"Wherever You Go, There You Are:" Examining the Development and Integration of Individual Identity Across Multiple Domains and Contexts

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Abstract: This symposium brings together researchers focused on issues of learning and identity development. We examine how the development of identity relative to a particular domain-specific learning environment—such as a leadership seminar, a nature trail guide program, a writing class project, or a teacher professional development course—can be better understood by looking at learners as whole persons, relative to their other experiences and identities. In other words, we investigate evolving identity *within* contexts by looking more broadly at participant identity *across* contexts. The session will present findings from this research, share methods for accomplishing this difficult work and making it manageable, discuss implications for further theory-building about identity, and provide recommendations for designing learning environments with identity development in mind.

Introduction

Identity has only recently begun to emerge as a focal point in educational research, as educators and scholars now struggle with not only the constructivist idea that learners' shape their own meanings of domains, content, and contexts (Palincsar, 1998), but also the more thorny and difficult assertion that learners shape their own subjectivity toward, attitudes about, and affinity or hostility for all aspects of their educational endeavors (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Further, researchers of cultural identity have articulated the phenomenon that aspects of learners' identities may be positioned by institutions and cultures such that they conflict in various ways with success in school or success in particular academic domains (Davidson, 1996; Nasir & Saxe, 2003). Clearly, as educators and researchers, we ignore identity at our peril.

Yet identity is a slippery concept and difficult to pin down. Individual identity has been described by research and theory as a constant sense of self, or a fluid and ever-changing performance (Buckingham, 2008; Goffman, 1959). Identity development has likewise been framed as a consistent trajectory, or a rapidly shifting current (Erickson, 1968; Gee, 2001). Nowhere are these paradoxes more obvious than when we follow the same individuals across multiple contexts and domains, as in connective ethnography (Leander, 2008), or when we hear the coherent life narratives that emerge from a host of disparate experiences (Bruner, 1991). Thus when research focuses on solely one context in the lives of learners, we leave great gaps in our understanding and insight.

The papers on this panel represent research that attempts to bridge these gaps. We examine how the development of identity relative to a particular learning environment—such as a leadership seminar, a nature trail guide program, a writing class project, or a teacher professional development course—can be better understood by looking at learners as whole persons, relative to their other experiences and identities. In other words, we investigate evolving identity *within* contexts by looking more broadly at participant identity *across* contexts. Our methods for these studies vary. Some actively follow participants through different contexts they inhabit, while others rely on the participants to make those boundary-crossing connections via interviews, essays, life maps, or other narrative means. In all cases, however, participant voices and participant stories are key, since our work is founded on the idea that identities and selves are constructed and reconstructed through narrative (Ochs & Capps, 1996). In the abstracts that follow, representing those voices and narratives is difficult given length restrictions, but participant stories and cases will be a vital part of the conference session.

Trail guide self-perception and domain-expert identity at an environmental reserve. Emily Evans (University of California, Davis)

Non-formal education programs in outdoor settings are common methods to impart land management messages and promote environmental stewardship (Ham, 1992; Widner & Roggenbuck, 2000). For many of these programs, with low budgets and limited staffing, their ability to recruit and retain volunteer guides and educators has a direct impact on the quantity and quality of programs available to the general public. This study sought to find out why volunteers choose to become involved with a guided educational hike program and how their perceptions and past experiences shaped their interest in guiding and in the Reserve.

When social interactions, such as teaching and learning, take place in natural settings, the environmental context of those interactions directly impacts the meanings ascribed to the environment and the nature of the social interaction. (Anderson, 2004; Clayton, Clayton, & Opotow, 2003; Neilson, 2009). The case of the volunteer guide program is a means to explore these issues of identity at the intersection of social and natural environments. This study explores how guides think of themselves in relation to the social and environmental context of the Reserve and how these perceptions influence their practice as a guide.

