

INFORMAL LEARNING AND THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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Abstract – It is now widely recognised that skills and competences needed for working and living can be acquired in a variety of ways outside the framework of formal educational systems. The author calls for an enlarged view of learning that emphasises the abilities of the individual learner and includes informal acquisition of skills on-the-job. In this kind of learning the teacher has to acquire a different role, becoming more of a partner in a joint educational process. The author argues that in this regard we can learn much from the example of popular educational movements in Latin America, some of which have established successful collaboration with the world of employment. In these examples he sees indications of promising approaches for the future.

Zusammenfassung – Es wird heutzutage weithin anerkannt, dass zum Leben und Lernen benötigte Fähigkeiten und Kompetenzen auf vielfältige Art und Weise außerhalb formaler Bildungssysteme erworben werden können. Der Autor ruft zu einem erweiterten Lernansatz auf, der die Fähigkeiten im Job beinhaltet. Bei dieser Art von Lernen nimmt der Lehrer eine andere Rolle ein und wird eher zum Partner in einem gemeinsamen Lernprozeß. Der Autor argumentiert dahingehend, dass wir vom Beispiel der Volksbildungsbewegungen in Lateinamerika, von denen einige eine erfolgreiche Zusammenarbeit mit der Arbeitswelt aufgebaut haben, viel lernen können. In diesen Beispielen sieht er Hinweise auf vielversprechende Ansätze für die Zukunft.

Résumé – Il est à présent largement admis que les qualités et compétences requises dans la vie privée et professionnelle peuvent s'acquérir en dehors du cadre formel des systèmes éducatifs et de maintes façons. L'auteur fait appel à une conception élargie de l'apprentissage qui souligne les capacités de l'apprenant individuel et intègre l'acquisition de compétences "sur le tas". Cette forme d'apprentissage suppose que l'enseignant adopte un rôle différent et devienne davantage partenaire dans un processus éducatif conjoint. L'auteur soutient qu'à cet égard, nous pouvons prendre exemple sur les mouvements d'éducation populaire en Amérique latine dont certains ont établi une collaboration fructueuse avec le monde du travail. Il décèle dans ces modèles les indices d'approches prometteuses pour l'avenir.

Resumen – Ya es un hecho ampliamente reconocido el que las cualificaciones y competencias necesarias para trabajar y vivir se pueden adquirir de formas muy variadas, fuera del marco de los sistemas de la educación formal. El autor reclama una visión ampliada del aprendizaje que enfatice la cualificación individual del educando e incluya la adquisición informal de cualificaciones durante la realización del trabajo. En este modo de aprendizaje, el docente debe cambiar de papel, enfatizando el de pártner en un proceso común de formación. El autor argumenta que, en este sentido, podemos aprovechar en gran medida el ejemplo que ofrecen los movimientos de educación popular en América Latina, de los que algunos ya han establecido una colaboración exitosa con el mundo del empleo. El autor considera



que estos ejemplos pueden servir de orientación para desarrollar métodos futuros prometedores.

Резюме - В настоящее время широко признается, что умения и навыки, необходимые для работы и жизни, могут быть приобретены разнообразными способами вне формальной образовательной системы. Автор статьи призывает к расширенному взгляду на учение, которое акцентирует способности индивидов и включает информальное приобретение умений на работе. При таком виде учения у учителя появляется другая роль – он больше становится партнером в совместном образовательном процессе. Автор статьи утверждает, что в этом отношении мы можем многому поучиться на примере народных образовательных движений в Латинской Америке, где некоторые из них успешно сотрудничают со сферой занятости. В этих примерах автор статьи видит обещающие подходы для будущего.

This essay is concerned with informal¹ learning as a form of learning integrated into practical living. The point of departure is the banal enough fact that although the learning subject can be supported in his/her learning activities by organisational contexts, these activities do not of necessity have to take the form of school. Learning also takes place outside of this institution. Without doubt, forms of school can also play a positive part for working children and adolescents, but traditional school concepts have so far rather resulted in their exclusion. The question thus arises where and how young working people (can) acquire competences that are useful for their life perspective. In attempting to answer this question, we must look at informal learning in everyday life. So far, educators have given too little attention to this form of learning. In the following, therefore, we will first of all go into the fundamentals of informal learning. Then, in connection with this, comes the “informal apprenticeship”, a widespread form (not only in Latin America) of the acquisition of occupational competence skills. From this, (partial) answers are developed to the question as to whether there is an alternative way of learning for young people from the movement of working children, and how it can be formed in cooperation with them. Comparatively little is known so far about how learning takes place within social movements as a “learning environment” (Lave). To what extent can peoples education (*educación popular*) as the educational theory of social movements (Liebel 1994) be connected with occupational, work-oriented training? The discussion of these questions will be complemented by thoughts on informal apprenticeship in small firms and the discussion of a concrete example, inspired by peoples education, of the use of the “informal apprenticeship” for working children and adolescents.

