On the Definition of Learning

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An interview with Christopher Winch

Interviewed by Merete Wiberg, Nina B. Dohn, Oliver Kauffmann, Ane Qvortrup and Peder Holm-Pedersen

Christopher Winch (1949) is professor of educational philosophy and policy at Kings College in London.

He is the author of several articles and books, including his pioneering study of human learning *The Philosophy of Human Learning* from 1998. Winch is convinced that a philosophical treatment of learning is necessary 'because of the distorted way in which learning has been treated by many psychologists and those educationists who have been influenced by them". (Winch 1998 p.1). The book not only gives a comprehensive philosophical analysis of the phenomenon and concept of learning, it also presents Winch's own views on learning, with decided inspiration from Wittgenstein.

Winch is an active participant in contemporary discussions on learning. He questions some of the prevalent trends in education, and is critical of concepts such as 'learning how to learn' and 'learning styles'.

As an aspect of his interest in the philosophy of learning, Christopher Winch also has done considerable research and writing in the area of vocational and professional education. In the book *Dimensions of Expertise* (2010) Winch explores the concept of expertise. His analysis, though, also offers interesting and valuable perspectives on the concept of learning. The book contains analyses of Wittgenstein's notion of rule-following, tacit knowing (Polanyi), knowing that and how (Ryle), as well as a discussion of the theory of expertise expounded by Dreyfus&Dreyfus.

The interview took place at Kings College, London on January 23, 2015, during the course of a visit to Christopher Winch and his colleagues. The interview was conducted by Merete Wiberg (int 1), Nina B. Dohn (int. 2), Oliver Kauffmann (Int. 3), Ane Qvortrup (int.4) and Peder Holm-Pedersen (Int.5).

In the course of the interview, we asked Christopher Winch to discuss how theories of learning can help us to understand the phenomenon of learning. In addition, we were interested in hearing how a change

of focus from the concept of learning to the concept of expertise has helped him to understand the phenomenon of learning.

Interview: Christopher Winch, 23 January 2015

1. Your shift of focus from learning to expertise.

INT1: *How do you see the relationship between learning and expertise and why did you shift your focus from learning to expertise? And how does the concept of expertise help us to understand the concept of learning?*

CW: Well, it was really because of my interest in vocational and professional education. I have done a lot of work in that area, and I have had a particular interest in the debates in epistemology about how we "know that" (Ryle). I thought these debates had a significant bearing on questions of expertise. So this is what partially explains my change of focus. You also asked how, and whether, the concept of expertise helps us to understand the concept of learning. I would put things the other way around: as we gain more clarity around our conceptions of learning, we are perhaps better able to understand expertise and "know-how". A central preoccupation of my book *Dimensions of Expertise* is how one can make sense of the relationship between having command over a body of systematic knowledge, and having the ability to make decisions in a professional context.

INT1: *Could you elaborate on your views about how the concept of learning helps us to understand expertise?*

CW: I think it is particularly issues around 'learning-how' which raises interesting questions in this regard. This was not so clear to me at the time when I wrote *The Philosophy of Human Learning*. Ryle draws attention to these issues when he talks about intelligence epithets, and how we evaluate actions and judgements. This is really important for an understanding of expertise. I tend to regard expertise as a sort of family resemblance concept. I have never attempted to produce a definition of expertise, and I am very sceptical as to whether it's possible. But on the

other hand, it does seem to be possible to identify some key features of expertise: in the first place, that expertise is subject to normative evaluation; and secondly, that there is a continuum from being a novice to becoming an expert. Both these features have to be accounted for. The concept and phenomenon of learning is really important for understanding the transition from the novitiate to expertise. We also have to make sense of the ability to apply these intelligence epithets to performances. We not only learn to become better at doing things; we also learn how to apply evaluative vocabulary to our own actions, and the actions of others.

INT1: *Would you say that the concept of expertise helps us to better understand this normative dimension, a sense which perhaps is lacking in the concept of learning?*

CW: I think it is another aspect of the normative. The prevailing emphasis has been on constitutive judgement: *what* makes this something, rather than something else. Whereas it seems clear that normative evaluation is a constitutive element of talk about know-how. It is this element which allows us to distinguish know-how from mere physical ability, for example. But there is also a normative framework involved in evaluation, when we determine what counts as a good, or an expert, or an excellent performance, as opposed to an ordinary one, or the performance of a novice. Normative criteria are different than those employed in constitutive judgement. Something can be constitutively x without necessarily being evaluated as excellent.

2. Theories of learning

INT1: *Do you have a favourite theory of learning and, if so, which one and why? You state in Philosophy of Human Learning that grand theories of learning are useless. Do you still think that this is the case?*

CW: Well, I would rather say, that all of them that have been produced so far are of very limited value; that is a more polite way of putting it. I thought the discussion yesterday was helpful in clarifying the distinction between producing a categorical framework for understanding, which

is important, though a notion not free from difficulties, and the idea that one can arrive at a universal explanatory account of learning. I maintained in *Philosophy of Human Learning* that the latter has not been done, despite various claims to the contrary. I think it is pretty unlikely that it ever could be done. This is not to say that we cannot construct explanatory frameworks about learning, but I think you have to start in a much less ambitious way, from the outset. For example, I think we know a lot more about how children learn to read than we did say sixty years ago, and that is one example of real progress.