To answer these questions, the researcher interviewed guides and observed them in training and leading walks. The researcher also had a participant-observer role in guide training, by enrolling in and going through the guide training program with a cohort of guide volunteers. Participants for the study were recruited from this cohort of volunteers. Guides were interviewed either in-person or on the phone; interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Fieldnotes were taken during guided walks, which were then matched to interview transcripts from guides (although not all participants had both interviews and walk observations). In interviews, guides were asked about their initial motivations, experiences leading the outings, and their interest and past experiences with non-formal teaching and learning in outdoor settings. Analysis of interviews and observations of the guided outings revealed three main characteristics of active guides: guides were motivated by an interest in teaching and learning, had a previous relationship to the place, and held an image of themselves that matched their perceived image of a guide.

This issue of image compatibility is critical to a focus on identity. Guides with some domain background such as plant biology or ecology, and who viewed their responsibility as educating visitors in the science of the reserve, made use of their existing expertise in their volunteer teaching. Yet on guide walks, the researcher observed that visitors to the reserve were not always engaged by taxonomic terminology and technical explanations of the reserve ecosystem, a phenomenon that some expertise-focused guides were aware of and frustrated by. Guide walks also revealed that some volunteers who lacked domain expertise, and who considered domain expertise important, were flustered on walks by visitors asking scientific or environmental questions that they could not answer. Yet image compatibility was not always related to domain expertise. Included in the participant pool were successful guides who identified more as artists or nature lovers, and thus lacked a background in environmental science or biology, but who viewed their responsibility more in terms of generating visitor enthusiasm and connection to the reserve. One example was an artist who led walks focused on finding spectrums of color in the reserve in different seasons; her walks contained virtually no scientific information at all yet still managed to engage visitors and create a positive walk experience. Retention in the guide program was the least successful for those who had a perceived image of a guide (as expert, inspiring, charismatic, educational, etc) that they could not match with their own identities and strengths.

This case study demonstrates that guides have different perspectives on what it means to be a non-formal educator, and that their perceptions of the guide identity are related to their motivations to participate. A prescribed identity of what it means to be a volunteer educator, such as domain expertise, may dissuade a potential volunteer from participating, if that image does not match their own self image. For land managers and education program coordinators interested in attracting and retaining volunteer leaders, carefully outlining the expectations of a guide and allowing for diverse perspectives on the role of volunteer educators may encourage a broader population of volunteers to participate and, in turn, a broader audience of visiting participants.

Life maps and the multi-contextual development of undergraduate leadership identity. Elizabeth Faber (Humboldt State University)

American institutions of higher education are working to develop relevant and meaningful learning experiences that prepare young people for leadership in a knowledge-dense, adaptive, and multicultural society (The Boyer Commission, 1998). But how does a college student learn to become a leader? This study explores the process of learning leadership across multiple contexts through the lens of identity development theory (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004; Erikson, 1968; Lord & Hall, 2005; Marcia, 1994; Rangell, 1994).

Existing theories of college student leadership development fall short in that they either focus primarily on one college context such as student government or athletics (Dugan, 2006; Hall, Forrester & Borsz, 2008) or lack specifics about the importance of reflective practices in the identity development in young, aspiring leaders (Logue, Hutchens & Hector, 2005; Posner & Brodsky, 1992). This qualitative study explores the learning outcomes and leadership narratives of undergraduate student leaders at a large public university. Six student leaders were recruited from the past participants of a leadership seminar on campus taught by the author, as well as through the social networks of those participants. Through narrative and artifact-driven interviews ranging from one to two hours in length, the student participants reflected deeply on their learning and development in college. They mapped their leadership experiences through lifelines—timelines showcasing their many involvements across curricular, co-curricular, extracurricular, and community-based contexts in college. The interviews revealed that these college students lead across multiple aspects of their identities: ethnic, social, academic, professional, etc.

The study also explores three new areas not described by existing literature in which young adults develop a leadership identity: identifying and committing to a core personal mission, developing emotional intelligence, and experimenting with peer teaching of leadership. Regarding core personal mission, interviews revealed that students were highly reflective about making connections across their various leadership experiences and finding common themes. One example is a Native student who was also a Cultural Studies major and led across social and academic groups on campus as well as in community service. This student articulated that across all these areas, her focus was on teaching others about connection to the land and repatriation of artifacts. Given that students themselves are generating these across-context missions, it is all the more crucial, then, that research on leadership development move beyond a focus on singular contexts for study.

