Chapter 10
Formalizing Institutional Identity: A Workable Idea?

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1 Introduction

Educational institutions have institutional identities that, in most cases, seem to have developed spontaneously. In numerous instances, there seems never to have been a conscious effort to purposely define the identity of the institution at the outset, i.e., to establish an institution with a deliberate process of defining sources of meaning for the institution on the basis of a set of religious, life-conceptual, philosophical or cultural attributes, and values that are given priority over other sources of meaning. For a collective social actor such as an educational institution (cf. Castells 1998, p. 6), there may even be a plurality of identities, the existence of some of which the institution may not be consciously aware of. In most cases, the identity of a particular educational institution, such as a school,[1] college, or university, seems to have developed as a result of the way in which the individuals forming the totality of the institution strove for "success in action" (Blackburn 1996, p. 297).

On the other hand, there are institutions that, from the moment of their inception have formalized and consciously defined their institutional identity. We find examples of this in, for instance, Christian, Muslim, and Jewish and other categories of religion-based schools, as well as in institutes of higher education such as Calvin College (Grand Rapids), Dordt College (Sioux Center), the Institute of Christian Studies (Toronto, Ontario) in North America, the Islamic University in Cairo, and the Hebrew University in Tel Aviv. Three rather well-known examples in Christian circles are the Free University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands) (which has since traded its original Calvinistic/reformed identity for a secular one[2]) (cf. Tervoort 2005, p. 145), the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (South Africa) (which in 2004 had to surrender its explicit Christian identity after its enforced merger with another university), and the Kosin University (South Korea) (whose Christian identity has come under pressure since it was placed under the direct supervision of the Korean Government in 2002). Since 1917, about two-thirds of the schools in the Netherlands consciously adopted a particular institutional identity as a result of "pillarization" (*verzuiling*), i.e., the practice of allowing schools to adopt a religious or value-based character and to associate with other

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schools with the same institutional character (the "special" schools – *bijzondere scholen*) (cf. Van den Berg 1992; Sturm et al. 1998). The remaining one-third form a conglomerate "public school pillar" (Strietman 2005).

According to the sociologist Castells (1998), recent global developments have made it either unfashionable for institutions to adopt a unique institutional identity, or made it impossible to do so. The dawn of the Information Age (successor of the Industrial Age) has brought a crisis of legitimacy that tends to question the meaning and function of institutions. Global networks of wealth, information, power, and multiculturalism have inspired most institutions to spread their wings and to look far beyond their institutional boundaries. In the process, many of them have either relinquished their meaning and concomitant value-system (as derived from their original institutional identity) or have found themselves deprived of actual meaning. In some institutions, a dissolution of *shared* institutional identity can be detected. Castells (1998, p. 355) remarks:

> No need for identities in this new world: basic instincts, power drives, self-centered strategic calculations, and, at the macro-social level, "the clear features of a barbarian nomadic dynamic, of a Dionysian element (are) threatening to inundate all borders and rendering international political-legal and civilizational norms problematic."

The dissolution of identity is reinforced by the fact that more and more (alternative) voices are being heard today (women, blacks, students, gays and lesbians, the poor, the previously deprived – to mention only some) (cf. O'Loughlin 1999, 2000[3]), and that we find ourselves in the "depths of a cultural winter", characterized by social constructivism, disbelief in the "progress myth", renouncement of the nostalgia for a total scheme of things, a continuing commitment to human autonomy, a consumer culture with regards to religions and worldviews, a collapse of modernity, the decentred self – a subject with no substance – and the "nomadic homelessness" of modern people (Middleton & Walsh 1995, pp. 12–13, 25, 31–33, 35, 41–84; also cf. Geelen 2005).

Furedi (2004, p. 19) concludes: "Our culture continually emphasizes problems that are not susceptible to human intervention. . . . Theories of globalization stress the inability of people and their nation states to deal with forces that are beyond their control. . . . It is widely believed that the world is out of control and that there is little human beings can do to master these developments or influence their destiny." Rorty (1999 pp. 262–263) concurs: "There is a sense that everything has fallen to pieces, that the sociopolitical future of humanity has become utterly unforeseeable. People are feeling let down by history, and are experiencing self-indulgent, pathetic hopelessness."

Does it make sense, then – is it still a workable idea – to try to formulate the identity of a particular institution (such as a school or an institute of lifelong learning) in the cultural and socio-political circumstances that prevail in the 21st century, an age that is not one of programmes? Is it workable in the face of the fact that sentiments in this century rarely seem to acquire a systematic form, in terms of which the vague aspirations of an educational institution can be transformed into real-life discussions about what should be done, and how it should be achieved?

2 Method and Structure

The theoretical argument or thesis unfolding in the rest of this chapter is the result of a literature survey integrated with the views of experts in the Netherlands who have devoted part of their academic lives to researching the problem of "identity and education/schooling". After a survey of the literature, the preliminary conclusion was drawn that Dutch educationists would probably be the best people to point the way forward because of their experience with, and insight into the "pillarization" of the education system that has been in effect in the Netherlands since 1917.[4] Their insight into the current dismantling of "pillarization" because of increased multiculturalism and other considerations was regarded as indispensable. The question discussed during each interview was: "Do you still regard formalization of the institutional identity of an educational institution to be worthwhile and workable, given the conditions that we find ourselves in, worldwide? Why (not)?" Their responses are used as part of the argument unfolding in the rest of this chapter.

