The Middle-Class Nature of Identity and its Implications for Education: A Genealogical Analysis and Reevaluation of a Culturally and Historically Bounded Concept

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Abstract We consider identity as a historically emerging discourse that requires gene-alogical analysis — not to discover the roots of our identity but to commit [ourselves] to its dissipation (Foucault 1977, p. 162). We suggest analyzing identity through the history of socio-economic classes, their life struggles, ambitions, development, and reproduction. We see learning not as a project of transformation of identity, but rather as developing access to socially valuable practices and developing one's own voice within these practices (through addressing and responding to other voices). The access and voice projects free agents from unnecessary finalization and objectivization by oneself and others (Bakhtin 1999; Bakhtin 1990). In education, we should develop indigenous discourses of learning and develop a conceptual framework that makes analysis of diverse discourses possible. We argue that learning, as transformation of participation in a sociocultural practice to gain more access, is a better conceptual framework than learning as transformation of identity.

Keywords Identity · Middle-class · Bakhtin · Sociocultural practice · Finalization · Objectivization · Education · Genealogy

> To speak of education in the 1990s is inevitably to speak of identity…. Identity has become the bread and butter of our educational diet.
> Hoffman (1998, p. 324)
> These days, the term identity is prominent in both scholarly and public discourses. The time-honored notion is experiencing an obvious renaissance, with its comeback even more impressive than its original appearance.
> Sfard and Prusak (2005, p. 14)

The notion of identity is one of the most widespread notions in modern social science (especially in the West): scholars in the fields of psychology, sociology,

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anthropology, education, studies of various arts, political science, economy, and so on apply this notion for diverse purposes in their research (Hoffman 1998; Holland et al. 2001; Sfard and Prusak 2005; Wenger 2007b, September). At the same time, many people criticize and reject this notion altogether. Non-American scholars are puzzled why there is not such a notion in their native languages, and suspect that the notion of identity is peculiarly American (or Western) and local and historically bounded (e.g., Wekker 1999; Zakaria 2003). In addition, some working class and minorities in the US protest when the notion of identity is applied to them (Parker 1995, April; Penuel 1996; Penuel and Wertsch 1995; Smith 1994). Finally, many U.S. social scientists feel that the traditional notion of identity is limited (Gee 2001; Holland et al. 2001; Lave 1992; Lemke 1995, 2002a, b, 2008b, in press; Sfard and Prusak 2005).

Unlike the former groups of identity scholars challenging the universal nature of identity, the latter group has looked how to improve the notion of identity by making it more flexible, fluid, dynamic, diverse, multifaceted, pluralistic, interpretative, contextual, relational, etc. Although these scholars see issues with the notion of identity as ontological—as grounded in the lives of people—they apparently do not see the emergence and rootedness of the concept of identity itself in a particular history of a particular society, nor the phenomenon it reflects as existing within a particular social group or time, nor its historical changes.

Following Hoffman (1998), we question the comprehensive and universal nature of the concept of "identity." With a few notable exceptions (Calhoun 1994b; Cushman 1990; Foucault 1977; Glasser 1972; Hoffman 1998; Wekker 1999; Zakaria 2003; Zaretsky 1994), researchers often do not ask if the conceptual and methodological framework of identity has any ecological validity for the studied population and is appropriate. In addition, within the analysis that follows, we address the axiological concern, common to genealogical analyses, of whether the phenomenon of identity always good or desirable (cf. Foucault 1977).

We propose that the notion of identity reflects as well as contributes to a historically, socially, politically, and culturally local phenomenon, emerging perhaps primarily or only within a U.S. and/or North American context. We consider the notion of "identity" as a historically emerging discourse that requires "genealogical analysis" (cf. Foucault 1995). In contrast with traditional historical analysis, genealogical analysis shuns the essential nature of any concepts or laws; the genealogist is thus a "diagnostician who concentrates on the relations of power, knowledge, and body in the modern society" (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982, p. 105).[1] We agree with Bauman (1996, p. 18) that "identity as such is a modern invention." The goal of our genealogical analysis of identity is fully compatible with Foucault's call for such study, "not to discover the roots of our identity but to commit [ourselves] to its dissipation" (Foucault 1977, p. 162). We suggest that it is time to leave a "conceptual reductionism" of viewing the notion of identity and its development solely in the world of "ideas" and "concepts," and move it into the world of the history of socio-economic classes, their life struggles, ambitions, development, and reproduction. However, we do

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[1] Genealogy differs from Foucault's archeological methodology in that the latter investigates disciplinary systems of knowledge, focusing particularly upon assertions of experts. Genealogy, by contrast, focuses upon de-essentializing ideas of such disciplines. However, Foucaultian genealogy should not be considered to be incompatible with or disconnected from archaeological methodology (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982).

not want to replace "conceptual reductionism" with "historico-sociological reduction-ism." The goal of this paper is not to view identity emerging necessarily out of historico-political phenomena. Rather, it is to see identity as emerging in response to, and making sense within, a particular and peculiar cultural and historical context in U.S. society (but it is interesting to see how our analysis of the historical and cultural context in U.S. society can shed light on the discourse on identity elsewhere). In this sense, our theorizing is of the nature of an approach to theory common in the European tradition in which, "given a certain phenomenon P (or a certain fact, relation, process, trend)… 'what does it mean that P?,' 'is it significant that P?,' 'is it really the case that P?,' 'what is P all about?,' or 'how can we make sense of or shed light on P?'" (Abend 2008, p. 178). Our goal is thus to provoke discussion rather than to report on solid findings (as we discuss before our questions in the next section). We are aware that our genea-logical analysis is incomplete, and expect it raises more questions than it answers.

Finally, a note on methodology. There are two levels of analysis in a Foucaultian genealogy: "the level of analysis of regional structures of power-knowledge and the level of the critique of the regime of truth" (Shiner 1982, p. 384). A genealogy involves "the analysis of the mutual productivity of power and knowledge" (p. 392) in a critique of what is considered to be "true." Genealogies see power as operating diffusely and at a local level. Power is also seen as relational, an approach which Foucault describes in his concept of "governance" as "a way of attempting to give structure to the terrain of the actions of others" (Shiner 1982, p. 391). Power operates from a micro-level, "reach[ing] into the very grain of individuals, touch[ing] their bodies and insert[ing] itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses and learning processes and everyday lives" (Foucault 1980, p. 39). As Shiner discusses, genealogy rejects the notion that there is any origin point to an investigation of an idea like identity, as if a continuous set of historic events led to its development. Furthermore, Shiner points out that genealogy denies the existence of a "subject" or "author" which makes history and any continuity to historical phenomenon. Thirdly, genealogy moves away from analysis of any organized disciplinary knowledge, theories and ideas that organize understanding of a concept like identity. The investigation of the micro-strategies of power-knowledge—as opposed to a teleological, authorita-tive or disciplinary approach to such an investigation—and the critique of what is considered to be "true" constitute the genealogical analysis which is followed here.

