

Neo subject-scientific learning theory: A reinterpretation¹

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Abstract

This article looks at discourses on relevant German and international theories of learning and examines various lines of criticism with regard to the subject-scientific theory of learning. These points of criticism focus chiefly on the age of the original publications, also on the word subject as a term, the question of corporeality, emotion and habitualness, the relevance of incidental learning and on the research methodology of co-research. The article will also examine moves to connect with and create distance from competing theory systems, as well as attempts to collate and pool advances in and branches of the family of theories. More recent research results are also applied which extend and differentiate between the category system of the subject-scientific theory of learning. Together, this quest for clues and analysis generate a new interpretation of the subject-scientific learning theory.

Keywords

learning theories, neo-subject-scientific theory, post-sovereign subject, qualitative research on learning

1. Why a new interpretation is required

Individuals need good reasons for learning, which then causes them to learn more effectively. This is a popular summary of the core belief of a theory of learning

¹ http://blogs.epb.uni-hamburg.de/lea-verlinkungsstudie/files/2015/09/Neo-subject-scientific-learning-theory_A-Reinterpretation_Grotlueschen.pdf

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based on the individual perspective. But is it true? And are individuals the only people who have a say in the matter? The answer is: of course not, that would be far too simple. But how can the theory of individual learning help to understand adult learning processes and where is it misleading? Is it even still relevant today?

The question of whether the theory of individual learning is still relevant, is sometimes answered with a reference to the more recent international debate. The international influence of the debate on learning theory is impossible to ignore. The roots of pragmatism, constructivism, transformative learning and communities of practice lie in North America. German approaches that are phenomenological, biographical, critical-pragmatic and subject-scientific have on the other hand only occasionally been subject to international debate. But a major paradigm shift in terms of learning theory has not been evident since the turn of the millennium. Approaches which have achieved international recognition were created decades ago (e.g., Mezirow, Lave, Wenger, Illeris, Jarvis, Engeström). Therefore, the question as to how contemporary discussions can be included into the debate on the theory of learning cannot sufficiently help us at the moment by including international approaches.

At the same time, the debate on the theory of learning is facing serious questions due to the latest discourses. The hypotheses on the quality of informal, even incidental or spontaneous learning drawn from the theory of life-long learning contradict one another in terms of the discourse on the theory of learning. On the one hand the necessity of spontaneity is stressed (Nohl, 2006) and on the other hand warnings are given about reverting to familiar territory in terms of incidental learning (Meyer-Drawe, 2012). Frigga Haug clearly criticised any narrowing down to intentional learning (Haug, 2003) and competing theories of learning also advocate the importance of incidental learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

But the issue of localising the learning process and development of competences needs to be raised again. Learning often appears to be thought of too much as a personal act and does not take account of the historical and material involvement of the individuals in terms of their social standing and class background. At the same time, there is criticism that previous approaches might not adequately examine issues regarding the subject, corporeality and emotion, habitualness and contextuality. However, this criticism is sometimes based on an unusual interpretation of the subject-scientific theory of learning. Let us summarise the points that have been criticised (such a concise description as Künkler's is seldom):

We do have the subject-scientific theory to thank for the fact that the learning process is being talked about at all in the learning debate. However, this has occurred at the price of not just a much too rational understanding of human subjectivity and learning which seems to originate from the familiar concept of the ‘sovereign subject’, but also at the price of a systematic blindness towards any relativity of human subjectivity and learning. From this stance, contradictions in learning processes only originate from outside influences; [...] this leads to a constriction in the concept of learning which emerges from an oppositional mind-set regarding self-determination and determination by others [...] and a sacred understanding of the subject which elevates the standpoint of the subject to a quasi-religious level and declares it divine territory. (Künkler, 2008, p. 39)

Tobias Künkler took the trouble to analyse key theories from the individual perspective before passing judgement. Therefore, we should give him credit for the fact that he at least attempted to understand the theory of individual learning. In full awareness of Holzkamp’s responses, in this early article Künkler does imply a rationalism that many others do not interpret in this way (see below). He also suggests a subject detached from structures (he calls it conditions), which I believe are not the core motif in the theory of individual learning (see below). Furthermore, the research methodology used to gain access to the generalised subject’s standpoint appears to be unclear to him. If he declares a sacred superiority of the subject as the starting point, the data can of course only be interpreted by the research subjects themselves. However, as Künkler stated in the notes, only very little research work on the theory of individual learning has presented it in such a sacred superiority as he suggests. As a result, he has doubts about the dualism of expansive and defensive learning. I agree with this, as I believe I did back in early 2003 (Grotlüschen, 2003, p. 313). Even if a grey area did exist between the extremes of expansive and defensive learning, this would still be a different theoretical concept than Künkler’s with his much more differentiated analysis that he suggested in 2011 of a “related link between self-determination and determination by others” in the learning process (Künkler, 2008, p. 341). Künkler also criticises (and rightly too) any reduction to intentional learning, but on the other hand he does not criticise intentional learning here and is therefore falls behind the discourse (see Meyer-Drawe, 2012). Finally, Künkler reveals Holzkamp’s reserved concept of physicality as an element that primarily curbs and obstructs the theoretical construct of body and mind. Despite Holzkamp’s own recourse to corporeality he tends to remain one-sided, the body has more of an inhibitive than a supportive nature and seems to be something that is subordinate to the mind (see Künkler, 2014).

The reasons for some of these assumptions are possibly that more recent debates on adult education silently take some axioms for granted but no longer discuss them. Therefore these need to be revealed. This article attempts to do just that. The article will not go over the discourse in order to summarise any truths about theories from the individual perspective per se, but an *interpretation of the subject-scientific theory of learning* will be exposed which primarily resulted from the work on adult education at the universities of Hamburg and Bremen.

Therefore, if this interpretation integrates or rebuts more recent counter-arguments, it is understood here as a new interpretation of the subject-scientific theory of learning and is therefore called a “*neo subject-scientific interpretation of the learning theory*”. Research results are also added to this interpretation, for example when categorical differentiations in the theory of individual learning have emerged as a result of qualitative research into learning in adult education. These two components – a new interpretation of the word subject as a term and an expansion of the learning theory categories based on the research results – make up the new approach to the theory of individual learning.