The rest of this chapter is organized as follows: first, some key concepts are defined, then the assumptions and the theoretical framework which served as the guideline for deciding what the answer to the problem question could be, are stated. After a brief historical overview of education in a few countries to show how the principle of freedom in education works and can impact on institutional identity, some conclusions are drawn. The chapter ends with a few suggestions regarding a possible way forward.

3 Conceptual Framework

The core concept in this research was "institutional identity". "Institution" in this case simply referred to an organization or establishment founded for a specific purpose, such as a school, college, university – in brief, organizations for teaching-learning/education[5] (cf. Collins 1999). The term "(identity) formalization" also presented no problems; it simply referred to the process of presenting a set of ideas, ideals, and values in a formal way, to give definite shape or form to them, in the process making them official and/or valid for the particular institution (cf. Collins 1999).

The concept "identity", on the other hand, has always been notoriously difficult to define in educational circles (De Wolff et al. 2002, p. 239; 2003, 208ff.). One dictionary meaning of the word is: the state of having unique identifying characteristics; the individual characteristics by which a person or thing is recognized.[6] All the Dutch experts interviewed in the research agreed that "identity" in essence meant two things: that which makes an institution unique in itself, and that which makes it different from all other similar institutions.[7] The problem with the concept "identity" is that it has been so widely used, in so many meanings and in so many educational contexts, that it has been rendered almost meaningless. It has become equivocal to such an extent that, for instance, van der

Walt et al. (1993) wrote a whole dissertation on “the identity of the Christian school” without attempting to define the term “identity”. They described the unique characteristics of a particular type of school, in the hope that the meaning of the term “identity” would emerge in the process. “Identity” has become an umbrella term for practically anything that one wants to say about the nature, character, and value-system of a school or a group of associated schools. Use of the term merely causes confusion, says Bakker (2004, p. 11).

To what extent the term “identity” has become meaning-inflated can also be observed in Castells’ (1998, 6ff.) sociological use of the term. The closest he comes to defining the term (around which his trilogy of books revolves) is to say:

> Identity is people’s source of meaning. ... By identity, as it refers to social actors (institutions, organizations), I understand the process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute, or related set of cultural attributes, that is/are given priority over other sources of meaning. For a given individual, or for a collective actor, there may be a plurality of identities.

Despite the meaning-inflation of the term “identity”, there is nowadays, according to Erasmus (2005, pp. 234–236), a renewed interest in identity, mainly because of the influence of postmodernism. According to “modern views”,[8] identity was based on the supposed existence of constant cultural and structural principles without which identity would have no meaning or substance. Identity was a bundle of objective cultural traits that could be put together for the purpose of identifying a person or an institution. Postmodern views reject this, according to Erasmus, and tend to stress the transactional nature of identity and of the role of the individual. Individuals tend to construct their own identities in contextual circumstances, in and through discussions, relationships, contacts, the development of social histories, language games as well as interpersonal and intergroup dynamics that relate to power, control, class, gender, religion, conviction, affiliative, and regional differences. The positional[9] production and definition of identity implies that the criteria for describing or circumscribing it are variable in nature and impact. Identity is not something permanent, but is rather a construction of the human representational capacity. It is an idea in the minds of people, the meaning of which depends on the number of people who share it. The only way to delineate and describe a particular (institutional) identity would be to contrast it with other identities. The representational capacity of the members of an institution should be applied for the construction of a notion of what the institution is “identical to”, and in what sense it is “different from”. Such notions are usually couched in the context of a narrative.

Voluntary relationships are important for describing the uniqueness of an institution and its associations with other organizations and groupings. The membership of groups, and the degree to which individiduals associate with groups (for instance, in the context of an institution) are in constant flux. Individuals change groups when social or economic circumstances change or are manipulated. They are constantly confronted with a multitude of possibilities in the context of which they have to decide about identifying with different groups and their values, about relating different identities with each other, as well as about reconciling the perceived contradictions between identities. Individuals create the meanings and

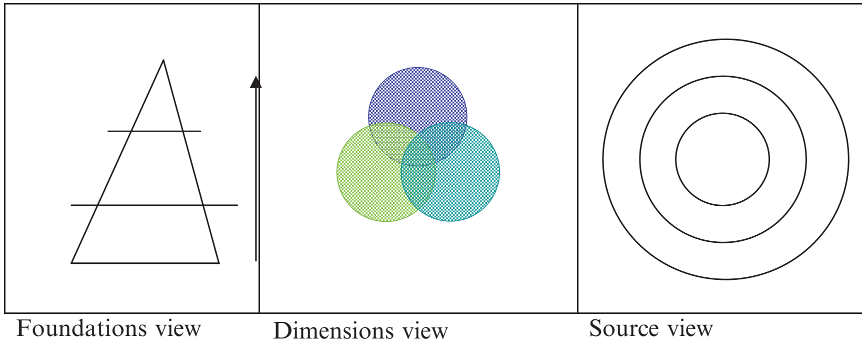
values associated with identity.[10] Describing and accepting an identity is a personal matter and the result of a multitude of choices that are constantly being made.[11]

Valenkamp (2005) agrees with Erasmus' analysis. According to him, people either operate with an "older"[12] concept of identity, where "identity" is seen as a fixed, definable concept or entity, or with a "newer" concept of identity, where "identity" is regarded as a malleable concept or a dynamic entity, as a movement, as the result of the impact of the religious or life-view foundation or source of a community on the life of that community. As will emerge from the rest of this chapter, most thinking about "identity" as a concept and as an entity today seems to be based on the "newer" approach. The Collins' definition of "identity" mentioned at the beginning of this section, is typical of the "older" approach: it defines "identity" as a stable or constant entity.

