled with feelings of ambivalence and defensiveness.

Introduction

The question of *becoming* – either *becoming* a human being, *becoming* competent in a certain profession or just trying to *become* a better partner – has for many years intrigued and puzzled scholars, religious groups, artists and many others.

In the Shakespearean drama *Hamlet*, set in Denmark at Elsinore Castle, Prince Hamlet confronts deep existential questions about life and death, his soliloquy pondering existence with the famous words To be or not to be? Hamlet reflects on the possible future consequences of *becoming* or gaining a new identity as the Prince of Denmark. In that process, he is indeed *becoming*, but reflecting on *becoming* makes him crazy, some claim, implying that *becoming* is a treacherous path.

Becoming represents more than just life stages, even though the concept of *becoming* involves a goal or intention. *Becoming* entails ongoing learning and is an identity-building process that takes place in everyday life. A complex matter, *becoming* is also a dynamic and relational aspect of social interaction.

The aim of this article is to describe and analyse how an individual, non-traditional student takes on a new career by acquiring a new professional identity and via the learning process involved in *becoming* a social pedagogue, i.e. how a farmer *becomes* a social pedagogue. This article will also present and apply a psycho-societal approach, which offers, according to Salling Olesen (2012a), a concept of subjectivity and a unique framework for empirical studies of social interaction by combining theoretical and methodological elements.

Learning processes occur whether we intend to learn or not. Educational institutions are one context where new learning processes can take place, for example, when adult students, referred to here as non-traditional students, choose or begin to study a new profession. For non-traditional students a career change is a process of *becoming*

something else that changes their professional identity. Salling Olesen (2007) suggests that professional identity must be seen as a subjective effort at lifelong learning, a process where individuals identify with their profession, enabling them to participate in life more fully. They become able, in the sense that they create their own practice and identity by combining their life history, gendered skills and knowledge with acquiring existing knowledge, thereby *becoming*. From this perspective, professional identity represents the collective effect of multiple learning processes. *Becoming* a social pedagogue or any other profession requires individuals to be active. *Becoming* is not to be regarded as an individual attribute, achievement or property, on the contrary, how subjects become a subject occurs collectively – the subjectivity in social interaction and on an individual level must be considered. The subject must be seen as *becoming* interwoven with the other, or the external sphere, which includes fellow students, the school (system), broader societal structures and a historic perspective.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. First, the concept of the non-traditional student is described in more detail and the Danish concept of recognition of prior learning (RPL), an essential aspect of non-traditional students gaining access to professional bachelor degree programmes, is introduced. A description of what the profession of social pedagogue specifically comprises in Denmark is also given. Second, the article presents the theoretical and methodological approach applied and outlines key aspects of the analytic approach taken. Third, the analysis of the empirical material is divided into six themes. Finally, the article concludes by describing how the non-traditional student is *becoming*. In addition, the article discusses how the psycho-societal approach can be used in further research on professional identity formation and transformation in adult life to lead to new understandings of non-traditional students.

Non-traditional students, recognition of prior learning (RPL) and the social pedagogue profession in Denmark

The phrase "a farmer becomes a social pedagogue" in the title of this article refers to a specific non-traditional student enrolled in a professional bachelor degree program. The term non-traditional student must be used with caution as it is imprecise and, according to Teichler

and Wolter (2004), defining it with precision is not possible since various students are considered traditional by some, but non-traditional by others. The notion of the non-traditional student originates from the Anglo-Saxon term non-traditional adult student (Alheit, 2016) and is currently defined in multiple ways, though there appears to be a general European consensus on a common understanding of the term. Crosling et al.'s (2008) international study *Improving Student Retention in Higher Education* points out five categories used regularly in international access and retention studies to identify non-traditional students: 1) low socioeconomic status, 2) disabilities, 3) first in family to participate in higher education (HE), 4) mature-age and 5) minorities and refugees. The project Access and Retention: Experiences of Non-Traditional Learners in HE, funded by the European Commission Lifelong Learning Programme, also employed these criteria (EU, 2011; see endnotes no 1).

For the purposes of this study, the farmer as social pedagogue fits with the definition of the non-traditional student as a mature-age student or adult student pursuing a HE. In the Danish context, these kinds of students most often have a vocational educational background. This is the case because, in recent decades, policymakers in Denmark have put greater focus on informal and non-formal learning, i.e. prior learning, in the effort to provide additional educational opportunities for non-traditional students (Aagaard & Dahler, 2010).