The purpose of the following discussion of the criticism uttered is not to provide an exegesis of Holzkamp, but to convey an interpretation, which could probably be considered as a consensus underlying the research in Hamburg. As a result, this could also constitute a division in the debate of critical psychology and theory of individual learning. The core element of the theory interpreted in this way is an emancipatory one, which doubts the conventional distribution of power in the relationship between teaching and learning and elevates the structural transmission of this relationship of power to the object of the conflict and the conflict of interest too. In the approach from the individual perspective, the decision about the course content (which is traditionally the responsibility of the teachers) is a subject of negotiation between teachers and learners. In this case the people learning represent their own interests, which can also be opposed to the interests of the teachers. The conflicts of interest reflected in the pedagogical relationship are always a result of social conditions. Just as the learners can fight for their learning problems to be dealt with, teachers also have an interest in drawing from general course content which can be re-used several times over. Both sides encounter the same problem of working, teaching and learning adequately because they probably lack the time to respond to the concerns of the other party. The social conflict regarding working hours and increasing efficiency is reflected and manifested in pedagogical spheres as well. The theory of individual learning is a political one² because its categories also

² The theory of art educator Nora Sternfeld is pursued who refers to Gramsci, Foucault and Rancière and believes that pedagogy is a genuinely political field (Sternfeld, 2009). Sternfeld does go into socio-theoretical positions extensively, but she lacks any

allow us to query social relationships as they appear in pedagogy and the conflicts in terms of hierarchy and interest which are lurking there.

The new interpretation of the theory of individual learning based on key works on the subject therefore also requires its political potential to be exposed again. The objective cannot be to elevate subjective reasons for learning, which are understood as being individualistic. If that were to be the case, Künkler's criticism would be justified.

2. When subjects learn – misunderstandings and the limits of theory of individual learning

A common question about the concept of the theory of individual learning is the explicitly or implicitly conveyed term 'subject'. If this question is posed from the position of a relational concept of an individual, the answer could be: Yes, when it developed the theory of individual learning definitely implied intention. No, the theory of individual learning does not conceive the subject as constitutive in the sense of relationships with an existing subject. Constructive debate could probably be conducted about this, in particular by referring to Meyer-Drawe, Ricken and Künkler.

However, this requires the subject, presented along the more recent interpretation of the subject-scientific theory of learning, to be separated from one which has to stand for an opposing character of the more recent theory of the subject, in other words a bourgeois, self-determined, western middle-class subject. This bourgeois subject is not a useful reference for a Marxist-inspired theory because it does overlook the historical and material situation of the majority of the population and cannot cover the conditionality of decisions that are allegedly subjective. As the subject-scientific theory of learning definitely developed through an analysis of Marxist theories, a different understanding of the term subject is presumed. An attempt is made to understand it, but above all to reveal a personal interpretation of an appropriate concept of the term subject in this theory. At the same time, a clear difference from a relational understanding of the term subject will remain. In my opinion, it will however be possible as a result to understand both tendencies. In the past, the subject-scientific theory of learning and a bourgeois understanding of the term subject were occasionally seen as synonyms for one another.

learning-theory and didactic element all the more. As regards the first aspect, I do not know of any theory of learning which reveals the political aspect of teaching and learning better than the theory of individual learning.

Therefore, it will be necessary to check whether various publications on the matter create a bourgeois, modern concept of the term subject – an issue which, to date, has not been adequately discussed. The argument is on two levels. First of all we need to ask what is accepted as a modern concept of the term subject and what components are actually inappropriate today. Secondly, we need to ask whether this modern understanding of the term subject is focused in the subject-scientific theory of learning and whether there are signs of a varied concept. Consequently, we need to clarify whether during eras of heightened interest (up to 2005 and up to 2015) a variation of the term subject in the theory of individual learning took place, or possibly will take place, or needs to be phrased as a new interpretation.

Modern subjects – with whom completely different theorists from Descartes to Kant to Habermas are connoted – are accused of creating an autonomous, rational, equal, dualistic, European, male, white, heterosexual subject. The next step is popularly to reject this subject as inadequate. However, I would like to make clear what aspects of this subject concept I consider inadequate today and which should be retained. As long as modern times have emancipated themselves from class-based society and religious regulations, as long as it has elevated logical arguments as tools of law and science, as long as it requires responsible conduct, equality before the law and formation of government, it does not appear to be a concept which should be renounced easily. However, distinctions do appear to be required.

2.1 The apparently autonomous subject is a socialised one

When it is assumed that the subject in modern times is autonomous (in some cases: self-determined and capable of making decisions), one argument proposed is that this term has no concept of submitting or involving the subject in their society, their habitus or personal circumstances. More recent concepts of the term subject understand the subject as both a developing and subservient being – a prominent current example of this is Judith Butler based on Michel Foucault. Others, the prime example here is Pierre Bourdieu, question how far a society with its formal openness does unwillingly ensure the reproduction of inequality by carrying out informal closing processes.

The concepts of subjectivation and habitus theory commit their concept of subject to a societal theory. Foucault's theory of power assumes that every individual is involved in power relationships (Foucault, 1976). Foucault rejects a concept of antagonism of two opposing classes where there are powerful owners of capital and a powerless proletariat. Pierre Bourdieu and Michael Vester's underlying theory of social background views the social model not as class

antagonism, but in three class statuses (Vester et al., 2001). In other words, the subject's autonomy is restricted here based on different social models.

The subject-scientific theory of learning is also linked to social theory. It places a Marxist analysis of society at the beginning. It concerns socialised subjects with real interests and expanded influence on their own circumstances (Holzkamp, 1983). Therefore, subjects of critical psychology are not unfettered by conditions (as Künkler mistakenly assumes), but are always the products of social structures in which they are involved and subjected to, therefore viewing society from their own positions in the social space which serve as the premise for their ability to act. This is particularly clear in early literature on the theory of individual learning. In *Grundlegung der Psychologie* in 1983, Holzkamp attacks what he believes is the overly psychologically variable approach to individual psyches and contrasts it with a model of the thoroughly socialised subject. As explained in more detail below, socialisation also involves the imperceptible internalisation of social norms. Therefore, it is surprising that ten years later Holzkamp drew on another theory as a social framework for his theory of learning. He applies the power theories described in the second volume of Foucault's famous trilogy. By referring to "discipline and punishment" he distinguishes between the types of untrustworthy disciplinary techniques in school lessons. He expands the discourse to include criticism of ideology of innate talent and school questioning techniques, as well as the difficult insinuation of proven truths.

