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12. Modernity, Postmodernity and the Future of 'Identity':

Implications for Educators

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China

'I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors: in one way in relation to those conversation partners who were essential to my achieving self-definition; in another in relation to those who are now crucial to my continuing grasp of languages of self-understanding—and , of course, these classes may overlap.   A self exists only within what I call "webs of interlocution" ' (Charles Taylor, 1989, p. 36)

The term 'identity' has been developed and used in different disciplines with different meanings and senses.   As a theoretical term originally emerging from the different, though related, disciplines of philosophy, psychology, sociology, and cultural studies, it has acquired a diverse range of usages.   And as a theoretical term that has spilled over into everyday language and become a common term used in people's everyday lives, it has acquired yet another set of ordinary usages overlapping with only some of its original theoretical meanings.   In recent years, the term, 'identity', has further acquired rising currency and capital in the research literature and discourses among communities of applied linguists, educators and researchers. However, it also seems to have become one of the most commonly used but under-theorized and often only partially understood terms, especially in the field of language education, where most scholar-researchers have not had the time and resources to delve into the diverse research fields from which the term has acquired its diverse meanings and theoretical import, some of which might be of relevance and

significance to the work of the language educator-researcher.

In the space below I shall attempt to trace the use of the term, 'identity', in different fields and disciplines.   I shall also seek to show how the discussion of identity issues is related to discussion of modernity and postmodernity, and then to propose some relevant and important senses of identity that can be used to facilitate the projects of educators and researchers.

1. Philosophical Debates on 'Personal Identity' and Musings on the Non-/Unity of

Self in Science Fiction

The usage of the term, 'identity', can be traced back to the use of the term, 'personal identity', in philosophical debates on what are the criteria of identity for persons.   The debates revolve around the philosophical question of what the necessary and sufficient conditions are for us to say that, for instance, the person over there is identical to the person who was there yesterday; or, in more intimate terms: the person I called myself yesterday is identical to the person I call myself today. Personal identity is the identity of the self but philosophers have traditionally debated whether the concept of personal identity matters.   The key proponent of this view is Parfit (1986), who argues that brain-splitting plus transplants (at least in imaginary scenarios) will give what matters to us when we talk about personal identity (e.g., personal memory or self-consciousness of the unity or continuity of self) and yet

because it generates two candidates, does not preserve the original person.   An

illustrative example can, perhaps, be provided in the main character played by Arnold

Schwarzenegger in the 1990 Hollywood film, *The Total Recall*, (based on a science

fiction written by Philip K. Dick, 1987), where the main character, originally a

powerful and loyal member of the ruling dictatorship, was given a memory transplant

that erased his previous memory of his identity, and then the events happening around

him gradually led him to believe that he had been someone working for the

underground revolutionaries; all these were part of a plan to make him the perfect spy

to penetrate the revolutionary groups.   However, the memory transplant was so

successful that in the end Arnold, when given the knowledge of 'who he really was',

chose to be the person whom he had already become: someone who sympathized with

the clause of the revolutionaries.   He had *chosen* to become another person and not

to revert back to his previous identity.

In our intuition about who we are, it seems that a sense of psychological

continuity or our memory of who we were and what we have become is central to our

sense of personal identity.   Talks about psychological continuity, memory and

self-consciousness naturally lead us to the discipline of psychology, which has also

devoted much work to the question of identity.

2. Perspectives from Interactive Social Psychology

What, then, is an identity? The common sense answer is that it has to do with who we—and others—think we are. But what does that consist of? When asked who we are, the research shows, most of us will respond with:

What one does—skills, vocations, roles (**competencies**)

Where one is from—locations, beliefs, groups (**communities**)

Who one is with—personal relationships (**commitments**)

—or, in Erikson's term, *mutualities*

(Kenneth Hoover and Lena Klintbjer Ericksen, 2004, p. 4; bolds and italics original)

The above quote (and let us call it the '3 C's resources' of identity making—more on this later) was taken from Hoover's edited volume (2004) on the legacy of Erik Erikson, a prominent psychologist who had drawn on multiple disciplinary perspectives to study the development and achievement (as well as lack of achievement—crisis) of identity in people (Erikson, 1950, 1958, 1968). Erik Erikson (and other psychologists inspired by him) adopted an interdisciplinary, 'psychohistorical approach, in which he emphasizes the unique cultural circumstances (encompassing political, economic, social, and linguistic forces) that shape an individual's development' (Hoover and Ericksen, 2004, p. 6). The psychohistorical

approach as described above would sound very akin to many sociologists'

understanding of identity, viz., the social constructedness of identity.   However,

psychologists working in Erikson's tradition focus also on the developmental aspects

or the process of identity formation.   An important theory is provided in the identity

status framework proposed by James Marcia (Marcia, 1966, 1967; Marcia et al.,

1993).   In Table 1, I attempt to summarize Marcia's framework based on Kroger's

delineation (2004).