The discussion of informal learning is not as new as it might seem, if one looks at more recent publications, especially from the USA. The significance of this form of learning was already discussed about 20 years ago. However, the debate took place in relatively isolated “development-policy” contexts. At the same time, it is not surprising that informal learning was talked about to begin with above all in the context of education and the “Third World”. Precisely in the less industrialised countries, formal and non-formal education continue to be of less importance for various reasons – for instance, lack of resources. Informal learning is predominant; it leads to the acquisition of occupational or employment-relevant competences. The proportion of persons who acquire corresponding abilities and skills by formal or non-formal education is, by contrast, relatively small.

To clarify definitions, the term “formal education” is used here to mean that which takes place in schools and educational institutions, with classes normally arranged by age group. “Non-formal education” is all organised learning that takes place outside of school (Sandhaas 1986: 399). Both terms are used in a different sense from “informal education” and “informal learning”. When distinguishing these terms, it is helpful to proceed from the learner and to refer to the degree of organisation of the learning concerned (Coombs 1974). The concept “informal education” should be avoided where in fact “informal learning” from the viewpoint of the subject is meant. “Education” suggests intentionality, whereas “learning” can also take place without intention. The notion “informal education” should only be used where what it involved is the creation of special contexts for informal learning. In the context of one British approach to informal learning, the intention is to link up with the lifelong process whereby people learn from everyday experience. However, according to this view, the notion “informal education” also includes non-formal education as organised pedagogical activity outside of schools and training institutions. Educational activity is also included in the framework of “community education”, as well as social advisory work. The representatives of this approach expressly invoke problem-oriented social education of German provenance (Jeffer and Smith 1996). Here “informal education” supports informal learning. “Informal education” refers to the conscious introduction of learning inputs into informal learning situations. On the other hand, “informal education” also means the opening up of learning strategies for and through the learners. “Informal education” should be separated in its definition from “non-formal education” and used as a concept when informal learning is to be rendered possible, supported, reinforced or structured. “Informal education”, then, always involves a deliberate intervention related to informal learning. Without doubt, informal learning is at the same time essentially self-determined learning.

Already in the UNESCO report on *The Objectives and Future of our Educational Programmes*, the Faure Report of 1972, it is stressed that the consequences of the scientific-technological revolution and the increasing flood of information will cause great changes in the traditional education systems.

These developments “have expanded the functions of autodidactic education and raised the value of active and conscious learning attitudes (Faure 1973: 41). At first with reference to “primitive societies”, the Faure Report further observes: “These informal, non-institutionalised forms of learning and apprenticeship still apply in many parts of the world, and are still the only form of education² for millions of people.” With regard to “modern” societies, the statement follows: “It remains a fact that the child – and the adult – receives a large part of his education directly and immediately from his environment, his family, his society. What he thus acquires is all the more significant because it conditions receptivity to school education, which in its turn gives the learner the framework that enables him conceptually to order the knowledge acquired from his environment” (Faure 1973: 53). It is further stated that “education” until recently in all societies was part of everyday life, either in the family or in groups, in community work, in the relation between craftsman and apprentice, or at play.

The Faure Commission which, independently of a subject-oriented perspective, was concerned rather with the realising of informal learning potential, stated that informal learning comprises about 70% of all human learning. The Commission demanded that conditions should be created to make this form of learning easier (Faure 1973). The Delors Commission of UNESCO resumed this perspective in 1996. It emphasised particularly people’s potential competence, which is lying fallow and requires to be mobilised. Formal and informal possibilities of learning, it states, should as far as possible be linked by an integrative overall system. The role of the teachers should also be newly formulated. The Delors commission demanded a turning away from knowledge-dominated learning to competence-developing learning, thus stressing the abilities of the learner. The development of key competences is expressly mentioned (Delors 1996).

Within the context of an essay written in 1986, Berstecher proceeds from the assumption that the “formal education system in developing countries” had already been researched in detail, but that there was a lack of research relating to “informal educational activities” (Berstecher 1986: 227). The author therefore demands the removal of the separation of learning and acting: “The inclusion of the living environment in the educational process, learning from coevals, older or working persons etc. would also mean relativising the value of professional teachers, school premises and books. The abolition or weakening of the formal entitlement system would both give a large boost to the sphere of non-formal learning and promote the integration of learning and practice” (Berstecher 1986: 229). The fact that anticipatory learning continually grows more difficult is an argument for ceasing to regard work and education as opposites. Precisely what this could mean for “developing countries” remains unclear. However, it is remarkable that Berstecher’s remarks related to the “Third World” of 13 years ago are now highly relevant to the industrial countries, doubtless to some extent for other reasons. The lack of recognition of informal learning is presumably connected with the fact that

educational planners continue today to proceed excessively from objective needs and too little from the potential of the learner. Thus although the potential of informal learning has repeatedly been debated, there is still a lack of a consistent change of emphasis and perspective to the subject of learning processes. Only when this comes about can informal learning be meaningfully linked with other forms of learning.