In 1993, Holzkamp's view of the theory of individual learning leads to the learning-theory debate on how learning subjects can deal with this social fabric in a reasoned way. Therefore, the theory of individual learning uses a socialised (1983) and governmentality-theory-based (1993) subject model.³ More recent research work also applies habitus-based theories (Bremer, 2007, Grotlüschen, 2010) instead of class-antagonistic or governmentality-based approaches.

In the theory of individual learning, the subject's autonomy is however not a given, but is something that has to be achieved. In this case there is indeed a certain level of normativity and a rationale of improvement as regards the theory of individual learning. I believe however that we are not talking about the rationale of self-perfection, or the neoliberal rationale of increasing efficiency. It is much more about a materialistic rationale of improving the ability to control one's own personal circumstances, in other words about *extended* (even if never full) autonomy in contrast to a dependence on the status given by birth, by employers, by parents or spouses.

³ Holzkamp is often criticised for this decision with the result that he replies to it in a response in 1997 and gives reasons for his choice (Holzkamp, 1997b).

In the concept of the subject-scientific theory of learning, the much-discussed “extension of control possibilities” is the key reason for learning. It was often criticised because it was considered too technical, too material, and too driven by skills which could be put use. Sometimes a response to this criticism was that from an aesthetic and philosophical standpoint understanding of self and the world could indeed be understood as extended control. However, today a more materialistic nuance is focused on here. What is so characteristic about the subject-scientific theory of learning is its immanent conveyance of social conditions. These are also always linked to materialistic distributional conflicts. Therefore, extended influence on personal circumstances is always a question of poverty and wealth, of secure jobs and influence and of political codetermination.

In this interpretation of the theory of individual learning, extension of control is very much on the material side of personal circumstances. Without wanting to imply that adult education could solve all social distributional conflicts by individuals engaging in further education or training, extension of control is nevertheless the key motivation in adult learning. In other words, learning is pursued in order to enjoy security even in cases of unemployment, illness or in old age. Learning takes place in order to gain control over time, including time for further education or training, to engage in political and cultural life, or to have time for reading. Control over material circumstances also includes living space and freedom of movement, the recognition of structural associations, opportunities to define political and professional lives and the ability to define concepts in terms of families and partnerships. This also implies being allowed to bring up children to enhance their skills – and not according to specifications laid down by the department for the welfare of young people (video).⁴ This enhanced control can also include collectively regulated areas for society as a whole (which could range from retail and building cooperatives to fishing rights to Creative Commons). My interpretation is that this extension of control is not simply offered to the subject, but is something that needs to be achieved politically. Depending on the location of the socialised subjects in the social space, the forces opposing the subjects can be different, but material superiority is one thing they have in common. It is often more a globalised accumulation of capital than a political opponent in a democratic space.

Therefore, more recent debate on the theory of learning does try to re-associate learning more with experience, contexts and places of learning (Faulstich & Bayer, 2009; Faulstich, 2013; Faulstich, 2014). The debate on

⁴ A video lecture in 13 parts exists in which Holzkamp explains in a highly differentiated fashion in what way a case study of practical social work includes an implied theory which is opposed to the interests of a mother and child in terms of adding to skills: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F3wu0u_7W6s.

critical psychology, published on the tenth anniversary of Holzkamp's death, also demands a greater emphasis on contexts and structures respectively (Dreier, 2006; Baldauf-Bergmann, 2006). Consequently, there does appear to be a danger that after the turn of the millennium this societal-mediatedness of individual existence, secured for society as a whole, is forgotten due to the socio-theoretical reconnection of the theory of individual learning.

2.2 The apparently rational subject is a subject that subjectively acts reasonably

There is a tendency to consider the modern subject as a rational one. I believe that rationality as a term often has a negative connotation and suggests an exaggeratedly purposeful, calculated, self-serving and well-conceived process of decision-making. In adult education in German-speaking countries, this theory does exist (Schmidt, 2009) even if it is a controversial one.

But let us turn to the positive aspect of rationality first. I believe that this idea primarily assumes that everybody is capable of rational thought. This in turn also includes verbalising and expounding on feelings, involvement and structures, criticising arguments, which are not compelling, weighing up arguments and reconciling interests in processes of negotiation. The purpose of rationality is to control actions and it applies logic, reflection and therefore cognition.

However, the concept becomes problematic if rationality is alleged to be the only way of controlling actions. By no means is every action the result of reflection, cognition is not the basis for every decision and what appears logical can be a hopeless mess when looked at from another perspective. In my view, the subject-scientific theory of learning can therefore also not be interpreted as rational but due to decisions, which have been subjectively taken in a *reasonable way*. These are however also dependant to the own perspective, thus a reason for a subjectively reasonable course of action does not require any objective validity. Secondly, emotional and motivational aspects (for example in the quality of the experience of discrepancies) also accompany cognition. In my interpretation of the subject-scientific theory of learning, emotions (if they can be articulated) are also the basis of subjectively reasonable actions. If subjects for example attend a learning group because they enjoy the proximity to and attention from the other members of the group, this feeling is a subjectively logical reason for taking part in the group. Thirdly, this interpretation of the theory of individual learning does not imply that each course of action is preceded by a process of consideration. Many actions occur pre-reflectively – or Bourdieu might say habitually. Learning theories from Dewey to Meyer-Drawe to Holzkamp differentiate between problematic requests for action which cannot be mastered with the usual range of

options (experience, experience of discrepancy, inquiry) and familiar actions (habit, habitus). Subjective reason does not include these unquestioned habits, which is why it seems often so unreasonable from another perspective. From a subjective perspective it might be reasonable to get into a car despite warnings of traffic jams – even if people who are less used to cars might consider this to be extremely unreasonable. In other words, in the new interpretation from the individual perspective, *restricted* reasoned action due to habit or a lack of questions asked is part of the concept. It is also part of the teaching-learning relationship, which is always about *expanding* on the limits of reflection and gaining greater scope for action.