Table 1: Marcia's Framework of Four Identity Statuses (Styles)

(Summarized based on Kroger, 2004)

Variable 2: Role Confusion	Variable 1: Identity Achievement	
	High degree	**Low degree**
High degree	MORATORIUM	DIFFUSION
Low degree	IDENTIY ACHIEVEMENT	FORECLOSURE

Four identity statuses (or identity styles) can be classified by cross-tabulating the

two variables of Identity Achievement and Role Confusion, which were understood as

two dimensions or continuums.   Those persons in the Moratorium quadrant and those in the Diffusion quadrant are both experiencing a high degree of role confusion (i.e., uncommitted to any social roles or values). However, the Moratoriums are very much in the process of active identity exploration, of examining different options available in their contexts for vocational, ideological, and relational and community commitments; whereas the Identity Diffuse are not.   The Moratoriums can be said to be on their way to attaining the status of Identity Achievement.   The Identity Achieved had undertaken serious vocational, ideological, and relational and community commitments after a process of active exploration among alternative possibilities and have found niches in society that seem to really "fit" their own interests and abilities. The Foreclosures, in contrast, have formed their commitments on the basis of identification by adopting the roles and values of their significant others (Kroger, 2004).

Among the most critical of identity's properties, as understood by Erikson, is its provision for a sense of continuity and self-sameness essential to a satisfying human existence (Kroger, 2004, p. 62) (more on the nature of this satisfaction when we discuss Charles Taylor's theories about identity in the next section). This description characterizes the person who has attained the Identity Achievement status in Marcia's framework described above (see Table 1).   While linguistic philosophers and

sociologists might disagree with psychologists in some of their basic theoretical

orientations (e.g., in their understanding of 'variables' and in their methodological

paradigms), it is in the respect of understanding identity as a kind of achievement

through active, conscious efforts (or construction) of the individual, who is seen as

always socially situated and constantly interacting with (significant) others in her/his

communities that they seem to agree albeit theorizing from very different theoretical

planes. This takes us to the theorizing work of Charles Taylor (1989) about the

sources of self and the making of the modern identity.

3. The Modern Condition, Loss of Horizon, and Identity

As a student of the modern human condition and a scholar who is simultaneously

held in high regard and much cited in the fields of philosophy, anthropology, cultural

studies, language studies and sociology, Charles Taylor holds special relevance to

educators and researchers precisely because of his 'philosophical anthropology' and

his emphasis on the discursive constitution of the self and identities.   Taylor (1989),

drawing on the ordinary language philosophy of the later Wittgenstein (Kenny, 1994),

stresses the social, discursive, interlocutionary (i.e., conversational, dialogic) origins

of one's sense of self and identities.   This view is akin to Vygotsky's ontogenetic

theories about the social, interactional origins of higher mental functioning (Vygotsky,

1978).   Taylor points out that since birth we have been immersed in 'webs of

interlocutions' (Taylor, 1989, p. 36), interacting with significant others (our

'conversation partners') in the community(ies) that we are situated in:

> I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors: in one way in relation to
>
> those conversation partners who were essential to my achieving self-definition;
>
> in another in relation to those who are now crucial to my continuing grasp of
>
> languages of self-understanding—and , of course, these classes may overlap.   A
>
> self exists only within what I call 'webs of interlocution'.
>
> It is this original situation which gives sense to our concept of 'identity',
>
> offering an answer to the question of who I am through a definition of *where I*
>
> *am speaking from and to whom.*   The full definition of someone's identity thus
>
> usually involves not only his stand on moral and spiritual matters but also some
>
> reference to a defining community.   These two dimensions were reflected in the
>
> examples …. [in which] I spoke of identifying oneself as a Catholic or an
>
> anarchist, or as an Armenian or a Quebecois.   Normally, however, one
>
> dimension would not be exclusive of the other.   Thus it might be essential to the
>
> self-definition of A that he is a Catholic and a Quebecois; of B that he is an
>
> Armenian and an anarchist. (And these descriptions might not exhaust the
>
> identity of either.)
>
> (Charles Taylor, 1989, p. 36; italics added)

It is important to highlight the dialogic, discursive, interactional, interlocutionary—i.e., *social*—nature of identities.   Who I am or what I make out my identity to be (to myself and others) at a certain moment (which can be relatively transient or lengthened) seems to be always situated in a consideration of *where I am speaking from and to whom*.   This has important implications for educators and researchers (as we shall see in the discussion in the last section of this chapter). The religious, ethnic, national, cultural (or other kinds of) communities that one identifies with become one's sources of reference for her/his values and commitments—his/her moral, spiritual stances.

Apart from the emphasis on the dialogic, discursive, social nature of one's sources of self and identities, Taylor's key arguments about the modern situation and loss of horizon (Taylor, 1989) are also worth our attention.   To Taylor, Erik Erickson's notion of identity crisis (see discussion in Section 2 above) is not just a transitional stage in an adolescent's development but also a general feature of the modern human condition.   Erik Erikson's (1958) argument of Martin Luther as a case illustrating a young man experiencing an identity crisis before settling as a protestant is quite beside the point, according to Taylor:

Erikson has made a perceptive study of Luther's crisis of faith and reads it in the light of contemporary identity crises, but Luther himself, of course, would

have found this description reprehensive if not utterly incomprehensible.