Bakker (2004, p. 8) agrees that "identity" refers to the meanings assigned to the ideals and work of an institution. Teachers tend to ascribe a very narrow meaning to "identity", viz. that it has to do with specific religious matters, matters related to, for instance, the religious convictions of Christians or Muslims. Educators and educationists should, in his opinion, also take cognisance of a broader meaning, viz. identity that is experienced from day to day in whatever takes place in a school (*beleefde identiteit* – "experienced identity") without necessarily referring to specific religious terms or concepts.[13] "Experienced identity" refers to how teachers express their life-view convictions in presenting a lesson, in thinking why they became teachers in the first place, in thinking about the uniqueness of their school, and in discussing the contribution the school could make to society. Identity pertains to the everyday experiences of teachers and learners, and to the degree to which the experiences are perceived as meaningful (Bakker 2004, p. 9).

Miedema's (2005) concept of "identity" embraces that of Bakker. He sees identity as three dimensional: it has a religious or life-view, a pedagogical-professional and an educational-curricular dimension or domain.[14] These dimensions are always coexistent, and they tend to constantly influence each other. The value system prevailing in, for instance, a particular school community will determine how the school gives expression to each of the other identity dimensions. Miedema warns against a foundationalistic as well as a totally relativistic view of identity.[15] There have to be fixed points and sides to establishing the identity of an institution, but the context also seems important. According to De Muynck (2005), the three views can be graphically presented as follows:

Like Miedema, De Muynck rejects the foundational view, because it implies deducing guidelines for behaviour from the statutes of the institution. Teachers holding this view give a precise description of the core doctrines of their faith, which they characterize as unchangeable. They say that their faith has an important impact on their way of thinking and acting, including their educational/pedagogical aims and practices. This impact is both implicit and unintended because it is mediated by basic beliefs as well as explicit in teachers' attempts to relate their faith to their pedagogical/educational views and practices, aspiring to model a strong and authentic commitment. Teaching styles, the school climate and organizational arrangements of the institution are all derived from the core (religious) commitment. This conception is based on an exclusivist view of faith and the idea that this faith should permeate



education and pedagogy at the institution decisively. Teachers holding this view relate their central pedagogical and moral values and beliefs to their faith, their personal relationship with God. This attitude transforms their perspective and provides both justification and motivation for adopting the values in question (De Wolff et al. 2003, pp. 214–215). According to Miedema and De Muynck, this view is too rigid and smacks of pedagogical dogmatism.[16]

Although the dimensions view is better because of its being more dynamic, it does not eliminate the danger of one dimension's dominating the others in unforeseen ways. According to this view, the aims and practices of a school should not be dominated by a particular religious tradition or by religious interests, though pupils have to be introduced to the religious tradition adhered to by the institution (such as a Christian school). The school climate should not be in conflict with the values and beliefs, or should be such that the values and beliefs are encouraged implicitly or explicitly. The religious orientation of the institution is perceived as an ethical orientation, which should be integrated, and influenced by the pedagogical/educational aims and principles of the institution. This view is clearly based on a pluralistic view of the religion or faith that the institution regards as the core of its work (De Wolff et al. 2003, p. 216).

The source view of identity seems to avoid most of these shortcomings. It can be represented as three concentric circles, of which the innermost represents the transcendental[17] sources (religion, life-view, principles, norms, value-system) of the institution's identity, the second represents the institution's history and tradition of pedagogical thinking, and the outermost circle represents all the practical aspects: organizational structure, praxis, teaching-learning processes. The three spheres tend to influence each other, but the source is seen to give direction to the exertion of all the influences. Identity, therefore, does not only say what an institution is, and what makes it different from others, but also what it strives to be. The religious and life-view sources impact on the values and the norms of the institution. Because the sources of an institution's identity are unique, every institution is unique, different from all others, in all aspects, including its ethical orientation (De Wolff et al. 2003, p. 215). In the final analysis, each institution gives unique and contingent expression to the different dimensions (Miedema 2005; also cf. Blomberg 2005, p. 4).

De Muynck (2005) and Miedema (2005) are proponents of a dynamic view of identity. In Miedema's opinion, the metaphor of Neurath's boat, the planks of which are being replaced during its voyage, is *ad rem* when thinking about the identity of an institution (Neurath 1973). Certain elements of an institution's identity can be replaced as and when necessary, while others can be retained for lengthy periods of time.[18]

Bakker (2004 pp. 10, 14) points out that one should distinguish between the "formal identity" of the school and the primary perception of "experienced identity" of those involved in the school. The latter tends not to reveal explicit connections with the sources of identity, i.e., religion, religious tradition or life-view. A gap has been developing between what is perceived as the formal identity of a school and what is perceived as its experienced identity and concomitant sense of meaning (Weigand-Timmer 2005, p. 7).