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

A wide range of contemporary European, including Danish, policies argues that in a comprehensive educational system individuals should have adequate opportunities to learn throughout life. The key aspects of interest are the learning potential, capacity and adaptability of individuals to become competent while simultaneously increasing their self-awareness and sense of dignity as a responsible citizen (Singh & Duvekot, 2013: 16). RPL in adult education has a strong tradition in Denmark and the other Nordic countries, though approaches vary regarding policy development, systems, solutions and practical implementation. In 2007, a crucial year for the acknowledgment and development of adult education according to the context of lifelong learning, adults in Denmark became entitled to have their prior

learning, i.e. what they know and can do, recognised and validated (Aagaard & Dahler, 2010).

The internationally recognised Danish folk high schools, which offer non-formal adult education, were established in Denmark during the latter half of the nineteenth century based on principles and values expounded by Grundtvig and Kold (Rasmussen, 2013). They represent one of the foundations for the acceptance of adult learning and education and what is now known as RPL. Rasmussen (2013) points out that one of the basic principles of folk high schools was the living word, i.e. prioritisation of oral narration and discussion. Folk high schools do not give exams and students live at the school in order to share not only in learning but also daily life and in practical activities. Over the years the original ideas and values have developed to encompass new, more expansive types of adult education and ways of recognising prior learning to promote access to further education. The philosophy behind the Enlightenment and a belief in universal education supported these efforts. The state and local authorities made practical and financial provisions to allow the establishment of non-obligatory evening classes for young people and adults. At its core, RPL is defined by the Danish Ministry for Children, Education and Gender Equality (2008) as the knowledge, skills and competencies an individual has regardless of how and where they were obtained. The main policy aim of implementing a new practice and acknowledging people's prior learning was to provide adults with better access to further education and more relevant educational opportunities. With folk high schools laying the groundwork over a century ago, the 2011 Danish Education Act states that when professional bachelor degree applicants do not meet the formal admission requirements, the education institution in question must undertake an individual assessment to determine the applicant's abilities. The assessment involves evaluating the applicant's overall competency, skills and knowledge base in relation what the degree program requires. Formal, informal and non-formal learning, as well as cultural engagement and life experiences in general, are taken in consideration. This expansive approach to RPL means that a broad range of non-traditional students have a greater chance of being admitted, especially in the case of professional bachelor degree programs.

Social pedagogue

The social pedagogue profession is specific to Denmark but analogous to pre-school teachers in a large number of other countries. Comparable positions in out of school care include social workers, educators, play workers and recreation instructors. Danish child care centres, e.g. nurseries, kindergartens, pre-school classes, leisure time facilities, out of school care and youth clubs, are an integral and independent part of the Danish welfare society and should not be confused with the school system and formal teaching (Bubl, 2016). Learning is an important aspect of day care and gaining more attention, but Danish legislation emphasises the importance of play and the child's social and comprehensive development, with a focus on fellowship and inclusion (Skaarup, 2014). As a result, these are essential aspects of a social pedagogue's work.

The pedagogue program provides professional qualifications for people to work with development and care:

- For children and young people (in e.g. day nurseries, day care centres, pre-school classes, recreation centres, school-based leisure time facilities, after-school clubs, 24-hour service institutions)
- In institutions for children, young people and adults with reduced psychological or physical capacities
- For adults with social problems (homelessness, substance abuse, mental disorders)
- In family centres and child and youth psychiatric hospitals (Bubl, 2016)

The theoretical and methodological approach

Across Europe, recent decades have witnessed a considerable expansion of biographical and life history research (Hallqvist, 2013) on non-traditional learners in higher and adult education (EU, 2011). Non-traditional students' stories are seen as a relevant way to gain knowledge regarding the formation and transformation of identity in education (Bron & Thunborg, 2016). The focus on biographical and life history research is part of a more general trend across the social sciences. This flourishing research trend on non-traditional learners is partly fuelled by dissatisfaction with surveys and other traditional research methods,

which tend to marginalise the perspectives and subjective experiences of learners themselves, or reduce them to subjective processes (West et al., 2007; EU, 2011).