Underlying our modern talk of identity is the notion that questions of moral

orientation cannot all be solved in simply universal terms. And this is connected

to our post-Romantic understanding of individual differences as well as to the

importance we give to expression in each person's discovery of his or her moral

horizon. …. This is linked, of course, with the crisis for Luther turning around

the acute sense of condemnation and irremediable exile, rather than around a

modern sense of meaninglessness, or lack of purpose, or emptiness. (Taylor,

1989, p. 28)

Taylor argues that what characterizes the modern human condition is a general,

widespread sense of what Weber called 'disenchantment' or what Nietzsche described

as 'loss of horizon' (1989, p. 17).   While the pre-modern person (e.g., Luther) could

rely on some well-received tradition or religion for their moral frameworks and

identities (until they replaced one universal system with another universal system, as

in the Reformation movement), the modern man/woman has lost that definitive,

universal assurance of moral frameworks and thus 'identities' of a diverse range (or

identifications with different communities or groups defined in whatever ways

deemed significant to the person) become important sources and resources in their

'quest' for a sense of where one stands and where one is heading to—providing value

frameworks to make the kind of 'qualitative distinctions' or 'strong evaluations' (ibid, p. 31) that one is bound to be confronted with as a human being, according to Taylor's theorizing of the basic human need to ask the inescapable questions of: Who am I? What is a good life or what makes my life meaningful or worthwhile?

Taylor's claims about the basic human need to seek moral frameworks and horizons (which can be provided by various identities made available through a person's interactions with significant others and memberships in different communities and groups) might concert with Erik Erickson and his colleagues' theories about identity crises (especially those experienced at the adolescent stage).

While Taylor and the psychologists seem to focus on the individual's active quest for, or negotiation and construction of, an identity (or identities) through interactions with significant others and communities, the sociologists seem to be more concerned about the (often unequal) distribution of resources or different kinds of 'capitals' for the negotiation and acquisition of worthwhile identities (e.g., socially prestigious and well-accepted identities; identities that confer power and economic benefits, etc.) among different groups of people and their children. Their concern is more about the production and reproduction of people's differential access to the powerful identities in society. It is to this important body of literature that we shall turn in the next section.

4. Sociology of Education: Capitals and Differential Access to the Societies' Valuable

Identities

Sociologists seek to uncover the structures and mechanisms that produce and

reproduce the social and economic stratification of different groups of people.

Education and schooling systems in modern society are key sites of such

socioeconomic and cultural production and reproduction.   As British sociologist,

Nick Crossley (2003) puts it:

> Class-based cultural advantages are passed from parents to children through
>
> the habitus, but as pre-reflective and habitual acquisitions they are generally
>
> misrecognized within the school system as 'natural talents' and are rewarded
>
> 'appropriately'.   The school thus launders cultural advantages, albeit
>
> unwittingly, transforming them into the hard and clean currency of
>
> qualifications.   (Crossley, 2003, p. 43)

In this 'laundering process', key categories of students/children are constructed

and used to both produce and reproduce differential types of identities and

subjectivities: i.e. to both classify students into different kinds of people and to

produce their consciousness and willing acceptance of 'who they are' (or what kind of

students, people they are and will be).

In this context it would be helpful to consider the work of French sociologist and

anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu and his often cited notions of *habitus, cultural capital and symbolic violence* in our understanding of how schooling and education systems work at classifying, stratifying and re/producing different social identities and subjectivities.   In the following paragraphs I shall annotate some of the useful notions from Bourdieu and show how they can help us to understand the ways in which different kinds of student identities are produced and reproduced in schools.

Cultural Capital:

This is a concept from Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1973; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1991) referring to language use, skills, competencies, and orientations / dispositions / attitudes / schemes of perception (also called "habitus"[1]), that a child is endowed with by virtue of socialization in her/his family and community.   Bourdieu's argument is that children of the socioeconomic elite are bestowed by their familial socialization with both more and the right kind of cultural capital for school success (i.e., their habitus becomes their cultural capital).   A recurrent theme in Bourdieu's works is that children from disadvantaged groups, with a habitus incompatible with that presupposed in school, are not competing with equal starting points with children of the socioeconomic elite and thus the reproduction of social stratification (see Lin, 1996, 1999 for an analysis of such reproduction in some schools in Hong Kong).   The notion of cultural capital has been used by education

researchers (e.g., Delpit, 1988; Luke, 1996) to describe the disadvantaged position of

ethnic and linguistic minorities and to problematize the notion that state education in

modern societies is built on meritocracy and equal opportunity.

