

***Identity and personhood: Confusions and clarifications across disciplines*** by Laurance J Splitter (2015). Springer, Singapore. ISBN: 9789812874801

Splitter commences this book by telling the reader that it was a pedagogical incident that led him to write it. Presenting a philosophical seminar series on the topic of ‘identity’ to bright undergraduate students in America from a range of disciplines heightened his realisation that we don’t all use the word in the same way to refer to the same thing. We wouldn’t normally think too much about it, assuming that identity, especially one’s own, is an obvious, assumed entity. However, it is not, really, the closer you examine the concept. Which is precisely what Splitter goes on to do.

Explaining that he wishes to connect the philosophical investigation of the concept ‘identity’ with what his students were particularly interested in at that time, namely identity politics, Splitter spends an even amount of time on both. The first four chapters of the book (Chapters Two to Five, given that Chapter One is the introduction) explain fundamental philosophical theories and investigations into the concept of identity, and Splitter is able to break down a difficult and highly conceptual topic into manageable and interesting explanations supported by useful examples to assist readers, even if they are not researchers in the field of philosophy.

Engaging with classical philosophical thought experiments such as Theseus’ ship, and asking Heraclitus’ question as to whether or not you can step into the same river twice, Splitter’s engaging writing style introduces interdisciplinary readers to Leibniz’s Law, natural kinds, Anomalous Monism, and his own Principle of Personal Worth, all in relation to the concept of identity. Identity is thus related to various philosophical approaches, commencing with logic and mathematics, progressing through epistemology, ontology and ethics, before concluding with a link to philosophy for children, the community of inquiry and pedagogical implications of his Principle of Personal Worth.

In the book’s blurb, Splitter tells the reader that he approaches the concept of identity from both logical-linguistic and socio-cultural perspectives, and explores the links between different disciplinary perspectives in order to get to the fundamental question of ‘who or what we persons really are’. In the second half of the book, Chapters Six and Seven, Splitter focuses on the identity politics that link our personal sense of identity to our social context, values and inter-relationships. It is the final chapter that I will now discuss as Splitter refers to the Philosophy for Children (P4C) literature when discussing the educational dimensions and implications of identity.

Although Splitter does make reference a couple of times throughout the text to Matthew Lipman, Ann Sharp and his own previous publications in the field of P4C, the discussion culminates in the final chapter, with Chapter Eight focussing on P4C and the Community of Inquiry (CoI). Splitter introduces this chapter by informing us that he will ‘revisit the issues discussed so far—specifically relating to identity and personhood—and view them through

the lens of education' (p. 179). He argues that all classrooms should be transformed into communities of inquiry, an argument to which I'm sure the readers of the JPS will be very sympathetic. Yet the interesting aspect to the defence Splitter provides for this claim lies in the notion of identity itself and his Principle of Personal Worth, which was carefully explained and defended in the previous two chapters.

Splitter convincingly explains that classrooms are central to the practice of children 'becoming persons'. Persons 'are characterized by networks of relationships that have both semantic/linguistic and moral/ethical dimensions' (p. 185), and we develop our sense of personal identity through our interactions with others. Therefore, the P4C pedagogical practice of a CoI is the best way to work independently but also collaboratively with a group of fellow investigators seeking shared meaning and pluralistic truth. The CoI is appropriate to such formation as it allows for caring and critical as well as creative investigation into ideas that are led by the participants themselves with space always available for new information. The self-correcting nature of the CoI is imperative, Splitter points out, and he cites this as cause for optimism (p. 187) as it allows for genuine progress in the accumulation of knowledge (p. 188, citing Karl Popper's ideas about falsifiability here).

Splitter goes on to address some pragmatic points that educators would have likely been asking in their own heads whilst reading this chapter, namely about curriculum and class size, and whether or not this praxis could equally work in countries that are not Western, English-speaking democracies. Splitter explains that for pragmatist John Dewey, upon whom the P4C method was largely based when Lipman introduced it to America in the 1970s, education was an extension of real life, and was all about *doing*. He writes, 'For Dewey, schools and classrooms must be real, genuine and meaningful for students, not by corresponding to something external which has these qualities, but by qualifying as *forms of life* in their own right' (p. 206). As the classroom is identified as one place where students *become persons*, the role of education in this self-forming process is of vital importance to society as well as to the individual.

Splitter concludes pragmatically, noting that, therefore, personhood is a relational concept with those relationships being both semantic or linguistic and moral or ethical; and he supplements this defence with his Principle of Personal Worth in order to avoid our identifying with socio-political constructs to the extent whereby we lose our individual sense of personal identity and value (p. 210). As we see ourselves as one among others, dialogue has a critical role to play in the development of our cognitive capacities, particularly in how we make meaning. Dialogue is therefore more than solely a useful tool for acquiring knowledge, and the role of the CoI within the P4C pedagogy is ideally situated to foster this holistic skill. To this end, Splitter encourages a progressive approach to education whereby every classroom is a CoI that encourages open dialogue and ultimately results in individual and societal flourishing.

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