In Bakker's (2004, p. 11) opinion, the only useful definition of identity is one "that contextually connects life-view and education". Such a definition has several implications: the identity of an institution is always contextualized and contingent; it refers to a particular institution in a concrete situation, and not to a cluster of, for example, schools (such as a "pillar" of schools in the Dutch system, or an association of independent (i.e., private) schools in the South African system, or of voluntary (i.e., private) schools in the British system). Viewed in this way, identity has limited potential for generalization: one cannot (for instance) refer to "the Christian school" as a collective or a cluster. One can speak only of the manner in which this or that *particular* school applies the religious tenets of Christianity in its own particular circumstances.

On the basis of the discussion so far, consisting of the results of a literature survey combined with the views of several Dutch experts in the field, "identity" can be taken to refer to those *source-based* characteristics that make a *particular* educational institution unique among its peers, that give it a specific life-view and value-based character and profile as it is *experienced* in the day-to-day life of the institution and of all those involved in it. Life-view and value-system is "more than religion",[19] although it is based on religion in the broadest sense of the term. It is the totality of convictions that a person uses to explain the world, and of the values that are regarded as necessary to cope with the world (Weigand-Timmer 2005b, p. 1). A life-view is all-encompassing, and therefore contains convictions about all aspects of an institution's existence, such as ethnic culture (origin of its students), language (medium of instruction), equality, equity, fairness (how staff and students should be treated), religious commitment (including convictions about the purpose of the institution; its aims, vision, and mission [Hoogland 2005]). A life-view is also a mode of looking at or seeing things; it guides our understanding of the world[20]; it forms a unity (it is not a random collection of ideas); it is both descriptive and prescriptive; it requires full commitment; it is typically human, and therefore also typical of human institutions; it is pre-scientific; it is a deep-rooted source of action; it is a definite image and map of reality – and yet fallible (cf. van der Walt 1994, 40ff. for a detailed discussion of all these characteristics of a life-view).

A brief overview of developments in three countries will now show how the principle of freedom of education works in practice, and how it can impact on institutional identity.

4 Institutional Identity: An Overview of the History of Education in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, a long struggle for the religious, philosophical, and life-view freedom of the school culminated in 1848 in the so-called Thorbecke Constitution, in terms of which this principle has been entrenched up to the present day. The struggle that followed after 1848 for the public financing of all schools led to the so-called pacification in 1917 (adoption of article 23 of the 1917 Constitution), in terms of which like-minded schools could form consortia or clusters (also known as "pillars"). After 1917, schools consorted in pillars on the basis of shared religious commitment, a shared life-view and a shared value-system, and they created structures to help them to plan, structure, manage the schools in a particular pillar in accordance with the shared value-system.[21] As mentioned before, the secular public schools were seen as a conglomerate "pillar" in its own right. Since the 1960s, however, "pillarization" (*verzuiling*) has become less fashionable,[22] resulting in the outcome that many schools today do not define their identity any more in terms of the religious/faith/denominational pillar they are supposed to belong to, but tend to become more self-reflective about defining their institutional identity. Schools tend not to define their identities in the religious or denominational terms associated with a particular pillar, but rather try to define their identities in terms of what they perceive the mission of the school to be or should be in the community. Society in general has become more open; schools also became more open. Schools have to say what they stand for in the new open context; they have to reveal the value systems in terms of which they operate. Although pillarization is a *de facto* thing of the past, schools with the same or similar religious or life-view climate still tend to cluster together, and to profile themselves in terms of a corporate identity (Strietman 2005). This new trend explains why all schools are today regarded by, for instance, Miedema and Vroom (2004) as "particular" or unique,[23] and why all schools, including those that were deemed to belong to the "public school pillar or sector", are called upon today to attend to the definition of their own uniqueness (i.e., institutional identity). Each and every school in the Dutch system has to realize that it is unique (special – *bijzonder*) in some or other particular sense.

5 Institutional Identity: An Overview of the History of Education in South Africa

The situation in South Africa is quite different from that in the Netherlands. During the colonial era (1652–1910), a system of government-funded public schools and government-subsidized private schools was established. This system was continued after independence in 1910, and before "apartheid" was enforced as official government policy (1910–1948). In the "apartheid era" (1948–1994), the system was continued, with greater emphasis on divisions between the various race, ethnic and language groups, and the provision of education for each in separate schools. One

could cynically argue that this was a system of "pillarization" – with a difference: the schools were not allowed to voluntarily associate themselves with schools entertaining similar value-systems. Apartheid was a political system of separation on the basis of race, ethnicity, and language. In the post-apartheid era (1994 – the present), school legislation provides for government-funded public schools, and government-subsidized independent (private) schools – both on a sliding scale, depending on the affluence of the parents and of the school community.

Because of having been so heavily dominated by the state, schools in South Africa never seem to have felt the need to reflect on their institutional identity. The schools for white children in the apartheid era provide a case in point. According to apartheid education Act 39 of 1967, all schools in South Africa, especially those for whites, were by definition "Christian". Because of this stipulation, most parents, especially those who belonged to the various Christian churches and denominations, neglected to reflect on the institutional identity of the schools attended by their children – in the supposition that the schools would obediently adhere to the statutorily prescribed Christian value-system.