Therefore, I believe that this type of subject-scientific theory of learning assumes that everybody can broaden this particular horizon, debate unquestioned premises (with the help of teachers), reflect on their own habitus, or think about their own processes of suppression. As a result, subjects are capable of offering an advanced, more general rationale for why they act. Consequently, without any guidance from religious authorities or officials, people acting based on subjective rationality are capable of rejecting or interpreting their religion and negotiating their societal model themselves. The ability to think is a condition for the emancipation from a class-based society and religious dictates. As far as I am aware, the substance of this aspect of the debate is not questioned.

2.3 The irrational, suppressing, familiarised, habitualised subject

Even if in the previous section distinctions were made as regards the concept of rationality, the purpose of the following section is to take a closer look at the many elements again which are not directly associated with (subjective) logic. These aspects include irrationality, suppression, experience, familiarity, corporeality and habitus. Two ideas can be identified that get to grips with this question: First of all it is the discourse about rationale itself, which *integrates* the above-mentioned socio-theoretical questions. A second approach is to *juxtapose* the theory of individual learning with other theories. Both are considered legitimate and appropriate in order to combat the risk of the sort of learning, which is understood as being individualistic.

Modern theories can be interpreted in such a way that they are directed exclusively at self-determined, subjectively reasonable individuals. However, it is also possible to understand both of these – the capability as regards self-determination and reason – as a foundation and which are a condition for emancipation from illegitimate domination. At the same time they do not describe everything that human actions consist of. Interpreted in this way, from the, of course limited (due to the process of socialisation) perspectives of the

subjects, they would always be able to articulate what they subjectively believe is advisable. Therefore, subjects believe they have reasons for the way they act. Based on this logic, experience, corporeity, habitus, subjectification, suppression and emotion cannot be seen as complementary to the theory of individual learning, but as representing a socialisation, the limits of which subjects do not reflect on, but which however they implicitly include in their subjective logic. Holzkamp explains this concept based on the example of the subconscious in the response to various misunderstandings of the theory of learning based on the individual perspective published in 1996:

We were then quickly accused of not taking into account the subconscious level that exists in people in our theory. (Holzkamp 1996, p. 262)

It is exactly this argument that is still presented today (see Künkler above). But according to the people who created it, the rationale of the theory according to the individual perspective goes much deeper and assumes that *suppression into the subconscious* is an act of a subjectively logical way of life. Because as a result, any “objectionable stimuli” (ibid, p. 263) which cannot be reconciled with a subjectively sound lifestyle are removed, so that a sensible way of life can be created. If the argument is expanded to include the habitus concept from 1996, then it would be subjectively advisable to automate repeated and tried-and-tested courses of action to such an extent that they can progress in a pre-reflective manner. This process of suppression or (even physical) familiarisation is subjectively advisable, but has not been reflected on, nor is it intentional.

By applying rationality, it is now possible to ask what questions suggest the suppression or familiarisation of certain aspects of life. The question as to why is not answered fully by psychological responses, but requires a look at historical and societal relationships. At the same time habitus and suppression are attributed with the basic ability to reflect – even if this is difficult individually and is not fully possible. By applying a similar logic, emotions can be considered subjectively reasonable and can be reconstructed with hindsight as regards their role and underlying reasons for them. Experiences on the other hand have no subjective reason because these occur without any input from the subject – but the low or high level of attention we give them is also based on subjective logic.

Therefore, the new interpretation of the theory according to the individual perspective differentiates more than the rational-choice assumption: Subjects act rationally by assessing their circumstances and possibilities. It is true that there are many things they cannot reflect on because these things have long since become a habit or a matter of course (Wittpoth, 2005; Meyer-Drawe, 2012). In the theory according to the individual perspective, this aspect does not have a

habitus-theory-based solution, but an ideological-critical one – based on the 1983 publication *Grundlegung der Psychologie*. Opinions may differ here, but the claim that Holzkamp hypostatizes an all-perceiving subject, is no longer sustainable if this background is borne in mind. The question why subjects sometimes do the opposite of what third parties think is good for them, is answered by Holzkamp. He offers the two terms of generalised and restrictive abilities to act (Holzkamp, 1983, e.g. p. 367 cf. and 480 cf.). A generalised ability to act assumes that subjects look at social structures and act according to them. A restrictive ability to act manifests itself if subjects do not recognise what framework their lives have and consider it to be something that is taken for granted that cannot be questioned. As a result, from this perspective subjects act for understandable reasons, but involuntarily reproduce existing conditions. From a subjective standpoint, both approaches make sense and reasons are given for them. The idea of a generalised ability to act can however be interpreted as if there were a world that is transparent and can be explained in its entirety with clear contexts and without any blind spot on the part of the subject concerned.

As regards the rationale for acting, Holzkamp also argues that for a subjectively good reason anything irrational or suppressed is also pushed aside, not taken notice of and ignored. The reason is that it suits subjects to sweep aside the matters in question from their consciousness – or not even permit them to enter into it in the first place (Holzkamp, 1997b). Based on this argument, experience and corporeity, habitualness and habitus are rooted within the foundationalist discourse, not outside it. In developing habits there are good reasons that explain how they occur, why they become entrenched and why they are not currently thought through – we would quite simply not be able to deal with it.

Corporeality is found in two places as regards the theory of individual learning. On the one hand as part of personal situatedness it is encountered in the theory of learning. With a subtle hint at Merleau-Ponty, Holzkamp establishes that even thinking requires the body and that the connection is defined in corporeality (Holzkamp, 1993, see 252 cf.). Secondly, a whole chapter is devoted to motor learning. Nevertheless, I agree with Künkler's arguments (2014) – according to Holzkamp's theory of learning, the body clearly remains the part of corporeality, which inhibits learning and has to be disciplined by the mind. A new interpretation of the theory based on the individual perspective and relevant research would be well advised in this case to draw on phenomenological inspiration to conceptualise corporeality in a contemporary way.

