Identity transformation as an intercontextual process

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Abstract: Societal and organizational change requires people to change their professional identity continuously. Starting from two theoretical traditions that address identity and learning, the authors analysed the learning narratives of two sets of learners – participants in a two-year experiential learning programme and student interns, both in the domain of organizational behaviour. They then developed a model of transformational learning for two aspects of a learner's professional identity: (1) the change in concepts and images that relate to who we consider ourselves to be; and (2) the development of a healthy self-worth and self-confidence. This differentiation of transformational learning into two distinct and complementary processes constitutes the contribution of this research to the theoretical understanding of identity transformation. By means of the notion of 'intercontextuality', the authors also describe the process that integrates the individual sense-making perspective and the relational–participatory perspective on identity learning.

Keywords: transformational learning; professional identity; professional development; organizational behaviour

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Understanding transformational identity learning

Our ever-changing society requires people to change their concepts of themselves, the world, the past and the future. These concepts are often objects of identification, in the sense that they relate to who we consider ourselves to be. First, we start from the proposition that increasing environmental change, diversity and complexity demand personal change – in the sense of transformation rather than mere expansion. Second, we presuppose that lifelong learning needs to address the whole person. In an industrial context in which 'knowledge work' is increasingly important, professionals need to be able to manage themselves, since the 'self', the individual person, is to an ever greater extent the most important 'instrument' at their disposal. In this regard the continuous acquisition of new information, knowledge and skills is not enough: the learning that supports the creation of sustainable competitive advantages is 'deep' learning which facilitates the development of the professional at an attitudinal level (see Hart, 2001).

Education and training (organized by business schools) can be important vehicles in meeting this challenge. This article contributes to the development of learning theory, and more specifically to the theoretical understanding of identity transformation. Based on these insights, innovative learning practices that support 'deep' professional development can be devised.

Transformational learning can occur at the level of information, technical–theoretical knowledge and skills and identity. We assume that learning at each competence level (see also Spencer and Spencer, 1996) has its own distinct dynamics. Further, transformational learning can be distinguished from expansive learning. Expansive learning, at an identity level, signifies a confirmation or elaboration of the identity. Identity *transformation* involves a more profound change, in the sense that old elements are put into the background and new ones come to the fore. Here we follow Mezirow (1991a), who makes a similar distinction between the confirmation and transformation of meaning schemes on the one hand, and deeper, less changeable meaning perspectives on the other. This view differs from the notion that deeper learning is equal to more radical, transformational learning, as reflected in the concepts of Bateson's four types of learning, from zero to III (1972/2000), single and double loop learning (Argyris and Schön, 1996), and simple and transformative learning (Robertson, 1996). So, in this article we choose to make a distinction between learning *levels* (information, knowledge and skills, identity) on the one hand and *kinds* of learning (expansion and transformation) on the other. Our focus is on identity transformation and expansion.

Two theoretical traditions: adult and situated learning

In his personal, almost autobiographical story about the evolutions in contemporary psychology, Bruner (1990) states that, after the rise of the behaviourist learning theory, two new currents were discernible: the cognitive revolution, in which constructivism was to be situated, and transactional contextualism. Two theoretical perspectives which explicitly connect identity and learning are the *adult learning tradition*, related to constructivism, and the *situated learning approach*, related to transactional contextualism. We consider these approaches as complementary to each other (for example, Hansman (2001) states that the implications of contextual or situated learning for adult learning have not yet been sufficiently explored). The theoretical goal of our study is to connect the adult learning and situated learning perspectives.

The adult learning tradition builds on the constructivist assumption that learning is an active and intentional process of meaning construction. This tradition also builds on the assumption of humanistic psychologists that 'there is a basic human impulse to grow towards healthy, full humanness, self-actualization, or perfection' (Maslow, 1991, p 117; in Merriam *et al*, 1996; see also Rogers, 1961/1995). Growth can be seen as a journey 'from relatively narrow and self-centered filters through increasingly inclusive, differentiated, and compassionate perspectives' (Daloz, 1986, p 149; see also Mezirow, 1991a; Tennant and Pogson, 1995).