In post-apartheid South Africa, where every citizen enjoys all the recognized fundamental rights accorded to human beings, schools are free to determine for themselves their institutional identity, despite the fact that the whole education system is governed top-down, everything prescribed in detail. The freedom of a school to determine its own institutional identity is entrenched in the following words in the *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* (DoE 2001, p. 5):

> The objective (of the *Manifesto*) – though it is really the start of a new journey – is that every single institution in the country will have a *Values Statement* and a *Values Action Plan*, and a shared commitment to them.

The determination of institutional identity has to take place within the parameters of statutory prescriptions – which is understandable in view of the fact that most of the educational institutions in South Africa are still of Third World standard.

6 Institutional Identity: An Overview of the History of Education in the UK

In the UK between 1800 and 1870 by far the majority of children who received an education did so in church-related schools. In 1870, with the passing of the Forster Act of Gladstone's reforming government, state funding began in England and Wales for Christian schools or schools with an explicit Christian foundation. These schools continued to exist but they tended to become increasingly blended with the state system because of their receiving public money. They also became subject to similar inspection procedures and were, in time, expected to follow the same national curriculum.

Control over the curriculum followed state funding. Based on the 1993 Education Act, there is currently a government commitment to an increase in the number of these state-funded faith schools in the UK. This is in line with government's policy to promote diversity and choice in education (schooling). In time there will be a whole

swath of state-financed schools throughout the country being handed over to private sponsors to run. All schools in the UK are, however, expected to adhere to the one single *National Curriculum* (1999). Compliance with, and implementation of, this highly prescriptive curriculum is mandatory for all state-funded schools. Although voluntary schools are allowed to enhance the curriculum for their own purposes, a set curriculum of core subjects must be followed (Pike 2004, pp. 155–158).

Pike (2004, p. 158) warns that the new voluntary schools that are now being established, and that accept state funding, will "need to religiously guard their faith-based identity". Schools that wish to retain a greater deal of control over their institutional identity and the curriculum can follow the example of the Christian Schools' Trust (CST), that has chosen not to receive state funding. Some of the CST schools recently went to court in a bid to preserve their distinctive Christian identity and their right to employ only Christian staff. After winning their case, these schools now have the freedom to appoint staff they believe are living a Christian lifestyle (Pike 2004, p. 160). The schools are currently involved in a new court case with respect to corporal punishment. As Pike (2004, p. 161) correctly points out, the case is not about corporal punishment as such, but rather about the question to what extent the liberal/secular state may impose its own values on those who do not share them and, in doing so, interfere with a minority's freedom of religion. The question before the court is: can a liberal hegemony seek to impose its own core values on others? What the CST is seeking, "is equal treatment with regard to the right of religious freedom so that minority groups can live in a way that is consistent with their beliefs" (Pike 2004, p. 162).

7 Preliminary Conclusion

On the basis of the discussion so far, the conclusion can be drawn that it has indeed become a most worthwhile, and indeed necessary, enterprise for educational institutions, including those involved in lifelong teaching and learning, to reflect on their identities. In many countries, legislation and statutory stipulations provide the freedom and opportunity for educational institutions to determine for themselves what their institutional identity should be, on what value-system their institutional identity should rest. Analysis of the statutory frameworks in different countries will reveal that the rationale for institutional freedom differs from country to country.[24] The legislative framework is, however, not our main concern here; our concern is how individual institutional communities can avail themselves of the freedom to reflect about their institutional identities. The rest of this chapter will be devoted to how school communities can apply themselves to this task.

7.1 The Way Ahead?

Castells (1998, 355ff.) concludes, on the basis of his sociological studies of global trends, that there seems to be no more need of shared, i.e., institutional, identities.

Because of this, "the dominant global elites" tend to consist of identity-less individuals ("citizens of the world").

However, he also observed the emergence of "powerful resistance identities" which "retrench in communal heavens, and refuse to be flushed away by these global flows and radical individualism". They build their communes around the traditional values of God, nation and the family, and they secure the enclosures of their encampments with ethnic problems and territorial defences. People who resist economic, cultural and political disfranchisement tend to be attracted to communal identity.

Castells also observed a third tendency, viz. the emergence of "project identities" out of the "resistance identities". The fact that a "commune" (for instance, an educational institution) is built around a resistance identity does not mean that it will automatically evolve towards building a project identity. It may well remain a defensive commune. Or else, it may become an interest group. In other cases, resistance identities may generate project identities, aiming at the transformation of society as a whole, in continuity with the values of communal resistance to dominant interests enacted by global flows of liberal capital, power, information, secularism, materialism, individualism, consumerism, moral decay, "deconfessionalization", increasing state intervention and domination in education, bureaucratization, greater emphasis on efficiency and quality, function and production driven organizations/institutions (cf. van der Walt 2004a, 85ff.; 2004b, 113ff.; Pike 2004, 149ff.; Lacher 2005, pp. 1–4; Geelen 2005; Groenewegen 2005; De Mik 2005).