2.4 Identical or different subjects and normativity

Does modern thinking consider subjects as identical and are they subjected to a uniform solidarity concept? In terms of the theory of individual learning, *socialised subjects* are not to be understood as heteronormative middle-class subjects, because they are subjected to societal restrictions – including exclusion, as well as distinction and suppression mechanisms. Society consists of more than a white, male middle class. Therefore socialised subjects have as many manifestations and lines of conflict as there are subjects and societal conflicts. This type of definition of subjects cannot therefore emerge from any implicit norm. In reality, due to the concept of the socialised subject, it should be possible to describe the illegitimacy of societal structures with regard to their influence on subjective scope for action, internal and external ascriptions and discrimination.

Apart from liberal accusations, the concept of equality is one that continues to be respected. After all it is all about equality before the law, in elections and in terms of access to education and jobs. Despite being fully aware that alongside this official equality, in all the areas specified, an informal equality has long run counter to the modern societal concept of formal openness, I still consider this fundamental concept to be vital. What is more, it is also applied by people who criticise it. Difference theories and post-modernism approaches usually criticise the fact that inequality is practised (unequal treatment of homosexual partnerships, of people with special needs, of working-class students in universities, of senior citizens and of migrants). In other words there is obviously a consensus as regards not practising discrimination.

But how is difference as a criticism of equality expressed? At centre stage is the criticism of informal normality constructs which dissenters, people who live their lives differently, or are of different sexual orientations are subjected to and by which they are measured and which really are often enough turned into a universally valid metric by white, male, heterosexual, young and healthy middle-class subjects. Compared with this fictive standard subject, anything that runs contrary to it is considered as not belonging or different. In terms of pedagogy for people with special needs, this discourse has been questioned for decades (see Marianne Hirschberg, 2009, with reference to Michel Foucault). In cultural and postcolonial studies eurocentrism has been criticised since the 1970s (e.g. Stuart Hall, and continued in adult education by Alisha Heinemann 2014⁵). Last but not least feminist theory has decried the heteronormative implication of the hegemonic concept of the subject (Judith Butler, continued in adult education Gerrit Kaschuba, Heide von Felden, Regina Frey, Susanne Maurer, Judith

⁵See also “Reasons for participating and not participating in institutionalised forms of further education and training” in this collection of articles.

Krämer⁶). In contrast to the discourse on equality, differences from the norm due to advanced age are examined less, however research has also been conducted into normative images of ageing (Burkhard Schäffer). Discrepancies and stigmatisation due to low levels of literacy provide a controversial debate, which in terms of theory is inspired by the New Literacy Studies (Barton & Hamilton, 2003; Tett et al., 2006). Studies based on the subject-scientific theory of learning were also made on literacy (Nienkemper & Bonna, 2010; Nienkemper, etc.⁷).

Positioning based on the new subject-scientific theory of learning requires using the diversity of the socialised subjects acting with a perspective and intentionally as the starting point for research. It would not be a case of discovering subjective sensitivities through a questionnaire (which purports to be objective) and reporting on departures of the variables from the average, but about a generalised reflection of the subject's standpoint (Holzkamp, 1996). The difference between the subjects and the researchers too is recognised, instead of correlating everything and anyone with an imaginary normal subject. Therefore, there can no longer be any objective, abstract and universally valid research results, but justifiable and transparent subjective logic at the most.

2.5 Dualisms, transitions and blank spaces

The latent *dualisms* of men and women, emotion and cognition, black and white, the West and the Rest, expansive and defensive, theory and practice etc., are also popular targets as regards modern theory systems. In this case I believe it is a good idea to develop the axes, as indeed has already happened in some cases. In the subject-scientific theory of learning, the categorisation of people or groups of people is not to be understood along dualistic axes of “normal” and “different”, but via the socialised subject based on class, milieu, migration or gender, which are inherent in subjects due to the societal circumstances.

However, by separating expansive and defensive learning, the subject-scientific theory of learning has introduced two more dualistic terms, which from an empirical aspect are not sustainable. There is no clear-cut division of expansive and defensive reasons for action, but a hybrid form of the two. These are not stable, but change – and what is more, in both directions. Learning that starts expansively can slip into a defensive form. Learning that commences defensively can turn into an expansive form (Grotlüschen, 2003, p. 313). More recent dissertations on the theory based on the individual perspective therefore

⁶See also Krämer “Lernen über Geschlecht in Spannungsfeldern” in this collection of articles.

⁷See also Nienkemper “Strategies in the case of functional illiteracy” in this collection of articles.

tend to categorise along axes of tension instead of the form of dually separated categories (Haberzeth, 2010). In my view, research on the subject-scientific theory of learning can now do justice to transitions.

On the other hand, the subject-scientific theory of learning cannot yet provide any answer to *voids* and *gaps*, as are sometimes required by difference theories. Susanne Umbach (Umbach, 2011) discusses a link between the subject-scientific theory of learning with Donna Haraway's characteristic of "significant otherness" which emphasises the aspect of 'not understanding' in particular. Since the translation of Judith Butler's book *Undoing Gender* into German entitled *Die Macht der Geschlechternormen* (Butler, 2004, 2009) the question of gender gaps in the gender discourse (which is all too often still conducted on a heteronormative basis) has gained new momentum.

3. The theory of learning: consolidation and developments in adult education

Actually there are now new developments in the theory of learning based on the individual perspective which are primarily the results of qualitative work. They subdivide learning – in some cases by referring to John Dewey's epistemological process perspective – in phases (Dluzak, 2009; Grotlüschen, 2010). Faulstich (2005, 2013) suggests developing a critical-pragmatic theory of learning⁸. Others connect learning with social backgrounds and habitus (Bremer, 200; Bracker & Faulstich, 2012). As a term, resistance to learning is now divided up into all types of resistance to learning (Grell, 2006) and complemented by a counterpart, learning interests. A series of textbooks (on resistance to learning, places of learning, learning periods, learning fees, the desire to learn etc.) has been published for trade unions (e.g., Faulstich, 2002; Faulstich, 2012). Learning guidance and diagnostics flank learning concepts drawn up in the middle of the 1990s (see below).