Symbolic Violence:

Another recurrent theme in Bourdieu's writings concerns how the disadvantaging

effect of the schooling system is masked, legitimized, or naturalized in people's

consciousness.   School failure can be conveniently attributed to individual cognitive

deficit or lack of effort and not to the unequal initial shares of the cultural capital both

valued and legitimized in school:

> ...the dominated classes allow (the struggle) to be imposed on them when they
>
> accept the stakes offered by the dominant classes.   It is an integrative struggle
>
> and, by virtue of the initial handicaps, a reproductive struggle, since those who
>
> enter this chase, in which they are beaten before they start...implicitly
>
> recognize the legitimacy of the goals pursued by those whom they pursue, by
>
> the mere fact of taking part. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 165)

Symbolic violence, according to Bourdieu, is the imposition of representations of

the world and social meanings upon groups in such a way that they are experienced as

legitimate.   This is achieved through a process of *misrecognition*.   For instance, the

recent "English Only" campaigns in the United States provide illustrations of the

political struggles required to create and maintain a unified linguistic market in which

only one language is recognized as the only legitimate and appropriate linguistic

marker of the American identity and this "English = American" symbolic

representation has numerous consequences for schooling and jobs (Collins, 1993).

Specifically, Bourdieu (1984) describes four kinds of capital in the following

schema (see Table 1, from Luke, 1995), which I find particularly useful for language

educators:

SYMBOLIC CAPITAL Institutionally recognised and legitimated authority and entitlement requisite for the conversion of Cultural, Economic and Social Capital		
CULTURAL CAPITAL	Embodied Capital	Knowledges, skills, dispositions of the bodily habitus
	Objectified Capital	Cultural goods, material objects and media

The Future of 'Identity'

		physically transmissable to others
	Institutional Capital	Academic qualifications, professional certificates and credentials
ECONOMIC CAPITAL		Material goods and resources directly translatable into money.
SOCIAL CAPITAL		Access to cultural and subcultural institutions, social relations and practices

Table 1: Types of Capital in Bourdieu's Framework (summarized by Luke, 1995)

With differential kinds of initial capitals, school children from different social

groups are soon classified into different categories and given different identity labels.

However, as Crossley (2003; see quote above) points out, the different identity labels

are assigned and legitimated by seeing this streaming and classifying as based mainly

on children's 'natural talents' or diligence, while their differential starting points (i.e.,

differential capitals in the form of different kinds of dispositions and competencies)

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are masked.   Positive identities are constructed and reproduced for those children

coming in with the right kind of cultural capital while negative identities are

constructed for those coming in without such capital.   Of particular relevance to

language researchers is Bourdieu's discussion of *imposter* (Bourdieu, 1991).   For

instance, in the fields of second and foreign language education, a boundary is often

drawn between the native speaker vs. non-native speaker identity categories.   A

non-native speaker imitating the accent of a native speaker might be seen as an

impostor; e.g., an ESL student trying hard to speak in the accent of the host country

(e.g., Canada) might often be seen as a linguistic minority student trying hard but

never quite fully acquiring the identity of the native Canadian speaker (see Taylor,

forthcoming).   The society's valuable identities often require certain embodied

cultural capital (e.g., certain prestigious accents) which might often be beyond the

reach of those who have not been endowed with such capital in their habitus.

Creative, Discursive Agency:

    Bourdieu has often been accused of being overly deterministic and a theorist

more of reproduction than transformation (e.g., Jenkins, 1992; Canagarajah, 1993),

and thus and a theorist of modernity rather than postmodernity.   Lemke, however,

points out that Bourdieu is not limited to reproduction; what he does limit is the

effectiveness of single agents in changing whole fields of valuation in specific social

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fields (Jay Lemke, personal communication). For instance, the legitimate prestige

and value attached to English in Hong Kong cannot be changed by single agents

unless there are systematic changes in the social selection mechanism (e.g., the

medium of the universities and the professions; the language of the job market; the

globalization forces). While the above seems true, an area in which Bourdieu offers

few analyses is the creative, discursive agency of social actors who find themselves

caught in dilemmas. As linguistic anthropologist James Collins points out:

> ...we need to allow for dilemmas and intractable oppositions; for divided
>
> consciousness, not just dominated minds; ... for creative, discursive agency in
>
> conditions prestructured, to be sure, but also fissured in unpredictable and
>
> dynamic ways. (Collins, 1993, p. 134)

James Collins' focus on the efficacy of human discursive agency in inducing

changes in social structures comes from poststructuralist thinking often associated

with postmodernism and postmodernity. In the next section we shall turn to the

postmodernist thinkers who theorize about, among other things, the individual actor's

creative making of identities (e.g., drawing on mass mediated images and storylines)

in the increasingly postmodern condition, characterized by increasing mass migration

and electronic mediation.

5. Insights from Globalization and Cultural Studies: Electronic Mediation, Mass

Migration, and the Role of Imagination in the Re-invention/fashioning of Identities

Postmodernism is the umbrella term covering diverse strands of thinking which nevertheless share a common distrust of and shying away from the totalizing master narratives that characterize modernist thinking (one common modernist master narrative, for instance, is that of the progress of humans towards greater liberation and emancipation). Postmodernist writers announce 'the collapse of universalizing, predestined paradigms of knowledge and the inefficacy of the imperative to categorize, to set essentializing boundaries' (Erni, this volume). Postmodernity, on the other hand, refers to the different features that mark out our contemporary situation as increasingly different from the times before us, as different from the modern situation or modernity. Globalization and cultural studies scholar Arjun Appadurai points out that two such features are the rising global trend of mass migration and the growing pervasiveness and importance of electronic mass media in people's everyday lives (Appadurai, 1996).