Regarding emotional intelligence, students articulated that they struggled with handling frustration appropriately and dealing with difficult people, and that part of their growth as student leaders involved developing concrete strategies for these kinds of personal and interpersonal challenges that could transfer across situations. While existing research has examined emotional aspects of leadership in terms of enthusiasm for leadership and one's own motivation to lead, dealing with negative emotions in leadership has not been a focus of inquiry yet in the broader field and is recommended as an implication of this study. In terms of peer teaching, one of the hallmarks of college student leadership contexts, and one that has yet to be dealt with in existing research, is a continuous turnover of participant leaders. Undergraduate students are on campus for four to five years, and they may attain significant leadership positions only in their last two or three years of their enrollment at the university. Thus by the time students have learned how to lead effectively in any given context, they are already on the verge of graduating and being replaced by other students in those positions. The student leaders in this study reflected on how they might effectively pass on what they had learned to the next group of student leaders in their various contexts, but they described that they were given little support for this peer teaching process. This is clearly another area for research and development on college student leadership.

In closing, this study's focus on learning leadership through identity development is unique in the literature on college student leadership development and both complements and complicates the primary Leadership Identity Development model (Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006). The use of lifelines to promote reflection and guide narrative-based interviews is also a new and effective method both for research and practice. Other recommendations for college student leadership development include active opportunities for reflecting and connecting across leadership contexts to articulate a core personal mission, and an explicit emotional intelligence focus in both research and training on dealing with negative emotions and difficult people. In terms of peer teaching, this study suggests the practical need for leadership development programs, as well as individual leadership contexts, to build in acknowledgement of and support for the high turnover of student leaders, and to create opportunities for peer teaching of leadership. Research on peer teaching could effectively examine leadership identity from the new perspective of how students think about their "legacy" as they graduate, and also investigate students' implicit theories of learning leadership through research observations of how they instruct their peers.

Identity tensions among teachers as online professional development participants and novice bloggers. Cynthia Carter Ching (University of California, Davis)

More and more teachers are turning to reading blogs in order to find web resources for education, and using blogs as pedagogical tools to encourage their students to write for a "real" audience (Martindale & Wiley, 2005; Williams & Jacobs, 2004). Yet research on teachers-as-bloggers is relatively rare. While a pioneering study by Luehmann (2008) examined the case of a highly competent and prolific teacher blogger, this study takes on a group of teachers as novice bloggers and uses Gee's identity theory (2001), to address the questions of what factors affect teachers' attitudes toward blogging, experiences with creating blogs, and meanings they make out of blogging as a social, educational, professional, and personal activity.

Blogging is a highly productive context for examining questions of identity for a number of reasons. Nardi and colleagues argue that most personal blogs fall into at least one of a few categories: blog as documentation, blog as muse, blog as confessional, blog as commentary, blog as catharsis, and blog as community resource (Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004). In each of these functions, and sometimes in several different functions within the same blog, writers work to position themselves in complex ways in relation to their audience, their topics, and, in many cases, in relation to the hosting technology itself. While most naturalistic studies of blogging end up examining a self-selected population, those who have already internalized the value of blogging and decided to create an online identity and voice for themselves, this study examined the case of a cohort of practicing teachers in an online program who were given the task of short-term blogging as a course assignment.

The context for this study was an online cohort of thirty-seven teachers enrolled in an MA program for practicing teachers with a focus on global issues in education. In addition to participating in live online meetings, teacher participants posted conversations asynchronously on a CMS discussion board and worked throughout six weeks on their major assignment for the third course, taught by the author, which was to develop a blog and make at least three entries reviewing educational websites about globalization. Teachers were encouraged to think of their blogs as both an opportunity to use the lens of the course readings to analyze educational websites (blog as commentary) and as a resource for other teachers who might be looking for similar web-based tools for teaching about globalization (blog as community resource). Out of the thirty-seven teachers, only three had prior experience with blogging in a personal context, involving sharing pictures and anecdotes from travel and family life (blogging as documentation). No participating teachers had ever blogged before from their professional perspective and voice as teachers. Data for this study include the archived feeds from all live meetings (12 course meetings for two hours each) wherein participants regularly talked about and referenced their career experiences at their schools sites, teachers' discussion board postings about their developing blogs and ensuing threads of responses and replies, and the teachers' blogs themselves.