The Classic Notion of Identity

The classic notion of identity was introduced in the early 1950s in the U.S. by Erikson (1994) to describe adolescent development. He argued that adolescence as a developmental period is characterized by a crisis of and search for identity,

> The wholeness to be achieved at this stage I have called *a sense of inner identity*. The young person, in order to experience wholeness, must feel a progressive continuity between that which has come to be during the long years of childhood and that which he conceives himself to be and that which he perceives others to see in him and expect of him…. Identity is a unique product,

which now meets a crisis to be solved only in new identifications with age mates and with leader figures outside the family (Erikson 1994, p. 87).

Identity formation, finally, begins where the usefulness of identification ends. It arises from the selective repudiation and mutual assimilation of childhood identifications and their absorption in a new configuration, which, in turn, is dependent on the process by which a society (often through subsocieties) identifies the young individual, recognizing him as someone who has to become the way he is and who, being the way he is, is taken for granted (Erikson 1994, p. 159, italics in original).

Follow-up research has supported Erikson's theory of identity (e.g., Adams et al. 1979; Bourne 1978; Brandt 1977; Donovan 1975; Fannin 1979; St. Clair and Day 1979). However, this research has been done mainly with European-American middle class adolescents (Cole and Cole 1993). Erikson's theory of identity and identity research appear to normalize these adolescents' experience within U.S. mainstream culture while deviations from Erikson's expectations about adolescents' search for identity have been considered as deviations from "normal" development.

Scholars of identity have made keen observations about Erikson's notion of identity. First, he presented the problem of identity as a developmental phase *specific to youth*. Erikson argued that young children before adolescence do not have identity but rather identification with significant others (often parents and later peers) (Penuel and Wertsch 1995). Although Erikson assumed identity in adults, he treated it as less problematic. Second, the notion of identity is linked with a *crisis* toward which youth are going. Identity is always a problem (Bauman 1996). Arguably, the notion of identity can also be applied to adults for whom belongingness to socially recognized adult communities is in question (cf., Bakhtin 1999; Du Bois 1961; Lewin 1948), or to those who frequently or comprehensively experience the uncertainty of being thrown into interactions with other cultures, either on a global or institutional level (Hermans 2001). Third, Erikson defined identity in terms of *choices* that individuals have to take in response to *existing* sociocultural, historical, economic, and institutional options, rather than, for example, in terms of options that the person can shape themselves (Edwards 1994, April; Waterman 1988). Fourth, Erikson's notion of identity has a *rhetorical and discursive* character of "persuading others and oneself [and by others] about who one is" (Penuel and Wertsch 1995, p. 85). Finally, identity formation is mainly shaped in terms of *career choice*, "in adolescence, society asks youth to define for themselves what they will do—what path of duty and service they will take as adults who must make a living for themselves and produce society's goods" (Penuel and Wertsch 1995, p. 88). For adolescents, "the choice of an occupation assumes a significance beyond the question of remuneration and status" (Erikson 1994, p. 129).

We pose several questions which we hope will provoke further investigation into the genealogy of the concept of identity, and related concepts in social science, and spark debate about the notion of identity more generally. Unlike conventional research methodology, our goal is to raise informed questions rather than to report on solid findings or provide comprehensive answers to all of these questions. In our analysis, we provide the most support for questions 1, 2, below. Questions 3 and 4 are questions we feel are provoked by our discussion of questions 1 and 2, which we hope will be the

subject of further multidisciplinary scholarship. We begin to address questions 5 and 6, but we note that significantly more scholarship is needed to address these questions in detail: (1) What kind of youth did Erikson describe? (2) Who is faced with the luxury[2] of having youth/adult crises and opportunities for making choices out of pre-existing options? (3) Who manufactured these options and their abundance for the middle class, and how and why? (4) When and why have these historical circumstances emerged in the US and why did they not exist in the past for the middle class and why do they not exist for upper and working classes today? (5) How and why has the notion of identity emerged? (6) What alternative notions exist in other cultures?

Brief Genealogy of the US Middle-Class and the Phenomenon of Identity[3]

We argue that the notion of identity reflects a historical, middle-class phenomenon[4] and it contributes to the maintenance and reproduction of the middle class in a certain historical time after World War II (WWII). It appears that after WWII, the U.S. middle class went through many important historical transformations, as depicted by fiction literature writers (Salinger 1964), sociologists (Lynd and Lynd 1982; Whyte 1956), psychologists (Cushman 1990; Erikson 1994; Foote 1951), economists and historians (Patterson 1996), and cultural critics (Glasser 1972; Zakaria 2003). This historical time was characterized by mass production, rapid expansion of the economy, expansion of the middle class, new and diverse job opportunities (especially for the middle class), rising expectations, emergence of new suburban enclaves as the place for the middle class to live, consumerism, shopping malls, proliferation of advertisement in people's everyday life, and so on. The changes were not just quantitative (i.e., just more of what previously existed same) but also qualitative. Before the end of WWII, the life of the old US middle-class could be characterized by the place and track in which they found themselves in the society. It was important for them to do what was considered by their social groups as *appropriate* to do, to have, and to be *within their social place*,

> 'I wanted my son to go to a different school in the East,' said a [middle] class mother [in 1924], 'because it's more cultured. But then I think you can have too much culture. It's all right if you're living in the East—or even in California—but it unfits you for living in the Middle West' (Lynd and Lynd 1982, p. 220).

The focus of the old middle-class on socially defined appropriateness is different from the social conformity of their contemporaries in other classes (e.g., working

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[2] Many middle-class participants might not experience these crises as "luxuries," but people from other classes, especially from the working class (thrown into a life of survival), might see them as a "luxury" (Lubrano, 2004). In other words, it may be a luxury for some families and communities to think of young people as having an "identity crisis" (e.g., "should I assume the identity of a doctor or a lawyer? No, let me have a psycho-social moratorium for a while!"). There is thus a collision of voices of people here from different classes.