With increasing mass migration taking place under forces of globalization we see more bodies crossing national, cultural, and geographical borders. Large-scale deterritorialization of peoples is taking place. For instance, in contemporary North America, one will find huge communities of Chinese, Koreans, Vietnamese or other groups of people having migrated from their original homeland and settled in different

North American cities.   To these diasporic communities and their children, their

identities are very much an issue and result of active negotiation and struggle rather

than natural conference by virtue of either their place of abode or place of origin.

The usual sense of ambivalence found in immigrant children about their cultural,

ethnic and linguistic identities can lead to positive viewing of their hybrid identities or

negative stereotyping of their 'non-pure' identities, often under the disparaging gaze

of their compatriots both in their current host country and in their place of origin.

Parallel to the trend of increasing bodies crossing national and geographic

borders there is also the phenomenon of more diverse images, fantasies, story scripts

embedded in the diverse popular cultural and media products crossing national and

geographic boundaries, entering into people's homes and everyday lives through

electronic mass media; viz., television, cinema, video technology.   Appadurai (1996)

theorizes that this trend has led to the increasing importance of the role of the

imagination in the everyday social life of people:

> …. In the past two decades, as the deterritorialization of persons, images,
>
> and ideas has taken on new force …. More persons throughout the world see
>
> their lives through the prisms of the possible lives offered by mass media in all
>
> their forms.   That is, *fantasy now is a social practice*; it enters, in a host of ways,
>
> into *the fabrication of social lives* for many people in many societies.

(Appadurai, 1996, pp. 53-54; italics added).

The implication of this, to my mind, is that the habitus of any person is increasingly in flux; i.e., no longer as predictable as before. For instance, a Chinese high school student located in Shanghai now can enter into the fantasy world of diverse video game scenarios from different places (e.g., South Korea, Japan, Taiwan) as well as enter into virtual communities with netizens crossing cultural, ethnic, linguistic and national boundaries. The implication for our consideration of identity is that the average person now has much more resources available to her/him for re/constructing, re/imagining, and re/fashioning her/his identities, some of which might exist mainly in the virtual world. If we draw on the 3 C's resources of Hoover and Ericksen (2004; see Section 2 above), then the range and nature of *competencies*, *communities*, and *commitments* that an average adolescent (at least for those situated in rapidly globalizing cities in the world) can develop, interact with, belong to, and draw upon have exponentially expanded than for their counterparts two decades ago.

This kind of things presents both possibilities and traps as global capitalism has made electronic mass media a powerful tool of shaping people's imagination of possible lives, and possible identities. Entire urban tribes and their associated consumer identities (e.g., 'the Pepsi Generation') can be created and maintained through sophisticated manipulation of visual images, music, songs, story scripts,

linguistic metaphors, and fantasies by the marketing and advertising engines that are

continuously pumping into people's imagination scenarios of possible lives,

glamorous identities, and elegant consumption life styles of the new urban,

cosmopolitan elite tribes (e.g., the Bobo urban tribe; see Brooks, 2000).   Cultural

branding strategies (Holt, 2004) are successful precisely because they work at the

cultural level by creating distinctive, prestigious identities or boosting up identities

that are under threat.   Advertising campaigns feed on people's identity anxieties and

identity crises (e.g., skilled manual laborers being phased out in the 1970s in the

United States found in the Budweiser beer commercials the positive image of their

masculinity again; see Holt , 2004).   With the pervasive electronic mass media

reaching every aspect of people's everyday lives, prestigiously branded consumer

identities (e.g., the Bobos) can be created and maintained—to feed the insatiable

appetite of global capitalism.   Such is the contemporary, postmodern situation that

many of us might find ourselves situated in, especially in the rapidly globalizing cities

of the world.

  6. Putting it all together: How do the many theoretical lives and senses of "identity"

help us understand our work as educators and researchers?

    While the philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, globalization and cultural

studies scholars might all have different theoretical and methodological orientations,

they do seem to share enough common ideas about the making and working of

identities.   For instance, they all seem to agree that we must not see identities as

essentialist categories based on what is usually misrecognized as primordia (e.g.,

gender, class, ethnicity, etc.), but as results of people's active construction of coherent

accounts that help them to make sense of their lives and their position in relation to

others and to the world. The 3 C's identity resources outlined by the psychologists

seem to summarize a large part of the consensus about the main kinds of resources for

the making of identities: competencies, communities and commitments, and of course

the three are also inter-related.   While philosophers and students of modernity such

as Charles Taylor stress the importance of identities as providing the horizon and

framework for the modern person to locate her/himself in the moral space, to rescue

oneself from the kind of identity crisis characteristic of the modern condition,

sociologists devote themselves to the study of the different kinds of valuation

mechanisms maintained in different social fields which legislate about what kinds of

identities count as valuable ones and what kinds of cultural capital count as tickets to

and markers of these identities—all these in the production and reproduction of the

prestigious identities and privilege of specific social groups, who are endowed with

such capital in their habitus to start with.   Postmodernist scholars in globalization

and cultural studies, on the other hand, alert us to the radical cultural change taking

place around and in us—the proliferation of imagined possible lives, possible

lifestyles and possible, glamorous identities, at least for those who can afford the price.

