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Lifelong Learning:  Master Education – Personal Development or/and Professional Competence Development?

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### Introduction

Master education for adults has become a strategy for Lifelong Learning among many well-educated people in Denmark. This type of master education is part of the ‘parallel education system’ in Denmark. As one of the first Danish universities who offered this type of Master education, Aalborg University has during the last 9 years made it possible for adults from public and private organizations to go through continued academic education.

This paper presents some of the results of a research project investigating the adult students’ motives and needs for participating in a master education and obtaining a master degree. The research interest was to determine whether the motives and needs would stem from for instance society’s increased demands for qualifications, job related expectations of competence development expressed from the work place, or rather the individual wishes for personal development and shift in career.  Furthermore, the research project investigates how the individual master graduate has made use of his/her education during the period from their graduation until the time of the survey. This means investigating their career path after having graduated and investigating the intended as well as the unintended effects (personal and professional) of the master education. The data have been gathered among graduates from a specific master education, Master in Learning Processes, and the paper will draw on results from a quantitative survey based on a questionnaire answered by 120 graduates who attended the master programme from 2000 to 2007.

### The concept of Lifelong Learning and the Danish parallel Competence system

The strategy of Lifelong Learning has been an important issue ever since the UNESCO conference in Montreal in 1960 where the first international conference, which officially ratified the idea of Lifelong Learning took place (Korsgaard, 1999). The concept of Lifelong Learning was furthermore seriously thematised in the report, sent out by UNESCO in 1972, *Learning to be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow.* Also in OECD the concept of Lifelong Learning was an important issue and in 1973 OECD published the report, named *Recurrent Education: A Strategy for Lifelong Learning.* Here the relationship between recurrent education and Lifelong Learning as a kind of interaction between work and education through out life was emphasized*.* The original breakthrough took place at the OECD meeting for ministers of education in Paris in 1996, with the head lines, *Making Lifelong Learning a Reality for All.* In a following report, *Lifelong Learning for All* the concept of Lifelong Learning was enhanced as a basis for educational policy in OECD. Historically it can be emphasized that UNESCO and OECD represent two different theoretical and ideological positions relating to the concept of Lifelong Learning. When UNESCO seriously introduced the concept in 1960 it was related to a humanistic tradition with focus on democracy and personal development as key words. Around 1980 the position of UNESCO is weakened, while OECD largely starts to set an agenda for the educational policy especially in the western countries. The new understanding of the concept of Lifelong Learning was based on neo-liberal philosophy, which considers education as an investment in ’human capital’ (Korsgaard, 1999). From UNESCO and OECD the concept has ever since found its way into the educational policy in EU from 2000 by the Lisbon declaration[[1]](#footnote-1). The Lisbon declaration has afterwards been followed up by series of EU-meetings and declarations[[2]](#footnote-2), for instance a Memorandum about Lifelong Learning in education from 30 October 2000[[3]](#footnote-3) and announcement from the Commission about ’e-learning’. Today Lifelong Learning strategies are important aspects of the Bologna process[[4]](#footnote-4) .

The European Commission’s memorandum on lifelong learning highlights three basic categories of purposeful learning activity:

* Formal learning, which takes place in education and training institutions, leading to recognized diplomas and qualifications
* Non-formal learning, which takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training and does not typically lead to formalized certificates.
* Informal learning, which is a natural accompaniment to everyday life. Unlike formal and non-formal learning, informal learning is not necessarily intentional learning, and so may well not be recognized even by individuals themselves as contributing to their knowledge and skills (Longworth, 2003)

If we look at the concept of Master education in a Danish context[[5]](#footnote-5) then it can be considered as one of the initiatives from the Danish government in order to meet the international strategies for Lifelong Learning in the formal education systems. It can be considered as an educational initiative to meet the demands from society and the labour market due a change and increase in the demands of the work force’s qualifications and competences. At the same time, Master programs seem to be able to offer people an opportunity to go through further education, and to obtain an academic degree – people, who for several reasons did not have that opportunity at a younger age.

Lifelong Learning in Denmark involves a strategy for continued formal as well as non-formal and informal education where the organization of the teaching and the learning activities are closely related to workplace learning and where learning and experiences from work are estimated to be of high value during the formal educational activities. From 2000 new Government regulations were introduced[[6]](#footnote-6), which obliged the formal education system to organize educational activities, which would make it possible for pupils/students to acquire qualifications for Lifelong Learning, so that they would be prepared for further and continuing education. It means that people when attending education would develop abilities and skills to learn for work *and* for life.