Statements such as 'the system of meaning that each person constructs defines the self' (Merriam and Clark, 1993, p 130) and 'we are basically what we have learnt' (Jarvis, 2001, p 53) indicate that learning and identity are seen as closely related. Learning results from the encounter between new experiences and the identity or self (Jarvis, 1987b, 2001; Merriam and Clark, 1993), consisting of meaning systems or frames of reference, biography and self-concept. Therefore the adult learning literature has a rather cognitive orientation (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999), which is mirrored in the importance of reflection. Reflection (Kolb, 1984; Mezirow & Associates, 1990; and Jarvis, 1987b, 2001) creates a space that allows people to relate to new experiences, because experience 'can never be grasped in its immediate manifestation but only reflectively as past experience' (Van Manen, 1990, p 36; see also Weick, 1995). By means of reflection people can, to a certain extent, become aware of their pre-reflectively appropriated identity through socialization processes (Mezirow, 1991a, 1991b). Yet it is difficult to think *about* values (read 'identity') because we think *in* values (Butler, 1996). Reflection is presented here as an important mediator between experience and identity. Otherwise 'we remain prisoners of our own pre-reflective biases and preconceptions' (Geller, 1982, p 61).

Mezirow's (1991a) model of transformational learning contains ten steps (pp 168–169), which can also be reinterpreted in the light of Kolb's (1984) learning cycle: (a) a disorienting experience is followed by (b) critical reflection resulting in (c) a change of perspective, which is consensually validated through a reflective dialogue with others and (d) thereafter pragmatically validated by action from the new perspective (Baumgartner, 2001; see Brookfield, 1987b who presents a similar model). Although presented in a linear-rational sequence, a more spiral-iterative interpretation of Mezirow's theory appears to be more valid (Courtenay *et al*, 1998).

Adult learning literature is mainly individually (Clark and Wilson, 1991) and cognitively (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999; Merriam, 2001) oriented; nevertheless, the importance of the relational is also acknowledged (see Mezirow, 1991b; Jarvis, 2001) or 'espoused' (as Argyris and Schön, 1996, would say). Most authors underline the importance of psychological safety (Brookfield, 1987a; Daloz, 1986; Merriam and Heuer, 1996; see also Schein, 2002) – as presupposed by Maslow (1968/1999) and Rogers (1980/1995) – which facilitates critical self-examination (Cranton, 1994). We realize that, except for these insights from humanistic psychology, 'the examination of the adult education literature regarding the intra- and interpersonal dynamics of the educational helping relationship, particularly cases of transformative learning, reveals that with a few exceptions the literature largely neglects the topic' (Robertson, 1996, p 45; see also Merriam, 2001).

The constructivist assumption implies that the learner is seen as 'an intellectual Robinson Crusoe' (Holman *et al*, 1997, p 139), an isolated, solipsistic entity detached from its relational environment, but capable of dealing with itself and its surroundings through the reflective construction of adequate meaning systems (Fenwick, 2000). The humanistic assumption implies that the individual is seen as an autonomous entity with an inner, stable, true self that spontaneously develops provided that psychological and social influences do not hamper the process (Usher, 1992, in Tennant and Pogson, 1995). The relational is conceptualized as a 'conductive environment' (Williams and Irving, 1996) that plays no positive and active role in the learning process.

From a situated learning perspective the relational context constitutes the learning process, which is consistent with the idea that the self is situated both socially and historically (see the social constructionist perspective – Gergen, 1994). The breakthrough of this perspective on learning is connected with the observation that 'despite the educational boom of the last fifty years, it remains true that individuals learn more as members than they do as students' (Thomas, 1998, p 358). It is therefore worthwhile to search for a kind of learning that occurs in the course of authentic activity (Brown and Duguid, 1996), as opposed to pedagogic activity, which focuses on learning itself (Brown *et al*, 1989). When people act and interact with one another, they are focused on participation rather than learning – but learning allows people to do this. From this point of view, 'school learning is just learning school' (Wenger, 1998): people learn the local cues and ploys – the 'hidden curriculum' (French and Bazalgette, 1996; Snyder, 1971) – that will allow them to