INT2: *In your book on expertise, you seem to argue that differences among domains of knowledge and know-how makes grand theories of learning impossible. Is that a correct understanding of your position? In other words, that being an expert in one domain is quite different than being an expert in another domain?*

CW: It is partly the reason, I think. My argument suggests that even if you could construct a very general theory of learning, it would be of limited applicability, given the diversity of domains, and the wide variety of contexts in which learning takes place. But I think my main critique in *Philosophy of Learning* was this: that those theories that we do have, which make very grand claims, do so on a very, very limited empirical base, and very often, the conceptual foundations of the theories have not been clearly thought through.

INT2: *Right. I agree that there is something flawed in those theories, but you seem to have a more principled scepticism towards grand theories of learning, such that even if one had an extensive empirical basis and a sound conceptual foundation, a grand theory of learning would be difficult, if not impossible to establish. So I suspect your scepticism must have something to do with differences in subject domains. Or perhaps it has to do with something else altogether?*

CW: I think it has mostly to do with the point Eraut raised about the significance of differences in domain. Moreover, if you go back to Ryle's discussion of intelligence epithets, he is pretty clear that you only really learn to apply them when you are thoroughly immersed in concrete contexts. Conceptual shifts happen all the time when

you move from one domain to the other. If you think, for example, of the creative writer, that would be a term of approbation... creative accounting is probably not. So the issue of domains is really important. I'm not saying that it is impossible for someone to arrive at a general theory of learning, but my assumption would be, that it would be at such a level of generality as to be of little practical use.

INT2: *That seems to imply that the first principle of a general theory of learning would be an insistence on the importance of immersion. Immersion of the subject within a domain is a necessary condition for learning. Is that right?*

CW: Yes. And the other point I think is the one about context ... learning is context dependent.

INT2: *You see those as two different points, immersion and context?*

CW: Yes I do really. To take an example like reading, I think there are all kinds of factors that can affect a child's ability to and willingness to read. And they are very often dependent on specific features of the environment.

INT2: *Right. So on the one hand, we have immersion in a domain, and on the other, immersion in a context. But these two spheres will interact, will they not? E.g., isn't the way you immerse yourself in a domain dependent on the way you immerse yourself in a context?*

CW: I guess so, yes.

INT3: *You are obviously right in pointing out the problems involved in building grand theories of learning in relation to differences of context. But if we approach learning from the point of view of Ryle's account of "knowing-how", can one not say that he is silent about the body's role, about what really, in an ontological sense, grounds our dispositions to know and to learn. What is the connection, for example, between 'knowing-how', and our abilities? The latter are still bodily abilities. Aren't we leaving something out of the picture here?*

CW: We are physically embodied agents, and to that extent, the body has to be taken into account. I think where I part company with Ryle is that he appears to think that any admission that there might exist a sphere of inner activity which affects action leads right into Cartesianism. He is extremely reluctant to do justice to that phenomenon. And that is the problem with the Rylean account. I don't have any problems with the idea of embodied agency. But if you're trying to dismiss the inward aspects of human cognition, then I think you are missing something very important. And I think that omission has quite a considerable bearing on the notion of expertise. You probably are acquainted with the so- called fluency theories of expertise by Dreyfus and others. In their account of expert performance, they neglect cognitive activity and judgement. I think that is a serious mistake.

3. Learning, training and instruction

INT1: *In The Philosophy of Human Learning, you criticize Rousseau for his dismissal of the importance of training and instruction (p.39). How do you- in the light of some of the considerations you raised in Dimensions of Expertise – look at the relationship between learning, instruction and training?*

CW: I don't believe my views on that issue have changed significantly in the period you mention. I think there are some aspects of training which depend on instruction. I didn't really bring that out in *The Philosophy of Human Learning*. But if you think of vocational education or professional education, you will see that it contains both bodies of knowledge, which mandate certain courses of action, as well as ways and means of justifying those courses of action. It seems clear that in any programme, let's say, for example, a programme of vocational education, there are elements both of instruction *and* training, as well as various ways of combining them. So we would expect to see instruction and training, as well as a variety of other kinds of pedagogical activities, within a broader umbrella which I call vocational education. That dimension of learning and education didn't receive much attention in *The Philosophy of Human Learning* because it wasn't my main focus of interest in the book. I don't think

my views on that subject have changed that much over time, but I think they need to be adapted to take account of practical learning and expertise.

INT1: *So it's not sufficient just to be in the context to learn, one also has to receive instruction?*

CW: Again, you don't want to generalize too much. But if you think of the logic of modern occupations, that of the " German Berufe", for example, they are really built up around that idea. That's their philosophical basis.

INT4: *Could you elaborate more on the conception of instruction? What is instruction, and more precisely, what constitutes good instruction?*

CW: Well, let's take the example of teacher education. It is probably also the case in Denmark, that people complain that educational theory does not have much relevance for practice. It is clearly a challenge for those involved in curriculum design to bring theory into an intimate relation with practice. Instruction in educational theory is necessary, but it must be such so as to help illuminate what teachers are actually doing in the classroom. It should give prospective teachers a means for both raising questions about the validity of the theories, as well as for raising questions about instructional practice. In my view, there has to be an intimate relationship between these two elements in vocational programs. I am aware that attention is being given to this issue by the Swiss, for example. I believe that in the German Cantons, where the dual system has been the norm, one is now moving towards a situation where the first year of the program is spent entirely in the classroom. Why? Because recent and rapid changes in working conditions makes it more difficult for people to just insert themselves into the workplace.