Using Gee's identity framework (2001), data were analyzed using axial coding to determine various different identities teachers were displaying throughout the course, in their blogs, in their discussions of themselves as teachers and bloggers, and tensions that occurred between these identities. Even aside from blogging, some participants experienced tensions between their reported institutional and discourse identities as expert and/or gifted teachers within their schools, versus their emerging institutional and discourse identities as "problem" students in the online program (i.e., those who often needed help with troubleshooting their online access, difficulties uploading work to the College of Education server, etc). These "problem" identities, both in the online program in general and in the blog assignment, were often associated with teachers' assertions about their nature identities, which they had also adopted as discourse identities—that of being "a dinosaur" (i.e., too old to be fully comfortable with online technologies) or somehow being inherently "hopeless" with computers. Additionally, those teachers who initially displayed an affinity identity as technology enthusiasts had little trouble setting up their blogs and personalizing their blog aesthetic, but some of these teachers still had difficulty writing in their blogs, as they struggled with how to establish and convey their discourse identities online and find voices for evaluating educational websites. In most cases, teachers who had never blogged before and teachers who had family blogs before the course both experienced some social anxiety regarding the public nature of blogs (Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004). Thus there emerged an additional tension between their discourse and institutional identities as authorities within their schools, or their affinity identities as previous family bloggers, versus taking on a discourse identity as a blogging educational authority to the online public-at-large.

This study demonstrates the importance of examining teachers' use of and meaning making with technology from an identity perspective, rather than an exclusive focus on training, since teachers in this study were daunted not primarily by the technical task of setting up and maintaining a blog, but by the tensions this requirement provoked in their ideas of skill, voice, authority, and self.

From Home to School and Back Again: Intersecting Trajectories of Identification in a Student's Development as a Writer. Deborah Fields (UCLA)

How can students build on their experiences, knowledge, and values from different parts of their lives (i.e., their identities) to develop an "academic identity," or a sense of self as interested in, good at, and having a future in some academic discipline such as science or writing (e.g., Barton, Tan & Rivet, 2008; Carlone & Johnson, 2007)? In this paper I use boundary objects and narrative analysis to unpack how one student developed a trajectory of identification as a writer, particularly as a writer that had a positive influence on other people.

This presentation represents part of a larger connective ethnography (Leander, 2008) following two 11 year-old children in many places of their lives during their sixth grade year, from October 2008 to August 2009. Data collection was theoretically driven to study how youth acted in different social spaces (their "identities-in-practice" – e.g. Barton et al, 2008), how the youth thought about themselves (what I call their "identities-in-narrative") and how others thought about them (others "identities-in-narrative" about the youth). To this end data include over 200 hours of observation of different subjects at school, sports practices, music lessons, performances, play with peers, and time with family (to focus on "identities-in-practice") and more than 50 interviews with the two youth and important adults in their lives (to focus on self- and others- "identities-in-narrative"). In analysis I constructed narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of *trajectories of intersections* based on events and narratives in the data to understand the consequences of youths' intersecting trajectories of identification. Then using grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000), I identified common themes across the different trajectories of intersections that might account for either productive connections or unresolved conflicts between identities.

In this presentation I discuss one trajectory of intersections across the life of an 11 year-old boy named Wynn. The instigating artifact that stimulated this trajectory was a letter he wrote to Dr. Seuss as part of an everyday classroom assignment, a letter for which he subsequently won a significant award. In his letter Wynn drew together personal conflicts about his bi-racial heritage; a beloved book from his childhood, *The Sneetches*; and his current social studies project in civil rights, which he described as "what all of my ancestors have done to each other." In itself, the letter acted as a powerful connecting artifact between different areas of his life that helped him to resolve conflicts in how he saw himself and how others treated him. A first place award for the letter further led to ripple effects across social spaces of his life: classmates began listening more carefully to his writing in class, extended family cited his award and the letter as evidence that Wynn was "smart," and African-American and bi-racial members of his church expressed how he had touched their hearts and that his writing was powerful. Eventually Wynn himself took up this narrative of himself as a good writer and at the same time began to change his daily practices to include more writing during his free time.