participate and become members of a community (St Clair, 1998). Lave and Wenger (1991) took an important step towards the understanding of learning as a process of relational repositioning within a community. To understand the learning process means that we understand how we become a member of a community of practice, and how our identity within that community is continuously redefined. Lave and Wenger's central concept, 'legitimate peripheral participation', is described by Brown and Duguid (1996, p 69) as 'an analytical category or tool for understanding learning across different methods, different historical periods, and different social and physical environments'. Each of these three words, 'participation', 'legitimacy' and 'peripherality', denotes a complementary relational quality between the newcomer and the community. These words therefore facilitate the view of learning as an enculturation process through which the learner becomes a full member of the community.

Learning goes hand in hand with a growing identification with the community, but this does not mean that individuals lose their peculiarities, the characteristics that allow them to contribute to and transform the community in which they participate (Brown and Duguid, 1996; Lave and Wenger, 1991). Hay (1993) criticized Lave and Wenger for not emphasizing strongly enough this active role of the learner-newcomer and his or her different, divergent practices, and how these could contribute to the community. Wenger (1998, p 85) acknowledges Hay's critique: communities of practice are 'the cradle for the self, but also the potential cage of the soul'. Only with difficulty can people change without the support of a community, but radical changes cannot be realized within one and the same community. In order to understand learning, the learner can be regarded as a broker (Wenger, 1998) or boundary crosser (Engeström, 2001; Guile and Griffith, 2001) 'acting within a field of diverse and interweaving communities' (St Clair, 1998, p7). Instead of 'contextuality', one can speak of 'inter(con)textuality' (Lemke, 1997). If we regard identity as a junction between multiple communities, we can acknowledge the unique, personal character as well as the contextual-relational character of identity (Wenger, 1998).

Research question and methodology

The focus of this paper is on the theoretical side of the research story. Nevertheless, here we provide a brief methodological background to the study.

The question that guides our research endeavour is: how does identity learning, and more specifically

identity transformation, occur? We try to grasp the identity learning process by means of the analysis of narrated significant learning experiences or learning stories. Here we assume that significant experiences prompt identity learning (Merriam and Clark, 1991; Tennant and Pogson, 1995) and that experience and narrative are closely intertwined (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989, 1996).

We chose to explore identity learning in semi-formal learning environments, because closed learning systems (Canning and Martin, 1990) do not foster identity transformation. In these semi-formal learning settings, people are intentionally oriented towards learning (in contrast with informal learning), but what is learnt, and how and when this is done, is not determined unilaterally.

In order to develop a general conceptual framework with a potentially high external validity, we opted for two very different learning environments. Both connect with the organizational behaviour domain with which the researcher is familiar:

(1) CIGO, a two-year post-experience training programme for organization behaviour professionals who are involved in organizational change and HR-related practices; and

(2) a seven-month student internship of final-year senior students studying work and organizational psychology.

In the analysis we focused on the similarities between the learning experiences from both environments in order to develop a broad, integrative framework.

We asked ten CIGO-trainees and eight student interns to narrate significant learning experiences. We interviewed them each three times. In the final analysis, we incorporated a selection of 59 well-documented stories that the respondents considered the most important. Through the comparison between expansive and transformational learning experiences, we formulated two scenarios that gave insight into the process of identity transformation. A further discussion of the applied methodological choices can be found elsewhere (De Weerdt *et al*, 2006).

In order to structure the data collection and data analysis, we assumed a basic configuration of the learning experience that emerged from the literature and the respondents' accounts: what is learnt, the learning context and the context of meaning. By discerning both learning and meaning contexts, we approach identity learning explicitly as an intercontextual process: people learn something because they link experiences related to the learning context with experiences in other contexts that give meaning to the events in the learning context. Learning events refer to other occurrences in other contexts through which they become meaningful. This tripartite relationship resembles three other frameworks: (a) the semiotic triangle of Peirce (in Culler, 1981), (b) Giorgi's (1989) interrelated dimensions of human experience: its meaning, the social dimension (how is one involved?) and the historical dimension (what happened before and after?), and (c) Pettigrew's (1985, 1987) analytical categories, which are helpful when studying change – content, process and context (that is, the what, how and why of change).