INT1: *Lave and Wenger have spoken a great deal about 'learning when you participate'. Does this notion of learning involve and include instruction, or is there something lacking in this theory of situational learning?*

CW: I think there is. What it reminds me most of is Oakeshott's account of learning how to be a politician in national politics. First you are a part of the community; it's there you pick up the normative structures, and the relevant moves and attitudes you will need later as a politician. You learn by gradually inserting yourself into the local context of the community. And that seems to be the kind of model that Lave and Wenger also work with in their example of the tailor. But as a working model, it doesn't fit at all well with other forms of education. I think it is a bit of a romanticized and selective description of reality.

INT2: *I don't think Lave and Wenger would necessarily abandon the idea of instruction. They would simply insist that the instructor should be in the work-place all the time, so that you would have peer- to -peer instruction. This in turn would eliminate the need for classroom instruction, with the result that you wouldn't have the dual system you mentioned above. But you would still have situational instruction.*

CW: I think in that respect their views resemble Ryle's somewhat. They don't want to deny the place of instruction, but it never actually plays any part in their own descriptions of learning.

INT2: *Indeed, it only plays a role in the context of participation itself. Of course, we say things while we participate, but the language of instruction in this case is not decontextualized. If we put it elsewhere then we are doing something essentially different. We are learning new school practices instead of vocational practices.*

CW: Yes. The emphasis for them is on participation, rather than instruction. Although I think they leave theoretical space for workplace-based instruction in their model, they don't seem too anxious to explore the implications of it ...

4. Current discussions of learning in society

INT1: *I know you have examined the concepts of "learning to learn" and "learning styles". Which of the current discussions or conceptions of*

learning do you consider important – in the UK, Europe and in other places? And which conceptions do you consider problematic?

CW: Well, I think you have already mentioned some of them.

INT1: *Why do you think they are problematic?*

CW: For example, I think there is very little empirical evidence to support the notion of learning styles. I think that point is quite well established now. In the case of learning to learn, as I hope I have shown in one of my articles, the claims are confused. We don't actually know what concretely is implied and claimed by the concept; it seems to me to be something fairly trite on closer inspection... normally the examples given come from the province of literacy and numeracy, or from moral education and the development of certain character attributes. The concept of learning to learn isn't some kind of a magic bullet. Finally, one might consider theories of brain- based learning. Again you have to look very carefully at what is being claimed by the theory. I would argue that to the extent that the theory employs a representational account of how the brain works, there is conceptual confusion. I think these are the three most dominant theories or paradigms that are currently in circulation in the educational system in this country, and there are powerful and influential figures pushing them. Though I don't know that much about it, the latest theory on the educational scene is the idea that you can develop memory very powerfully. I haven't looked much at the literature, but on the face of it, there doesn't seem to be much conceptual confusion, unless one bases one's approach to learning on some kind of storehouse conception of memory.

INT1: *So it seems that it is not researchers who are discussing these things or proposing these concepts. Or is it?*

CW: Well, actually, I think it is. You may know more about it than I do.

INT3: *I would like to ask a follow- up question on the topic of brain-based learning. I am curious about the comment you made regarding representationalism- specifically, that it involved a form of conceptual confusion. Could you elaborate on that?*

CW: I think representationalism involves making the claim that one can describe the workings of the brain in representational terms. The brain represents itself to itself and so on. This logic implies in turn that the brain uses a representational framework of propositions. I try to argue in *The Philosophy of Human Learning*, on the basis of Wittgenstein's private language argument, that that doesn't really make a great deal of sense. Of course, I am not sure how much Hacker would agree with that conclusion. I believe his focus is on the mereological fallacy, as you know. He has been under some attack for that. It's worth noting that he has been called a "Linguistic Policeman". In addition, there is a rather more sophisticated objection from Rom Harré. I think there are potential problems with dismissing representationalism solely on the grounds of the mereological fallacy.

INT3: *Doesn't this impasse result in a potential danger? Namely, that in one corner, we have people working with the paradigm of brain-based learning running the show... And here we are, sitting in the other corner, talking about conceptual confusion. Even if we might be right about that as philosophers, it's the others who run the show. Can you say a bit more about that?*

CW: It is a bit of a political problem. I think philosophers, as you know, are very often regarded with suspicion, sometimes with good reason. I think in the case of the philosophy of education there has been an unfortunate tendency to be generally dismissive of empirical work, and even to suggest that none of it is of any use. And that's led to alienation between psychologists and sociologists and philosophers. So I certainly don't think we should let philosophers get away scot free in this situation. But from what I can see of the attempt to engage in discussion with the neuroscientific community, the blame isn't solely on the philosophers' side. Hacker made a serious effort to work with an established neuroscientist to set out some of the problems. I know from talking to people in the neuroscientific community that there are dissident voices. But, as in all areas where there is a dominant paradigm, your career can suffer if you kick against it too much, it is difficult to argue for something contrary to the conventional wisdom. I think the challenge posed by Bennett and Hacker to the dominant paradigm (Bennett & Hacker, 2003), eds.]

was simply dismissed with too little care, for they were right to pose it.