To be treated with caution is the predominant discourse on informal learning as expressed in North America, which is by no means primarily taking place within education or social science, but is integrated into debates on economic theory. The debate on the recognition of informal learning is, from this perspective, closely tied to economic cost-utility thinking (Garrick 1998: 5ff.). In the context of this discourse, which is closely linked to the debate on learning organisations, informal occupational learning has a highly instrumental character. As Garrick shows, informal learning within the competence-based approaches contains a hidden curriculum. Based on the reconstructed experiences of six persons learning within such a context, he criticises the messages concealed within the promise of empowerment. In the context of this approach, informal learning is seen by employers as a way of making the labour force more useful. This is in contrast to the overt aim of expanding the knowledge of the individual. In this context, those who break the bounds of the community spirit of the firm will easily place themselves outside of the “learning organisation”. It is also significant that there are distinct limitations as to the subject matter of informal learning in the context of the firm. Social questions such as division of labour according to gender, the distribution of social wealth, the production of products harmful to the environment, etc., are not addressed (cf. on this Garrick 1998: 20ff.).

Thus, often what is presented as informal learning serves the interests of the employer rather than the learner. However, it can be turned to the advantage of the latter provided there is a “demasking” (Garrick 1998) of the intentions that lie behind “human resource development” approaches.

Informal learning: the example of informal apprenticeship

In the sphere of occupational employment-oriented learning, informal methods play an important part. These learning processes are everyday practice in many parts of the world, but are still largely ignored by education research (see in detail Overwien 2000). For example, informal apprenticeship exists traditionally in many countries in Latin America as a means of acquiring occupational competence. What takes place here is more than merely learning the trade. The notion of informal apprenticeship combines two rather contrary components that are in a relation of tension to each other. “Apprenticeship” refers to a planned learning process which is at least roughly structured. Learning processes are informal when they are not planned in a professionally educational manner (Schöfthaler 1981: 97ff.). Within the informal appren-

ticeship which is common in small firms, there are learning processes that are not exactly planned, but are at the same time more or less clearly structured in line with the production requirements of the firm. Beyond that, many small firms are places of socialisation for the young people working there, and not only where these are family firms. The connected learning processes are also generally termed informal (Nestvogel 1978: 64).

Considerably more young people acquire occupational competences through an informal apprenticeship than would be possible in the framework of state projects and programmes or those organised by non-governmental organisations. Training measures comparable in their effect would no doubt also hardly be able to be financed, given the existing political will of the decision makers. The structures within which the training takes place do not need to be established with much effort and cost, but already exist. Often, this kind of competence acquisition is more relevant for employment effectiveness than many training programmes, although the frequently extremely poor working conditions must also be mentioned. Informal apprenticeship is a traditional form of competence acquisition with a varying degree of commitment which, however, is generally assumed by all concerned (Overwien 1994: 188). Under conditions that are more or less arranged by agreement, young people learn the competences required for a given field of activity. The duration of such informal apprenticeships varies considerably. It depends not only on the skills and abilities required for the occupational field concerned, but also on the subjective judgment of the workshop owner, who assesses the progress made and the economic benefit derived from the labour of the informal apprentices. Apart from certain gender-specific fields of occupational activity, the informal apprenticeship system involves particularly young males in the field of handicrafts.

Not all informal learning processes are equally complex. Frequently, individual skills can be learned more or less in isolation, and then brought together in the production process. However, there are also production processes that require from the start more complex skills and abilities. Greenfield has studied how weaving is traditionally learned in an indigenous population in Southern Mexico. She stresses the cultural and particularly the social interconnections of learning. In the context of a guided learning process, learning takes place from the start in practical action, with direct checking of errors. Greenfield draws attention to the particular character of the process, applying the term "scaffolding" to it, by which the instructors withdraw progressively from the learning process (Greenfield 1984: 129ff.).

Informal apprenticeship fits into the social structures of the sphere of small firms. Young people are integrated into working life at an early stage. They learn chiefly by imitation and identification (cf. Bakke 1995; Overwien 1994). From varying tasks in the context of the existing division of labour in the firm, it results that frequently also experienced workers are involved in passing on activity-related competences. It can be assumed that the higher the degree of identification of the informal apprentices with the economic as well as ethical

and social objectives of the other employees, but above all those of the master-craftsman, the more learning becomes self-motivated. The theoretically other pole of an assumed continuum, however, is that of the shallow practising of only a few skills that are essential for the firm concerned.

Traditional or informal learning processes are usually considered excessively from a European or North American middle-class perspective, with its learning models from the small family and the school (Nestvogel 1988: 32ff.). The concept of imitation applied against this background, which is in any case burdened with negative associations, sets off strongly devaluing associations relating to narrow limits to learning. For this reason, it should be separated from the schemes of thought connected with imitative school learning. In small firms, after all, learning does not take place in a static, abstract and artificial sphere, but on the basis of concrete models in the social and economic environment. These manifest themselves in the work of the adults in the context of their shared activities with young people. Overall, the notion of “participatory experience” (Nestvogel 1988: 31) in this context is more precise than that of imitative learning. But it should once again be stressed that in this connection we need to ask how the quality of the informal and traditional apprenticeship can be improved, and how bridges to the formal education system can be created.