[3] We do not have space here to investigate historical dynamisms and diversities of social classes beyond the juxtaposition of the generically defined "working class", "upper class", "old middle class", and "new middle class" in the US and, by extrapolation, to Western Europe, Canada, etc. We are aware that we paint here a rather static picture lacking important nuances and full of apparent overgeneralizations. We hope that this brief picture inspires further historical analysis.

[4] We should point out that our analysis of "middle class," and all classes here, are Anglo-American in their orientation and historical content.

class and upper class) and different from the social conformity of the new (current) middle-class with its focus on choice and fashion. For instance, for upper class folks, social conformity has been historically based on the discourse about elitism (i.e., socially prestigious exclusivity), nobility, and honor (Wood 2004; Zakaria 2003).[5] Then, and probably nowadays, working class social conformity has been heavily based on group solidarity in a struggle for daily well-being (Lubrano 2004; Willis 1981). For working class folks, we argue, appropriateness was probably a lesser conformity factor than solidarity, the latter having been referred to as a living tradition (e.g., like being fans of a particular sport club) rather than as a social place as it was for the old middle-class.

Unlike working and upper classes, the middle class cannot take its existence for granted. Even though born in the middle class, one *has to work hard* to remain in the middle class. Fussell makes an important observation that middle class status has more to do with "psychic insecurity" than it does with income status, and/or locations or positions within a contradictory system of class/authority relations (cf. Wright 1985). Fussell's emphasis on "psychic insecurity" is an important aspect of the way in which we operationalize "middle class"[6] status in our analysis here: "The middle class is distinguishable more by its earnestness and psychic insecurity than by its middle income. I have known some very rich people who remain stubbornly middle class, which is to say they remain terrified at what others think of them, and to avoid criticism are obsessed with doing everything right" (Fussell 1984, p. 33). While working class folks are born in the struggle for survival and upper class folks are born into native-born entitlement, middle class folks are born into the anxiety of not slipping back into the working class (or slipping out of their tenuous privileged status born from educational attainments): Fussell argues, "the middle class man is scared. As Mills (1951) notes in his study of the 'American middle classes,' 'He is always somebody's man, the corporation's, the government's, the army's'" (Mills 1951, p. xii, cited in Fussell 1984, p. 36). Class anxiety is the middle name of the middle class. George Orwell also nicely described middle-class anxiety and even middle-class envy for the working class (proletariat, or "proles" in Orwell's character's jargon) who does not have this anxiety,

> There's a lot of rot talked about the sufferings of the working class. I'm not so sorry for the proles myself…. The prole suffers physically, but he is a free man when he's not working. But in every one of those little stucco boxes, there is some poor bastard who's *never* free except when he's fast asleep (Orwell 1939, p. 5, italics in original).

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[5] It appears that there has been some change in the American upper class in regard to the degree to which they participate in schooling in order to transition into future schooling; for instance, upper class young adults may take achievement tests to go into elite colleges. This transformation of the upper class has been noted by sociologists; see, for instance, Brooks (2000). However, a phenomenon of "two Harvards," (i.e., Harvard University) has been noted, the Harvard for the middle class and the Harvard for the elite, with the latter's experience being much more about access into powerful networks (Konigsberg 2007). Furthermore, as Soares (2007) has noted, a prioritization on cultivated leadership and personal character has been more notable in U.S. elite college admissions in the standardized admissions test era than an emphasis on an "academic meritocracy."

[6] Despite many attempts to develop essentialist definitions, the notion of "class" in general and middle-class in specific seems to be always contested and illusive and probably depends on the purpose and the material of the analysis (Gallie, 1956; Reich, personal communication, July 28, 2003).

Of course, both working and upper class folks might have their own anxieties as well but their anxieties are not so much about their belonging to their class per se (it can be about position in their class). The middle class position and status has to be earned (Weber and Kalberg 2001) rather than found (as it is in the other classes).

It is important to note that the psychic insecurity of middle class status may also be increasingly experienced among those whom Brooks (2000) refers to as the "educated elites" in U.S. society. It could be that this insecurity of at least some members of the elite in U.S. society reflects the fact that their position in the social order may no longer immediately guaranteed by family name or fiat as it was in the past. It is not clear if this phenomenon is experienced among all considered to be elites in U.S. society, or if this phenomenon reflects the cultural dominance of the psychic experience of the middle class in U.S. society (which may ultimately have some impact on the values, ideas and experiences of all classes).

A series of social, economic and political changes dramatically transformed the US middle class as to how it has earned its status and defined itself ideologically (and transformed its self-perception): the boom in the US economy in the postwar period; revolutionary changes in mass production and consumption; re-orientation of the economy on production and consumption of non-essential and quickly obsolete products, celebrities, and experiences (Lowe 1982); growth of a service-based economy; demographic changes; dramatic socioeconomic and geographical mobility; rapid emergence of suburbs; personal control over one's life and preoccupation with the self (Grob et al. 2001); advertisement of a new, not-existing-yet, desperate need for "the buyable fantasies" (Cushman 1990; Ewen 1989; Glasser 1972); and so on. Patterson (1996, p. 339) described the postwar buzzwords that had newly emerged to describe the changing middle class phenomenon as "alienation," an "identity crisis," the "age of anxiety," "eclipse of community," people are "uprooted," "mass society" has obliterated "identity" and "individualism," and society is a "lonely crowd." A "therapeutic culture" also developed in which "experts" helped people to "feel good." Whyte (1956, p. 7) provided a negative portrait of the emerging new middle class grounded in the Social Ethic of personal comfort and harmonious social relations. As Riesman described the newly emerging middle class in his sociological work "The Lonely Crowd," "The other-directed person wants to be loved rather than esteemed" (Riesman 1950, p. xlii).