And these images are pumped into people's homes by powerful mass media engines

driven by global capitalism.   We might summarize the common themes emerging

from these diverse theoretical discourses about identity as follows:

- Coherent accounts (or narratives/stories) of self are results of one's active

  construction, by smoothing over one's fragmented experiences and contradictory

  practices, beliefs, and desires to construct a sense of personal continuity and

  unity (see Connelly, this volume).   The need to construct such a coherent

  account of self ('personal identity') is debatable (see Parfit's ideas discussed in

  Section 1 above) and might be culturally and historically conditioned (see first

  paper of Skeggs, this volume).

- Identities are socially and discursively constructed; they are not naturalistic

  categories based on what people misrecognize as 'primordial' features such as

  gender and ethnicity, as these are also regimes of difference socially and

  discursively constructed (e.g., see Winter, this volume).

- Some philosophers believe that people have a fundamental, existential need to

  find meaning in one's life and to find one's bearings with regard to what counts

  as the good life (Taylor, 1996). This echoes many psychologists' observation that

people, and especially adolescents, do seem to have a psychological need to

construct for themselves identities that are positive and empowering (Erikson,

1950, 1958, 1968).   One needs to feel that one has self-worth, by seeing oneself

as having certain competencies that are valued and valuable in society or in some

reference groups significant to them, by belonging to certain communities that

one cherishes, and by sharing the values and commitments of these communities

significant to them (Hoover & Ericksen, 2004) (e.g., marginalized schoolboys

taking up a hyper masculine identity to resist marginalization by school

authorities, see Harrington, this volume).   One can experience a sense of what

the psychologists call identity crisis or the philosophers call loss of horizon when

one fails to find such satisfying identities for oneself.   Students of modernity

argue that a feature of the modern condition is the pervasive sense of loss of

horizon and a continuous quest of the modern person for reassembling one, as

traditional frameworks with universal value claims gradually give way to

multiple, diverse frameworks in which the modern person is immersed, and out

of which the modern person finds resources to position her/himself in relation to

the good (Taylor, 1996) and to others.

- Those who have the power to define and delimit identity categories in society or

  in specific social fields (often doing so in rigid, reductionist, essentializing ways;

see Martinsson & Eva, this volume) have both the symbolic capital (e.g., to define what kinds of competences are worthwhile or markers of valuable identities) and the cultural capital to produce and reproduce the privilege of their groups (see both papers by Skeggs, this volume). Those who seek to resist such essentializing categorizing and positioning might engage in strategies of identity political struggle, and might also take up essentialism as a strategy to redefine and reassert the value associated with their own identities (e.g., see the schoolboys described by Harrington, this volume).

- Fixed identity categories and their essentialized contents are often naturalized, legitimized and produced and reproduced in people's everyday discourse (e.g., powerful middle class women reproducing the discourse of stereotypic gender roles for women in Malaysia, see Khemlani-David & Yong, this volume). These identity ideological contents might be willingly accepted and subscribed to by those marginalized by these identity categories themselves; for instance, an immigrant woman's identification with her role as a filial daughter and thus her decision to stay in a poor-prospect job (which limits her access to valuable communities, opportunities to acquire important competencies, and future professional identities) to earn the money to support her family (see Hansen, this volume).

- Fixed identity categories and stereotypes might also be mobilized in people's everyday interactions to re/position (remote) *others* as debased or sub-human beings (see Cheng, this volume) in a move to construct oneself a superior identity in relation to those *others* (see Cheng's conversation analysis of such identity positioning acts, this volume).

- Social actors marginalized in a certain social field might mobilize other resources and capitals available to them to 'turn the tables', to infuse new meanings and positive associations into their formerly marginalized identities (see Eng, this volume).

- Under globalization forces with mass migration and the penetration of electronic mass media, the role of the imagination in people's social life has become ever more important. Cultural marketing strategies capitalize on people's identity needs/crises and provide people with powerful images and cultural resources to construct positive identities or boost up their identities which have been under threat. Cultural capitalism also capitalizes on working class people's emotions and affective energies, extracts them and infuses these energies and emotions into white middle class bodies—re-branding them as new powerful, marketable identities, while leaving the black working class youth identity as stigmatized as before (see second paper of Skeggs, this volume).

- Postmodernist and post-structuralist scholars have sought to break away from the straitjacket of modernist, essentialist identity categories and point to the performativity theory of identity (Butler, 1993; see discussion by Erni, this volume).