Today you may expect that most young people going through formal education in pre-school and gymnasium before entering the university might have developed some abilities and skills for Lifelong Learning by the way teaching has been organised by use of for instance e-learning and tools to support reflection on a meta-cognitive level. However, you cannot expect that adult students participating in master programs would have been trained in competences for Lifelong Learning during their former education, because it might in fact have taken place within another educational agenda characterized by more conventional understandings of teaching Therefore, it seems to have been challenging for the universities to meet the diversity in expectations from the adult students in the Master programmes (see Krogh, 2003, Aarkrog (DUT), Klewe, 2006, Lorentsen, 2007 and Helms Jørgensen, 2008). Furthermore, the ministerial orders regulating the area permits universities to give access to students who do not hold a bachelor degree, as long as they are estimated to have knowledge and skills at bachelor level through assessment of prior knowledge.

However, until now there have only been few investigations within the field of Master programmes in Denmark concerning the students’ motives for enrolling and the impact of the education on the individual master student. In this paper we will relate some of our results to the results from a similar investigation, ‘Building health informatics capacity - educating the workforce’, carried out by Marianne Sørensen and Christian Nøhr,Virtual Centre for Health Informatics, Aalborg University in 2004, and with the results from a research project following the first cohort of the Master in Learning Processes (Krogh, 2003).

In this present investigation we were interested in investigating some of the driving forces, such as motives and needs, for adults participating in master education and obtaining a master degree. Furthermore, we were interested in investigating how the individual master graduate has made use of his/her education during the period from the graduation until the time of the survey. This means investigating in which professional direction the master graduates went after having graduated and investigating the desired as well as the not desired or unintended effects (personal development and job related), in relation to the master education.

### Adult learning

The existing literature on research in adult learning illustrate that there are some very important driving forces for adults participating in education. These driving forces seem to have nothing specific to do with the concept of competence development and Lifelong Learning strategies attached to the above mentioned more political and ideological aspects. Lindeman has in Knowles (2005) identified several key assumptions about adult learners (see also Buckley & Caple, 1995, Illeris, 2006). These key assumptions constitute the foundation of adult learning theory, which say that

1. Adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy; therefore, these are the appropriate starting points for organizing adult learning activities
2. Adult’s orientation to learning is life-centred; therefore the appropriate units for organizing adult learning are life situations, not subjects
3. Experience is the richest resource for adults’ learning; therefore, the core methodology of adult education is the analysis of experience
4. Adults have a deep need for self-direction; therefore, the role of the teacher is to engage in a process of mutual inquiry with them rather than to transmit his or her knowledge to them and then evaluate their conformity to it.
5. Individual differences among people increase with age; therefore, adult education must make optimal provision for differences in style, time, place, and pace of learning.

However, as Knowles points out, Lindeman did not dichotomize adult versus youth education, but rather adult versus ‘conventional’ education. The implication here is that youths might learn better, too, when their needs and interests, life situations, experiences, self-concepts, and individual differences are taken into account.

The Danish researcher Bo Jacobsen distinguishes between the two concepts, ‘experiences’ and ‘life experiences’ and he underlines the aspect of activity in the creation of experiences. It is when we act or when the outside world or environments act towards us that we experience things (see also Illeris, 2006).It means that making experiences is a form of holistic creation, including thoughts, feelings, perceptions, understandings and values, as a result of a person meeting the outside world. As such, life experiences represent a particular holistic creation consisting of something cognitive and something emotional, something general and something very personal. In that perspective life experiences means learning continuously and is just another word for learning processes. The wish for Jacobsen is to point out that a person’s experiences in life involves a special kind of dynamic, a life power and a various amount of possibilities for development , which may lead to a considerable number of changes, if adults’ life experiences are integrated in the teaching activities. Areas of importance for the creation of life experiences are experiences from work life, private life, leisure time, social life, more existential aspects and travel experiences.

In addition, personal aspects such as gender, age, generation and stages in life are of great importance according to the Danish researcher Johan Fjord Jensen. He especially emphasizes the meaning of different ages, and where especially the turn in life around the age of 40 seems to be of great influence on a person’s understanding and reflection of personal life experiences and therefore further considerations and motivations for learning.