We argue that after WWII, the US middle class has predominately become choice-based. The new middle-class has begun earning its class status by "making the right choices." The post-WWII US economy has learned to manufacture—physically, institutionally, and psychologically—choices for the middle class (Patterson 1996). Rather quickly, middle class folks began seeing themselves earning their middle class status not by their hard work in organizations, not by meeting the expectations by more powerful others (their bosses), not by their discipline of fitting in what was considered to be appropriate for their status, but through making "smart choices." Unlike previous transitions, this metamorphosis occurred almost painlessly and almost voluntarily (at least in the participants' perception) through consumerism and new and better job opportunities (Glasser 1972). As Patterson (1996) notes, these new job opportunities were abundantly available, and rates of income, home-ownership and higher education rose consistently until the early 1970s, "Optimistic

perceptions of continuing prosperity drove social change for the middle-class in postwar America" (Patterson 1996, p. 79).

In the second part of the twentieth century, not only did the new choice-based middle class ideology trump old middle-class ideologies—proprietary-entrepreneurial and wage-based—described by Max Weber in "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" (Weber and Kalberg 2001), but it also successfully trumped the upper class ideologies as well to become the dominant mainstream ideology in the US (and, arguably, in Western Europe). In the social sciences, choice-based, middle-class ideology has powerfully proliferated (if not colonized) the ideologies of other social groups (that is why, in our view, the notion of identity is applied so universally). Everything and everyone is seen by researchers as a sign of identity (Sfard and Prusak 2005). Identity has been "discovered" everywhere in the past and in the future. For example, Erikson (1958) discovered an "identity crisis" in young Martin Luther. As Wenger (2007b, September) claimed recently, "The 21st century will be the century of identity." Probably, as we suspect, for the first time in history, middle class ideology has become fully hegemonic and totalizing. Rejection of the notion of identity by people and cultures has become a sign of their identity.

Zakaria (2003) provides an interesting example of the dominance of the new middle class values in US society. He points out that the producers of the movie *Titanic* (Lieberman et al. 1996) had to alter the history of the tragedy because the historical reality probably did not fit the current middle class ideology of "making smart choices." The movie depicted chaos and violence among panicked passengers of the Titanic, especially among the upper class males who tried to push less powerful others in struggle for survival. However, in reality, driven probably by the upper class value of honor, many upper class men consciously and orderly offered women and children to go to the boats first,

> Benjamin Guggenheim[7] similarly declined a seat, yielding his place to a woman, asking only that she convey a message home: 'Tell my wife . . . I played the game out straight and to the end. No woman shall be left aboard this ship because Ben Guggenheim was a coward.' In other words, some of the most powerful men in the world adhered to an unwritten code of honor—even though it meant certain death" (Zakaria 2003, p. 237).

Meanwhile, according to the survivors, it was among the third class where the panic spread most (Eaton and Haas 1987). Upper class men disproportionally died in the Titanic catastrophe and were thanked by the survivors by the erection of a special monument in Washington, DC, "To the brave men of the Titanic, who gave their lives that women and children might be saved" (Zakaria 2003, p. 238). The film producers probably decided that the real history would be seen as implausible for the modern audience.

Another important change caused by the emergence of the new choice-based middle class was the transformation of the relationship between school, which was always a middle class institution (Labaree 1997), and the reproduction of the middle

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[7] Benjamin Guggenheim was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the fifth of seven sons of the wealthy mining magnate Meyer Guggenheim (1828–1905) and Barbara Myers (1834–1900). He was heard to remark on the sinking Titanic, "We've dressed up in our best and are prepared to go down like gentlemen." (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benjamin_Guggenheim).

class. In the first part of the twentieth century, the school was "*a sorting machine*" (Sidorkin 2002; Sorokin 1927; Waller 1932) for providing a gateway into the waged middle class. School enrollment represented a pyramid: the higher the class grade, the fewer students remained. Those students, many of whom were middle class, who did not fit the school discipline regime were either expelled by the school or dropped out by themselves. The school was the first institution for waged middle class through which youngsters earned middle class status to become managers or professionals.

In the second part of the twentieth century, the US public school became more and more compulsory and less pyramidal, at least for middle class youth (although it still remains more like a funnel rather than a pipeline, especially for working class youth). After WWII, for middle class youth, graduation from a compulsory school was almost not an issue any more. School had stopped being "a sorting machine" (Sorokin 1959) for the middle class. Rather, we argue that school became *a choice machine* for the middle class. The modern compulsory school institution provides the new middle class parents and their children with opportunities to make "smart choices" that can eventually help them earn middle class status for their children. Modern compulsory school is full of manufactured choices for middle class folks: private school vs. public school, good neighborhood vs. bad neighborhood, good reputation school vs. bad reputation school, advanced placement (AP) classes vs. non-AP classes, higher track vs. low track, electives vs. no electives, choices to join extracurricular activities, and so on.

Manufactured choices require resources from their participants (both parents and students): money, efforts, time, and access to institutional networks. But also, these choices can bring new resources. Choices become the new capital for the new middle class. While middle class folks make choices, they become defined by them for access to the new choices. For example, those who "chose" not to buy a house in an affluent neighborhood might put their children at risk of getting a poor education in a less affluent school with fewer resources (Mah 2001).

Defining the New Middle-Class Discourse on Identity

Many scientists practicing in the discourse of identity have noticed how difficult is to define and operationalize the notion of identity (Sfard and Prusak 2005).[8] Wenger (2007a) admits, "I don't know what identity is but I know that I care about it." Many sociocultural scholars using the identity discourse in their research are very concerned about the objectivizing and finalizing nature of this discourse (Gee 2001; Holland et al. 2001; Lemke 2008b, in press; Sfard and Prusak 2005). But in our view, all their attempts to address this important issue are unsatisfactory and, arguably, never can be satisfactory. The identity discourse focusing on "who people are" are packaging people in containers of certainty (finalizing) and treating them as object of the

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[8] We wish to note to the reader here that we do not intend to operationalize the notion of identity materialistically, as a social entity which is *formed* out of class, or not formed out of class. Such a discussion is of great debate in sociology (the degree to which identity is formed from class or knowledge, for example), and we wish to indicate that we see such a discussion as being out of scope of our paper. In this paper, we treat identity discursively, and are indicating the discourses in which we sense the identity discourse lives, and in which it makes sense. We sense this is a different project than understanding its material underpinnings.

discourse (objectivizing). Sfard (2007) provides example of how a descriptive discourse about one's participation (e.g., "One has been involved in a minor traffic accident") becomes a discourse identifying the person (e.g., "One is a poor driver"). However, as Bakhtin argued, "a subject as such cannot be perceived and studied as a thing, for as a subject it cannot, while remaining a subject, become voiceless, and, consequently, cognition of it can only be dialogic" (Bakhtin 1986, p. 161), In the identity discourse, learning is seen as repackaging of people by placing them in different containers (i.e., "identity transformation", using Wenger's terminology). It gives a wrong impression for researchers that at the end of their research they know and can know people whom they research. Instead of engaging in the conceptual discourse of identity (e.g., like, "storytelling about self" Holland, or "experiencing of one's own agency" Wenger), we define it ontologically and genealogically.