Employment-oriented learning for working children and adolescents

After the conclusion of an apprenticeship, whether formal or informal, young people will hardly be in a position to start a business, even a small one, themselves. Further learning, in the context of long-term experience of work and life, is required in order to become familiar with work processes, costing, staff management and other aspects of running a business. The individual path to becoming a small entrepreneur is thus a long one. Frequently, it takes many years (Singh 1997; Bakke-Seeck 1995; Boehm 1997: 24; Overwien 1994). In particular where young people are concerned, it is necessary to think of different forms of the organisation of work, preferably cooperative.

Acquiring the necessary competence for a micro-business, requires certain personality traits (frequently already marked during the process of socialisation) as well as key competences drawn from school and nonformal education, in combination with the training and work experience in the firm. Therefore, it becomes quite clear that a separation of working and learning is counterproductive from an employment perspective. A number of research studies on the acquisition of employment-relevant competences for the field of micro-enterprises in various countries in the “Third World” confirm this (cf. Karcher and Overwien 1997).

Training for working children and adolescents or, to use the Spanish acronym, NATRAS (*niños y adolescentes trabajadores*), whose learning experience is generally rather informal in nature, must therefore proceed from their

everyday lives and their working and learning situations. Their learning habits, particularly the practice of learning by doing, are of particular importance for the shaping of educative processes. Since the focus needs to be on the acquisition of competences appropriate to their situation, a subject-centred learning process needs to be organised in which the emphasis is on the learners, and not the curriculum or the teachers. Their previous experience must be suitably taken account of, and they themselves must as far as possible steer the learning process. Otherwise they may become alienated from the training and even decide to break it off. For this reason, much attention must be paid in the process to the participation of the NATRAS. Furthermore, the matter to be learned needs to be chosen so as to be predominantly practical and partly productive, so the learners can earn money as soon as possible by applying what they learn. With regard to the great importance of key competences, the learning opportunities need to be broader than is usual for limited instrumental competences. The learning courses should be integrated in the activities of social movements or local organisations, as the processes then become more continuous and more effective. In the sphere of social movements, however, their objectives and the means to achieve these are in the forefront. The question as to what the individuals involved derive as learning experience is frequently only a marginal question in the awareness of those involved. Where the objectives are only partly achieved or not at all, the competences acquired can also fall on the debit side. In the case of success, they are too little regarded as learning experience that can have further application. Educators in the role of learning advisors can and should contribute to making informal learning potentials more conscious and thus more applicable for those involved.

Informal learning and a subject-related approach demand an unfamiliar role from teachers. Educators are rather organisers of learning processes; they act as assistants to learners or learning groups to a greater extent than was hitherto normal. The role of the educator in *educación popular* satisfies these needs in many ways. After all, in education for liberation, it is from the start taken into consideration that the participants already possess abilities, that they already possess relevant knowledge gained from experience, even without certificates. In *educación popular*, learning proceeds from the subject. This applies not only to literacy courses for adults, but basically also to work with children and adolescents. The children's movement in Latin America, as a part of *educación popular*, also lives from the constant construction of relevant learning environments. The processes of self-organisation for the purpose of representing their own interests can only come about via concentrated informal-organisational learning. Informal learning, as becomes clearly apparent, cannot be separated here from social learning. For outward-directed work too, for the preparation of cultural activities, for the expression of political views, a high degree of informal learning is necessary.

The effectiveness of informal learning presumably depends greatly on key competences such as organising or communicative ability. In the context of

peoples' education, it is precisely these competences that are promoted. It is obvious that informal everyday learning often takes place in the form of dialogue. Adopting this approach helps to remove superfluous barriers to learning. In the approach that bears Freire's stamp, the teachers, who act rather as coordinators, withdraw increasingly in the course of the dialogic learning process (Freire 1972). The process of dialogue in the group enables the learners to approach the goal of their learning process as subjects, learning together informally. The learning process takes place in this case between the subject concerned and the object of learning, but also between the subjects themselves (Freire 1973). It is essential that the learners develop ordering structures to classify what they have learned. If we take it, following Freire, that achieving awareness of the alterability of the world is a step towards liberation, then it can be said at the same time that this realisation is a precondition for all really self-intentional learning.

In this context, Liebel reconstructs *educación popular*, in synthesis with approaches to street education, as an educational social movement. He traces a close connection traced between educational approaches critical of political rule and a practical approach proceeding from people's need for survival (Liebel 1994: 159ff.). Apart from this, there are few research findings on (informal) learning within social movements. One interesting study stresses the connection between learning in social movements and the existence of social networks. Monkman studies the migration-related learning processes of Mexican immigrants in California. Her enquiry focuses on possible ways of supporting the informal learning of the immigrants by means of units of non-formal education. For this purpose, the author carried out biographical interviews and gave the results depth with participatory observation in the context of meetings with immigrants. The development of what she calls "transnational" identities essentially takes place within longer-term learning processes linked with social networks (Monkman 1999: 369). Although details are not given of the underlying learning processes, the persons interviewed repeatedly emphasise their relevance.

