IDENTITY, LIFELONG LEARNING AND NARRATIVE – A THEORETICAL INVESTIGATION

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IDENTITY, LIFELONG LEARNING AND NARRATIVE — A THEORETICAL INVESTIGATION

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ABSTRACT

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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CONTENTS

Abstract **3**

Acknowledgement **5**

List of contents **6**

Chapter 1 Introduction **13**

1.1 Identity and education **13**

1.2 Identity in the practical world/society **14**

1.3 Identity on the theoretical level **15**

1.3.1 Philosophical approaches to identity **16**

1.3.2 Psychological approaches to identity **22**

1.3.3 Sociological approaches to identity **29**

1.4 The need of further exploration **33**

1.5 Theme of the research and how it was conducted **36**

1.6 A theoretical rationale **38**

1.7 Aims and contribution **41**

1.8 Overview of the structure of the thesis **41**

Chapter 2 Why has identity become a problem in modern societies? **48**

2.1 Introduction **48**

2.2 Why identity and modernity? **49**

2.3 What are modernity and modernization? **51**

2.4 Giddens's view: self-identity with anxieties caused by external changes **57**

2.4.1 Modernity: Giddens's view **57**

2.4.2 What is the late/high modernity? **60**

2.4.3 Self and self-identity in relation to the late modernity **62**

2.4.4 Giddens's analysis: lifestyles and self-identity formation **68**

2.5 Bauman's view: identity as an unfulfilled project due to radical individualism **71**

2.5.1 What is liquid modernity? **71**

2.5.2 Problem of identity and individual *de jure* **73**

2.5.3 Bauman's analysis: citizenship and Individua *de facto* **76**

2.6 Individualization, modernity and identity **77**

2.7 Other questions related to the problem of identity **82**

2.7.1 Where does the problem of identity exist? **82**

2.7.2 To whom the identity has becomes a problem? **83**

2.7.3 How does identity become a problem? **85**

2.8 Critical Observations **90**

2.8.1 Different 'anxieties', different identity problems **90**

2.8.2 Criticisms towards Giddens: radical individualism and hidden power **92**

2.8.3 Criticism towards Bauman **95**

2.9 Implications for lifelong learning and some criticisms **95**

2.10 Reflections on the notion of reflexivity **99**

Chapter 3 Paul Ricoeur's view on personal identity and narrative identity **102**