Having summarized the trends emerging from different scholars' views on identity above, what then are the implications for us, educators, located in different contexts of the world?   Before carrying on with this heavy theoretical discussion, let us revisit the lyrics of John Lennon's song, *Imagine*:

Imagine there's no heaven,

It's easy if you try,

No hell below us,
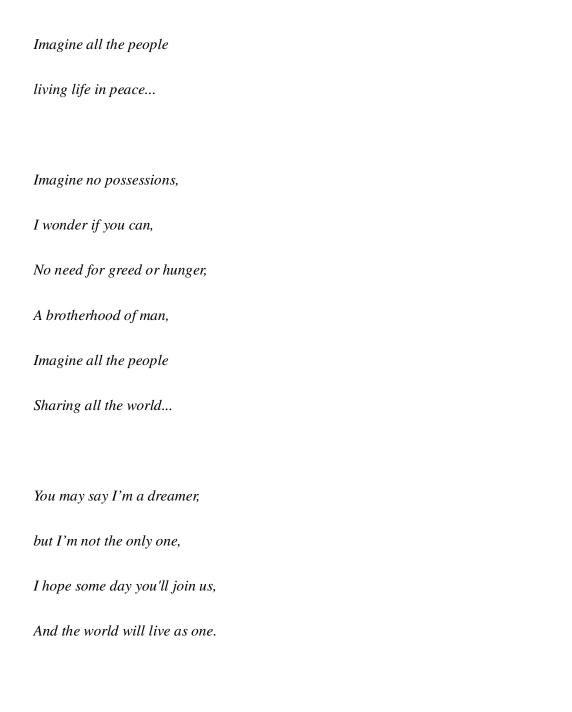
Above us only sky,

Imagine all the people

living for today...

Imagine there's no countries,

It isn't hard to do,

Nothing to kill or die for,

No religion too,

Imagine all the people

living life in peace...

Imagine no possessions,

I wonder if you can,

No need for greed or hunger,

A brotherhood of man,

Imagine all the people

Sharing all the world...

You may say I'm a dreamer,

but I'm not the only one,

I hope some day you'll join us,

And the world will live as one.

    Can the world live as one?   Should or can we do away with identity categories and boundaries?   Can we live without having the need to engage in some kind of identity struggle and politics?   It would be relatively less difficult to imagine such a scenario if one already occupies the privileged positions and possesses the prestigious

identities in society—in fact it will be to such a person's advantage to make everyone

think that there are no such boundaries and that everyone is equal or have equal

access to the world's goods, both symbolic and material ones, and that if one does not

have access it is mainly due to their lack of efforts and industry (i.e., the meritocracy

myth), and not because they have made certain cultural capital essential criteria for

acquiring those prestigious identities (and the privilege that comes with them), and

such capital is beyond the reach of people outside of their own groups / communities /

habitus.

   As long as there is social inequality and as long as the powerful groups of people

in society continue to fix essentialist identities for others (or conversely, ignore or

deny the existence of others who are different from them) there will still be the need

for identity struggles and identity politics.   However, can such a politics go beyond

strategic essentialism?   As Cultural Studies scholar Stuart Hall (1996) puts it:

…. This does not make it any easier to conceive of how a politics can be

constructed which works with and through difference, which is able to build

those forms of solidarity and identification which make common struggle and

resistance possible but without suppressing the real heterogeneity of interests and

identities, and which can effectively draw the political boundary lines without

which political contestation is impossible, without fixing those boundaries for

eternity. … But the difficulty of conceptualizing such a politics (and the

temptation to slip into a sort of endlessly sliding discursive liberal-pluralism)

does not absolve us of the task of developing such a politics. (Hall, 1996, p. 444)

Without attempting to offer any solutions (which is quite impossible, if not

presumptuous, for any single researcher to embark on), I shall propose one possible

way of showing how educators can draw on the postmodernist theory of

performativity to help marginalized students (e.g., like the schoolboys described in

Harrington's paper, this volume) to create positive, fluid, hybrid, multiple identities

that can be accepted by themselves and others.

7. Learning from Postmodernist Cultural Strategies: Creative Performativity and

Helping Students to Recreate Their Identities in Positive, Fluid, Dynamic, Hybrid,

Multiple, Ways

Identities per se do not seem to constitute the problem.   In fact we all need

some kind of identities, especially positive ones, which we can feel proud of and

accepted by significant others.   What is problematic, however, is the fixing,

essentializing act (usually by the powerful groups in society) of using rigid identity

boundaries and contents to label, stereotype and limit the possibilities of groups of

people/students, and to exclude them from the society's goods, or conversely, to deny

their difference or existence and ignore their needs altogether.

If postmodernist cultural re-branding strategies have been successfully used by cultural capitalism to capitalize on people's identity needs/crises, and to create powerful consumer identities to feed the appetite of global capitalism (see Section 5 above), we can perhaps appropriate these cultural strategies and use them for helping students to recreate positive identities for themselves, but in much more fluid, hybrid and dynamic ways than the cultural industries' re-branding strategies.