In the context of peoples' education, in view of unalleviated poverty, it will become increasingly necessary also to discuss questions of the economic future of the participants. On the educational level, Gibson attempts to give relevant suggestions on the basis of a comparison. The author examines parallels and differences between the education of Paulo Freire and "enterprise education", which is practised above all in Great Britain. This latter sets out to promote small entrepreneurship in the education sector as well, and in this way to point out employment alternatives. This is not directly applicable to peoples education, where what is involved is the individual and the collective and their role in overcoming oppression. "Enterprise education" focuses only on the individual and his or her economic possibilities. We do not wish here to separate off elements of peoples education as a "method" and thus to deprive them of their political content. The question is rather how elements of "enterprise education" may be included in an expanded

horizon of *educación popular*. Gibson sees the parallels especially in the context of the educational process. In both approaches, the subjects are in the foreground, and a process orientation is given preference over a knowledge orientation. In both approaches, too, the teachers accompany the process. A problem orientation with the discussion of solutions is also among the parallels. Further aspects are the strengthening of the personality, and the self-confidence of the participants (Gibson 1994: 49ff.). Contradictions between the two approaches can be seen particularly where, on the one side, what is aimed at is a collective orientation together with the strengthening of the subject, and on the other only the strengthening of the individual in the economic process. Portions of "enterprise education" could provide an impetus for informal learning in the structure of *educación popular* inasfar as a view of people as also economically acting subjects is more strongly acknowledged. However, as a rule, it will have to be a question of cooperative economic activities, if considerable contradictions are not to arise between the educational approach and practical action.

A popular education programme in Nicaragua³

The question now arises how the type of education outlined above can be put into practice. Hitherto there have been few documented examples, but these at any rate give indications of a corresponding problem-oriented and practice-related debate in the context of the Central American children's movement (Liebel 1993). This includes the consideration of the use of informal learning structures in small firms for NATRAS. In Managua the NGO INPRHU collaborates with corresponding firms. The same organisation is endeavouring to connect informal apprenticeships and *educación popular* in Esteli in the North of Nicaragua. Although employment-oriented learning here too is not directly integrated into the structures of the children's movement as a social movement, the liberation-education-oriented educators of the NGO build upon concrete learning experience of the NATRAS in the movement of working children. This is clearly shown by the formulation of the young people's selection criteria. The selection itself is, however, made not by NATRAS but educators. The staff of the NGO do not carry the movement approach consistently further, but act largely in the context of conventional socio-educational practice. However, the learning and empowerment processes from the movement of working children are taken up. Most probably they are even a precondition for successful training in small firms. Without an individual strengthening of the NATRAS within collective processes, an apprenticeship for them in the largely hierarchically structured firms would presumably be hardly thinkable.

The economic possibilities in Esteli are very limited. The town has 100,000 inhabitants, of whom 70,000 live in the town itself and 30,000 in the rural environs. Out of the 70,000 inhabitants, 53% are below the age of 15. The

context for the project is favorable, as constructive collaboration with the municipal administration is possible. The fact that the administration is Sandinist is not so important. What is important is rather the attitude of politicians and authorities, which is oriented to local questions.

The number of young people engaged in training is dependent both on the economic possibilities of the small firms and on financing by organisations from Norway and Spain. The money is needed for educational guidance and for a grant as a compensation for income not earned during the period of training. The NATRAS attend a building timber or furniture-making shop, a metal workshop, a saddler's or a hairdressing and beauty salon. Training also takes place in a smithy. In the context of the project, training places are sought locally, in order to provide training in accordance with local structures, both economically and socially. In the context of a second training variant, work is done in a nursery garden, in which plants for afforestation, decoration and fruit trees are grown. This firm belongs to INPRHU. More than in normal small firms, there is the opportunity here for the NATRAS to contribute their experience. In the context of the project work, experience has shown that a working child or adolescent cannot move from one day to the next from working in the street to a more or less formal kind of work such as that in a hairdresser's or a carpenter's shop. Therefore it is meaningful for many NATRAS to work in a sphere more open to their needs and experience.

Selection of the trainees is made according to various criteria. First of all, the workshop owners take no one under 13 years of age. As a rule, it is assumed that younger children lack the necessary physical strength. A further important selection criterion is previous participation in experience processes in the framework of the overall project. This involves above all a certain level of identity and self-awareness within the organisation. Furthermore, the young people should be able to try out social relations in the framework of the assisted groups that differ from those of the street. They should develop a self-critical attitude and think over their work experience in the street. Overall, what is involved is a process of becoming conscious in the context of which the expectations of the new work acquire a proper foundation. A permanent process of reflection begins in the preparatory groups, and accompanies the change from the street to the workshops. Further criteria for selection include "psycho-social" factors such as the role of the NATRAS in the context of their family economy. Basically, family contact is regarded positively. Sometimes, however, difficult family constellations result in patterns of behaviour that hamper training.

Most of the NATRAS have been able to acquire enough schooling to be able to read and write and perform basic mathematical operations. There is no school or school-type institution integrated into the project; there is, however, close cooperation with schools. Here, cooperation takes place only with schools whose teachers contribute a sufficient background of thought about the life of young people in the street. The founding of a special project school has been rejected for political reasons; it is the state's task to provide

schooling. The educators of the project see themselves as mediators between the NATRAS on the one hand and families, schools, workshops and political or administrative instances on the other.