We define the phenomenon of identity as a historically emerged public discourse about negotiation between available ready-made choices and discourse on self (one's own self and/or selves of others). Thus, the identity phenomenon often involves four important components:

1) discourse about personal choices (in contrast, for example, to a discourse about obligation, calling, honor, survival, duty or no discourse at all),
2) search for a better choice for one's comfort and harmony (in contrast, for example, to search for good of a community or not to search at all),
3) ready-made choices (in contrast, for example, to creating new, previously un-available choices or not to see choices at all, like, for example, in discourses on fate or destiny), and
4) discourse about self (in contrast, for example, to discourse about family, or no discourse on self at all).

On first glance our definition of identity discourse is somewhat different than one provided in contemporary educational literature focusing on storytelling about one's (own or anybody's else) self (Gee 2001; Holland et al. 2001; Lemke 2008b, in press; MacLure 1993; Sfard and Prusak 2005; Wenger 1998). However, this might not be true. Although, the new middle class has undergone many historical changes after its emergence in the second half of the 1940s and its identity discourse with it—developments that the newest definitions of identity seem to reflect,—we argue that at a closer look, it is possible to find all four of the above characteristics in these newest definitions of identity (cf. Zaretsky 1994). It is, however, outside the scope of this paper to do a genealogy of the modern new middle class and its identity discourse from the late 1940s to the present time including appropriation of the identity discourse by the Civil Rights movement and identity politics (Zaretsky 1994) (it is also complicated by local conditions and diverse communities in and outside of the USA).

With the proliferation of choices, the new middle class has firmly left and fallen out of the social matrix of predictable social roles (Calhoun 1994b). Social roles and places have stopped describing people and stabilizing social relationships.[9] Personal choices have become the main discourse of the new middle class that is supposed to provide

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[9] Interestingly, within the "identity statements" she collected from her students in the 2000's as part of a course assignment, a Dutch colleague found lots of examples of choice making in the narratives that are characterized by "suffering and being lost in all the options they see themselves confronted with" (M. De Haan, personal communication, December 20, 2007).

affordances for people's social orientations. Based on interviews and surveys, sociologist Whyte (1956) described (and highly criticized) the emergence of the postwar new choice-based middle class and their new discourse about personal choices,

> The young men [from middle management] speak of 'the plateau' [as their personal choice for their career and life]. If they were to find this haven they would prove that the Social Ethic is personally fulfilling. For the goal of the plateau is in complete consonance with it; one's ambition is not a personal thing that craves achievement for achievement's sake or an ego that demands self-expression [as in the Protestant Ethic of the old middle class described by Weber]. It is an ambition directed outward, to the satisfactions of making others happy. Competitive struggle loses its meaning; in the harmonious organization one has most of the material rewards necessary for the good life, and none of the gnawing pains of the old kind of striving (Whyte 1956, p. 173).

It is important to comment on Whyte's description that in contrast to the old middle class' discourse of obligation or calling, the new middle-class participates in discourse of personal, but ready-made, choices to which they felt they were entitled.

The new middle-class sees everything as a choice. As one of our undergraduate education middle-class students in the US once asked us (the first and the second author) in our classroom discussion of environmental justice, "Why do poor people *choose* to live in environmentally degraded areas?" The condition of economic necessity or ill fate is unknown to them. Similarly, scholars of identity define it comprehensively through seeing choices and their performances,

> We can perform longer-term identities through how we enact an identity-in-practice, and we can constitute and change longer-term identities in the same way. The longer-term identities inscribed in our habitus (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990) constitute dispositions for action in the moment, and are themselves constituted through many actions across many moments. If these dispositions are positional and structural, similar for persons of the same social class background, gender, etc. it is because of the similar life opportunities, access to situation types, expectations of others, etc. that we encounter repeatedly in living the kind of lives typical of our caste, generation, etc. We are more likely to have certain choices in clothes, foods, discourses and not others presented to us or available to us, and to consistently choose within this range of choices, developing a habitus which distinguishes us in our later 'spontaneous' choices from those whose life trajectories led them to develop dispositions in a different range of opportunities (Lemke 2008a, p. 24).

According to this view, life consists of big and small choices and theses repeated choices we made define us and crystallized in our identities.

Reevaluating the Notion of Identity: Alternative Conceptual Discourses

In this section, we demonstrate (outside of any genealogical analysis) that non-identity discourses are still alive and well at the peripheries of the Choice-Based Middle-Class Empire of Identity Discourse. However, among many scholars, the

concept of identity is an unquestioned truth, rather than a culturally-specific or culturally-loaded idea, leading them to apply the concept universally to all people, even upon those who may reject it. Holland and her colleagues define identity in the following way,

> People tell others who they are, but even more importantly, they tell themselves and they try to act as though they are who they say they are. These self-understandings, especially those with strong emotional resonance for the teller, are what we refer to as identities (Holland et al. 2001, p. 3).

These authors imply that this narrative practice of talking about oneself, reminiscent of discourses which package the self like a commodity, and "self-understanding," which seems to suggest the self as a finalized object, is universal and common (even to the point of "strong emotional resonance") to all people. We argue here that talking about the self and the discourse of self-understanding are culture-specific practices.

Similar to Holland's efforts, Taylor (1989, p. 27) defines the notion of identity as a person's commitment to certain moral/spiritual frameworks (e.g., Christian, anarchist) while making personal decisions. He does not seem to envision possibilities of alternative morality to the binary he poses: either to have the commitment to a particular framework or not. We suggest that the notion of identity itself is culture-loaded. It is, again, out of the scope of this paper to state how this more recent identity discourse is different from earlier 1950s discourse. However, it can be stated that this discourse extends a middle-class preoccupation with this discourse that may be a constraining influence on the problems and prescriptions of the human sciences.