Teachers in the schooling system occupy functional roles that are imbued with authorities (though only in a relative sense and this is always subject to negotiation and re-negotiation by students). Like it or not, teachers have been occupying powerful positions and we can use our power to privilege certain groups of students (usually those who have come from similar cultural and social backgrounds as ours and have the cultural capital to respond positively to our demands and become likable to us) and denigrate certain other groups of students (usually those coming from a different social, cultural, or linguistic background from ours and not having the appropriate capital—attitudes and competencies—to respond positively to our expectations). We tend to create rigid, stereotypic identity categories for both groups of students and solidify the boundaries between them. However, if we draw on the postmodernist theory of performativity of identity (Butler, 1993), we would see the

need to re-create identities in much more fluid, hybrid, multiple and dynamic ways; as

Erni (this volume) delineates Butler's theory below:

.… [Butler] argues that one acquires subjectivity through reiteration and the

temporal logic that governs it.   But through the same process, one's subjectivity

can be challenged, even destabilized.   Accordingly, every identity is constituted

by discursive formation as much as by deformation (229).   After "essentialism,"

then, we can reinforce Butler's theory of performativity by emphasizing those

moments of performance of the self that are intense but not necessarily

accumulative, energetic but not always constitutive, encountering but not

formative, connecting but not congealing.   But always consequential.

And if language is the primary medium mediating the construction,

deconstruction, and reconstruction of identities, then perhaps educators can explore

ways in which language can be creatively used to provide more fluid discursive

resources for students to achieve new, multiple ways of understanding themselves—to

create new languages of self-understanding in more multiple, positive, empowering

ways.   For instance, instead of following the traditional schooling values of

classifying students (usually in binary ways) as 'bright student' vs. 'slow students' (or

'polite students' vs. 'uncooperative students'), we can propose new non-essentializing

languages of self-understanding; e.g., by creating multiple, positive vocabularies to

describe the diverse range of resources and attitudes that students bring with them.

However, positive language alone is not sufficient if we do not relax our own value judgments by allowing students' voices, discourses, attitudes, and cultural and linguistic resources to enter into dialogue with ours, to interpenetrate and inter-illuminate ours in a two-way enrichment sense (vs. the one-way transmission model of traditional teaching): i.e., to allow our own, as well as students', values, resources, and competencies to be mutually hybridizing and hybridized (see Luk & Lin, 2006 for some concrete classroom examples).

Similarly, teachers can also strive to create conditions (e.g., multiple 'webs of interlocution', see Taylor, 1996, and discussion in Section 3 above) under which students can create and belong to multiple communities in school which offer them nurturing attention and positive identities but without solidifying their membership categories—e.g., without iron-casting them in only one category (e.g., rigid binary identities of the masculine vs. the feminine; see Harrington's paper, this volume), always opening up new, hybrid multiple identity possibilities for them to explore and develop their different potential interests and abilities in new arenas, interacting with different groups of peers and people. If cultural capitalism has capitalized on electronic media to create new possibilities of creating new positive identities for people (albeit with the final aim of driving them to consume), teachers can also help

students to draw on their imagination to re-invent, re-fashion, re-create new, positive, multiple, fluid and dynamic identities for themselves to overcome the straitjacket of the usual binary, static student, gender, ethnic, social class (or other essentializing) identities circulating in most school contexts.   As Appadurai (1996) puts it:

…. the imagination has now acquired a singular new power in social life.   The imagination—expressed in dreams, songs, fantasies, myths, and stories—has always been part of the repertoire of every society, in some culturally organized way.   But there is a peculiar new force to the imagination in social life today. More persons in more parts of the world consider a wider set of *possible lives* than they ever did before.   One important source of this change is the mass media, which present a rich, ever-changing store of *possible lives*, some of which enter the lived imagination of ordinary people more successfully than others.   ….

(Appadurai, 1996, pp. 53; italics added).

Songs, dancing, drama and multi-modality arts, including youth popular cultural genres such as hip hop and rap music, and artistic and discursive genres from different linguistic / cultural traditions, can be explored as means to help students to work together to imagine and create more empowering identities for both male and female students, linguistic minority students and students with non-mainstream talents and

needs.   While these proposals are not new at all, it is hoped that by destabilizing the

rigid identity categories and boundaries that schooling usually imposes on students

and teachers that teachers and students can work together to explore new ways of

imaging, creating, and living out fluid, multiple, dynamic ways of being, speaking,

relating, acting, and seeing in the world that defy the essentializing effects of labeling,

stereotyping, iron-casting and self-negating identification practices.   To end this

essay, I shall quote urban hip hop artist and poet, Saul Williams:

> … I was able to see that hip hop was still voicing a CENTURIES OLD DESIRE
>
> FOR RESPECT…" (Saul Williams, 2006, p. xxvii; capitals mine).

Starting off as a source of counter-cultural African American youth resistant

identities in the 1960s and early 70s, American hip hop culture has, however, been

very much commercialized and re-branded by mainstream cultural industries, losing

much of its youth resistant and reflective power.   Saul Williams, in his 2006

collection of poetry, *Dead Emcee Scrolls*, seeks to rekindle our thinking about what

hip hop culture desires and can aim to achieve—respect, for self and others.   It is

hoped that our theoretical explorations into the many senses and meanings of

identities and the processes of identity making will help us achieve precisely this

aim—respect, for self and others, and fluid, empowering, and dynamic identities for

all.

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Footnotes

[1] However, "habitus" stresses more the encompassing ecology that a person is immersed in from early age, while capital stresses more the currency in specific fields of those predispositions, attitudes and skills acquired as a result of immersion in a particular habitus.