In Denmark, especially at Roskilde University, various approaches to life history have been developed inspired by German theory, primarily critical theory originating from the Frankfurt School. Danish researchers were quite ambitious when they began a large-scale, three-year life history project which ended in 2002: "We wanted to develop a methodology for understanding people's learning motives – and resistances – in the context of their life experiences – past, present and future – in which the totality of their everyday life world and basic societal conditions are condensed" (Salling Olesen, 2016). One of the leading Danish contributions to the field of life history research is the psycho-societal approach, which is a combined theoretical and methodological approach developed by Salling Olesen (2007; 2012a; 2013a) and is applied in this article. Salling Olesen (2016) explains that: "The term 'approach' indicates the intrinsic connection between the theory, the empirical research process and the epistemic subject [...] Paradigmatically this is a mediation or synthesis of critical theory of society and the symbol interpretational focus in psychoanalysis". The psycho-societal approach embraces the life history perspective, where biography is used not to understand the specific individual but to learn about the individual subject and the psychological and societal dimensions by integrating a theory of subjectivity and a hermeneutic interpretative methodology to explore the lived life experiences.
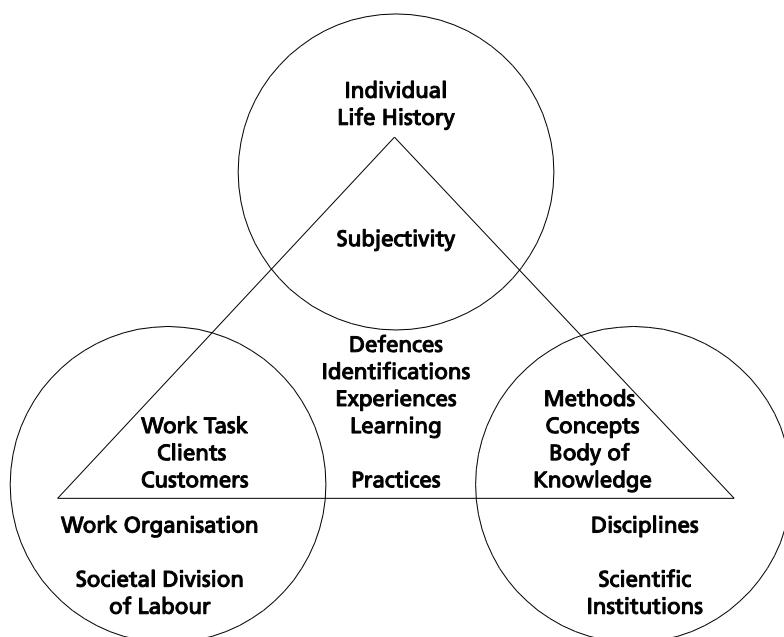
Salling Olesen's theory of subjective experiences conceptualises individual psychological development as the interactional experience of societal relations. These experiences and encounters with the external sphere produce an inner psychodynamic as a conscious and unconscious individual resource (Ibid.). The individual subject constantly construes his or her subjectivity in the process of *becoming,* which is a result of the dynamic meeting between the individual and the surrounding conditions, which provide various kinds of new influences. This notion of subjectivity is closely related to Weber's (1994), which points out that people never finish developing their subjectivity and hence simultaneously affect their surroundings as they constantly transform themselves between the subjectivity and the surrounding society. As

a result, *becoming* is an ongoing process where the non-traditional student, as the individual subject in a dialectic process, develops his or her professional identity and competences in interaction with the environment.

Research model

As described earlier, the psycho-societal approach is interdisciplinary, emphasising the dynamic nature between the individual and the surroundings, thus integrating psychological and social dimensions of experience. Figure 1 provides an overview of the three key factors constituting the subject in the research model. This offers a heuristic approach to researching learning processes that is fluid and flexible, though without claiming to be perfectly flawless.

Figure 1: *Heuristic research model used to analyse 'becoming' in professional identity and learning processes (Salling Olesen, 2007)*

Individual
Life History

Subjectivity

Defences
Identifications
Experiences
Learning

Work Task
Clients
Customers

Practices

Methods
Concepts
Body of
Knowledge

Work Organisation

Disciplines

Societal Division
of Labour

Scientific
Institutions

The three circles in the model represent relatively independent dynamics but are nevertheless in relational exchange with one another. The triangle illustrates the research areas of relevance for this article. The items listed in the circles but outside the triangle are beyond the scope of this article but will be touched upon briefly as they are pertinent to my research field but can also be understood as widespread structures in society that must therefore be recognised and described on their own terms (Salling Olesen, 2006).