If Castells' observations are correct, educational institutions can follow one of the following three routes with respect to formalizing their own institutional identities:

1. A school could become part of the dominant global elite as an identity-less organization consisting of identity-less individuals ("citizens of the world").[25] This option does not require formalizing the identity of the institution, but will entail the application of a neo-pragmatist approach to the contingent challenges the institution is confronted with. Because no guiding-star principles are recognized in such an institution, it tends to "muddle through" (Rorty 1996, p. 42) and to do what comes naturally "in a battlefield between a plurality of possible decisions" (Rorty 1996, p. 71) in specific (i.e., contingent) situations. There are no algorithms for deciding controversial questions (Rorty 1996, p. 73).

Because of the availability of different neo-pragmatic tools for helping the institution to get from the present to a better future (Rorty 1999, p. 231) and to do the most socially useful things to do (Rorty 1999, p. 233), not much needs to be said about identity, except that it is a social construction (Rorty 1999, pp. 236–237), one in which pluralism is maximized. As a liberalist, Rorty feels that society should accept the liberal goal of maximal room for individual variation; this is facilitated by a consensus that there is no source of authority other than the free agreement of human beings (Rorty 1999, p. 237). People have no other duty, in his opinion, than to be cooperative with one another in reaching free consensus. This anti-authoritarian philosophy "helps people set aside religious and ethnic identities in favour of an image of themselves as part of a great human adventure, one carried out on a global scale" (Rorty 1999 pp. 238–239).

In view of our preliminary conclusion above, viz. that searching for institutional identity seems not only workable but indeed necessary, we tend to think that most educational institutions will not follow the neo-pragmatist route advocated by Rorty, but will rather feel the need to discover and define their unique institutional identities. The Dutch experience has shown that each and every school has a need to "be itself", to design its own vision and mission, to take sides in matters of importance, to think about its values, and to manage itself according to a specific philosophy and value-system. Each school feels the need to draw its own institutional profile, says Strietman (2005). He goes on to say:

> Each school has its own value, runs under its own power, and works in the modern community from the vantage point of its own vision of the human being and society, whether implicitly or explicitly.

It has to be assumed, however, that some schools will neo-pragmatistically attempt to do this by reaching free consensus about what the school's identity is or should be; reaching consensus about a school's identity can indeed be part of the great human adventure, as Rorty claims.

2. On the other hand, a school could prefer to develop a "powerful resistance identity" to help "retrench itself in a communal heaven", and refuse to be flushed away by gobalization and radical individualism (associated with liberalism). It could decide to build itself around traditional values of God, nation, and the family, in the process securing the "enclosure of its encampment" with ethnic problems and territorial defences.[26] Minority groups often find this option attractive. Conservative religious groups in both the post-World War II Netherlands,[27] and in post-apartheid South Africa have often been tempted to follow this strategy. The same applies for ethnic/cultural/language minority groups in South Africa, such as the white Afrikaners or the so-called coloured Griekwa, to mention only two examples (cf. Mochwanaesi et al. 2005).
3. A resistance community could, however, go beyond this phase and develop a "project identity" out of its "resistance identity". In the process, it could aim at the transformation of society as a whole, in continuity with the values of its communal resistance to the dominant interests enacted by global flows of capital, politics, power, information, and secularism. What does an institution require to develop such a project identity? Firstly, it needs a communal logic that tells those attached to the institution what makes them and their institution unique and special or distinctive among other similar institutions (Pike 2004, p. 150). Secondly, those involved in the institution have to construct for themselves a notion of the special and unique identity that they and their institution hope to possess. Thirdly, because project identities tend to emerge from resistance identities, those involved in the institution have to define for themselves what it is they are resisting. What do they find unacceptable and would never consider for inclusion in their own sense of meaning for their institution? Fourthly, they need to reflect on the principles, the values and the norms on which they perceive their institution to be based, on the basis of which they intend developing and promoting their

institutional identity. In other words, they formulate the vision and mission of the institution. Fifthly, they have to reflect on the essential ingredients of what they perceive the identity of the institution to be: religious, life-conceptual, national, territorial, antithetical, aspirational, ethnic, linguistic, and so forth. Lastly, they should assess the threats, possibilities, and the challenges in the environment to which the institution would have to respond, given the identity chosen for it.

This third option is based on principles and values, and is therefore anti-pragmatic: a bedrock of principles and values has to be discovered or constructed for the identity of the institution. Strietman (2005b, p. 19) correctly points out that a democracy seems to function on the basis of unprejudiced respect for the differences among people and their motives, whether secular or religious. These differences cannot be hidden away in the little cubicles of their particular (separate) existences. The question would be whether the institution can weather the storm of all the environmental challenges and attacks by harking back to its bedrock of principles, fundamentals, essences, and values.

8 Recommendation

Every 21st-century educational institution, whether it is a school, a college, a university, a faculty of education – all institutions involved in lifelong teaching and learning – is experiencing the impact of globalization, of a new global order, and has begun to feel the need to reconsider where and how it should "fit in" in the new circumstances. In other words, every educational institution feels the pressure to rethink its institutional identity. In doing so, those managing, and participating in, an educational institution as a social actor, have to consider the three options mentioned in the previous section, and resolve to follow one of them.