3.1 Introduction **102**

3.2 Paradoxes of personal identity **104**

3.3 Ricoeur's theory of personal identity **107**

3.3.1 The differences between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity **108**

3.3.2 The dialectic between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity **116**

3.4 Narrative identity as a solution to the paradoxes of personal identity **120**

3.4.1 Ricoeur's theory of narrative **121**

3.4.2 Why does the concept of personal identity need to be connected with narrative theory? **127**

3.4.3 How is the identity of the character constructed in the connection with narrative? **129**

3.4.4 How does narrative identity mediate between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity? **131**

3.5 Narrative identity as a structure of human experience **133**

3.5.1 Narrative identity as self-interpretation **134**

3.5.2 From life to narrative identity **136**

3.6 Limitations of narrative identity **137**

3.6.1 An instable and continually reconfigured identity **138**

3.6.2 Exclusion of certain events **138**

3.6.3 Ethical limitation in narrative identity **138**

3.7 *Ipse*-identity in the dialectic of oneself and others **140**

3.8 The overarching dialectic: between sameness and others **145**

3.9 Conclusion: reflexivity and the role of learning in Ricoeur's theory of personal identity **146**

Chapter 4 Charles Taylor's view on identity and narrative **149**

4.1 Introduction **149**

4.2 Does personal identity matter? **150**

4.3 Taylor's view on the self **154**

4.3.1 Self in 'moral space' **154**

4.3.2 Self in the web of interlocution **156**

4.3.3 Self is partly constituted by its self-interpretation **157**

4.4 Taylor's definition of identity **160**

4.4.1 Identity as moral being **160**

4.4.2 'Others' in moral identity **162**

4.5 Taylor's theory of 'strong evaluation' **164**

4.5.1 What is strong evaluation? **164**

4.5.2 'Depth' of strong evaluation **166**

4.5.3 The nature of strong evaluation **168**

4.5.4 Strong evaluations and self **171**

4.5.5 Strong evaluations, agency and identity **172**

4.5.6 Strong evaluations, agent and person **173**

4.5.7 Two modes of reflections **174**

4.6 Identity and the good **176**

4.6.1 How identity is linked with the good? **176**

4.6.2 How should we understand the notion of the good? **178**

4.6.3 Three 'axes' of the good **182**

4.7 Taylor's moral theory in relation to the notion of the good **183**

4.7.1 Taylor's moral domain **183**

4.7.2 Moral ontology **185**

4.7.3 Articulation of moral frameworks **186**

4.7.4 Where do strong evaluations come from? A moral realism **188**

4.8 Identity and meaning of life **191**

4.8.1 The link between identity and meaning of life **191**

4.8.2 Problematic modern identity **194**

4.9 Why does moral identity need of narrative? **195**

4.9.1 Self-interpretation requires language **195**

4.9.2 Narrative is an inescapable temporal structure **197**

4.9.3 Is narrative an inescapable structure? **201**

4.10 The roles of learning in Taylor's theory of identity **204**

4.10.1 Articulation and learning **204**

4.10.2 Narrative and learning **205**

4.10.3 Reflexivity and role of leaning **207**

4.11 Conclusion **208**

Chapter 5 The role of narrative in understanding identity **211**

5.1 Introduction **211**

5.2 What is identity? **212**

5.2.1 How can identity be defined? **212**

5.2.2 An examination of the *concept* of identity **215**

5.2.3 An understanding of the *importance* of personal identity **220**

5.2.4 A synthetic understanding of the notion of personal identity **226**

5.2.5. Defining personal identity **229**

5.3 Paul Ricoeur and Charles Taylor on the role of narrative in understanding identity **230**

5.3.1 Paul Ricoeur's view on the role of narrative in understanding idenitity **231**

5.3.2 Charles Taylor's view on the role of narrative in understanding identity **238**

5.4 The emergence of two categories of roles of narrative in understanding identity **244**

5.4.1 Category of structural roles of narrative in understanding identity **246**

5.4.2 Category of interpretative roles of narrative in understanding identity **249**

5.4.3 Narrative as a double role: both as structural role and interpretative role **254**

5.5 Differences and issues between two theories **257**

5.5.1 What are the differences? **257**

5.5.2 What are the issues? **261**

5.6 Between life as narrative and life 'as it is' **263**

5.6.1 Carr's view on relation between life as narrative and reality **264**

5.6.2 Ricoeur's view on relation between life as narrative and reality **267**

5.6.3 Taylor's view on the relation between life as narrative and reality **271**

5.6.4 Bruner's view on the relation between life as narrative and reality **273**

5.6.5 A discussion of my view **275**

5.7 Between narrative identity and identity 'as it is' in reality **277**

5.7.1 Narrative identity is subordinated to reality **277**

5.7.2 Narrative identity reflects the nature of the identity of the subjectivity **279**

5.7.3 Narrative identity is a corollary of our self-interpretation of our lives **279**

Chapter 6 Lifelong learning, identity and narrative **284**

6.1 Introduction **284**

6.2 The emergence of lifelong learning: from education to learning to lifelong learning **285**

6.2.1From the discourse of education to the discourse of learning **285**

6.2.2 Changes and lifelong learning **289**

6.2.3 Flexibility, reflexivity and lifelong learning **291**

6.3 Personal identity and lifelong learning **294**

6.3.1 Personal identity as a 'thing' and as a 'being' **294**

6.3.2 'Learning' and 'lifelong learning' that is relevant to personal identity **296**

6.3.3 Normative reading of Giddens's analysis and reflexive earning that is relevant to identity **297**

6.4 Giddens's view on modernity, self-identity and reflexivity **301**

6.5 What kind of reflexivity? What kind of identity? **305**

6.5.1 An active human agency? **306**

6.5.2 Radical dynamics of modernity? **309**

6.5.3 Internal criteria? **317**

6.6 Issues of personal identity and learning implied in Giddens's analysis **319**

6.7 Towards different views of learning in relation to personal identity **322**

6.7.1 Are we what we make of ourselves or what we are? **323**

6.7.2 Is personal identity merely shaped by social impacts of the dynamics of modernity? **326**

6.7.3 Is the 'internal criteria' the only criteria a person uses to guide the reflexivity in his/her identity making? **330**

6.8 Leaning relevant to identity as lifelong learning: a critical synthesis of

different views **335**

6.8.1 A definition of learning **335**

6.8.2 Reflexive learning in the dialectic between sameness and selfhood **337**

6.8.3 Reflexive learning in the dialectic between oneself and others **338**

6.8.4 Reflexive learning in the dialectic between sameness and others **340**

6.8.5 Reflexive learning in moral frameworks **341**

6.9 The need of narrative in lifelong learning in relation to personal identity **343**

6.9.1 The role of narrative and lifelong learning in Giddens's analysis of identity **343**

6.9.2 Alternative views of narrative in relation to identity and lifelong learning **346**

6.10 Conclusion **353**

6.11. Finally reflection **359**

Bibliography **363**