From the constructivist perspective of the *adult learning* literature, the notion of meaning context refers to the learner's autobiographical experience that gives meaning to new experiences acquired in the learning situation (Jarvis, 2001): people do not learn in a vacuum. The idea of context of meaning helps us to gain insight into how other contexts are brought into the learning enterprise and how they contribute to the meaning construction of the learning experience. The constructivist idea that the construction of knowledge proceeds simultaneously with the construction of the 'context of use' (Eraut, 1994) is here widened to a 'context of meaning': studying identity rather than knowledge, we exchange 'usefulness' with the broader idea of 'meaningfulness'. From a *situated learning* perspective, the significance of knowledge relates to its situated character (Brown and Duguid, 1996). However, people participate simultaneously in multiple communities and in doing so they can be regarded as linking pins (after Likert, 1961) connecting diverse contexts. Therefore, learners need to deal with a multiplicity of identities (Tulviste, 1991) and their multi-memberships (Wenger, 1998). The construction of the situated curriculum takes place in the encounter between learning context and other contexts; that is, between learning context and other contexts; that is, contexts of meaning. In short, from an adult learning point of view, 'context' is closely related to meaning construction, whereas from a situated perspective 'context' refers to the relational and the idea of community. So we handle the notion of context as a bridging concept between the two approaches, and this allows us to integrate – to a certain extent – both theoretical traditions.

Results: two complementary learning scenarios

The confrontation between data and theoretical concepts and propositions resulted in two distinct and complementary learning scenarios, both of which describe a process of identity transformation. Both scenarios provide insight into a certain kind of transformational learning narrative. We propose that, to the extent that the narrative deviates from these

scenarios, transformational learning is hampered and an expansive kind of learning comes to the front.

Learning scenario 1

Example – one of Leo's learning experiences as a CIGO participant:

Leo introduces himself as the superintendent of a hospital and starts the conversation with a description of the hospital. What drives him in the job is his constant care of the patients. Throughout the session he typifies himself as a person with a 'passion for pastoral work', 'inspired by the holy fire', a 'fanatic' and a 'perfectionist', a workaholic. He wants to step out of the rat race – where he feels like a hamster in a wheel – into the CIGO programme in order to reflect and reorient. He continuously stresses his introspective attitude: 'I am circumspect: I do not undergo [life in CIGO] passively'. He himself calls his learning a 'detoxification process'.

During the first week of the programme, Leo finds himself without the instrument-objective structure typical of his professional context. Paradoxically, because of this lack of structure, he initially experiences CIGO as a straitjacket and stresses the compulsiveness of the training: 'there was no escape'. The participants set up informal contacts and he notices how they become a group rather than a collection of individuals. Moreover, he finds a soul mate, a participant who also works in a hospital: 'there is an identical twin in the group'. As the participants reveal more of themselves, Leo admires their rich, diversified lifestyles: 'I have observed the evolution of this group, which has forced me to undergo their diversity'.

What he misses at work are informal contacts. He has ended up in a lonely spot, having been in charge for two decades. His social web has to a large extent disintegrated. But he hopes to function more in a team context from now on since there is a new board at the hospital. He hopes to establish contexts that transcend purely professional aspects and to be able to discuss all kinds of topics.

He contrasts his experiences in CIGO with his one-sided life, commuting between home and office and with the emphasis on work: 'to do something else is stolen time'. He refers to the agricultural three-course rotation when he states that he lives in a monoculture: he feels the need for a third element in his life, something above and beyond home and office. This will give him a more multi-coloured life, which will improve the quality, rather than the quantity, of his professional life and of his contacts with others. During the two follow-up interviews he mentions some of the steps he has taken: rather than watching TV at home – an excuse to read – he takes his wife to the cinema, rides his bike, participates in a parents' committee and is now the chairman of the nurses' and midwives' association.