Individual life history, placed in the top circle, represents the individual or non-traditional student's unique life history, which comprises, for instance, childhood memories, school experiences, relationships and work. The life history is not the focus in and of itself, but is used as an aspect of subjectivity to reveal the complexity of subjective processes. As the items in the centre of the triangle illustrate, individual subjectivity is formed by and as the interplay between the individual (and his or her life history) and social and societal (historic) factors in the broadest sense. The circle on the left involves the societal division of labour, which consists of the educational institution, tasks involved in being a student, fellow students and the teachers. The circle on the right represents scientific institutions or the theory base of the research approach, e.g. specific knowledge, the methodological approach and analytic model. This heuristic model shows how the various dimensions dialectically interplay with one another.

Becoming through the consciousness of everyday life

Becoming must be seen as the subject's practices, an amalgamation of her or his defences (mechanisms), identification processes, experiences and learning processes in everyday life, and can be interpreted as a concrete mediation between the three dimensions (circles), especially within the triangle (figure 1). I draw on an important theoretical concept, called consciousness of everyday life, in relation to the individual subjective process of becoming that involves the editing of the complexities of everyday life The consciousness of everyday life relates to the learning, practices and ways, via defences, that subjects handle their lives, including the life of being a student but also of *becoming* a social pedagogue. German Professor Thomas Leithäuser's 1976 book *Formen des Alltagsbewusstsein* introduced a theoretical framework for

understanding the subjective dynamic of the consciousness. Drawing on the work of German psychoanalyst Alfred Lorenzer and French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre's classical analysis of historical changes of everyday life (Weber, 2003: 108), this framework shows that learning processes can be understood and analysed as something mediated by an individual's life history, culture and history. According to Leithäuser (1976), everyday life situations are flooded with impulses and demands. To prevent the individual from breaking down, individual and collective mechanisms ease various kinds of anxiety, fear and ambivalence by reducing the complexity of reality, which can be called, in other words, the subject's editing of daily life. Therefore, the subject's life must be seen as an array of experiences when adapting due to necessity. In this process of adaptation, suppressing and repressing socially illegitimate sensations and reactions is important but exhausting psychologically in different aspects of daily life (Weber, 2010).

Encountering non-routine phenomena or new contextual factors requires more than just solving cognitive issues as novelties, deviations and new demands involve particularly emotional and social change that may generate anxiety because of the overload of perceptions and information. This input may activate past experiences but also provoke future orientations, such as ideas about seeing oneself in a certain profession one day. The editing of reality may also activate imaginary/imagined meaning, becoming wishful thinking about how life should be (Leithäuser, 2012: 609). Editing the overload of perceptions that impact learning processes, i.e. what is accepted consciously and unconsciously, is essential. The consciousness of everyday life offers an important point, about how people need to edit their perception of life in order to be able to handle it.

Analytical approach

Before embarking on the analysis, I briefly describe the interview approach and the applied interpretation approach, which I call the Dubrovnik method as it involves reflecting with research peers and an ongoing process of developing interpretation methods.

In order to understand the interviewee's experiences and how they are brought to the surface and revitalised through new (mainly study)

experiences, I employed a semi-structured interview approach focusing on narration (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009: 173) inspired by various life history approaches (West et al., 2007; Salling Olesen, 2013a & 2013b) and structured by an infinite number of themes but also left open to allow spontaneity and free association (Hollway & Jefferson, 2007: 36-39). The next section introduces the method of interpretation.

Dubrovnik method

I call the interpretation method used the Dubrovnik method because it was developed at the annual International Research Group for Psycho-Societal Analysis conference held in Dubrovnik, Croatia. Members of the group are researchers from Europe, especially Germany, the UK, Norway and Denmark. The group often analyses transcripts of group or individual research interviews using an approach based on Lorenzer's work, which proposes a tripartite scenic conceptualisation. Sallinge Olesen (2016) explains:

Lorenzer, in brief, draws on the hermeneutic methodology of psychoanalytic understanding, namely 'scenic understanding'. Lorenzer separates the methodological principles of psychoanalysis – simultaneous attention, free association, and the concepts of transfer and counter-transfer – from the clinical context of doctor-patient relationships, and transfers them to social and cultural interpretive practice.