We are here referring to general theories and considerations on adult learning, which we find may explain some of the results from our investigation on what master students consider having been of most importance by having completed the Master program in Learning Processes.

### Short description of the Master program

The Master education in Learning Processes is at part time study (half time) running over 2 years and amounting to 60 ECTS point. To be admitted to the education it is required that you have an education at bachelor level and that you have at least 2 years of relevant work experience, relevant here meaning ‘relevant to the study of learning and learning processes’. Should there be any doubt as to whether an applicant possesses the necessary educational background he or she may be invited to participate in an interview for further assessment. The target group consists in general of anyone interested in studying and working with learning processes, and the student body includes persons (practitioners) with different professional backgrounds such as health care personnel engaged in or responsible for education and educational activities (nurses, physiotherapists, doctors), teachers from various kinds of educational institutions, and consultants.

The purpose of the programme is to enable the students to understand theories on learning and learning processes and gain competence in applying them; to gain knowledge and insight into selected subjects and problem areas in the field of learning processes and to understand and apply methods of evaluation of learning processes. Furthermore, the students are introduced to and apply tools to develop, plan and organise learning processes, as well as tools to present knowledge and insights in various contexts. The study consists of a compulsory first year focussing on learning theory, methodology, organisational learning and evaluation of learning processes, and a second year where the student may choose a specialisation from a range of possibilities. The final and fourth semester is dedicated to writing the master thesis on a topic of the student’s own choice within the general field of the education or within the specialisation. In addition to choosing the subject of the master thesis the student is to a large extent free to choose his/her own professional profile within the education’s framework through the choice of specific subject for the different assignments and projects. The student is thus free to choose according to his/her own interest or – as we see in some cases – the interest of the work place.

*“The Master thesis and all the other written assignments took their point of departure in something that was relevant in my working life, and it has meant that I gained a far greater insight into and understanding of the problems and challenges there are in my working life.”*

The education is problem-oriented and project-organised, and to some respect group-based. The moderation expressed regarding group-work is related to the fact that although it is highly encouraged and recommended from the education’s side to work in groups or at least in pairs, some students find it too difficult to accommodate to when having at the same time to consider their work place’s demands, their personal needs and their other commitments (family etc.) and therefore prefer to work individually. During the first semester, however, the students are placed in working groups and are asked to complete a number of assignments on learning theory together, as well as to work on a minor pilot project in order to learn the basics of the Aalborg PBL-method[[7]](#footnote-7) in preparation for the larger project work that they are going to carry out the following semester.

The organisation of the education can be described as a mix mode, with a number of weekend-seminars combined with it-supported study and group-work with supervision and feedback. Differentiations of teaching forms are being used in order to meet the diversity and differentiation in needs and experiences among the adult participants and in order to strengthen the relationship between theories and practice and the formal and more non-formal activities. Most of the master students are working while attending the Master program.

### Results from the investigation

# Method

The data have been gathered from graduates, who attended the master programme, Master in Learning Processes from 2000 to 2007. The paper draws on results from a quantitative survey based on a questionnaire answered by 120 graduates. The informants, however, were invited to supplement with qualitative statements in relation to all questions. Some of these qualitative statements will be included in our discussions.

A questionnaire containing 39 questions grouped in 4 sections: Backgrounds, Experiences from attending the Master program in Learning processes, Present job, and the Master program and your qualifications.

The questionnaire was web based and a letter was sent to 200 candidates, who had graduated from the program asking them to go to the web page and fill in the questionnaire. 58% have answered the questionnaire. 21 % of the informants are men, 79% are women. The questionnaires were filled out anonymously. Descriptive statistics were applied to the standardized answers. There were much free text answers, which have been summarized by the authors.

**The adult students’ background**

The adult students represent a diversity of professional backgrounds, such as nurses and different kinds of staff from the health care sector, teachers, and some of them with a background as academics. Their age is between 30 and 59. 59.1 % was among the age group of 40-50 years when they started on the master program.

Most of them represent the public labour market, especially hospitals and educational institutions, quite a few come from non-governmental or professional organizations. Most of them were occupied with tasks related to education, consultancy and development. 22.6% had a leader position when they started on the master programme.