We can look to Russian culture for an example of an alternative discourse (and ontological project) to the identity discourse (and ontological project) that can help to see identity discourse as constraint. In Russia, there are strong tendencies to reject the notion of identity for the notion of "*lichnost','*" which can loosely be translated as "personality," but which actually means a person's possibility to indefinably transcend their life circumstances. Discursively, *lichnost'* refers to the question, "How to do the right things in face of corrupting conformism and pressing circumstances?" It is not necessarily about a commitment to a particular, ready-made moral/spiritual framework, as Taylor (1989, p. 27) seems to suggest, but about transforming and transcending these frameworks. This is very different from the question that the notion of identity raises, "Who am I in comparison with other people and my own past?" (c.f., Gleason 1983). *Lichnost'*s opposition to conformism runs through many diverse domains (e.g., moral, relational, intellectual conformism). In Russian, there is no exact word for the English notion of "identity," while in English there is no exact word for "*lichnost'*". As a Russian psychology scholar stated: "How to translate [the word] 'identity' in Russian? … I associate the [English] word identity with smile like this [shows smile of fake politeness common in some US communities]. It sounds like [Russian term of] 'lichina' [i.e., 'social mask'] to me in contrast to Russian [notion of] 'lichnost'!" (Anton Yasnitsky, personal communication, September 10th, 2007, translation from Russian by EM). Holzman (1997) captured the spirit of *lichnost'* in her book's epigraph that she dedicated "to the young people of the All Stars Talent Show Network—who create hope and possibility each day as they build environments in which they can grow in a deadly and violent world".

Expanding the Vision of the Self Away from Identity

One theme that is often present in ethnographic research on the issue of identity in minority and working class adolescents (especially in the context of discussing "youth at risk") is rebellion against identity as an attempt of others to pinpoint one's self within his/her sociocultural space and time (Heath and McLaughlin 1993). An example of such rebellion can be found in Penuel's (1996) ethnography describing the stories that young minority participants in the YouthPower program tell about themselves. An African-American working class young man describes why he does not feel fully comfortable with the adults who run the YouthPower program while being comfortable with his peers outside the program.

> …at YOUTHPOWER / they know me because I'm YOUTH/ I'm a YOUTH/
> they want to get a YOUTH perspective/
> …the only reason I FELT they felt/ they knew ROBERT/ because Robert was a YOUTH/
> they want to get a OBJECTIVE from a youth/
> that's how they PUT me in that position/
> that's how they KNOW me/…
> how do I say it/ you know/
> um SIGNIFY with me whatever/ what HAVE you/
> but when IN the Hill/ it's just like I'm ROBERT/
> I'm not Robert from the HILL/
> I'm not Robert from SANDY Ave/
> I'm not Robert from the COMMUNITY Center/
> I'm not Robert who's EIGHTEEN years old/
> I'm ROBERT/ and that's how they KNOW me/

This rejection of identity resonates with Parker's (1995, April) observation of the slogan written on a T-shirt worn by a young African American woman: "The identity I wear the best is my first and last identity: human being." Both the extremely local stress on self-uniqueness—"I'm ROBERT"—and the extremely global all-embracing self-definition as "a human being" are ways to rebel against others' attempts to finalize them and to define a sociocultural form of one's self.[10] Maslow (1960) warned psychologists and social researchers from identifying people's protests against being "rubricized", labeled, and finalized as evidence of their psychological resistance that maintains an underlining complex.

This argument runs counter to discussion in the literature that suggests that working class and upper middle class teenagers talk about themselves differently using competing identity discourse narratives. Gee (2000) argued that working class adolescents, when asked to describe their identities as future college students, predominantly described themselves in a dialogic and relational manner, "'I think it is

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[10] These examples show rejection of the identity discourse by some contemporary US minority youth. They probably have alternative discourses worth studying. Our hypothesis is that in some African American communities an alternative discourse to a middle-class discourse on identity exists about "signifying" (Gates, 1988). Please notice that Robert in Penuel's study seemed to refer to this "signifying" discourse in the example above. We call for studying historically and culturally indigenous discourses about how people describe agents of deeds and the genealogy of these discourses.

good [her relationship with her boyfriend]' … 'I think I should move out [of the house],' … [or] 'I think I'm so much like a grown up'…" (p. 416). Gee noted that these comments are "dialogic and interactional" in nature (p. 416), anticipating replies from significant others, and contextualized to the adolescents' specific, lived situations. He interprets the working class adolescents as having an "identity" that is "dialogic and interactional," which he contrasts to the upper middle class adolescents who "fashion themselves in terms of (anxiety-filled) movement through 'achievement space' wherein they accrue skills, attributes, attitudes, and achievements as capital that will make them worthy of success" (p. 419). And, unlike the working class adolescents, who predominantly contextualize their "I-statements" in relation to the dialogic replies from significant others, "the upper middle class teens very often talk about relationships and activities in ways that seem to have a direct or indirect reference outside of themselves to achievement, success, or distinction in the adult world and in their futures" (p. 416). It is intriguing how much the upper middle class adolescents' discourse parallels our earlier discussion of the genealogy of identity. But, in our view, what Gee leaves unquestioned is the applicability or acceptability of the discourse of identity to the working class youth, even though he appears to be aware that much of the identity discourse found in the working class youths' discourse may in fact be co-constructed between the University-based researcher and the high school subjects.[11]

Bakhtin (Bakhtin et al. 1990) can help to further conceptualize the challenge that Robert brings to others' definition of his self. Bakhtin pointed out two aspects of self that he called "spirit" (I-for-myself) and "soul" (I-in-eyes-of-others). Spirit is activity-, meaning-, goal-, and future- oriented. It is uncertain, inconsistent, abrupt, free, incomplete, and avoids any reconciled description, except referring to its uniqueness (e.g., "I'm ROBERT"). Spirit exists as unfinished deeds, not as words (unless they are parts of deeds).

On the other hand, soul is the harmony of correspondence of the self and the world; it is the reference of self to the world. Soul is always a narrative or an image. It is past-, form-, and order- oriented. Bakhtin stressed that knowing about one's own soul is a gift from others since one cannot see his/her own birth, death, one's own body in the interior of one's house, one's own deeds in sociocultural and sociohistorical backgrounds, and so on. He wrote, *lichnost'* "is not subordinate to (that is, it resists) objectified cognition and reveals itself only freely and dialogically (as *thou* for I)" (Bakhtin 1999, p. 298). In the current discourse on identity, it seems that "soul" is responsible for describing one's identity by others while "spirit" is responsible for transforming "identity" by one's self.