5. The role of expertise in the welfare state

INT5: *I was wondering if you could say something about the current role of expertise in society today. In particular, I would like to hear your comments about the way welfare professions and semi professions, like nursing, teaching and so on, are being managed. For instance, what dimensions of expertise does new public management favor? Do modern welfare states provide good conditions for developing the kind of expertise you write about?*

CW: I think conditions are difficult under new public management, where one of the premises appears to be, that there aren't very high levels of trust between managers and workers. If you take the kind of approach adopted in the dual system, the worker is expected to be both autonomous, and to be able to work in teams with other people. As you probably know, the Germans emphasize the skill element of Fertigkeiten and what they call Fähigkeiten [Winch, 2010, p. 73]. Are those distinctions present in Danish as well? In this approach, planning, evaluating, coordinating, communicating are all extremely important elements of one's professional competence. They can't just be reduced to skills. There is another piece of Ryle's work which is much less well known, called *On Thinking* , which calls attention to this. I have learned a lot from it. Ryle put his finger on something which is often overlooked in English philosophical discourse. It is very much there in the German one. So to answer your question: to have independent workers who can coordinate and cooperate horizontally rather than vertically, we don't need large layers of management. One can be trusted to get on with the job, not to act in a self interested way, to be a good professional. That kind of trust doesn't seem to be much encouraged under new public management.

INT5: *So these dimensions of expertise are under pressure in the current way of managing the welfare state as you see it?*

CW: Yes. I mean, in this country, it has always been less emphasized.

INT5: *Does that mean that we are seeing another kind of expertise developing within welfare professions? To be an expert under the prevailing conditions might be something quite different than the kind of expertise you have been talking about.*

CW: I think there are different sorts of things going on. For example, in occupations like nursing, you will see much more emphasis on the regulation of higher education, where nurses are actually required to undergo higher education. But paradoxically, in countries like Britain, it doesn't lead to their being excluded from very strict performance management systems. So although in theory, higher education should enable personnel to enjoy higher levels of autonomy, in practice autonomy is not so well regarded, because it conflicts with the regime of performance management. It is a serious issue. Take teaching, for example. When teachers are held accountable, they may lose their jobs if they don't produce results. This ensures that they are going to be focused almost entirely on satisfying the demands of management. As a consequence, they may not attend to other things they believe, and have been taught to believe, are important to fulfilling their professional responsibilities. I don't think anyone has a good answer to that dilemma. I was watching a House of Commons Select Committee on education where this problem was pointed out to our Secretary of State by the Chair of the committee. No answer came, because there isn't one under the current system. As long as we work within the logic of a performance regime, we take account of its demands. Under that kind of regime, one always tries to gain advantages and avoid negative consequences. So it becomes a game of cat and mouse.

INT2: *Isn't your distinction between being an expert and excellence of action of relevance here? You seem to argue that it is quite possible to be an expert in performance management, without being an actual expert in a profession. In that case, you wouldn't necessarily be performing excellent actions, because you would be performing actions that normatively weren't the ones that you should be performing, as a nurse for example.*

CW: Yes. A thing that has happened in the educational system in Britain is perhaps of relevance here. We have seen a performance regime in school for years. If you look over the history of it, you see at first the establishment of a set of performance criteria. Pretty soon afterwards, schools learn how to take advantage of them. They produce the intended outcomes. In the next round, the criteria are further refined, and then the same thing happens all over again. The latest re-iteration of criteria has been done very thoroughly. What we have now is a very elaborate system of performance criteria for secondary schools which is intended to eliminate the possibility of gaming all together. One can conclude that whoever devised that system is an expert in performance management.

INT2: *This state of affairs cannot be considered to be something positive, because it doesn't lead to excellent actions.*

CW: The whole framework of assumptions around which the system is based has got problems.

INT2: *Exactly.*

CW: One can still be a kind of expert, but at the price of actually discounting the expertise of the people whose performances one is going to manage. That's where the problem lies.

INT5: *It is pretty much the same in Denmark, I guess. We see a new kind of expert there, one you might call "the evidence expert" or "the expert who knows best practice". This would be a professional who is able to base his practice on evidence, or, at the very least, one whose practice is informed by some knowledge of best practice. Do you see that kind of figure here in England as well? How does the figure of "the evidence expert" fit into your treatment of the different dimensions of expertise?*

CW: I think evidence-based and evidence-informed are different. There is a joke about precisely this distinction. We have all heard about something called evidence-based policymaking. Someone has remarked that it usually in reality is more like policy-based evidence making. There is a lot of truth in that comment. Once again, teaching is quite

interesting as an example, because the dominant conception is that teaching is a craft, and you learn it "Lave and Wenger style". But at the same time, we hear the rhetoric about evidence-based practice. If we know what works – that's the other phrase - then we can tell teachers what to do. One simply devises a set of protocols, which are mandated by the evidence, give the teachers the protocols, and say, do this! For example, we claim to know that synthetic phonics works as a method for teaching reading. Therefore, on that basis we can devise teacher- proof programs and put them into effect. You see many examples of that kind of logic. But under it, the ability of the teacher to make judgments about what they are doing, or should be doing, is very restricted, and mostly limited to minor matters, such as the timing and sequencing of activities, rather than on making judgments about the needs of individual children. It seems that evidence-based teaching has found its own niche. On the other hand, evidence- informed teaching, where you use the evidence as an ingredient in your own making of judgments, is much less recognized. It's one of the jobs of a university to say that we need to recognize the value of that, and to argue that universities are an indispensable means for developing this capacity.

