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Identity, School, and Student Learning

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Main Arguments in This Speech

- Identity is an important concept in understanding human action and behavior. It is the basic framework from which we perceive, interpret phenomena and ourselves
- Identity is defined in myriad ways. In this project we have been approaching it from the narrative point of view
- Identity narratives can be categorized hierarchically into three level: autobiographical, social and cultural
- Learning can also be described as a narrative process. In learning we create meanings not only about the phenomena to be learned but also ourselves as learners
- I suggest that the so-called Positioning Theory can make interrelations between identity and student behavior more understandable
- To influence on behavior we need to make efforts to influence on students' positioning in the specific situations



Identity as a Philosophical Concept

- Identity is an answer to a question “*who I am and where do I belong to*”
- French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) divides identity into three:
 - Idem identity (sameness to others in a specific moment or time)
 - Ipse identity (who am I compared to others)
 - Collective identity (who are we as a group)
- *Iipse identity* is divided by Ricoeur into four:
 - Practical identity (what is valuable to me)
 - Biographic identity (what has my life been)
 - Qualitative identity (what am I like)
 - Singularity of me (how do I define myself as one person over time)
- It is a narrative that can change from time to time and context to context



Psychological Background of Identity Concept

- Erik H. Erikson: Eight stages of life course from the question of basic trust vs. mistrust (1) to Ego integrity vs. despair (8)
- James Marcia applied the idea to describe adolescent development towards identity



James Marcia's Identity Status

- **Crises and engagement are the most important processes in identity development**
 - **Identity Diffusion** – the status in which the adolescent does not have a sense of having choices;
 - **Identity Foreclosure** – the status in which the adolescent seems willing to commit to some relevant roles, values, or goals for the future
 - **Identity Moratorium** – the status in which the adolescent is currently in a crisis, exploring various commitments
 - **Identity Achievement** - the status in which adolescent has gone through a identity crisis and has made a commitment to a sense of identity



Narrative Turn in Social Sciences

The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances – as though any material were fit to receive man's stories.

Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting ... stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation.

Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives ... Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself. (Barthes, 1977: 79)



Narrative Identity

- Jerome Bruner's theorizing on paradigmatic and narrative knowledge and thinking changed psychological and education conceptualizing of self and identity
 - Self is a narrative, a story, constructed and reconstructed in a situation (Bruner 1986, 1993)
- Bruner's conception of self and identity as narratives reflect the so-called narrative turn in social sciences (e.g. Roland Barthes 1977)
 - Autobiographical narratives were seen as major sources of finding out about self and identity
- Autobiographical narratives are typically analyzed to understand the identity construction as negotiations between a person and life experiences
- Autobiography is not only a method for finding out of a person's life history, self or identity, but also the best description of the architecture and processes of self (W.F. Pinar 1994)



Identity as a Narrative

- Identity is a narrative or story of me (cf. McAdams)
 - It is expressed in stories I construct about me and my life,
 - The process starts in early childhood from images we interpret (faces around us) or stories we hear about ourselves
 - Later on we reconstruct identity narratives throughout our whole life (discourses with each other, life experiences, reinterpretation of memories, etc.)
 - What happens to us is not important, but what we think happened is crucial to identity narratives (interpreted meanings)



Learning as a Process of Making Meanings

- Learning can be seen as a phenomenological process – we attach meanings to our perceptions (Husserl)
- Constructivist and socioconstructivist learning theories emphasize that the knowledge a person creates is subjective and constructed in the contexts and/or in social discourses
- In both theories meanings are the most important learning results
- We learn about objects, facts, concepts, phenomena etc, but we remember only knowledge that means something important to us
- When perceptions and experiences are interpreted they get meanings
- Reflective processing is important to reinterpret experiences from new perspectives and subject positions



- Narratives collect the meanings into a more or less coherent story (plot, temporality, causal relations etc.)
- Are schemata as memory structures comparable to narratives?
- Learning can be understood as a process in which we create meanings and process the meanings into abstract knowledge structures that can be verbalized in different situations and contexts with narratives
- In this process we construct meanings about learned phenomena, but also ourselves as learners and human beings
- Narrative learning as a concept is sometimes understood as a process of making one's life story or autobiography (e.g. Ivor Goodson)
- I argue that all learning is narrative, since the stories are constructed and verbalized from the knowledge, autobiographical, contextual, and situational perspectives



Narrative Nature of Human Knowledge

- The process is same also in school learning whether we learn mathematics, history or some other school subject – human knowledge is NOT objective or free from personal interpretation
- We create narratives that are contextual and situational and depend also on how we position ourselves in the situation in which we verbalize the narrative
- What kind of stories we create about ourselves in the learning processes?