Bakhtin et al. (1990) argued that spirit and soul are differently constructed in time and space. He defined the space of the spirit as "horizons" which involve the means of one's activities in relationship with one's goals. In contrast, he called the space of the soul "environment" or "background" which embraces the individual-in-the-world. In terms of time, Bakhtin defined "goals" as time for spirit and "memory" as time for soul (both notions embrace the past-future continuum). Bakhtin defined "memory" as a special

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[11] As Gee (2000) wrote, "we were interested in whether and how each teenager would (or wouldn't) accommodate to this academic identity. Of course, we fully realize that when we study identities emerging in interviews, we are, unavoidably, studying something that is co-constructed by the teen and the interviewer" (p. 415).

narrative activity that calms the spirit down by referring it to the sociocultural and sociohistorical world and thus transforming spirit into soul. "Goals" and "memory" have a collective, dynamic, relational, and contextual character.

Bakhtin et al. (1990) argued that full analysis of the self is impossible without the simultaneous focus on these two aspects of the self: *dukh* (spirit) and *dushá* (soul).[12] To study the self as spirit (*dukh*) means to focus on one's current incomplete projects and deeds while to study the self as soul (*dushá*) means to focus on biographies and on narratives about one's self (Sullivan 2007). As Bakhtin pointed out, each story is also an act that transcends the story itself because it is told for a special occasion to a special audience with a special intention in the open world. This open world is incomplete and unreconciled (i.e., many events, interpretations, and transformations can occur with the person-in-the-world). Many current attempts to reconstruct the concept of identity that are coming from a sociocultural perspective appear to fit Bakhtin's notion of self as "*dushá*," as one part of "*lichnost*'" (McAdams 2006; Sullivan 2007). When people are asked (e.g., by a researcher) to talk about themselves, they provide temporary, relational, and context-bound consummation of their life that they picked up from reflection of other people and their own past (i.e., "their *dushá*").

Bakhtin's conceptualization offers not an alternative approach to the notion of identity but, we argue, it offers an essentially *anti-identity discourse*, as Bakhtin resisted any projects to pinpoint, to objectify, to finalize, or to identify a person in a dialogue.[13] The Russian notion of "*lichnost*'" resists excessive finalizing and objectifying by the self and others. The other part of "*lichnost*'" as one's incomplete deeds and projects (i.e., "dukh") is left out of McAdams' and Sullivan's analyses or is viewed negatively as rebellion or "a torn narrative." People not only try to make sense of themselves in stories but also try to transform the world and themselves in actions as well as transform their stories,

> The self is not a phenomenon with definite and defined socially typical and character-type traits; it is not a specific formation consisting of univalent and objective features, all of which together answer the "who is he?" question. Rather, the self is a *distinct point of view on the world and on oneself*; it is a meaning- and evaluation-generating position of a person with respect to himself and to the outer reality. Important is not what the self is in the world, but what is the world is for the self, and what the self is for himself (Bakhtin 1999, p. 47, translated from Russian by A. Sidorkin for his upcoming article "Dialogical Self and Multiculturalism").

Each person rejects who he or she is (in his or her own and other eyes) in the uncertain and open potentiality of his or her future. This point usually escapes research on identity that focuses on narratives about self. Studies of *when*, *to whom*, and *why* people talk

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[12] Apparently, in one of her comments, bell hooks articulated an ambivalence that many African-Americans express about their race, "Two things I want you to know. Number one: I want you to forget that I'm black. And number two: I don't want you ever to forget that I'm black" (Simpson and Simpson 2007, October 18, n.p.).

[13] Of course, objectifying and finalizing are unavoidable and even very useful but, at best, Bakhtin (1986) argued that they are always temporary, limited, situated and potentially offensive (see also Matusov and Smith 2007).

about themselves might help to complement research on *what* people say about themselves. For example, in research on identity, participants are often asked by the researcher to talk about themselves rather than to talk about why they have chosen to do so—their intent and vision of the "experimental" situation is left out of the study.

It is interesting to know what people try to accomplish in narratives about themselves. It would be also interesting to focus on what people try to avoid talking about and how it relates to incomplete deeds and projects that they are currently involved in. Their description of identity ("*dushá*" in Bakhtin's terms) and transformation of identity ("*dukh*") are two aspects of one process.[14]

Conclusion: Educational Implications

In this paper, we argue against the cultural expansion of the notion of identity to phenomena and communities in which it does not belong. We also argue against treating it as a theoretical rather than a mainly anthropological-sociological notion. For example, even though some religions classify people as non-witches, cold witches, and hot witches (Latour 1987), this does not mean that social scientists should use it as a theoretical construct applied to any person in any culture. In other words, we do not need to believe folks in the new middle class that it is necessarily true that people are definable by the choices they have made (or even definable at all).

There is a growing tendency in a sociocultural scholarship of educational research to define learning through the "analytical lens" (Gee 2001, p. 99) of the concept of identity, like for example, "Learning is a transformation of identity in that it transforms who we are as agents in the world" (Wenger 2007a, n.p.). This conceptual move is often used in sociocultural opposition to traditional cognitivist approaches that define learning as acquisition of skills, attitudes, and knowledge. Many sociocultural scholars argue for "constructivist identity" based on active invention of choices, on diversification of choices, and on contextualization of choices—in contrast to "essentialized identity" based on ready-made, universal, and decontextualized choices (Calhoun 1994a; Gee 2001; Kvale 1992; Lemke 2008b, in press; Søreide 2006; Wenger 2007a; Zaretsky 1994): "Identity is thereby not something ready-made that we can find or develop, but something we create and recreate through our relations to the world and other people" (Søreide 2007, p. 24). In our view, this conceptual move is good and legitimate but it is good and legitimate only for certain communities, in which the identity discourse historically makes sense. However, when this discourse about identity is not indigenous to the community, this conceptual framework constitutes "imposed etics" (Rogoff 2003), the outsider's framework being imposed upon the observed community.[15]

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[14] There are other cultural notions alternative to the identity discourse. For example, there is the African-American notion of "signifying" (Gates, 1988) or a Euro-American notion of "positioning" (Davies and Harré 2001).