INT5: *What kind of skills would a teacher need to learn to make the transition from being simply an evidence-based teacher, to one who knows and is able to use the relevant research in his teaching practice, as one ingredient among others? What kind of knowledge or skills would an expert teacher need to be able to do that?*

CW: Your question leads back to that point that was made earlier about expertise. First of all, teachers need to be able to understand the research. I don't think teacher education, as it is done in Britain at the moment, gives them the ability to do that. Secondly, teachers need to be able to make judgments as to what bearing that research has on what they're doing. So for example, if they only read meta- studies of education, like John Hattie's, that is not really going to help them deal with problems in a classroom. In other words, they need to understand the implications- if any -of the research for what they are doing, and to formulate their own course of action on the basis of that understanding. That is where the link between theory and practice is important. It enables you to make judgments on the basis of what you've read and understood.

INT4: *Could one perhaps describe the difference between these two kinds of teachers' use of the evidence as the difference between responsibility and accountability?*

CW: Yes... I think teachers who tackle their work informed by evidence are still accountable for what they do, but in a different way. One might be asked: "Why did you make this or that judgment"? The answer will probably be something like this: "that in terms of the alternatives available to me, and the constraints present etc. it seemed to me at the time to be the best course of action to take". One relies on one's professional judgment, rather than on some protocol dictated by a performance regime.

INT2: *That teacher would likely have some explaining to do higher up in the system, because he or she would have to argue why it wasn't enough to just tick off the boxes. It's easier to be accountable upwards in the system when you just follow the protocol. So the distinction you made previously makes sense.*

CW: Well, let's take an example: Teachers are accountable under a performance regime for producing good exam results; they are not accountable for giving good advice about possible careers to children. You might say, professionally, they ought to be, because they adhere to a professional ethic that says one ought to attend to the needs of the children. But in terms of the accountability regime, they are not held accountable, just as they are not held responsible either.

6. The concept of learning

INT1: *Let's return to the concept of learning. Do you think knowledge of theories of learning actually helps teachers? As you know, theories of learning are not often evidence-informed.*

CW: I think they have to. I argue in my forthcoming book, that whatever happens, teachers always act on the basis of theories. As Keynes once said...business men...you think they're talking common sense, but they are actually working on the basis of some outmoded economic

theory. Teachers who seem to be making very pragmatic judgments are all the time making assumptions, more or less. They justify their own justifications, on the basis of theoretical assumptions they are not fully aware of. That is a dangerous situation. It is one of the problems with the craft notion of teaching. Gramsci said that common sense is sedimented ideology and theory. If teachers only relied on common sense, that would be a really bad situation. Therefore, teachers do need to know theories. They also need to know the theories' strengths and weaknesses, and whether they are conceptually coherent.

INT5: *Could you give a more specific example of the relation between the knowledge of learning theories and the practice of teachers? Why is that relation so important?*

CW: Let me give you an example from my own teaching career . When I started teaching, the theories of Basil Bernstein on verbal deficit and working class educational achievement were very influential. I remember looking at some notes the Head of the school made at the first school I taught in. The note said that children start school without any language at all, which is obviously nonsense. That is a good example of the influence of a theory on school practice. It can really affect your perception of reality, in this case, in quite a negative way.

7. Rule-following in relation to learning and expertise

INT1: *I think rule-following is an important concept in your first book, The Philosophy of Human Learning. How does Wittgenstein's concept of rule-following help us to understand learning? Or does it help us?*

CW: Yes, I think it does, though I think you need to extend his account. I think that Wittgenstein was probably more concerned with how one participates in a practice and what constitutes a practice, than he was concerned with issues that have to do with how one improves within a practice. It's clear that more work needs to be done in this area. Of course, Ryle began to look into some of these issues, but he only touched upon the developmental dimensions of learning within a practice. I would say that there are norms governing the transition

from novicehood to expertise. But it is probably unlikely that they can be adequately captured in a set of discursive norms. Looking at things more broadly, I would endorse the Baker and Hacker account of rule-governed activity in "Language, Sense and Nonsense" in one of their Wittgenstein commentaries, where they describe the various kinds of normative practices which jointly constitute the normative framework in which people operate, as a form of rule-governed activity. I think their thinking also takes account of the kind of objections made by people like MacIntyre against Peter Winch, for example. Smoking or sitting down or walking are not obviously rule-governed activities, in the conventional sense of the term. But they are certainly also activities subject to normative constraints at the very least, and probably normative prescriptions as well to a certain extent.

INT2: *But sometimes we might have norms and rules that we are only more or less aware of. And we might get into situations where we feel somehow that we should not merely follow our conventional norms, that the situation we're in demands something else. So my question is: what governs our judgment in those kinds of situations? In other words, how do we normatively judge our own norms?*

CW: Well, do you know the novel by Tom Wolfe called "Bonfire of the Vanities"? There is a lot in it about people who fall foul of the law, people down and out, people from black communities and so on. One of the things Wolfe does is to describe people's behavior in court. When someone is a defendant, you would normally expect their demeanor to be anxious and respectful and so on. At one point, he describes this young man coming in to the courtroom with a sort of swagger, where you go walking on the balls of your feet. He calls it a 'pimp roll'. So this guy comes into the courtroom, doing the pimp roll. In effect, he is consciously deviating from the kind of normative expectations we have of people in that situation, because he wants to make a point. He is more interested in what his peers think about him then he is about what the judge thinks. So I think that would be an example of the kind of situation you described before.