Two collections of articles were published in the middle of the noughties. The 50th issue of *Forum Kritische Psychologie* published by Frigga Haug and Ute Osterkamp was dedicated to the 10th anniversary of Holzkamp's death. Developments in the theories from the individual perspective were for example demanded regarding the structures of learning (Dreier, 2006). Baldauf-Bergmann also urges not misunderstanding subjects as isolated individuals (Baldauf-Bergmann, 2006). Tentative connections with competing theories of learning

⁸ Judith E. Krämer's study (in preparation and see this collection of articles) and Eva-Christine Kubsch's current dissertation use phase models of expansive learning understood along the theory of individual learning.

remain the exception however. Faulstich and Grotlüschen discuss the concept of experience and interest between pragmatism and the theory of individual learning (Faulstich & Grotlüschen, 2006).

Faulstich and Ludwig's collection of articles (2004), which they use to take stock at the same time, stick more closely to learning. However, they only deal with adult education. In this case the theory of individual learning is discussed from perspectives of governmentality theory (Forneck), habitus theory (Brem), restricted subjectivity (Wittpoth), constructivism (Arnold) and the Munich interest theory (Krapp).

Following these two milestones in the mid noughties, new work is currently emerging, such as Ulrike Eichinger's well-received book on the theory of individual learning in social work (Eichinger, 2012). In conjunction with Danish partners from Copenhagen, we are also gaining work on further education and training, operations and advice (Thomsen, 2012). This development is also leading to a consolidation of English publications resulting from the discourse on adult education as regards theories on learning and from the individual perspective.

3.1 Research work, distinctions and results

Many traditional issues in adult education (learning, teaching, target groups, organisation, institution, skills) are being researched with a background based on the theory of individual learning. This is Joachim Ludwig's style as regards the development of organisation and in-company training (Ludwig, 2000). Quality-management issues have for example been established following the system of "learner-driven quality testing in further education" in the tradition of demands based on the theory of individual learning (Zech & Angermüller, 2006). Janine Rehfeld (Rehfeldt, 2012) wrote about informal learning by junior managers in the automotive industry. As regards organisational development in hospitals, Claudia Schepers has written a paper which already creates distinctions between phases of resistance (Schepers, 2009; Dluzak, 2009). In the case of in-company training planning, Martin Allespach also carries out research from the perspective of the board of the German trades union IG Metall (Allespach, 2004). With a look at works councils, Simone Hocke draws distinctions between different types of cooperative learning by interpreting conflicts as a reason for learning. She also discusses inconsistencies in the way works councils act (Hocke, 2012). Zinth presents a requirements analysis based on the theory of individual learning (Zinth, 2008).

Erik Haberzeth conducts research into the didactic perspective based on the theory of individual learning by looking at in-company training offered

(Haberzeth, 2010). Claudia Schepers on the other hand looks at resistance to learning on the part of teachers (Schepers, 2014). By looking at the perspective of casework (Ludwig, 2003) and reconciliation (Faulstich, 2003) it becomes clear how didactics with characteristics of the theory of individual learning are possible and advisable. In this case, subjects who are learning are no longer considered as people who are aware of all the limitations and course content, but as people who can definitely benefit from teachers. Faulstich says that the teachers' job is to reconcile the interests of the people learning with the course content offered. Therefore, the concept is designed to be negotiated. Ludwig maintains that it is the people learning who submit their case and draw on the expertise of teachers and fellow learners.

As regards literacy, Andrea Linde (2008) focused her dissertation on theory of learning and literacy and also looked at the habitus theory. In terms of literacy, Joachim Ludwig's research group also drew distinctions between different concepts (Ludwig, 2010; Ludwig, 2012b). Linking literacy research with the New Literacy Studies by Zeuner and Pabst (2011) is not strictly speaking an approach based on the theory of individual learning, but is definitely inspired by learning theory.

It is true to say that outside in-company training and courses offered by independent institutions, learning definitely takes place, but Klaus Holzkamp does not make this type of learning the focus of this theory. However, the latest development looks at "co-learning" empirically, above all Jana Trumann who discusses learning in social movements (Trumann, 2013) or in the library (Trumann, 2009). Non-intentional co-learning is also debated as regards gender learning processes (see Krämer, in preparation). As regards developing skills, in a more recent article Langemeyer calls for the integration of skills in societal structures within which competent action is possible (Langemeyer, 2013). She quite rightly warns against an individualistic interpretation of skills and learning and shows that the theory based on the individual perspective runs counter to the "social mediatedness of individual existence".

E-learning has been and is repeatedly discussed in terms of learning theory. The assumption that a special form of self-determination arises through e-learning has not been borne out, but the potential inherent in the theory of individual learning to explain subjective sets of reasoning (Grotlüschen, 2003). At the same time it also becomes clear that expansive or defensive reasons for learning do not emerge in their purest forms, but vary and can change too. The e-learning manual that Patricia Arnold, Gerhard Zimmer, Lars Kilian and Anne Thillosen drew up together (Arnold et al., 2004) consolidates relevant approaches. The Klaus Treumann (2002) group uses the learning theory of individual learning. Most recently they applied it with a study funded by the

DFG on learners' orientation in e-learning (Treumann et al., 2012). The question of the quality of e-learning has been pushed for years by Ulf Ehlers – also with a background based on the individual perspective (Ehlers, 2004; Ehlers & Schenkel, 2005). As regards the question to what extent e-learning is also suitable for the disadvantaged, a series of observations were made about ten years ago in job-creation courses in which learning software was used (Grotlüschen & Brauchle, 2004; Grotlüschen & Brauchle, 2006). The target group uses social strategies to master the technology, for example by joining forces with others. A look at the perspective of the teachers, who in some cases fear that e-learning will have a massive impact on their profession, rounds off the trilogy (Brauchle, 2007). In conjunction with Petra Grell, an analysis followed later of Second Life as a place of learning, which primarily uses the interpretation based on the individual perspective of Foucault's power techniques (Grell & Grotlüschen, 2009). When analysing e-learning didactics, Stephan Frank marginally touches on perspectives from the individual perspective too (Frank, 2012).