Basically, the project works within the context of local structures. Thus the idea also arose for training in existing workshops. The gearing to existing structures of the labour market renders possible the identification of local employment possibilities for working children and adolescents. The workshops at Esteli have a simple level of craftsmanship and mostly work for the local market. The educators see their role to begin with in speaking to the workshop owners and sensitising them to the problems of the working young people. They then visit the workshops and begin a dialogue on the life of the NATRAS, an exchange of ideas on the thinking of the young people such as the latter could hardly carry out in this form with the workshop owners. In the course of the discussions, the question is put whether the small entrepreneurs could imagine giving work to NATRAS. In this process, it is of special importance to learn something about the attitudes of the workshop owners towards the NATRAS, as this is decisive for the success of cooperation.

Most of the owners of the small firms already have experience with young people, as there are numerous apprentices employed informally who learn a trade within a few years, for which to begin with they receive no wages. They often have the status of apprentice for three, four or five years, after which they receive a relatively sparsely paid job as assistants. In the workshops in which there are other apprentices as well as the NATRAS, there have been no problems so far. The other young people are aware that the NATRAS are only able to obtain training with the aid of grants, whereas they themselves are financially enabled by their families to work as informal apprentices. One difference between the NATRAS and the "normal" informal apprentices is that the former have experience of life in the street and are correspondingly stigmatised. They have experience of violence, including among themselves. It can happen towards the end of the week that there is drinking in the workshops, arguments take place and the tone is frequently pretty rough. By reason of their previous experience, the NATRAS are often not prepared to expose themselves to such structures again. As, however, these are part of the reality of life, they need to learn to cope with them in their own way.

Only one of the 24 workshop owners with whom the project currently cooperates learned his trade in the framework of a formal training. Even in the field of hairdressing and beauty care, training in Esteli is frequently informal. In other towns, professional non-formal courses are offered. In some cases, the hairdressers in Esteli have attended such courses in other towns, but most of them have trained informally. In the workshops, learning takes place alongside production. There are no programmes or curricula. A structure results from the production that happens to be in demand. The owners of the workshops, too, as stated, also have no systematic training.

The workshops with which cooperation exists are relatively small, with

hardly more than three to five employees. Most of them are formalised insofar as they pay taxes. It is important for the workshop owners to declare to the state authorities that when they employ the NATRAS they are not doing so to obtain more workers, but are performing a social service. To this end, there must be a formal contract to prove this to the ministry of labour.

The advantage of training in the daily practice of the workshop is the closeness to the reality of the firm and to the market. Thus learning takes place with the tools available locally and with products that can be sold locally. The quality of the products and services is, however, mostly not very high, or at least depends greatly on the individual experience of the workshop owner concerned. The success with which the apprentices are able to learn in the context of such workshops certainly also depends on this experience, but also on the didactic ability of the workshop owner.

Another problem is the economic situation. Young people who no longer work in the street, sell in the market or clean shoes need an income. They cannot afford to train without reward. In contrast to the other informal apprentices, who are bound within a more or less functioning financial family structure, the NATRAS usually lack such support. Therefore they receive about \$40 (1998) a month as a grant. This grant is below the income that they would as a rule be able to get in the street. However, it must be taken into account that the situation of the NATRAS is considerably improved in the context of training. Thus, for example, they only work four hours a day, instead of from six in the morning to five in the afternoon. They work either in the morning or the afternoon, and can go to school the rest of the time. Furthermore, they are not exposed to physical violence, ill-treatment and so on. These improvements in their living conditions have a positive effect on their self-esteem. In this connection, it is also important that work takes place within the group and creates social bonds. The NATRAS thus earn less than before, but on the other hand have a number of advantages. One problem frequently is that they were used to getting a daily income in the street without having to wait for it. Now they are confronted with receiving their pay only at intervals, for instance fortnightly. For many of them, this is a problem, as they obtain credit, for instance, in the small shops in the quarter and thus can get into a vicious circle of debt. On the other hand, members of their families see this comparatively fixed income coming in, and attempt to share in it one way or another. In the families, it is expected that the NATRAS pay their share of the housekeeping costs. Whenever water or electricity bills arrive, corresponding demands on the young people are made. Since, however, they had been used to disposing of their income alone and making no contribution to the household, this can lead to tension. In this, the moderating influence of the educators is important.

Every one to two weeks, there are meetings with the NATRAS to discuss the situation in the workshops. It is discussed what problems there have been, how learning has taken place, etc. At the same time, there are also meetings with the mothers. Most of the NATRAS have some contact with their families.

Young people that only live in the street are not included, as too much instability is seen here. A process of negotiation always needs to take place to restore the relationship between NATRAS and their families, so as to create a certain stability.