INT2: *But then he is still doing it because of norms of his peers, rather than the norms of the courtroom?*

CW: Yes, he has decided that he is going to do it that way, rather than the other way. He has got his own reasons for doing what he does.

8. Training and conditioning

INT3: *You distinguish between training and conditioning in your book The Philosophy of Human Learning. From your perspective, training involves rules and, therefore, norms. This seems to suggest there is a difference between 'mere conditioning' and training. Obviously, conditioning exists. It has a function, right? But isn't there a gap between conditioning and training, building your argument, as you do, upon Wittgenstein? And doesn't conditioning in one way or another play a role in learning?*

CW: Conditioning is a term that applies both to animals and humans I think. It is probably easiest to see the gap between conditioning and training with humans. With regards to your question, are you trying to imply that there is some kind of continuity between conditioning, training and activities. I think there probably is. I think there are cases where you move from being conditioned to do certain things to being able to be trained to do certain things. Again, perhaps one example might be Strawson's account of how children learn to react to resentment in the early stages of their moral formation. First, we have reactive behaviour on the part of adults. This in turn leads to reactive behaviour on the part of children. These patterns of reaction again become the foundation, if you like, for the ability to be trained in certain activities. So, I wouldn't argue that there was an absolutely impermeable distinction between the two.

INT3: *My question might be related to something we talked about earlier, when we discussed Ryle and his silence regarding the role of the body in cognition, when I used the term "the ground for dispositions". If we adopt the Wittgensteinian perspective, we will ask questions like" how does the infant get in to this more or less closed circle of rule-following, or" how does he gain entry into concrete life-forms" et cetera. These kinds of questions point at conditions of early human life... where we might get some help from biology and psychology. But*

Ryle and Wittgenstein are notoriously afraid of dealing with empirical science.

CW: The growth of the ability to speak and to understand is extremely important here. Ryle does actually draw a distinction between drilling and training, which is pretty much the same as the distinction that I've been trying to draw. And as far as I recall, Ryle argues the two are different, but he does not argue that there is no possible transition between the two. But, as you suggest, he does not actually give us an account of how you get from the state where someone is capable of being conditioned, to one where the person is capable of being trained. And certainly one of the capacities which make the transition possible will be the ability to understand- to understand what was being conditioned, and how that can be trained into something which is more than mere conditioning. I think an account of this transition has to involve an account of the child's growing mastery of language in various contexts.

9. Training, action and reflection

INT3: *We also have a couple of questions on the role of awareness, or consciousness. You consider the kind of learning associated with training as more closely linked with action than with reflection and knowledge (The Philosophy of Human Learning, p.56). This seems to give the impression that training doesn't involve conscious awareness. There are plenty of examples of inculcating a type of expertise through action without conscious awareness. So what is the relation between conscious awareness and training?*

CW: Any account of professional judgment, I think, has got to give due place to the phenomenon of people arriving at a decision consciously in some kind of ratiocinating process. I think if you can't do that, then there is something seriously missing in your account of it. Some writers on expertise, I think Ryle, actually, and Dreyfus too, try and avoid this issue. I don't think it can be avoided. And I don't think it needs be avoided either, because I don't think admitting the reality of rational processes necessarily entails that you are a Cartesian, as Ryle appears

to think. My own preferred way of approaching this issue would be to take the kind of view that Peter Geach took in "Mental Acts", although I would also include other elements from a Wittgensteinian perspective. My position also has very strong affinities with Vygotsky's view of the transition from outer to inner speech; that is, that we first learn to assert discursively in outer speech, and then afterwards, as a secondary ability, we learn to do it inwardly. I suggest one should conceive of judgment as something analogous to assertion, with the difference that the former primarily refers to inward activity (if one can use that term without too much confusion).

INT3: *You seem, then, to be turning the normal path of intuition around. Isn't this in line with Wilfrid Sellars and his considerations about Ryle and 'the Rylean ancestors': First, we are immersed in society and then we learn and make tools. Finally, we can use those tools to understand the process and explain ourselves as beings having minds.*

CW: Yes, and lastly be able to do that as a purely internal act. I think that is the way forward. I think these considerations are important for expertise, because you need to be able to account for the occasions where someone is confronted with a complex, unusual situation that they haven't come across before, and where they have to formulate a course of action. Perhaps it doesn't matter so much how they might subsequently explain their actions, if they are asked to justify what they did. What will come to expression in that case is the quality of the justification afterwards, not what actual mental processes they went through prior to acting. It does seem important that we allow for the possibility that people do think things through in this way, and that very often it constitutes an important condition of professional judgment. I don't think it is same thing as reflecting while acting. The idea that you can do this sort of thing in the middle of carrying out an action seems unrealistic; it is more likely these kinds of episodes usually take place at some level of detachment from the actual activity.

INT1: *So you better like the often-used concept: reflection on action?*

CW: Yes, that's right. Or also: reflection before action.