[15] This "imposed etics" is of concern not only for populations studied by social scientists, but also for the study of social scientists themselves. It seems important to take a situated perspective on social scientists as well; there are may be some communities of social science researchers for which the notion of "identity" is seen as a relevant and important concept, and others for which it may make little sense at all. This is not a relativist position, however, in that we challenge social scientists employing the notion of identity to consider the possibility of "identity" as imposed etic for the population of study.

To visualize the consequences of discourse alternative to the identity discourse in education, we consider an example from the practice of the first author as a professor in a teacher education course. A teacher education undergraduate student, a preservice teacher, reported to Eugene Matusov's class that she "betrayed" her "own educational philosophy of community of learners" during her teaching practicum. In her view, she fell into an institutionally sanctioned "adult-run approach" (Rogoff et al. 1996) that privileges the teacher's control of the students over students' and teachers' mutual responsibility. In response to her confession, Eugene, as her instructor, tried to move her away from, what he considered, the trap of the identity discourse. In his analysis at the time, the preservice teacher was faced with a teaching dilemma. She could accept responsibility for her pedagogical mistakes and the potential damage she did to children, her students, by blaming herself for the betrayal of her beloved teaching philosophy (and, thus, betrayal of herself, as a good, caring teacher). However, she could also reject any responsibility for these mistakes by rationalizing the necessity of her harm-producing pedagogical action. She could also reject this responsibility by rejecting her educational philosophy as unpractical altogether. The first option in the dilemma leads to the preservice teacher's paralysis, depression, and demoralization; while the second and third options lead to the student's cynicism, pedagogical insensitivity, and irresponsibility. In our analysis, both approaches eventually lead to destruction of teaching mastery, loss of higher goals, and professional demoralization. In Eugene's reply to the student in a class web discussion forum, he offered an alternative discourse,

> I do not think about myself as a bad teacher or a good teacher. I found it more useful to think about myself as 'an [oldtime] adult-run teacher who tries to become a more collaborative and better teacher.' This helps me to avoid being arrogant ('I'm better than most teachers!') or being paralyzed by my own mistakes ('I betrayed my philosophy!') that eventually can lead me to more exciting learning of how to become a better teacher. I expect from myself to do a lot of adult-run mistakes and then and when I do them, I work hard on how to recover from them, how to minimize the damage that I made, and try to figure out what forces me to do them so I can avoid them in future. By the way, I've 'stolen' this approach from the Alcoholic Anonymous Association that insists that an alcoholic can become only 'a dry alcoholic' but never a fully recovered one. What do you think?

As the instructor, Eugene offered a new discourse for the student to make sense of her own pedagogical experiences (i.e., adult-run mistakes) not as "a new identity" but rather a new discursive tool to address her dilemma of taking responsibility for her mistakes without becoming paralyzed and demoralized by this responsibility. In this non-identity approach, the teacher is not defined by, let us say, a collaborative educational philosophy, as much current sociocultural research of teachers often has done (e.g., see Søreide 2006); rather, this non-identity approach assumes that the teacher *actively defines* what a collaborative educational philosophy means for her through her own actions and through her own responsibility and in the form in which it is shaped (by literally "going through and over" the border of collaborative and non-collaborative philosophies). Of course, an identity approach might still describe Eugene's guidance as helping the student to transform her professional identity

moving from "a collaborative teacher" identity to "a recovering adult-run teacher" identity (paraphrasing Heidegger, it is possible to comment that, "for a hammer everything is a nail, for an identity approach everything is identity"). But by doing that, the identity approach misses the point: Eugene did not help the student transform her identity but rather he helped her free herself from it (as it was suggested from her and other students' replies to his web posting). Eugene was using an image of "an adult-run teacher who tries a collaborative approach" not to create a new identity for his education students but rather to give them a tool to orient themselves better (free themselves) within their experiences and practices. Let us illustrate this with the following analogy. When a person who needs to cross a narrow bridge over a deep canyon is told by a guide to look straight ahead and forget about the abyss below, the guide's advice is not aimed at creating a delusion in the person that the abyss does not exist; rather, the guide mediates the person's fears and puts them under the person's control. Eugene's offer of the "recovering adult-run teacher" to his students is aimed at the same goal.

This approach is similar to how Zaretsky describes Foucault's position about identity discourse, "For Foucault, identity is not something whose assertion leads to liberation but rather something we need to be liberated from" (Zaretsky 1994, p. 211). Rather than being a slave of some ready-made ("good") educational philosophy that she betrayed by crossing its boundaries, Eugene's student, using the new alternative discourse as a useful tool that he offered to her, had become an active agent to define her own (current) version of the collaborative educational philosophy through her pedagogical experiences and reflection of these experiences. For example, the student (and other students) had realized that actively working on recovering from the teacher's own mistakes with students is also a part of collaborative educational philosophy (along with expectation for one's own mistakes).

We agree with many sociocultural scholars that learning is the learner's transformation of participation in a sociocultural practice and that it often involves transformation of the learner's social relationships with others, transformation of the ways in which others have known the learner and the ways the learner has known him/herself, transformation of the practices themselves, and so on. Through learning, the learner might become a different type of agent and a different person – learning can be holistic. However, these facts do not and should not mean that learning is "the identity project," unless, of course, this is exactly what the participants are after (see Ball 2004, as an example of such identity fabrication projects by the participants). We see learning not as a project of moving people from one identity, defining them, to another identity—however, contextual, active, flexible, fluid, dynamic, relational, hybrid, fragmented, and multifaceted it might be—but rather to develop access to socially valuable practices and their own voices within these practices as an agent of transformation of these practices (in address and response to other voices, see Bakhtin 1986). The projects of promoting access to socially desirable voices and of developing voices seem to be better, for us, than the identity projects because the access and voice projects free agents from unnecessary finalization and objectification by the self and others (Bakhtin 1999; Bakhtin et al. 1990). In education (and arguably elsewhere), we should develop indigenous discourses of learning and develop such a conceptual framework that makes analysis of these diverse discourses possible. We argue that, for all these reasons, *learning as transformation of participation in a*

sociocultural practice to gain more access to it is arguably a better conceptual framework than *learning as transformation of identity.* We insist on the "classic" *participatory* (Lave 1988, 1992; Lave and Wenger 1991; Rogoff 1990) understanding of a sociocultural approach to learning and education rather than on the newly developed *identity* version of this approach.

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