IDENTITY, LIFELONG LEARNING AND NARRATIVE – A THEORETICAL INVESTIGATION

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In post-traditional societies, identity has been pervasively understood as a ‘thing’ one needs to and can endeavour to achieve or create. Many studies about identity in the humanities and social sciences have increasingly been approached in both reified and impersonal ways. These trends in understanding identity have made a significant impact on research into education and identity.

This thesis aims to demonstrate the complexity of personal identity on a theoretical level and endeavours to rethink the theoretical understanding of personal identity in relation to the notion of learning. Based on Paul Ricoeur and Charles Taylor’s theories of personal identity, this thesis argues that personal identity needs to be understood both as sameness and as selfhood at a conceptual level. Ontologically, the former belongs to the category of ‘thing’, ‘substance’ in terms of permanence in time. The latter belongs the category of ‘being’ in terms of permanence in time. This thesis will argue that this conceptual understanding of personal identity suggests that identity is largely ‘shaped’ by social, cultural, traditional, moral and ethical dimensions in the human world over time, rather than merely being a result of personal endeavour as an individual creation or/and an adaptation to constant social changes.

The moral and ethical dimensions of personal identity also suggest that the need for and ‘meaning’ of personal identity to a person in his/her life cannot be simply approached in an objective manner through impersonal terms. Rather, personal identity constitutively depends on self-interpretation, which highlights the role of narrative in understanding personal identity.
This thesis further argues that a new understanding about reflexive learning relevant to personal identity can be drawn from this theoretical understanding of personal identity and narrative. This new understanding is based on a person’s reflexivity not only in the dialectical frameworks between sameness, self and others, but also in different moral frameworks. What this presents us with is a different view of lifelong learning as an alternative to lifelong learning implied in the notion of a ‘reflexive project of the self’.
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