INT2: *But sometimes while acting you have to act more intuitively, in the heat of the moment, so to speak. Afterwards, you will likely be able to rationalize what you did, but the fact is, you did act, and probably with good reason. What would you call the form of judgment made in that kind of situation? If it is not reflection in action, then what is it? It is one thing to supply the arguments beforehand; quite another to come with them afterwards. But given that one did act, and that one acted accountably and responsibly and well in the situation, what is one doing if the judgment actually is only articulated afterwards?*

CW: I think there is clearly a distinction between thoughtful and non-thoughtful action, and I'd be happy to use that distinction when dealing with the sorts of cases you describe. But again, as Wittgenstein said, 'Thinking is a widely ramified concept'. It doesn't entail that one has to go through some sort of conscious representational action in order to act thoughtfully, or to think while acting.

INT3: *How would you avoid the fallacies of representationalism, that is, of having to judge and represent your own mental states? I think you obviously want to avoid the pitfalls of representationalism as a first-level description of mental states – of mentality as such – but when you are reflecting on your own cognition, don't you need a means of representing your own mental states?*

CW: I don't have a problem with that. My problem lies with describing the brain as a user of representations.

INT1: *Where would you locate the process of representation? If it is not there in the brain, where else could it be?*

CW: We do have representational abilities, and these are the prerequisites of representation, which is an important point.

INT5: *Could you elaborate on something you were discussing previously with Interviewer 2, where professionals act in the heat of the moment. In some way, one can say there is knowledge in play. There is some process of performing and knowing occurring in the action. How do you conceptualize that situation? There is both action and knowledge, but*

there doesn't seem to be much reflection involved in the process. You just do something because you have to do something. Somehow it seems to be a good idea. How would you view or describe that situation?

CW: Quite a lot of our abilities can be described discursively but they are not completely described discursively. I think that includes both capacities connected with acquaintance or perception and also capacities associated with knowing how to do things. So we have capacities which we are not fully aware of, always. They are not present to our conscious minds. And for which our explanatory abilities are just incomplete or inadequate to fully describe them. That is the harmless version, if you like, of what are termed the tacit elements of knowledge. The capacities we have outrun our ability to describe how we use them. When someone is asked why they did such and such in the heat of the moment, some sort of explanation and justification is called for. Depending on the context, it might be an inquiry, if something has gone badly wrong. The focus will then be on the quality of the explanation, rather than on trying to establish exactly what was going on in the person's mind at the time. To what extent one accepts the justification and explanation offered, I guess, depends on the circumstance.

INT1: *Maybe this point has some connection with Vygotsky's view of developing tools when we are trying to explain something, and how this process can help us to develop our ways of thinking.*

CW: Yes, you are right. I think it does, because it involves a kind of reflection on action as well. One asks oneself: Why did I do that? That can lead to greater self knowledge.

INT2: *If you had to point at one learning theorist, would Vygotsky be your favourite?*

CW: I have never been very happy with the actual accounts given of scaffolding, for example. As a conceptual framework, though, I think it is more promising than some of the other existing frameworks. I have never seen a Vygotskian approach really used as well as it might have been. For some reason, it has always seemed disappointing to me. I don't quite know why that is.

INT1: *I think there has been a lot of focus on scaffolding. People tend to forget all the other things Vygotsky said.*

INT3: *Can I go back to the question of consciousness? Do you have any independent ideas on the notion of consciousness? Obviously, there is a difference between tacit and non tacit knowledge, just as there is a difference between conscious and non-conscious behaviour,or between conditioning and training. These differences exist. But what about consciousness as such, and its possible role in mental causation? I am curious to hear your comments about that.*

CW: I think it is implicit in what I have said. There are clear cases of what you might want to call mental causation. Cases where somebody considers alternative courses of action, argues merits and demerits, maybe to themselves, maybe to someone else ... and on that basis, acts. I don't see anything particular problematic about that.

INT 3: *I am thinking of the standard ontological issues.*

CW: Perhaps you mean some of the ones Ryle raises. There is the regress argument, for example: if you avow something, then you must know how to avow, which assumes that you know that such and such is a way to avow, and so on.

INT 3: *I am referring both to the ontological problem of the explanatory gap, and the ontological question about what consciousness is as such. Maybe you wouldn't put it like that; maybe you don't agree with this way of posing the question about the nature of consciousness. Previously, it seemed that you were saying that Ryle had got it wrong, because he opted for the dichotomy of dualism and non-dualism, excluding the possibility that there might be something in between. So that is what I am thinking of- the standard ontological question.*

CW: I suppose my view would be similar to that of Strawson, that a human being is a primitive category to which p-predicates apply. I would be happy with that. You keep on asking for an explanation, how one might explain our capacity for judgment. I have explained why I think Ryle's account is unsatisfactory. What more do you

want? Of course, that is not going to satisfy a lot of philosophers or psychologists.

INT1: *When you talk about judgments, are you referring to a certain theory? What kind of theoretical explanation would you give of judgment?*

CW: I think the best explanation I've seen is Peter Geach's. I think it needs elaboration because he only deals with the case of assertion; he doesn't, for example, extend his account to supposition, or to the processes of reasoning that lead to conclusions. But I don't think it would be philosophically problematic to extend his account.

INT 1: *Many refer to Aristotle's concept of phronesis, or something like it. Does that make sense to you?*

CW: Yes, as long as judgment takes account of the concrete situation people are in. I think phronesis also covers the phenomenon of the *way* in which people do things, not necessarily when they are ratiocinating or contemplating their actions, but when they are acting thoughtfully. I think phronesis, generally speaking, has to do with the way in which something is done. It is not an added extra, as Ryle would say, or a parallel activity that goes on alongside action.