The Dubrovnik method, structured on stages of questions, is an inherently hermeneutic approach. The stages involved in reading a text draw on different dimensions of experience: common sense understanding; immediate bodily reactions of comfort of discomfort; and the sensuous and dramatic patterns of group dynamics. The questions asked of the empirical material in the analysis of Amy, the non-traditional student, are:

    1) What is said? What is the text about?
    2) How is it said (About what?)?
    3) Why is it said in this particular way?

These questions relate to different levels of understanding people's speech and communication. What is said corresponds to the

propositional meaning; how it is said corresponds to the meta-communicative meaning; how it is said about what relates to the pragmatic meaning. Finally, why it is said in a particular way addresses the intentional meaning. Question 3 can also be differentiated into the manifest intentions and the hidden and excluded intentions but also brings in the societal context.

The manifest might be read, but it is possible that the interviewee follows an unconscious strategy that can only be understood when we, as researchers, are aware of our feelings, such as irritation, confusion and shock (see Urwin, 2012), and wishes regarding our own transference and countertransference of reactions (Hollway & Froggett, 2012). The responses of the interviewee and researchers are a mirror of the unconscious scene (Hollway & Volmerg, 2013; Weber, 2001a). As Weber (1995: 132) points out, the researcher subject is not outside the process, on the contrary, the researcher in the process as well, which is why spontaneous provocations should not to be suppressed as an unprofessional disruption but rather seen as a source of critical reflection. Awareness of these aspects in the interpretation process is necessary and acknowledging them is not without challenges.

Analysis of specific non-traditional student

As presented in the introduction, my focus is on how subjects *become*, i.e. on how they take on a new professional identity dialectically formed by the interwoven psycho-societal dimensions. The empirical material comprises an interview with a non-traditional student, referred to as Amy, who was previously a farmer but is now in a social pedagogue degree program. The analysis, supported by excerpts from the interview, focuses on a single case study to illustrate my approach to the field and offers insight into one person's life history.

First, I present a summary of the portraits derived from my content analysis of the interview (narrative segments). This is followed by an analysis and short discussion of Amy's life history and her experiences of being a student, organised in significant themes referring to the past, present and future.

Portrait of Amy

Born in 1980, Amy is 34 years old at the time of the interview and in her fourth semester as a student in a social pedagogue degree program. She has two children. She grew up in mid-Zealand, Denmark and lived with her parents. Her father worked as a contractor, often driving tractors to and from building sites, and her mother worked as a childminder in private day care. Amy's maternal aunt and uncle are social pedagogues. When she was eight, her family moved into a new house and she started in a new school. When she was 12 she participated in school-sponsored internship on a farm. At age 16 she went to a boarding school that specialised in farming alongside traditional school subjects and graduated from here in the tenth grade. She applied many times for a job at the zoo but failed to get it every time.

After boarding school she went to the School of Agriculture in Roskilde, Denmark for three years and eight months. She got her diploma and became a farmer specialising in livestock. She got a job on a farm, where she was responsible for feeding the animals and managing and teaching new staff. While working on the farm, she completed leadership and economic management courses. After six years of employment, she had to quit due to severe acute respiratory problems and nose bleeds caused by an allergy. She did not want to take medicine and was unable to work in the stable for more than a few hours per day. She decided to change her career but had no idea what her new career should be. After participating in a work assessment program run by the local authorities, she quickly applied to a social pedagogue program, went through an individual assessment and was accepted, thus becoming a non-traditional student.

Career choices: Amy's motivation for choosing a social pedagogue program

The subjective motivations for pursuing further education are complex and manifold. In Amy's case, positive trajectories mainly characterise her learning processes during her school life and further education. In the interview, her positive path seems particularly related to her experiences and her ability to focus on any given task, whether for academic or practical reasons. She depicts how she adjusts to the given situation and requirements. There are some breaks in her narrative:

> [...] not that it has to be a calling, working as a social pedagogue, I think. It's more... it' of course just paid work, but it's too... that you have the kind of excitement and motivation for it ... you see, I ... it might be silly, but I'm that kind of a person, as ... no matter where I find myself, I adjust.