3.2 Subjects who learn incidentally

Do subjects intend to learn? The controversy surrounding intentional learning and co-learning is one of the most difficult in the theory of individual learning. As already mentioned above, several more recent analyses have also examined unintentional learning (Rehfeldt, 2012; Truemn, 2013; Krämer, in preparation). Jana Trumann reconstructs learning processes in citizens' action groups and notices that learning is often talked about, particularly in an informal context.⁹ In her dissertation, Janine Rehfeldt defines informal learning as a *constructed learning context* with a large proportion of cooperative learning processes (Rehfeldt, 2012). As a result, she is working at an interface between existing theory of individual learning and development which she believes is necessary.

These types of learning processes inevitably take place. The question is merely whether the theory of individual learning can understand them and what their peculiarities are. One of the key characteristics is presented by Frigga Haug (2003): In hindsight, learning is often forgotten and what has been learnt is seen as something which is taken for granted. This characteristic often makes it hard for teachers to return to a state where they lacked the knowledge that the people taking part in their course or the students currently find themselves in. The existence of unintentional learning has therefore already been articulated in the

⁹ In my own sample group regarding learning which was initiated intentionally (Grotlüschen, 2003) nobody talked about learning, but in fact about clicking, perusing, reading etc.

new interpretation of learning from the individual perspective, even if this did not happen until 2004. However, the key problem of unintentional learning does not lie in its entrenchment in the familiar (Meyer-Drawe, 2012). Käte Meyer-Drawe argues that it is the very incidental nature of these types of learning processes that reproduces those societal relationships, which immediately provide a suitable solution for the learning situation – without people reflecting on what this implies on the other hand. In other words, no resistance to learning occurs because there appears to be a superficial, functional solution to the problem. At the same time traditions are contributed, gender relationships reproduced, distinction mechanisms are learnt and much more, which the same person as a subject capable of reflection possibly strives to overcome. The theorisation of unintentional learning (which needs to be distinguished from incidental and informal learning) therefore benefits from criticisms from a phenomenological perspective.

3.3 Aspects of learning – resistance to learning, learning interests, learning advice, learning diagnostics

The concept of *resistance to learning*, published not in a text book but in a special article (Holzkamp, 1997a), is particularly absorbing. I believe that resistance to learning occurs due to conflicts that have not yet emerged between personal interests and the interests represented by the teachers or structures within the learning setting. This unmasked correlation has a crippling effect and creates resistance to learning. Resistance to learning is not synonymous with defensive learning which can occur intentionally and when all the parameters are known. Based on this interpretation, the characteristics of resistance to learning are the simultaneous effectivity of subjects and society, as well as pre-reflection. Resistance to learning is not beneficial to subjects or society. Consequently, it is not to be understood as active resistance to structures which impair emancipation. This would be the case with expansive learning or the generalised ability to act. Resistance to learning is therefore not an emancipatory act. Resistance to inadequate learning set-ups, described as student protests for example (see Ribolits, 2011), is not a case of resistance to learning, but expansive learning, as long as something can be learnt along the way.

Learning interests are therefore designed to respond to resistance to learning. Learning interests also include correlations between society and subjects, some of which can be congruous and some of which contradictory. Subjects do not have learning interests awaiting arousal from the moment they are born. Learning interests arise as a result of subjects actively engaging with

world around them, and are therefore specific to social backgrounds and unequally distributed in society.

Resistance to learning and learning interests are subjectively well-reasoned acts and not something that pedagogues need to sweep aside. The brief to pedagogues is much more to unveil them from the pre-reflective space by talking to the people learning. Explaining why there is an imbalance of research into target groups, or why people reject further education or training (usually due to *external influence* in other words societal barriers) and why people take part in further education due to *internal influences*, is counterbalanced by the concept of resistance to learning and learning interests. When people reject further education or training, or refuse to participate, this is the result of action the socialised subjects take.

In addition to the key question of learning and teaching, questions about advice and diagnostics are being increasingly discussed as regards further education and training. Therefore, learning based on an interpretation of the theory of individual learning is currently being expanded to include learning advice and diagnostics. As regards career and education advice, in her dissertation Rie Thomsen from Copenhagen asks to what extent individualisation of societal problems is institutionalised (Thomsen, 2012). Henning Pätzold analyses learning advice in a narrower sense which is something the later work of Joachim Ludwig also focuses on (Pätzold, 2004; Ludwig, 2012b). In the *Lernberatung und Lerndiagnostik* volume Ludwig also links the two above-mentioned extensions of classical teaching and learning (Ludwig, 2012a). The diagnostic branch is currently being developed from “Formative Assessment” (Bonna, 2008) to determination of skills (Schügl, 2010; Schügl & Nienkemper, 2012) to learning diagnostics (Nienkemper & Bonna, 2010; Nienkemper & Bonna, 2011; Zimper & Dessinger, 2012).

4. Research methodology based on the theory of individual learning

A final area that Tobias Künkler has criticised is research’s understanding of the theory of individual learning. He implies that research into the theory of individual learning exaggerates the perspective of the subject. He goes on to say that this perspective is then dominated by researchers, who at the same time want to understand it fully and then blank out the now much-discussed conditions. Therefore, it is worthwhile taking another look at the conditionality and foundationalist discourse. In this interpretation, conditions do exist if they allow an issue to be explained without any reason placed in between. If we take conditions such as frost and water, the result is ice. No reasoning is required to

do this because causal chains can be created in the form of clauses that generate a consequence. (When it freezes water turns into ice). It is impossible to form a logical sentence if the word “sensibly” is placed between. (When it freezes water sensibly turns into ice). Rationality is identifiable in the following statement: If it’s cold, then it’s sensible for me to put warmer clothes on. Holzkamp concludes that social science is about reasons, not conditions. This also implies that there can be more than one reason and that reasons conflict and need to be weighed up with one another. (If it’s cold, then it’s sensible for me to put warm clothes on. But it doesn’t look that smart, so I’ll just put a few warm clothes on).