Learning scenario 1 consists of three processes or 'movements' of learning: orientation, elaboration and (non-hierarchical – see further on) integration (introduced in De Weerdt *et al*, 2002). Each movement

has three aspects: participating, relational positioning and meaning construction.

In the *orientation process* the learning curriculum is constructed. When entering the learning community, the learner participates ideally in a way that is congruent with the way he or she participates in other specific contexts. This gives the learner the experience of having acted 'authentically' (that is, according to who he or she is) elsewhere. In this learning scenario other members of the learning community do not value the practices Leo introduces into the learning community and/or there is an initial sense of alienation from the community. The relational quality between the learner and other members (or the community as a whole) decreases; the relational field is out of balance. In the example this is manifested by Leo's discomfort during his first days at CIGO. The experience triggers the construction of a curriculum: the unfavourable relational position, in which the learner finds himself, invites him to articulate a more valued identity. Confronted with the diversity in the group, Leo's longing for a richer professional identity grows. This curriculum construction is facilitated if there is recognition – that is, an experience of congruence between the way the learner encounters himself in the learning context and the way he does this in other contexts (see (1) in Figure 1). More implicitly, Leo's discomfort resembles the kind of experience he has in other (family) situations in which he is not supposed to work (although he does). This course leads to the construction of a learning tension, defined as the experienced discrepancy between the encountered self and an ideal, valued identity in the community. The strength of recognition gives a certain weight to this learning tension.

Trust, psychological safety and self-confidence facilitate this orientation process: if the learner feels at ease and if there's enough self-appreciation, he can more easily (a) participate according to who he considers himself to be (according to constructed identities related to other contexts) and (b) come to a recognition of the situation in which he finds himself and of the need to do something about it. In the example, Leo is determined not to run away from the difficult situation he finds himself in, which allows him to encounter an unwanted part of himself.

This moment of orientation is characterized by congruence, which means that the learning curriculum is construed more or less simultaneously in the learning contexts and in contexts of meaning. The *elaboration moment*, on the contrary, is the moment in which the learner makes a difference in terms of his or her identity now and past experiences (see (2) in Figure 1). In the elaboration moment, the learner participates in a way that is incongruent with the way in which he or she
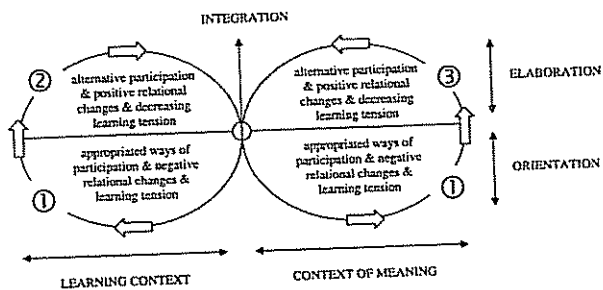
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Figure 1. Learning scenario 1.

participates in other contexts: it involves a change of tack. Ideally, this change is well received by the other members, which results in a restoration of the relational field. The learner then connects again with others and the identity of community. This is illustrated by Leo's process of establishing relationships with other members and actually becoming a member of the CIGO community rather than a prisoner in it. Being a member of CIGO alone contributes to a richer, more multi-coloured life. Therefore the learning tension (related to learning context) may decrease, which goes along with the rewriting of one's identity. Here also, psychological safety and self-confidence provide a certain foundation for the rewriting of the self, which makes it easier to jump into the water.

The *integration* moment takes place when both orientation and elaboration movements are taken up in the contexts to which the events in the learning context are referring; that is, the contexts of meaning (see (3) in Figure 1). The experience of congruence in the orientation process invites the learner to negotiate and construct a related learning curriculum in other contexts too, which makes it possible to engage in these contexts in an elaboration process. CIGO confronts Leo with his one-sided life and his new membership invites him to establish new relationships at work and in other communities. Hence what happens in these contexts of meaning is not merely a replica of what happens in the learning context.