Even though she describes her choice to study to become a social pedagogue, she does not articulate herself as an agent; the choice appears to have been due to her allergy, i.e. something outside herself. She explains, "The allergy is the reason why I had to change professions, not me". Her narrative about the reason for studying is contradictory. She is split, on the one hand, between herself as a pragmatic agent choosing her own career and, on the other, the allergy, not her, turning away from farming. Reflecting on her present situation, Amy seems to attach importance, and perhaps regret, to her experience of leaving her job as a farmer and being a student, i.e. to *becoming* a social pedagogue.

Acquiring new competences: Pigs or children, same-same?

The analysis of Amy's motivation for studying to become a social pedagogue is ambiguous, as her narrative about working with children illustrates:

> [...] I was forced to choose something different. Then, I thought about the little pigs, then the little children ... I know, it might sound a bit ... but I nevertheless think ... well, I had so many things up and running, then I thought that the social pedagogue profession, it's also about love and care [...] I don't care whether it is someone with two or four legs because when it comes down to it, it's sort of the same (thing).

Amy draws on her experiences and vocabulary (discourses) related to her former profession as a farmer, using them to describe the situations and problems social pedagogues encounter. She even goes as far as to compare children with pigs because both need someone to care for them. Indeed children and animals both need care, but why is this notion of care essential for Amy to express? *Why is it said in this particular way?* This is a way of dealing with the adaptation of knowledge and skills, from one practice to another, a way of finding a pathway to become competent by applying the well-known language of the profession. At

the same time, this strategy may function to suppress anxiety about feeling incompetent and insecure in an academic profession, as she calls it. Comparing children with animals, however, falls outside the legitimate norms of the pedagogic profession, which she is aware of. Her use of this somewhat unsuitable comparison may therefore indicate feelings of aggression and ambivalence. Amy's insistence corresponds with or symbolically illustrates her ambivalent emotions towards the fact that she had to leave the farming profession and, at present, has to acquire new skills and knowledge about being a social pedagogue, which she nevertheless thinks is interesting and believes holds future opportunities.

As for the notion of *becoming*, i.e. becoming competent, competences in a life historical and psycho-societal perspective must be seen primarily as subjective capabilities developed through life historical experiences, which are a result of societal learning processes. These experiences become individual prerequisites for various kinds of new learning (Salling Olesen, 2013a). In this perspective, Amy's experience with farming (her training) provides her, for example, with perspectives on what it means to be a student and an approach to studying, which in some cases either fits or clashes with the social pedagogue program. This is a complex matter; her professional skills may be viewed not only as an advantage but also as an obstacle by other students perhaps leading to resistance, which might be a learning process but will not always lead to the acquisition of professional knowledge, skills and competences.

Experiences and re-configuration: Amy's life history learning processes and her present situation

Amy recalls or reframes certain situations in her new program by relating them to experiences in her past, her childhood. This approach is an example of *Nachträglichkeit*, or deferred action, and involves re-activating former experiences in a new life situation, evoking new understandings of the past as well as actions in the present (and future). Becker-Schmidt (1982) draws on this term from Freud's description of the Oedipal phase in puberty. Freud sees what occurs as development, while Becker-Schmidt defines it as social learning (Weber, 1995).

Amy's narrative about how she dealt with changing to another school as a child describes how she became quieter, nerdier, playing chess at the library and talking with the librarian. The world of books

became highly important and she interacted less frequently with her classmates socially. The library and talking with the librarian became a safe zone, where her anxiety was suppressed and academic interests simultaneously awakened. The process of being a new student, living in a new house and in a new town – her parents' wish, not hers – led her to the library, which also became a refuge for her when she gave up being a farmer due to allergies to begin studying as social pedagogue. Amy explains:

> [...] then there are some breaks. I often go to the library together with somebody. I have a very good relationship with the librarian there and I try to somehow gain knowledge by doing that. Then, back to the classroom, where you have to present something and do a PowerPoint ... I really like the times when we have to present our work or have a debate because I think it's very, very important that we don't isolate ourselves.