**Financing the study**

In the parallel competence system, the intentions are that employers to a certain degree support the employee’s participation in a Master program financially[[8]](#footnote-8). There are different ways of doing this.

The survey shows that most of the informants had the study fee paid by the employer. Other expenses were covered fifty-fifty by the employer and by the student.

34. 8% had no compensation in time from the workplace. The remainders got compensation in time by having some days free from work around exams and delivery of assignments or one day off a week, an agreed amount of hours free, spread through out the study period. One informant indicates having to cheat to find time during work time,

“*I had the time I succeeded in cheating to get, for instance work on FC [First Class – the IT-communication program] and photocopy during work time*”

Another says,

“*It was possible for me to organize my work, so that I could gather days, but without reduction in work time*”

**Motives for studying**

90.4% of the informants indicate that the most important reason for entering the program was a personal desire and initiative, and 78.9% indicate that the main reason for entering the program was a desire for personal development. 31.6% indicate that finally the time had come for them to obtain an academic education. 28.1% further indicate that they wanted to achieve a new job profile and 28.1% saw an opportunity to advance their career. 64.9% indicate a need for improving knowledge and skills related to job functions at the time. Only 14.0% indicate that higher salary was a driving factor for starting in the master program. Only 10.5% indicate requirements from employers as an indication for entering the program. 42.1% indicate that a possibility for new job functions might be a consequence of going through the master program. These findings correspond with findings in the evaluation done by Krogh in 2003 and the investigation, done by Sørensen and Nøhr in 2004).

Question 1.12. What was the reason for you to start the master study? (multiple markings)

Cross referenced with Question 1.1. Gender

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Male** | **Female** | **Cross-gender****Total** |
| Wish for career advancement | 30.4% | 27.5% | 28.1% |
| Wish for job change | 17.4% | 20.9% | 20.2% |
| Wish for personal development | 91.3% | 75.8% | 78.9% |
| The possibility of taking an academic education was not present till now | 26.1% | 33.0% | 31.6% |
| My children had left home so now the possibility was there | 4.3% | 9.9% | 8.8% |
| Demands from employer | 0.0% | 13.2% | 10.5% |
| There were no clear motives behind | 0.0% | 1.1% | 0.9% |
| The possibility of new job functions | 47.8% | 40.7% | 42.1% |
| Wish for a shift from the public sector to the private sector  | 4.3% | 3.3% | 3.5% |
| Wish for a shift from the private sector to the public sector  | 4.3% | 0.0% | 0.9% |
| Wish to improve my knowledge and skills in relation to the job I held at the time  | 87.0% | 59.3% | 64.9% |
| Wish for knowledge and skills which were not directly related to my job  | 26.1% | 17.6% | 19.3% |
| Wish for higher salary | 13.0% | 14.3% | 14.0% |
| Other, please specify | 4.3% | 7.7% | 7.0% |
| Total | 23 | 91 | 114 |

**Experienced achievement of qualifications and competences**

In order to determine the learning outcome experienced by the informants a number of self-assessment questions were asked. The questions were based on the study regulation specifying the intended learning outcome of the program in terms of specific qualifications and competences.

One aspect of the learning outcome is related to a differentiation of teaching forms used. One of the essential teaching and learning forms is the Aalborg PBL project model, which *intentionally* leads to subject and profession related learning at a high level and at the same time supports development of creative, analytical and methodological qualifica­tions and competencies. Furthermore, students develop general and personal qualifications and competencies, if the method is used accordingly, such as competencies for project management, planning and implementation and cooperation (Krogh and Gulddahl in Kolmos et al, 2004).

The teaching form in question is expedient and has been the source of success for numerous graduates from Aalborg University in their jobs. This has been confirmed for instance by the Candidate and Employer Research Study.[[9]](#footnote-9) Well-founded arguments for the project form are found in the social development tendencies, at labour market and in the light of potential learning benefits, which are embedded in this working method. The work process has similarities to some types of research work, but it is also related to types of work processes as they are seen in business not least in project management and in combination with organisational learning. This way of working at the university makes it possible for the students to participate in defining the assignments they have to work on and are driven to work on in relation to workplace interests as well as more personal interests and needs. In this context there are similarities to the principles of Modus Two research (Gibbons, 1994 and Nowothy, 2001). The intention is not to turn all students into researchers but to develop skills that are useful within their future professional work and life.