Most of the educators engaged in the project are former teachers, with years of experience. However, when selecting them it is important that they have retained a critical attitude towards their activity as teachers, and are also integrated in the development of the community. They are former teachers who saw their work at school as involved with the community, proceeding from their political convictions. It is a fundamentally important approach within the project that all those involved go through mutual learning processes. The teachers too expect to learn from the NATRAS. This means that the roles on both sides are different from those in school. In the everyday process of work, conscious reflection on the experience is important. To some extent, this experience is also recorded in writing. One important function of the teachers in accompanying work in the small firms is to have regular conversations with the NATRAS about the situation with regard to relations on the level of the firm. When there are difficulties with the workshop owners or with colleagues, suitable intervention immediately ensues. Not infrequently, situations arise in which problems involving the families of the workshop owners need to be tackled.

At the time of writing, there are 44 NATRAS in training, which lasts between one and one-and-a-half years. Work is done in the workshop for four hours a day from Monday to Friday. Every Saturday, there are meetings for evaluation and planning. Most also still attend school; a few who work eight hours a day are unable to, but these are adolescents of 17–18 years of age. In the context of the programme of grants there have been no fluctuations, apart from some initial problems. However, at times the NATRAS become involved in family activities, for instance during the coffee harvest; they return to the project, however. Out of 124 apprentices, 22 (20%) have meanwhile obtained a more or less stable job in the trade they learned. Two returned to the street. Most of the rest work in the context of the family economy or as occasional workers in informal employment. Most, then, are not directly employed in the field in which they trained; but it should be noted that it is relatively common in Nicaragua to change jobs when the occasion arises in order to improve income. A fixed identification with certain trades does not exist to the same extent as in, say, Germany. For example, at the moment the production of tobacco is being resumed in Esteli. In this context, i.e. in the cultivation and also the production of cigars, earnings can be made. The cultivation of tobacco and the production of cigars in a “zona franca” (a zone of production largely free of taxes and other contributions, with very limited rights for those employed there) offer the possibility to obtain a (small) income under very poor working conditions – but at least a comparatively regular income.

From the perspective of the project, it is regarded as a considerable advan-

tage that the young people gain psycho-social stabilisation. Even when they subsequently do not work in the same trade, there is a considerable boost to their self-confidence, and the development of an individual-positive identity can be observed. Regarded from a psycho-social perspective, the project is a success. The training is also important for the role of the NATRAS in their various family environments. Their personal esteem by others is considerably enhanced. Initially, there were problems in a carpentry workshop with an owner who gave one young person the same work continually for six months. The owner was then talked to and the situation resolved. Such initial experiences were of importance for later work, as such cases can nowadays be avoided. Other problems include avoiding situations where the NATRAS have nothing to do but clean out the workshops. There are also sometimes problems of relations with other workers who wish to exert power, etc. Within the project, there are examples in which young people from the street came to employment via a lengthy process. Pepe entered the project at the age of 13. At this time, he was strongly "callejizado", that is, had almost broken off contact with his family, slept in the street or in houses with friends with whom he sniffed glue, was involved with drugs, stole in buses, etc. Through the involvement in the movement of working children and adolescents and the project, a lengthy process was initiated in the course of which he not only concluded elementary school but was able to be integrated into a business dealing in automobile spare parts. In time, the owner of the business developed so much confidence in this young person that he even gave him the day's earnings to take to the bank. When the owner died, problems arose as to his further prospects. Workshop owners frequently demonstrate readiness to support the project; they must, however, see and accept that there is an organisation in the background that intervenes and supports.

The nursery garden founded by the organisation INPRHU, whose inception was preceded by a market study, is of a somewhat different nature. On the one hand, this firm has more socio-educational supervision than is possible in smaller firms. For this reason, work is carried out here with NATRAS who come comparatively directly from the street. It can perhaps be compared with many training projects in Germany in the sphere of work with socially disadvantaged young persons. One point of emphasis is on the psycho-social reinforcement of the NATRAS. However, from the beginning an aim has been that a number of the young people will later be able to become independent with activities from the field of work of this nursery school for forestry and decorative plants. Thus from the start an awareness is created as to what raw materials and half-finished goods must be used, the part played by working hours, how sales can be implemented, and what the final profit amounts to. In practice, there are of course contradictions between this market orientation, that is, the question of profitability, and the requirements of working with young people. Additionally, the economic and thus employment structure of Nicaragua permits only limited predictions concerning a subsequent integra-

tion into the market. On the practical level, the solution to this is that the educator and coordinator in the nursery has a double qualification: as well as his educational training and experience, he also has business knowledge. At the same time, for educators involved there is permanent further training, including in economic matters. Within the nursery garden, additionally to informal learning in daily work, there are also special courses. In the context of the nursery garden, the founding of one's own firm could also take on collective forms.

Conclusion

To sum up, it can be stated that this approach contains a number of promising aspects for the future. The young people involved are working children, or "street children". They are now working in local craft firms or trades, in carpenter's shops, bakeries, a nursery garden, etc. They receive a small grant as compensation for loss of income in the street, where they previously earned money, but in the context of activities with little perspective. The owners of small firms pay their "normal" apprentices no wages, which means that it is the training they are interested in. Relatively independent young people such as the "street children" do not always find it easy to tolerate these structures. This is possible finally only because the process of the "informal apprenticeship" is accompanied by varied educational activities oriented to "*educación popular*". These activities are geared to the requirements of the young people.