According to Bakker (2004, p. 27), institutions (i.e., their managers/leaders and all others involved) should convene from time to time in an "identity conference" (Dutch, *identiteitsberaad*). Such a conference should be held in the context of the daily existence of the institution; it should be deliberately contextualized in terms of the everyday life of the institution[28]; it should be seen as part of the quality control policy and measures of the school, and should take into account the biographies and the individual interpretations of those who attend. With the formal identity of the institution in the back of the participants' minds, the aim of the conference should be to bridge the gap between the formal identity of the institution, and its "experienced identity". This process requires contextualization. The conference should take the form of an inductive process, in other words, should not focus on deducing directives and guidelines from the formal identity, but should be a bottom-up process.

The conference should have two main items on its agenda: (a) Which of the three courses outlined above do we follow? (b) How do we give concrete form to the strategy that we have chosen?

Different questions should be raised in the process, such as: Why have we opted for this choice? How can we give concrete form to the choice that we have made with regards to the identity of this institution? How can and should we cope with the (negative or positive) effects of our choice? What is our vision and our mission? To what end and purpose do we commit this institution and our own participation in it? Do we adhere to a particular religion and life-view, and to the values and norms associated with it? Which life-view elements should we use as building blocks for outlining or describing the identity of this institution? What core values do we accept in this institution? How do we "profile" the institution (i.e., what do we think the institution should be and do, and what should its aims be)? What does our daily experience at ground level tell us about what the institution should be and achieve? How can we bridge the gap between what we perceive to be the formal identity of the institution, and its identity as experienced by those involved in it? How can we narrate to ourselves and to others what we perceive the experienced identity of the institution to be?[29]

To be able to participate meaningfully in such an identity conference, the members of an institutional community should have or develop the capacity to think independently and creatively about the identity of their institution. Especially, those who teach should become reflective practitioners. According to Miedema (2005), this means that the professionalization of the teaching staff should receive the highest priority.[30]

9 Conclusion

The answer to the question formulated in the title of this chapter seems to be: Yes, the formalization of an institutional identity is still a workable, and indeed worthwhile and necessary option in the early 21st century. Although "identity" has become a highly meaning-inflated, overused and equivocal term, it can still be employed for describing the unique characteristics of a particular institution for lifelong teaching and learning. In the process, the leaders and participants in such an organization will have to make certain choices, and an identity conference should be held in the context of the institution's daily life and practical circumstances to decide on how they should deal with the implications and results of their choice regarding the institution's identity. By doing this, all those involved in a particular institution for lifelong teaching and learning can explicate for themselves, as well as for all other stakeholders, the value-system on which they base the work in the institution, including the normative framework in which their pedagogical interventions with learners are couched, also what they perceive the long-term aims of life-long teaching and learning in that particular institution to be.

Endnotes

[1] Although the discussion in this chapter focuses on schools, the findings also apply to all those institutions of teaching and learning involved in the process of lifelong learning.

[2] According to Van der Plas (2005, p. 21), the university still sees itself as having a “Protestant-Christian identity”. As a result of its long tradition of participating in an inter-religion dialogue between Christians and Muslims, the university has recently (2005) established a Centre for Islamic Theology. Graduates of the Centre can be trained elsewhere to become fully fledged Imams (Van der Plas, 2005).

[3] Derrida (1995, p. 35) speaks of the “end of monologism”.

[4] Cf. the following references in the bibliography: Bakker 2005; De Muynck 2005; Hoogland 2005; Miedema ; Strietman 2005; Valenkamp 2005; Weigand-Timmer 2005.

[5] Including all those involved in the processes of lifelong learning.

[6] Other meanings offered by Collins (1999) do not fit in with the meaning ascribed to “identity” in the context of educational institutions.

[7] De Wolff et al. (2002 pp. 239–240) found that there were basically six conceptions of “identity” (in this case, of a Christian school): three in Dutch, two in Anglo-American and one in German literature. They also surmised that because “countries have a unique internal discussion driven by unique historical and societal circumstances”, the debates about institutional identity take different forms. This is indeed the case: because of the unique history of education in the Netherlands, much of the educational debate there involves discussions of the “identity” of institutions (De Wolffet al. 2003, p. 207); in South Africa, for instance, the debate takes a somewhat different form because of that country’s different educational past.

[8] Conventional, primordial, instrumental and oppositional views.

[9] According to prevailing conditions in the course of social transactions.

[10] Blomberg (2005, p. 3) argues that, where metaphysics was foundational for roughly two millennia, with Descartes the emphasis shifted to epistemology. We have now entered a third age, in which axiology takes centre stage. It represents a turn to values for living, a turn to “lived values”.

[11] The problem of institutional identity in a postmodern context deserves a more detailed discussion, which is unfortunately not possible in the present context. Excellent descriptions of the postmodern and culturally pluralistic times in which we live can, however, be found in Middleton & Walsh 1995; McGuigan 1999; Chen et al. 2003; Appignanesi & Garrat 2004; Verbrugge 2004; Scruton 2005; Hofstede & Hofstede 2005. For analyses of the situation specifically in Africa, the following can be consulted: Makgoba (1999) and Hoppers (2002). The impact of “postmodernism”, despite the difficulties experienced in coming to grips with it, on attempts to formalize an institution’s identity should not be underestimated.

[12] Modernistic.

[13] As will be explained below, the narrow and the broader meanings belong together: the religious or life-view source determines the nature of day-to-day experience of identity.

[14] In another context, he distinguishes with his co-authors at least four dimensions or domains: the religious, the pedagogical, the didactical/curricular and the organisational (De Wolff et al. 2002, p. 243).