We assume that, ideally, there is a process of orientation and a process of elaboration in all the contexts involved. In what sense can learning contexts be discerned from contexts of meaning? From a meaning construction perspective, the learning context is the context put in the foreground and thus referring to the contexts of meaning. Therefore, every context is potentially a learning context. From a relational perspective, the learning context is the context in which the relational quality allows the process of orientation and elaboration to happen first. If the relational conditions are insufficient, the learning process can shift

to one of the contexts of meaning – which as a result becomes the learning context.

Learning scenario 2

Example – one of Renka's learning experiences as a student intern:

Renka starts her student internship in the HR department of a media firm. Her tasks include recruiting and selection – specifically, campus recruitment, drafting a welcom e brochure, organizing sessions for employees, filing applications and organizing social elections. Halfway through her internship, after about four months, she decides to move on to a different type of internship, opting for an organization dedicated to the integration of the disabled into the job market.

Already, during the first contact with her supervisor, there is an atmosphere of insecurity and distrust. Although she herself experiences the atmosphere on the job as positive – informal, with plenty of laughter – her performance is constantly scrutinized and the feedback is negative, often destructive. 'They made me go round in circles . . . Nathalie kept a close eye on me. [. . .] Towards the end of my internship [in that organization] I made a minor mistake for which they reprimanded me really harshly.' Also: 'Many things that seemed trifling to me, apparently were sensitive to them. [. . .] A lot of their remarks hurt me. [. . .] Frans and Nathalie are truly strong characters and I felt a weakling in comparison.'

Renka could count on the support and sympathy of the people from the social administration. She had already done a holiday job with them before her training and she intends to go back there at the explicit request of the documentation department team. 'I could not return to the personnel department. But I will go back to the documentation department for a second holiday job. I enjoyed working with these people last summer: I hit it off with them. Moreover, they are somehow at odds with the personnel department. When I left it, they said: it does you honour.'

She decides to leave her internship position and look for a different one. Renka defines this as a necessity, as a compulsion: 'I was at my wits' end. I could not possibly stay there for three more months. When I got up in the morning I felt nauseated, suffered from abdominal cramps'. Also: 'That last week, when I woke up, I did not feel at all like getting up. I really felt sick.' She does not feel that her decision to start an internship elsewhere is proof of her 'running away from a problematic situation, because I think that you have every right to quit when you feel utterly miserable'.

Renka finds trust and support in her new internship post. Her new supervisor gives her advice and reassurance: 'You can do it! [. . .] It is very understandable that you are nervous. Everyone [who does this for the first time] is nervous. I myself was all in a tremor when I had to do this for the first time.' He gives her a free rein, he gives her trust: 'It is not for me to tell you what to do. I am willing to help you, but you should prove yourself in these three months.'

'From one internship post to the other was a complete reversal. [. . .] I felt completely at ease [in the second post]. That [academic] year simply consisted of two parts.' Renka concludes: 'What matters to me, what I have learned is that there is no need to be unhappy anywhere. Yet some people think that there is no possibility [for change] so they keep plodding on. You do have the possibility to quit.' This is what she has learned from this experience. She also reports: 'My second practical has made me stronger, because I did not consider myself a weakling, a dwarf. If I ever found myself in a similar situation as in my first internship post, I would be a lot more self-assured, knowing: look, you can do it.'

Learning scenario 2 also describes an enculturation process, but a more harmonious one. The learner participates in a way that is congruent with appropriated ways of participating elsewhere. This goes along with an increasing relational quality: through her participation the learner connects with others and the community as a whole. This positive interaction between the learner's participation and the quality of the relationship with other members leads to a sense of safety and trust (see (2) in Figure 2). Renka's second internship experience (here conceived as a learning context) illustrates this process. In scenario 2, the positive experience in the learning context is sharply contrasted with its opposite, that in the context of meaning – where the learner participates in a way that is strange to herself. She is not able to be herself, which coincides with a decreasing relational quality with other members: whatever she does, it is no good. In the context of meaning, the learner ends up in a negative spiral of conflict between self-alienation and relational deterioration, which contrasts with the experiences in the learning context (see (1) in Figure 2). This negative spiral can be found in Renka's first internship experience (here conceived as a context of meaning).