Looking at the data from our investigation in relation to the informants’ experiences in relation to the content of the Master program, 68.4% indicate that they have to a high degree acquired abilities and competences in understanding the use of theories about learning in relation to their workplace experiences.

44.7% indicate that they have to a high degree acquired understanding of and competences in using methods in evaluation and assessment of learning processes.

44.7% indicate that they have to a high degree acquired skills and tools in developing, planning and organizing learning processes.

11.4% indicate that they to a high degree and 29.8% to some degree have acquired methods in communicating subject related knowledge to different target groups. 42.1% find that they possessed these competences in advance.

5.9% indicate that they to a high degree and 16% to some degree have acquired abilities in cooperating in interdisciplinary teams, while 67.5% indicate that they were able to do that in advance.

19.3% indicate that they to a high degree acquired abilities for Lifelong Learning (i.e. continuously acquire new knowledge and skills). 26.9% indicated that they to some extent have acquired such competences, while 48% indicate that they had these competences in advance.

Concerning the question about abilities to work in a problem oriented and developmental way respectively 14.0% and 21.1% indicate that they to a high degree have acquired these competences. 27.2% and 32.5% answer that they to some extent have acquired such competences, while 50.9% and 37.7% indicate that they possessed such competences in advance.

When asked about their acquired experiences related to communication of the content of the disciplines orally and by writings 4.4% respectively 30.7% indicate that they to a high degree, and 35% respectively 43% indicate that they to some extent have acquired such abilities. On the other hand 30.7% respectively 17.4% indicate that they possessed such abilities in advance.

To the question whether they find, that they have experienced being able to work in a research based way, 44.7% indicate that they to a high degree and 43% to some degree have acquired these abilities. 10.5% mention that they possessed these abilities in advance

The informants were invited to comment on the questions and to inform us about other types of competences they experienced to have acquired.

The most important aspects which was emphasized were statements like,

“*Even because of the fact that I had been working in a problem oriented way for many years what I learned best was to use the method, which you use at Aalborg University*”

“*An understanding of how “situations” can be understood from the perspective of different theoretical perspectives and the use of methods are what has made the greatest differences in my understanding*”

*“The most important aspects for me have been that it was possible for me to work with workplace related problems theoretically and become more knowledgeable within this field”*

It is interesting to see hat the informants to almost all the questions have answered that they possessed the mentioned abilities, skills, and competences in advance. Of course, this is characteristic for well-educated adults attending further education, as they have been in learning processes during a long-lived life, both personally and related to their jobs, and therefore they have many life experiences and qualifications. This is supported with statements like,

“*The many ‘possessed in advance’ is absolutely not due to the fact that I devalue the master program, but due to the fact that I already have a VPÅ[[10]](#footnote-10) from 1995, later on Nordic studies in learning via Nordisk Folliga Akademi (30 ECTS) in 2000, combined with continuous competence development as associate professor at a University College. That means that I signed up for the master degree in order to get a formal diploma within the area where I think I have acquired competences because titles have become so important in the professional bachelor education systems. The greatest learning outcome for me was the module about development in e-learning processes.*”

“*It is not because we do not learn any thing new………..I could answer ‘possessed in advance’ to all questions, but I have to some extent become much better*.”

“*I have improved within almost all aspects of the master program, but actually I was not without qualifications at the beginning.*”

“*I experienced to achieve an academic approach in doing things, which has been invaluable for me in doing my work and for my personal development. The personal development has been the greatest – I have obtained security in relation to communication. It has optimized my feelings of self-worth and to a great extent contributed to increased quality in life*”

Some find that they have obtained the ability to work in a meta-cognitive way, and at a higher level have become more conscious about the knowledge they possessed in advance. Some of them explain it as a gift to gain access to the newest knowledge and theories. Some mention the possibilities of working together with other types of professionals with different backgrounds and experiences, and the vocabulary used in the master program as quite new and exciting to learn.

When asked what they value to be the most important aspects of the master program 95.6% state the fact of being allowed to educate themselves and to learn new things. 96.3% indicate being allowed personal development as a gift and 31.3% indicate to a certain degree the problem oriented project work as important.