Narrative Identity – Hierarchy of Stories of Me

In the process of constructing meanings, we do it on at least three levels:

- Personal, autobiographical identity – story of me as an individual
 - Who am I as a person (student, child, friend, professional)
- Social identity – story of me a member of communities
 - Where do I belong to, what memberships do I have, who are my friends, what are my networks
- Cultural identity – story of me as a citizen or human being in the global world
 - Who are we, what is my mission in the world



Nature of Narrative Learning Processes in Different Levels: Example from Teacher Education

Curriculum levels	Instructional goals	Learning goals and objectives	Focus of meaning making	Form of learning processes	Individual positioning in learning discourses	Example of contents: "Individual differences"
Individual	Enhancing the formation and reconstruction of individual identity "me as a person" –	Formation of personal identity, construction of personally meaningful knowledge	Life story Identity – me as a person One's own knowing and actions as a person and human being	Intra-individual discourses (discourse with oneself - who am I), In teacher education: Transforming personally meaning knowledge to teacher's pedagogical knowledge	Positioning oneself in relation to one's history, positioning oneself as a person and a teacher, Recognizing one's strengths and weaknesses - strengthening (feedback), -standing on one's own feet	Gender identity, Ethnic and cultural identity



Nature of Narrative Learning Processes in Different Levels: Example from Teacher Education

Curriculum levels	Instructional goals	Learning goals and objectives	Focus of meaning making	Form of learning processes	Individual positioning in learning discourses	Example of contents: "Individual differences"
Social, Community	Becoming a member of a group and community, relations to peers and colleagues, students and classes – "me as a member of profession"	Becoming a member, growth of professional identity, Acquiring knowledge that strengthens memberships	Relations to colleagues and students, Meaning related to being a member of the community	Inter-individual discourses (other people, contexts and situations); Me vs. others Me vs. environment	Positioning oneself to colleagues, students and stakeholders; active positioning to strengthen the membership	Genders in school, Multicultural school community, Encountering and accepting individuality in schools



Nature of Narrative Learning Processes in Different Levels: Example from Teacher Education

Curriculum levels	Instructional goals	Learning goals and objectives	Focus of meaning making	Form of learning processes	Individual positioning in learning discourses	Example of contents: "Individual differences"
Culture, society, world: values, history and future	Understanding the general purpose of the profession, schools, education and different subjects: "me as a member of humankind, as a human being and educator	Formation of global identity, positioning oneself towards global issues. Identity as a citizen, moral beliefs and values	One's relation to cultures, values, ideologies and their history. Being a Finnish teacher in the world	Contextual discourses (ideologies, cultures, nation-state), "Me and my cultural background, me and my values"	Positioning oneself to nation-state, ideologies and culture. Cultural, moral and ideological positioning in work, positioning politically.	Individuality as a social, cultural and ideological phenomenon; gender differences, equality in Finnish school



Schools as Places for Narrative Learning

- Research findings show that schools do not support identity development in the extent they are supposed to (e.g. Lannegrand-Willems & Bosma 2006).
- Too little time for meanings in school learning
- Applying Ricoeur's Three-Stage Mimesis process in school instruction:
 - Prenarrative stage: Students have prior knowledge (preconceptions and preunderstandings) about phenomena to be learned (e.g gravity) (mimesis1) –
 - Narrative stage: Experiences are collected into narratives having plot (creating a story of gravity) (mimesis2)
 - Reconstructive stage: Narratives become part of our perception and experiences (the created story of gravity is verified in real life) (mimesis3)



Identity, Discourses, and Student Positioning in School Learning

- Instructional Discourses
 - Curriculum discourse (purposes, objectives, and goals), Pedagogical discourse (teaching), Scientific discourse (how science defines the phenomenon), Student to Student discourse, Etc. (Sari Yrjänäinen 2011)
- Positioning Theory
 - Langenhove & Harrè (1999) described human discourse in terms of positioning – a mentally taken 'role' in a specific situation
 - People try to reposition each other by own positioning during the discourses



- Stuart Hall (1999) stated that identities appear in subject positions which we take in different discourses
- If we think school as a discursive context then student behavior can be considered as response or opening in a discourse
- A student positions him/herself and 'discursive actions' (e.g. Behavior) are expressions of the positioning



Identity Positioning as a Personal Tool in Learning Process

- Student positioning influences on what the student perceives and how experiences are interpreted
- Teacher positioning influences on what meanings teachers communicate in different discourses
- Meanings that teachers communicate become affordances to students
- An **affordance** is a quality of an object, or an environment, which allows an individual to perform an action. For example, a knob affords twisting, and perhaps pushing, while a cord affords pulling. A bicycle affords driving.



- In what extent student perceive the affordances and accept them depends on students own identity positioning in the situation
- Teachers need to be flexible and skilled to change their positioning when they see that a specific positioning does not work (students do not perceive the affordance offered)
- Positioning is a tool to influence on meanings created on oneself also
 - Identity reconstruction



Conclusion

- Identity is an important concept in understanding action and behavior
- Identity is a result of meaning making and narrative processes in and outside school learning
- Identity influences on positioning and on what we perceive and what information we receive
- Identity positioning relates on what kind of meanings we create from received information and about ourselves as learners and persons



- To support students' positive behavior (PBS) it is important to influence on the students' personal, social, and cultural identity stories.
- Those narratives are the frameworks from which students position themselves and create meanings about subject matters, other people and themselves
- These kinds of analyses of the relations of learning and identity show that we have a still a lot to study to understand the whole complexity of identity formation in the school learning contexts



Thank you!