This learning scenario 2 is characterized by the absence of orientation and elaboration processes: there is no construction of a learning curriculum. Therefore, in this scenario the dimension of meaning construction is not well articulated: the learner 'discovers' retrospectively that she has changed and this realization results from the contrasting experience described above. Renka realizes 'afterwards' that she has become strong through what she has experienced.

By means of learning scenario 1 the content dimension of the learner's identity is addressed: scenario 1 is about the transformation of the images of who we are and what we stand for (see Leo's quest for a rich, multi-coloured identity.) Here, in scenario 2, the process dimension of the identity is addressed – the quality of the relationship we have with ourselves, in terms of self-confidence, self-worth, positive self-treatment. The experience of contrast between the
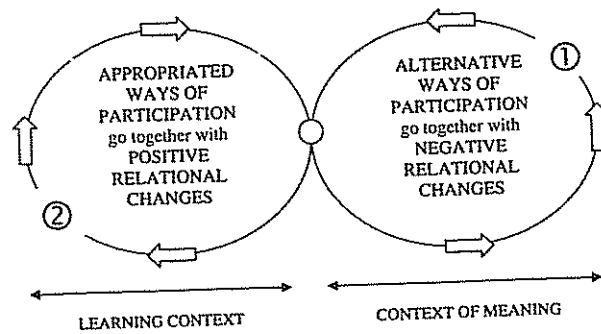

Figure 2. Learning scenario 2.

positive events in the learning context and the negative ones in the context of meaning means that the learner's self-confidence is (to a certain extent) increased (restored).

Discussion

Roughly stated, our findings reflect the situated learning perspective and the adult learning perspective in the sense that transformative learning is conceived both as a process of relational repositioning and of changing participation, and as an active process of meaning construction. This is of course of no surprise, because both frameworks constitute the starting point of our analysis. Learning scenario 1 relates more closely to the adult learning theory, because here the learner is more consciously oriented towards the process of learning itself. Learning scenario 2 is akin to the situated learning theory, because here learning is more embedded in the participation process. Both scenarios, however, are conceived as processes of enculturation from a multiple contextual perspective. We will briefly discuss our findings in relation to the theory of Mezirow.[1]

Mezirow (1991a, 1991b) considers transformative learning as a process based on critical self-examination and also as a process in which people build up 'an empowered sense of self' (1991a, p 161) by successfully taking up different roles from a newly created perspective. Interpreting Mezirow's linear model in a more spiral-like way (Courtenay *et al*, 1998), we subscribe to the view that the validation of the self is not simply a means by which people establish transformative learning; it is an integral part of the process itself. However, we differentiate the process of identity transformation, and as a result we recognize two different but interconnected scenarios which describe the processes of self-examination and self-validation.

The most substantial difference between Mezirow's ideas and the two learning scenarios is the fact that the

Mezirow conceives identity transformation as an emancipation process whereas we conceive it as an enculturation process by which the learner becomes a member of a (learning) community. For Mezirow, transformative learning deals with inadequate assumptions which are acquired through enculturation. This point of view is similar to 'the post-Cartesian ideal of clear, self-responsible thinking . . . the source of one set of disciplines of reflexivity, one in which the subject disengages himself or herself from embodied and social thinking, from prejudices and authority, and is able to think for himself or herself in a disengaged fashion' (Taylor, 1991, pp 304–305). We assume, however, that what is viewed as (in)adequate is not in the first place stipulated by our rational reason but by our membership of the multiple communities in which we dwell simultaneously. Emancipation, liberation and awareness arise, in our view, from multi-membership (Bouwen, 2001).

As stressed by many authors in the adult learning tradition, transformative identity learning is associated with discomfort, anxiety, conflict and crisis. Learning scenario 1 approaches learning from a deficit perspective: the learner is confronted with his personal shortcomings in trying to participate in the activity of the community. The relationships with significant others in the community is of a conditional kind, which relates to what Schein (2002) calls 'survival anxiety'. People learn if their survival anxiety exceeds their learning anxiety. This survival anxiety is triggered when the enculturation is hard-pressed: not every way of participating is valued by significant others. If relationships are conditional, power is also involved, and this is an underexposed dimension of learning in both adult learning and situated learning approaches (Fenwick, 2000). Learning scenario 1 contributes to the acknowledgement of the role of power in communities: learning is no non-committal enterprise.