INT3: *How one views it might also depend on one's (philosophical) training, you might say.*

CW: I do think phronesis is something more than prudence. Some people describe it as prudence. There seems to me to be a distinction between regarding the virtue in itself, and then considering how it is actually exercised.

INT1: *In Denmark we talk often about forms of knowledge. You seem to use the concept in another way. In your book, it seems more to signify subjects or disciplines ...*

INT2: *... Like the German "Fach" or "Fach Gebiet". Is that correct?*

CW: Yes, that is right. I have been very influenced by Hirst's theory of the forms of knowledge. I just think that it tries to do things at too high a level of generality. That's one problem. The other problem is that it doesn't take sufficient account of the more practically oriented subjects, for example, the ability to speak a foreign language. Unfortunately, when Hirst revised his position, he went completely off in the other direction, and argued that what really matters are practices, without offering any account at all about how knowledge might inform practices. So, in a sense, he is a bit like Ryle there. I think it was a mistake for Hirst to abandon the idea of forms of knowledge. I think, as I mentioned, there was a problem with generality. There was also the problem of not taking sufficient account of practical subjects. He probably also needed to look more into the question of how knowledge of a "Fach" might affect action. In my view, those things could have been done.

INT 2: *Danish is very similar to German and we often struggle with translating the term "faglighed", which is "Fachlichkeit". I think that what you are actually trying to get at with the term 'forms of knowledge' is what we mean by "faglighed". Does that make sense?*

CW: Yes I think so.

INT 2: *It is a field of knowledge for a subject, which includes systematic knowledge, as well as the ways of applying systematic knowledge in different situations and from different perspectives – a Weltanschauung, a way the subject views the world. Does that make sense?*

CW: It does. But there is something else which Hirst does not bring out as much as he could, which is the fact that subject expertise does involve a lot of know-how. It involves the ability to find your way around the subject, to grasp the connection between concepts, make material inferences and so on. It is unfortunate that he didn't develop that side of it, because then he would have seen more clearly that subject expertise has a lot in common with know-how. I think people who talk about learning outcomes forget that as well. They think that knowledge can be adequately described in terms of someone's ability to state propositions and understand their relationships.

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An interview with Knud Illeris

Interviewed by Mikala Hansbøl and Gerd Christensen

About Knud Illeris

Knud Illeris (1939-) is Professor Emeritus of lifelong learning at the Danish School of Education, Honourable adjunct professor at Teachers College, Columbia University, and an inducted member of the International Adult Education Hall of Fame.

He is the author of numerous articles and books and, since the late 1960's, he has worked on questions like "How does human learning function?" and "What happens when intended learning fails or becomes distorted?" (Illeris, 2015). In 2007, (2006 in Denmark) Illeris published the book "How We Learn: learning and non-learning in school and beyond" in which he presented an updated version of what he calls a comprehensive and coherent learning theory – a new edition is expected to be published in September 2016. One of the central elements of his theory, and perhaps one of the best-known of his ideas, is his conception of the learning triangle, in which learning is represented as the intersection of content, incentives and interaction in a concrete context. Illeris' work is remarkable for the way it strives to understand learning empirically as progression and regression, with continual movements back and forth between the two poles in an increasingly fluid world. Illeris adopts an eclectic approach to learning, and his inspiration stems from a variety of sources. He developed his own position by compiling and developing a wide variety of theories, such as: perspectives interested in student-centred education (e.g., Jean Piaget, Thomas Nissen and Carl Rogers); the Frankfurter School, combining Marx-inspired understandings of society and Freudian understandings of the individual (e.g., Oskar Negt, Thomas Leithäuser, and Thomas Ziehe). Donald Schön's work on the reflexive practitioner and David Kolb's theory of experiential learning have also had a significant influence on Illeris' thinking. In his later work, Illeris has been inspired by the notion of transformative learning, as can be found, for example, in the work of Jack Mezirow, and by Peter Jarvis's approach to learning.

Illeris is, and has been for many years, highly influential in the field of education, both in Denmark and internationally, where his empirical research, as well as theoretical work, have influenced educational policies, and inspired numerous educational programs. Illeris's ground-breaking work on problem-oriented learning and participatory direction was one of the major sources of inspiration for the development of the then (1972) new University Centre of Roskilde. The latter emphasizes the importance of the students' self-directed, problem-solving activity in learning, and it sees project-oriented group-work as the central study activity of the university. Illeris has also been an influential figure in relation to vocational education, where he has developed empirically-inspired theories of vocational training, which aimed simultaneously at the development of 'general' qualifications and personal development.

With his book "Learning in the Competition State" (Illeris, 2014, in Danish), Illeris continues to contribute to our understanding of how important the discussion of the concept of learning is to the field of education and educational research. As he himself states:

> "... genuine learning theory is about how learning takes place and functions in various situations and conditions, and not about how it can be streamlined as an industrial production process – simply because learning is an entirely human, and in no way industrial, matter" (2015).

The following interview was conducted as a historical-biographical interview, and it took the form of a conversation with Illeris, where our primary interest lay in the task of understanding the 'engine room' underlying the wide variety of his work and ideas on education. We wanted to obtain deep insight into Illeris' thinking on learning, the development of competence, education and practice. And we were interested in exploring the course of his theoretical development, tracing developments in his learning theory and understanding of learning, as it finds expression in his work, from its beginning up until today.

The interview was conducted at Roskilde University on March 2nd, 2015.