[15] Views of institutional identity occur on the whole continuum from relatively static to relatively dynamic, as De Wolff et al. (2003, p. 211) discovered in their empirical research in the Netherlands.

[16] For a more detailed discussion of foundationalism and anti-foundationalism, cf. Biesta and Miedema (2004, 25et seq.) According to Miedema and Biesta (2004, p. 27), Derrida’s deconstructionism “is an attempt to bring into view the impossibility to totalize, the impossibility to articulate a self-sufficient, self-present center from which everything can be mastered and controlled”.

[17] "Transcendental" in this context means "underlying" or "basic", a "condition of possibility".

[18] Cf. De Wolff, Miedema, & De Ruyter (2002, pp. 242–243) and De Wolff, De Ruyter, & Miedema (2003, p. 208) for more detailed discussions of the static-dynamic continuum in terms of which identity is viewed.

[19] "Religion" in the narrow meaning of a particular faith or belief. This sentence clearly does not refer to "religion" in the broadest meaning of the word, because "religion" in the latter sense is the underlying source and driving force behind everything that one does or believes in, and therefore, also of one's identity concept. "Religion" in the wider sense refers to "binding" or commitment. "Religion" is derived from Latin *re-ligare* (to rebind; cf. English "ligament" and "ligature" (Blomberg 2005, p. 9)).

[20] This guidance is only possible because of the presence of an underlying value-system.

[21] The *Besturenraad* (Management Council) of the Christian school pillar is an example of this.

[22] "Pillarization" has come under pressure for various reasons, such as the increased influx of immigrants (*allochtonen*) that led to increased multiculturalism, and also because of how increasing secularization, life-view diversity, egoism and liberal individualism impact on, for instance, the Christian school "pillar" (Bakker 2004, 5, 7, 16ff.). As a result of this, Weigand-Timmer (2005 p. 1) and others refer to the *de facto* discontinuation of "pillarization" – *afschaffing van het bijzondere onderwijs*)(also cf. Tervoort 2005 p. 146; Strietman 2005b p. 19).

[23] In the pillarization period (1917 – c 1960s), the referent "particular" used to be applied only to those schools that consorted with others in a recognizable pillar, and not to the so-called public schools, which supposedly had no need for defining their institutional identity in terms of a value-system.

[24] In state dominated totalitarian systems, there is of course no such freedom. Questions are also raised about it in democratic countries. The Dutch Labour Party, for instance, has recently expressed its doubts about the principle of freedom of identity. Other political parties disagreed with Labour. In their opinion, the loss of freedom of education will be tantamount to a denial of the pluriformity of society (Strietman 2005b, pp. 18–19). Ironically, the principle of freedom of education in the Netherlands, established in quite different social conditions in 1848 and reconfirmed in 1917, is now being used by immigrants to establish their own "pillars", in the process creating a new system of "apartheid". Some Islamic scholars are concerned about this development because it allows children to think that they are living in an "imaginary Netherlands, in their own school culture" (Groenewegen 2005, p. 8).

[25] In terms of the argument developed in this chapter, no individual or institution can, however, be "identity-less". To be "identity-less" is also to have a certain identity, to value certain things in life. Blomberg (2005, p. 9) correctly says: "(People) are valuing creatures". Pike (2004, p. 151) speaks of "the impossibility of ideological neutrality". According to him, "by addressing ultimate questions of origin and destiny, aims and purposes, what is and is not important or valued, education is governed by a set of convictions that are 'religious' as they are matters of faith and belief. All schools are 'faith-schools'"(Pike 2004, p. 153).

[26] Castells (1998, 12ff., 42ff.) mentions several examples of this approach: groups of people who entrench themselves in religious fundamentalism (in the form of, for instance: American Christian fundamentalism or Middle East Islamic fundamentalism) or into ethnic minority communities (for example the Basque country, Catalonia, Scotland or Quebec, all nations without states).

[27] De Wolff et al. (2002, p. 243) mention literature in which this option is preferred by some Christian schools: "In practice, this position may lead to the decision of a Christian school to withdraw from society into its own community, because the school wants to conserve an explicit Christian school ethos, while society is considered to be increasingly anti-religious." Hoogland (2005), agrees with the Anglo-American authors mentioned by De Wolff et al. who argue against such a reaction of Christian schools, because they believe this reaction will lead to the disappearance of Christian schools. Hoogland, however, sees the reaction of these schools as *behoudzuchtig* (Dutch for: aimed at selfish self-preservation).

[28] De Wolff et al. (1992, pp. 245–246) agree with this. According to them, those involved in a school can agree about the identitity of the institution at an abstract and general level, but this does not necessarily imply that they will not take different positions with regard to the commitment in the institution or with respect to the interpretation of the aims and practices of the institution in all domains (the dimensions mentioned in the conceptual framework above).

[29] Weigand-Timmer (2005b, p. 1) points out that none of these questions can be answered without implicitly resorting to the participants' life-view convictions. Also cf. De Wolff et al. (2002, pp. 245–246) for a discussion of the relationship between life-view and education.

[30] See Groenewegen (2005b) for a report of such an identity conference held by schools in the vicinity of Emmeloord, Noordoostpolder, in the Netherlands.

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