Some emphasize,

“*At the beginning I found it rather irritating to be put into a group together with other persons, to whom I should relate and work together with. – I mean, I had come to the study to receive learning, not in order to meet new people. Soon demands were put to us in the group, and I had to change my attitudes. In the group, we were 3 women and 2 men. We women had a fantastic collaboration throughout the whole study program and passed the men. Today, we are still the best friends and we often meet. And we agree on, that we had never carried it through without each other…..!”*

“*It was important for me – in the middle of the 50th – to test, whether I was able to…..!*”

### The Master degree’s relationship with career development

Approximately half of the informants (50.9%) indicate that their master thesis came to have an influence on their further career development, and from their statements it is seen that the influence took a number of different forms. The most general form of influence is seen in the replies stating that the informants are able to apply the knowledge from the thesis in various contexts, and one informant describes that he/she ‘travels around’ in the organisation disseminating the information and the knowledge obtained through the master thesis, because it is highly relevant new knowledge for the colleagues. Development of new projects and products for the work place as a rather practical and concrete result of the master thesis is also mentioned. Some mention that as a consequence of their master thesis they had an increase of salary or got promoted. Others state that their master thesis opened new job opportunities for them – either in the form of new employment in a different organisation or institution; or through job expansion in the existing employment with for instance increased responsibilities, new areas of work and cooperation with other groups of employees in the organisation; or, as one informant states, through participation in international projects focussing on the subject which was the object of the master thesis. Some informants report that they have become self-employed, either through starting their own firm or, as is the case for one informant, through applying for and being granted development funds in order to carry out the visions and perspectives of the master thesis.

As can be inferred from some of the responses above, the master degree has in many instances led to new job opportunities for the informants, which can be seen in the following numbers,

* 64.3% has changed work one or more times after graduating.
* 73% has changed work functions, mostly to positions in management, development, human resource and consultancy.
* 27% hold a management position and 73.3% carry management responsibility for more than 10 employees.
* 14.1% wish to become managers in the short or long term.

### Summing up – the informants’ evaluation of the master education and their outcome

As described earlier a master programme in the Danish parallel education system is a workplace- and job oriented study aiming at increasing the students’ job competencies, and seen in this perspective the above-mentioned results are not surprising. It is to be expected that the graduates would perform better in their work place, qualify for new types of job positions or make more radical career changes because of their new educational background. The wish for professional development as a motive for embarking on the education is seen as an almost inherent factor and also supported in the surveys statistical findings (see paragraph on Motives). However, it is interesting to see that personal development in various forms also appears to be perceived as an important outcome of the education, whether it has been specifically wished for – as 78.9% indicated that they did - or not.

Many informants comment that the study, their learning processes and their outcome have been both professionally and personally rewarding, something that they can and do make use of in both their professional life at work and in their private life,

*“Equally relevant in my private life and at work. Insight into human beings, relations and yourself!”*

*“The study has given me qualifications which I use in my work function, my private life and my leisure-time activities. It has given me great satisfaction and a positive self-image.”*

*“Relevant in order to follow my children’s schoolwork. Relevant in order to work with both management and development of organisation and employees. Relevant in order to evaluate practice, projects etc.”*

Some of the informants have experienced the education as an ‘eyeopener’, for instance as one informant thus reports that the master education has opened his/her eyes to the fact that he/she possesses some academic capabilities that he/she was unaware of. The theme of personal change and growth is also indicated through terms like ‘development’, ‘development process’ and ‘personal development’ which are recurring in the comments given by the informants when asked to describe what the study has meant to them. Having the opportunity to and being able to become absorbed in the study has played an important role for many of the students who describe that they find themselves at a time in their life when they feel an acute need to focus on and strengthen their theoretical knowledge to counterbalance and qualify their practice related experience.

*“It has been very positive and has whetted my appetite with regard to continuing to do research. It is the first time in my working life that I have had the opportunity and space for contemplation – a fantastic experience.”*

*“It has been a great satisfaction for me to take an academic education which has meant that I could develop my competencies and knowledge in the field between theory and practice. It is, of course, particularly important with respect to my work, but at the personal level also gratifying – has meant far greater job satisfaction in my present job.”*

In addition to feelings of gratification the informants report about an increase in self-confidence and feelings of self-worth as a result of having completed the study,

*“The study has definitely supported my development process both in work life and in private life. The education has added some good plusses to my self-confidence which affects the way I act in different situations in a very positive way.”*