Her experience in the present recalls former experiences, with certain rituals and similar actions repeated, which provides insight into how Amy experiences studying and dealing with the task of being a student. The library is and has been a pleasant and safe place to go to, but the difference between today and previously is that she wants to interact and discuss with her classmates rather than the librarian. This reflection on the past and the present might reactivate former understandings of her childhood, for example, causing her to realise that perhaps it was not as lonely as she once believed. The above quotation also demonstrates that she has developed new interests by connecting with fellow students in specific work situations. At one point, she also discusses how her work as a farmer changed her behaviour and improved her attitude toward social relations. Amy's narrative demonstrates that subjectivity and capacities developed through the life history of the individual have a significant influence on the conditions for re-configuration of knowledge and skills and for further learning.

Envy and aggression: Critique of salad-days peers

From the viewpoint of being a student in the social pedagogue program, Amy describes her formal peers as being in their salad days, use of this Shakespearean idiomatic expression reflecting her view of them as inexperience and as behaving immaturely. She finds herself in

another position and sees herself as highly competent, possessing a sense of superiority and a degree of omnipotence. The following excerpt illustrates her psychological position of feeling great or unlimited power:

> I was quite amazed at how incredibly young people studying pedagogy are. Well, I might be biased; I just thought they would be a bit older. Well, I thought they might have had some more vocational experience, been out travelling or… […] suddenly I find myself side by side with somebody who just finished their upper secondary education and has never even ever taken care of children or anything. I thought, Oh my God, they're totally in their salad-days […] But I think that some of them are also fairly sharp … who can just do anything.

Due to anxiety and as a defence (mechanism), Amy constructs her peers and younger fellow students from a position of superiority. She sees them not only as less able but as incompetent in terms of taking care of children, which is what the program is about. Her attitude towards them is somewhat aggressive. This portrayal corresponds with the rhetoric and approach familiar to her from the School of Agriculture as well as her farm internship, where 'they certainly are less competent and do not to ask any questions" about ethics and practice. Her discourse not only reduces her fellow social pedagogue students to employees but also reproduces clichés in a tone reminiscent of management talking down to a subordinate. Amy mimics the hierarchy familiar to her from farming. Simplification is a common response when confronted with the complex, multifarious experiences of everyday life, as Leithäuser and Volmerg's (1994) notion of the consciousness of everyday life suggests (Weber, 2010: 11).

In the excerpt above, Amy not only criticises and reacts hostilely towards her peers, but she also praises their knowledge and skills considering they mostly only have an upper secondary education diploma. She recognises that they have something that she does not, which is also evident in other social situations. Her ambivalence towards her peers gives her permission to tell them off or to tell them what to do, but she also needs them as they possess the academic wisdom essential to group work. Ambivalence represents a conflict, and as defined by the Hungarian psychoanalyst Ferenczi, it is not to be understood from the perspective of the classical confrontation between libido and thanatos,

but instead as an inner vacillation deriving from the contradictory qualities of reality (Weber, 2010).

Amy's previously mentioned outburst of aggression (or hostility; see Schorn, 2003) also signifies regression stemming from envy, which is a powerful, even destructive, emotion that arises when people are compared to each other. Unconscious envy is a primitive sensation involving a sense of privation and powerlessness that compels individuals to spoil the success or enjoyment of others (Andersson, 2005: 247). Austrian-British psychoanalyst Melanie Klein's (1984) later writings and theory on envy view its expression as the subject's desire to destroy anything good, beautiful or valuable that is beyond the subject's grasp (Andkjær Olsen, 2002). In this article, the subject's response to unconscious envy is more subtle, working as a psycho-societal process deriving from Amy's feelings of inferiority as a student with the lowest academic skills, activating tension between her and her fellow students, who she calls salad-days peers. This regressive action is fuelled by envy, but is also quite restrained. Feelings of envy are exacerbated by the fact that students compare their work and marks. According to Schorn (2003), identifying envy is difficult because it is often masked.

Relations and domination: The role as the organiser

Amy takes on the role of organiser in group work, giving her the responsibility of making sure that everybody does their agreed tasks and duties and that deadlines are met. When she talks about this role, she refers to her former job as the head of feeding on the farm:

> Because I had to be the leader, you see? I had the responsibility and then I think, nobody helped me or was my safety net, because of that I have expectations toward myself and others, and tell people what I want them to do […] I expect people to bring their computer every time, and I expect them to have done the reading. People have to actively participate and I also expect them to call and let us know ahead of time if they're sick or send a text or something, and not five minutes after.