The decisive factor is that the premise does not appear to be predictable as a *condition* but that it becomes the reason when viewed by the subject. This occurs if the subject pays attention to a premise (cold and clothing) and considers it desirable (warmth and fashion). Therefore, in each act by the subject the conditions – which have become premises due to the subjective standpoint – are effective. Acts cannot however, in the case of causal or mono-causal logic, be predicted as the consequences of conditions. In fact in between there are inconsistencies, aspects that are overlooked, factors that are familiar, selective perception, wishful thinking and everything which turns *logic* into *subjective logic*.

Furthermore, a comment on understanding and reconstruction needs to be made. Understanding includes not understanding too. However, this is due to two components. Firstly it concerns the basic lack of knowledge on the part of subjects and the separation of subjects and their temporary externalisation in the form of interviews, texts or actions. This is one of the bases of all hermeneutics and is not questioned explicitly anywhere in the theory of individual learning – however it is not explicitly discussed either.

A second component is the concept of foundationalist discourse. If research does not understand acting subjects, the reason is that (depending on each subjective interpretation) it is not sufficiently aware of societal premises and cannot therefore understand the conclusiveness of subjective logic. The insinuation is nevertheless that the way that subjects interpret their premises allows them to make subjective sense of their action. Therefore, the theory of individual learning requires tolerance that on the one hand, even if understood in depth, the full perspective from the individual perspective can never be adopted. On the other hand it also demands that the assumption of logical action on the part of subjects (who sometimes might act in a way that is impossible to understand) is maintained.

In terms of methodology, three approaches try to do justice to these requirements. Based on *Grundlegung der Psychologie* (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 544 cf.) Morus Markhard (2006) calls for a concept of co-research where those on

whom the research is being conducted can be involved in developing questions, surveys, analyses and interpretations. This is more than just a mere communicative validation by interviewees, because in this case it is much more about adopting the perspective of the co-researchers when creating the questions and capturing the data appropriately. However, the attempt to conduct research on an equal footing always fails when science uses terms that the target group do not know. In other words it is not a meeting of subjects which is free of hierarchies. Consequently, this approach has seldom caught on in adult education (with the exception of Rie Thomsen).

The works quoted often use the grounded theory, which will not be explained here in detail and can be used congruently with the co-research concept. The only decisive factor is that the translation of coded paradigms also includes conditions. In the interpretation of the theory of individual learning, it does however appear to tally better with the grounded theory and to apply reasoning in the way discussed above (von Felden, 2006; Grotlüschen, 2010, p. 177).

A third approach concerns research workshops which, in addition to verbal survey tools, also make and interpret visual artefacts. They are used in the Vester, Bremer, Lange-Vester and Teiwes-Kügler group as a habitus-hermeneutics procedure (Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2004; Bremer & Lange-Vester, 2006). In the form of theory of individual learning they are also encountered in Faulstich, Forneck and Knoll, as well as their teams and dissertations (Faulstich et al., 2005; Grell, 2006). New developments are currently emerging (Bracker & Faulstich, 2012; Umbach, 2012; as well as Mania and Tröster in this collection of articles).

5. Conclusion: The new interpretation from the individual perspective

Subjects are socialised and learn as a result. Rationally we can also imply that all conditions do not become reasons for subjects taking action until the subjects have accepted or (implicitly) acknowledged these reasons – otherwise they are irrelevant.

As a result, if *foundationalist discourse is interpreted strictly*, even a material obstacle, such as a lack of a driving licence (condition), would only become relevant if it means that due to a concern about a lack of abilities, or due to the fear of being caught (condition), subjects actually did not drive their cars. In this way, based on subjective logic, subjects integrate with societal conditions (because no money to purchase a driving licence is given to them). In its original form, foundationalist discourse therefore integrates what is irrational, pushed

aside, habitualised and emotional – and societal conditions too. With this type there are no theories other than foundationalist discourse because they can be re-interpreted with a certain rationale.

Alternatively, it could be suggested that *subjective reasons* on the one hand could be complemented by *societal conditions* on the other. Consequently, many contemporary works expand the reception of the theory of individual learning to include aspects of societal theory in order to generate interpretations of research materials from them (see Bracker, Faulstich, Krämer, Bremer, Heinemann). In the new interpretation of the theory of individual learning, it is irrelevant whether the societal conditions are integrated in foundationalist discourse and only emerge through the perspective of the acting subject, or whether they are added to accompany the theory of individual learning. For research and the understanding of learning following a new interpretation of the theory of individual learning, it is primarily important to acknowledge the existence and power of the irrational, corporeality, suppression, habitualisation and emotion. In my opinion whether this happens in the first or second variation is equally acceptable.

As a result, based on the new interpretation of the theory of individual learning, learning subjects encounter teachers and institutions in the backdrop of societal conditions. It is suggested that subjects have individual abilities to learn and skills that have been gained individually, although they have to learn in societal conditions and act competently. Subjects are given careers and educational/training advice, although they have no control over their education/training and career alone. Subjects can weigh up decisions rationally, but they only attempt to do so if the familiar action taken fails. Incidental learning can be a step forward, but does not exceed the borders of what is implicitly perceived. Reasons for learning and the way learning progresses entail emotions and are subjected to restrictions in terms of corporeality. Expansive and defensive learning can occur as hybrids and change during learning processes. Resistance to learning can be subdivided in phases. Resistance to learning can serve learning interests as a complementary concept. Learning advice and learning diagnostics can be structured to follow the theory of individual learning. The concept of competence and competence models too are socialised in the interpretation of the theory of individual learning and are tied to conflicts of interest.

Adding to skills as a genuine life interest is not always manifested openly. Subjects can also stand in their own way. Nevertheless, gaining more skills – despite all the intrinsic value of education and training – always also implies a material improvement in the person's circumstances. Subjects only have a significant reason to learn when they can anticipate this improvement as a result

of their endeavours. To be precise, a subjectively good reason for learning is only assumed here if the people learning can clearly increase their possession of societal resources. By looking at socialised subjects (at a micro, meso and macrodidactic level) research into the theory of individual learning can expose situations that lead to resistance and resistance to learning.

However (as shown by the revision of recent works inspired by the theory of individual learning) a socio-critical interpretation of the approach is required in order to counter an individualistic interpretation.

6. Appendix: Dissertations and postdoctoral theses (also) using the theory from the standpoint of the subject

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