Studies carried out by the NGO itself concerning the success of the project have shown that a relatively small proportion of those who complete the training subsequently work in the field of activity of the firms they trained in. But the great majority are able to pursue independently an activity that guarantees their survival, either alone or together with others. The reason for the relative success appears to be the connection between informal learning in an environment that is not always experienced as pleasant, but which is the world of real life, and educational activities that are consciousness- and subject-oriented, and to a high degree participatory. Thus, people's education can certainly be connected with the attainment of an income perspective, as the occupation takes place in perfectly normal small firms. But the previous experience of the young people within the movement of working children and adolescents also seems important for success. The learning experiences from this social movement and the strengthening received, which can also be described with the term "empowerment", have certainly been important preconditions for the success of the project. It can therefore be asked whether an approach of this kind with young people of similar biographical preconditions can function at all without the influence of a comparable social movement.

From this perspective, further experience needs to be evaluated for the thorough clarification of the possibilities and limits of a link between peoples

education and employment orientation. It would be important to aim at a combination of the corresponding approaches. For example, the “Organizaciones Económicas Populares” (OEP) in Chile from the time of the resistance to the dictatorship of Pinochet, founded by slum-dwellers with the goal of the production and distribution of goods and services, have not yet been studied from the aspect of learning. Meanwhile, materials of the “Programa de Economía del Trabajo”, a Chilean NGO, clearly show that politico-economic activities on the level of this social movement were consciously connected with learning inputs (e.g. Pet 1987). Overall, the means and competences available to the individual members of the organisations were thematised and pooled. The activities were not only concerned with direct survival production, but at the same time with work on self-identity and participation in the changing of political and social structures, combined with an improvement in the quality of life of the members. It was not only a small group of slum-dwellers in Santiago de Chile that was involved. In 1982 there were about 280 OEPs in the region of the capital; by 1991 the number had grown to almost 2400, involving 80,000 people. Community vegetable gardens and soup kitchens had been founded, but also cooperatives in various fields. All these groups had in common that they were engaged in economic activity within an economy based on solidarity (Nyssens 1997: 63ff.). In the mid-1980s, Möller studied the work of a women’s group in Venezuela whose goal to begin with is common education. From this activity, little by little production activities of many kinds are developing (Möller 1986). Rudolph shows, from an example in Argentina oriented to *educación popular*, that orientation to everyday life and simultaneous practice-related employment-oriented work with young people can be successful (Rudolph 1997).

Such examples ought to be examined systematically as to concrete modes or procedure from the point of view of the combination of social movement and informal learning. Relevant indications are provided by the Nicaraguan example, but overall it remains unclear what institutional and organisational requirements of informal learning in social movements exist, and how precise the learning that takes place is. Apart from this, non-governmental organisations frequently develop dynamics of their own that can endanger many of the above-mentioned principles of peoples’ education. For instance, the interest in guaranteeing stable jobs with corresponding influence sometimes collides with the need of the “basis” for democratic structures. Further, there is the question as to the spectrum of learning potential of social movements and possible bridges to formal education. Also to be discussed is the exact role of educators with increasing consideration of informal learning. The question whether and which key competences (Negt) are important for informal learning, and how they are acquired, is equally important. Here too the question as to transfer to other situations in life arises. The role of motivation to learn in the case of informal learning also requires investigation.

This list of open questions is doubtless incomplete: tackling it also presents methodological challenges. By reason of the complexity of the subject,

research studies on informal learning need to be interdisciplinary in approach. Apart from a certain number of studies in the field of education in the narrow sense, studies in the field are chiefly in ethnology, anthropology and psychology. Research findings from cultural, cognition and socialisation research should also be adduced. In the context of anthropology and ethnology, there are a number of studies (especially from the USA) dealing with the dependence of learning on culture, and examining learning processes on the level of an ethnic group or in the context of the village. In the field of museum education, too, informal learning processes are being studied. These studies need examining as to their applicability to the field of social movements. It is to be stressed that although the cultural contexts may differ, methodical approaches may be relevant for other contexts too.

Notes

1. The adjective “informal” is used above all on three levels. The first is that of social relations, for instance in the case of informal groups or informal relationships. A further level of the use of the term is the economic. First applied to countries of the “Third World”, the informal (economic) sector was defined in contradistinction to the formal sector. The formal sector embraces medium and large, frequently multinational, enterprises which make use of capital-intensive technologies, together with the field of public services. The “informal sector” is a blanket term for extremely heterogeneous activities mainly by small enterprises, whose common denominator is the fact that they stay largely outside of state control – which makes them informal rather than formal. It is on the third level of the application of the term that this essay will concentrate. In distinction to formal and non-formal learning, the term “informal learning” is used, particularly in the literature in English.
2. Sandhaas draws attention to a problem of (also cultural) translation: Frequently in German-language publications on international education questions, the English word “education” is equated relatively arbitrarily with the German words “Bildung” or “Erziehung”, since it covers either and sometimes both of these. (The same problem also arises in French and Spanish.) (Sandhaas 1986: 404).
3. This section is based on an interview with Carlos Gonzalez, the Director of the NGO INPRHU-Esteli, in March 1998.

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