I argue that multiple things supported the development of Wynn's identity-in-narrative and identity-in-practice as a writer. Both the letter and the award acted as boundary objects (Star & Griesemer, 1989) that signified Wynn as an accomplished writer to different groups of people. The certification of the letter through the award he won magnified the impact of the letter. Both the certification and his mother's brokering of the letter to family, church members, and peers supported others talking about Wynn as "smart" and a good writer, and about his writing as touching their lives. Finally, the ways that Wynn was characterized as a writer tapped into values of different communities: academic achievement (particularly at school and home), leadership and diversity (at church), and creativity (at home). Boundary objects, certification, brokering, and shared values are themes found not only in the case of Wynn and his trajectory of identification as a writer but across other trajectories of intersections found in the larger study. I will discuss the implications of these findings for supporting productive intersections of identities.

Doing Cross-Contextual Work: On Method

While the papers on this panel differ in terms of their basic methodological approach—interviews, observations, connective ethnography, discourse analysis of texts and online conversations—there are some critical intersections that are worth noting. First, all the studies are qualitative in nature, and they all have engaged meaningfully with presentation of findings and also hermeneutic interpretation through theoretical and critical lenses. Related to the qualitative nature of inquiry is a post-positivist approach wherein we are not so much concerned with the objective validity or accuracy of the narratives we hear from participants. Instead we argue that the stories participants carry with them from experience are more important and more powerful for shaping identity than the actual events themselves (Bruner, 1991; Ochs & Capps, 1996). Thus our boundary-crossing work to examine identity in multiple contexts is not for the purpose of somehow "triangulating" data or validating participant reports from one location to another, but rather to fully trace the terrain of participants' narratives through the worlds they inhabit, on their terms.

Second, in all the studies on the panel, the researchers are co-participants in at least one context under study, thus having some already-existing connection to the participants and the contexts they inhabit (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). This not only facilitates subject recruitment and data collection, as well as conversation during interviews, such that researchers can ask informed questions about the shared context and participants can respond with abbreviated insider language without explaining every detail, but it also seems to push participants to do more identity-positioning and boundary-crossing rhetorical work in interviews, reflections, etc, almost as if they are thinking, "You know me in *this* context, but let me explain myself in *that* context."

Finally, third, in three out of four of the studies on the panel, written texts are of critical importance. Participants construct written artifacts—a lifeline, a blog, an essay—and then that artifact becomes a focal point for reflection, a fulcrum for personal change or revelation, and the crux of research inquiry. Writing is an artifact of practice that is authentic, crystallizing, and useful for research as an anchor for further analysis, but it is also a valuable kind of data in and of itself, particularly when examining identity. As described by Bazerman and Prior, the aim is to perform discourse analysis on written texts and their surrounding narratives, "so as to uncover signs of social identities, institutions, and norms as well as the means by which these social formations are established, negotiated, enacted, and changed through communicative practice," (Bazerman & Prior, 2004).

Symposium Structure

The session will take the form of a traditional 90-minute paper session, with brief opening chair's remarks and approximately twelve minutes per paper, followed by discussant comments and audience question-and-answer. Our discussant, Na'ilah Suad Nasir, from UC Berkeley, is an authority on cultural identity, culture and mathematics practices, and the sociocultural and practice-related shaping of identities across contexts. Her work represents one of the earliest attempts to connect learning practices in and out of school among African American mathematics students, situate these practices within institutional and cultural contexts, and elucidate important tensions among these phenomena (e.g., Nasir, 2002). Her comments will speak to common themes among the papers, provide suggestions for future research, and frame some productive topics for discussion with the audience during question-and-answer.

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