*“I wouldn’t have been without it. It has increased my self-confidence, job satisfaction, impact, analytical ability quite incredibly. Previously I needed very much to tell about experiences, various educations etc. when I should introduce myself. It is not at all necessary any more, I am much more self-contained and show what I can in words and action, and no one questions my competencies any more.”*

As indicated above and in the section on Motives a high percentage of the master students entered the education with a wish for various kinds of professional and personal development, and the results point to the fact that they generally feel that the expectations have been more than fulfilled. It is, however, also established through the results – and in particular through the informants’ qualitative statements – that the education and all that it has entailed has left more and different traces and had far more impact than the informants had envisaged before embarking on it. The changes may have had both a positive and a negative side, but even in such cases, the informants seem to make an overall positive evaluation of the outcome,

*“The Master thesis and all the other written assignments took their point of departure in something that was relevant in my working life, and it has meant that I gained a far greater insight into and understanding of the problems and challenges there are in my working life. The Master education has meant that my self-confidence, impact and job satisfaction are in constant development. It is difficult for me to imagine a working life where I did not have this education. It has meant so much, and in spite of the fact that I became very ill (perhaps stress related) when writing the Master thesis I would not have been without it. ”*

When interpreting the informants’ statements in a broader context you could say that although many of the initial motives for starting on the education stated by the informants pointed towards developing resources and acquiring skills related to their working life, the additional outcome was the further development of personal, social and perhaps even cultural identity. In this respect the Master education – although having by law an overall job related aim of improving the students’ job competencies – also has an important ‘Bildung’-effect i.e. the development of more personal directed aspects of learning.

### Conclusion

In this paper we have presented some of the results from a research project investigating adult students’ motives and needs for enrolling in a master education and obtaining a master degree as well as the outcome of the education and the experienced influences on the informants’ career path. Furthermore, we have looked at the intended as well as the un-intended or unforeseen outcome of the education.

We found that motives and needs may stem from a range of factors, and that they often co-exist within the individual student. Although one hypothesis was that society’s increased demands for qualifications and job related expectations of competence development would be a major factor in ‘pushing’ people to enter a Master education, the investigation showed that the informants’ individual wishes for personal development were by far more important as a motivating factor. The wish for development of job related knowledge and skills also proved to stem from the individual’s own drive rather than from demands expressed by their work place. The wish for a shift in job functions was a relatively clear goal for many informants. Here we found that most of the candidates changed work place and work functions after the education, mostly to positions in management, development, human resource and consultancy. At the same time many of them claim that they have experienced an increase in self-confidence in handling job-related functions and in job satisfaction as well.

Based on the both the quantitative and qualitative answers from the informants we can conclude, that the lifelong learning aspect of this master education is primarily a question of personal development but integrated in and by means of professional competence development. It is consequently not an ‘either-or’ (*either* personal *or* professional), but a ‘both-and’ (*both* personal *and* professional). Further more it seems as if the goals for lifelong learning has been reached in the sense that the candidates state that they have enhanced their study skills for continuing education and development in non-formal – as well as in formal education.

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1. The Lisbon convention is about ‘recognition of qualifications within higher educations in the European region’. The convention was signed in 1998 and has been ratified by a large number of countries, among them Denmark. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See these in annex 2 in report form the Commission about future concrete goals for the educational systems, January 31, 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Here the EU-Commission and the member countries have defined Lifelong Learning to be all the meaningful activities, which continuously take place in order to increase knowledge, skills and competences. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Bologna-declaration of June 1999 is signed by ministers from 40 European countries and has become an important structural framework for the European educational cooperation. The declaration commenced a process which lasts until 2010. The purpose is that European educational systems must attend a number of reforms meaning they will become more transparent, that quality assurance is highly valued and that foundation for mobility is increased [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. It is important to mention that Master education in Denmark is the highest level of the so called parallel competence system in Higher Education which is different from the Candidate education which is the highest level in the Danish Higher Education System (excl. Ph.D. degree) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Act on vocational adult basic and tertiary education and training, no. 488, 31.May, 2000. The ministerial order on Master Education in Learning processes No. 43, 20. January 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. PBL is the international abbreviation of Problem Based Learning [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. In Denmark education normally is financed almost 100% by the State. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Candidate and Employer Research Study 2002/03, Aalborg University and Roskilde University Centre [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Degree in Adult Pedagogy [↑](#footnote-ref-10)