Learning scenario 2 suggests an alternative for the 'no gain without pain' scenario. Although the 'starting point' of the experiences in the context of meaning can be painful (as in the case of Renka), in this scenario the self is strengthened through the learner's participation in the learning context. Here an elevation rather than a deficit perspective spurs learning. This distinction between a deficit and an elevation perspective is also made by Kolb (1984) when he states that 'apprehension is a registrative process transformed . . . by *appreciation*, whereas comprehension is an interpretive process transformed . . . by *criticism*' (p 103; emphasis added). Learning by comprehension is related to scenario 1, in which the learning gets stuck, eliciting a process of meaning construction. Learning by apprehension is related to scenario 2, in which the

learner becomes a member of the learning community in a harmonious and appreciative way. The meaningfulness of this experience lies more tacitly in the experience and activity themselves. This process also resembles Maslow's (1968/1999) description of the learning of children in which he speaks of 'growth through delight'. Here, participation is accompanied by an increasingly positive relational climate that (conditionally) encourages the engagement of the learner and (unconditionally) creates relational safety. In learning scenario 2 the relational characteristics are of a more positive, unconditional kind than those in scenario 1. This enables people to build an unconditional positive self-regard through which they can engage in a self-critical pattern of learning conforming to scenario 1.

These considerations are indicative of the complementary character and interconnectedness of both scenarios.

Conclusion

In 'knowledge' industries that endeavour to create competitive advantage, professionals need to develop themselves not only in terms of knowledge and skills, but also in terms of their attitudes, values and beliefs – in other words, in terms of their identity. Identity transformation contributes to this in-depth, 'deep' professional development. In this paper we have conceptualized this process of identity transformation in the hope that the conceptualization will invite and inspire educational centres to create innovative learning environments which address the professional as a 'whole person', rather than just the hands or the brain.

The contribution of this research to our understanding of identity learning lies in the explicit conceptualization of identity transformation as an intercontextual process, operationalized by the distinction between learning context and the context of meaning – as, for example, in the educational versus the professional context. The mediating concept of context, as a frame of reference and as a community, allows us to link the adult and situated learning traditions. This intercontextual approach attempts to understand learning through the interplay between differences and the congruence of contexts.

Furthermore, we differentiate the process of identity transformation into two different but hypothetically connected sub-processes – represented by scenarios 1 and 2. In scenario 1 the content-related side of identity, the story of who we are and what we stand for, is transformed. The confirmation and continuation of this changed sense of self form the basis for an identity transformation in accordance with scenario 2. In this scenario, the process-related side of identity, our sense

of self-worth and self-confidence, is transformed. Identity transformation in conformity with scenario 1 is grounded on this self-confidence. Scenario 2 is about transforming outer safety into inner safety. Safety within the learning context allows people to make a difference and to transform their identity (according to scenario 2). And if this safety is, to a certain degree, internalized into self-confidence, as in scenario 2, people can more easily translate and integrate their transformed identity – which remains connected with the learning context – into other (possibly professional) contexts that really matter.

Finally, we tried to draw together two theoretical traditions that address identity learning. The adult learning tradition approaches identity learning in the first place as a process of sense-making by the individual learner. The situated learning tradition sees learning as a relational, participatory process. Our framework integrates these different, complementary dimensions of learning by acknowledging that identity learning is a matter both of sense-making and of participation. Identity learning is an individual as well as a relational process. In this article we have attempted to bring these dichotomies together in order to generate a more complete and integrative understanding.

Note

[1]The four ingredients of Kolb's (1984) model can easily be recognized in learning scenario 1, in which participation and meaning construction are part of both the orientation and elaboration moments. Active experimentation and concrete experience, plus apprehensive understanding, connect with the idea of participation. Reflective observation and abstract conceptualization, plus comprehensive understanding, connect with the idea of meaning construction.

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