On the one hand, her management style compensates for her less developed academic skills and represents a means of being in control. Amy shows her (e.g. academic) vulnerability and lack of experience in

the discipline of academic writing when she states: "[…] The first paper we had to write was three pages or so, and it had to be done like this and like that, I thought, Oh God … a paper footer, what the heck's that, huh?" On the other hand, she draws on her experiences from feeding the animals on the farm, where being late was not an option, rules and regulations regarding particular farm tasks appropriately and strictly adhered to. In this respect, she reproduces familiar ways of handling a given task in the farming industry, but concentrating on the structure and formal rules may serve as a crutch, possibly obscuring her focus on the substance and content of her study program and interpersonal relationships, which she finds difficult. Amy's relationship to her fellow students is more a matter of work roles as she does not highlight socialising further with her fellow students. Thus Amy's reliance on the rules can be viewed from a dual perspective as either transfer or as a container of anxiety, but perhaps most correctly as a combination of the two.

Imagining the future imaginations: Wishes and expectations about becoming a social pedagogue

Amy's future wishes and expectations are to combine her vocational farmer training with her social pedagogue degree. She sees the latter as a low status profession, commenting: "It's low paid and the present situation is not good at all", but she is nevertheless optimistic about finding a job. Since being a social pedagogue requires a bachelor degree and she has farm training, she can apply for a job at the School of Agriculture as a teacher, which she hopes to do. Amy states:

> But I think if I'm able to combine my social pedagogue degree with my agriculture and farm training, that if it's not possible to find any work at a day care centre, then I could work at a technical school, for example, or at a school of agriculture. Then I could become one of those lively teachers. Well, that's actually an option. I've thought about that a great deal, that could be a … one … well, a step stone.

In the process of becoming, Amy reflects on her professional life, stimulating thoughts about possible future paths. She is uncertain that she will be able to get a job, especially if she fails some subjects, or worse, does not get her social pedagogue degree. To diminish the various

feelings of anxiety that the vagueness of her future causes, she simplifies reality. From Leithäuser's (2012) perspective of the consciousness of everyday life, Amy is editing reality to lessen the feelings of doubt, activating an imagined meaning – a dream – of becoming a lively teacher with a synthesised profession. She wants to become as happy and competent as she recalls being as a farmer. The acquisition of a new professional identity simultaneously carries the old identity but in the process of *becoming*, this will change in the coming future.

Conclusion

The qualitative research method employed in this article conceptualises identity change and learning as moments in individual life courses and subjective life experiences. An applied life-history-based psycho-societal approach also formed the foundation for the analysis. This method offered a rich, detailed, more complex and, arguably, more humane view of the human subject, without reducing the subject to merely a social determinant. These results thus reflect the aim that by capturing something of the complexity of our subjects, we offer something true about them (Hollway & Jefferson, 2007:156).

With this aim in mind, the goal of this article was to apply a psycho-societal approach to illustrate how a farmer *becomes* a social pedagogue. Analysing the case of a non-traditional student, Amy, as an individual subject primarily shows that the career change of *becoming* a social pedagogue when already equipped with the professional identity of farmer is challenging, provoking feelings of defensiveness and ambivalence. The outcome of her process uncovered by the analysis is manifold as Amy's life experiences, emotional engagement and interactions play a significant role in *becoming*.

The analysis contains examples of instabilities in the Amy's text that illustrate feelings of ambivalence toward her fellow students. She is dependent on their academic skills, for example, regarding group work and she thinks that some of them are talented but she simultaneously labels them as immature and not suitable as either students or future social pedagogues. The manner in which Amy operates linguistically varies. For example, she employs the discourse she acquired as a farmer as a useful tool to aid in learning the professional skills needed to be a social pedagogue, using language that is familiar to her, i.e. that of a farmer, also has a strong attraction.

Amy's idea of a combined profession or occupation as a teacher at the School of Agriculture is a result of dwelling not only on her former job as a farmer but also the anxiety she projects onto what a positive future might bring. She reacts self-protectively and uses an identity defence. Although the acquisition process is an ambivalent one, where she simultaneously wishes to become a social pedagogue and yet acts against her own best interests by holding onto her farmer identity, she nonetheless demonstrates that she has the ability to combine competences and to re-activate and re-configure knowledge and skills in a new context.

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Endnote

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