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## **Learning and otherness.**

Findings on *why* and *how* to use the concept of alterity when approaching academic teaching and learning settings

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### **Concise outline:**

1. Introduction – What this is all about... and what it is not
  2. Theoretical & research foundation – Why this is relevant
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    - 2.2. Encounters in learning processes
    - 2.3. The importance of reflection
    - 2.4. The self in (academic) learning contexts
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  3. Parts of the whole – What has been studied
    - 3.1. Grasping the obvious: Study A
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    - 4.1. Alterity as tool for educational research and theory
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## Summary:

Following Meyer-Drawe (2008), who stresses the relevance of experience as well as moments of irritation in her approach to learning, this research project is situated. Its aim: To introduce the concept of alterity as fruitful instrument in educational (research) discourses.

My dissertation uses a psychological as much as a sociological-subject-related understanding of learning (cf. Illeris, 2014; Jarvis, 1992; Künkler, 2011) and thus focusses on the importance of the social context in human learning processes as well as on the role of social identities. In my research I use identity, the dynamic construct that offers a person meaning and orientation, to establish alterity (as conceptual sister if identity) as instrument for empirical educational research. The term alterity itself describes phenomena, in which a *self* constructs its *other* to reassure itself of its own identity. The underlying notion of encountering otherness in learning (regarding other people as much as other knowledge structures or academic systems), is already being theoretically discussed in educational sciences (cf. Göhlich & Zirfas, 2007; Koller, 2012). However, using these encounters as analytic and methodological tool via the concept of alterity so far has been overlooked; a gap, my dissertation managed to bridge.

Based on three separate, yet focus-wise successive studies I collected and analysed situations in which encountering the other in academic teaching and learning settings can emerge. The results of each study have been published in three individual papers, which provide the fundamental elements of this cumulative dissertation (Thielsch, 2017, 2019a, 2019b). In these studies I used divers research designs and methodological approaches: from qualitative and content-analytic methods to ethnographical ones and finally the design of a quantitative survey, thus combining inductive and deductive perspectives. This framework paper summarises the main findings of my research, offers concise insights in the studies I conducted, and provides the conceptual foundation of this PhD project.

My research concludes in establishing an understanding of human learning based on the concept of alterity. It thereby offers an approach to analyse encounters with otherness in academic learning as well as to make explicit, how and why these trigger meaningful reflective impulses. Such encounters with the other can be operationalised via a four-dimension model. A model that allows us to analyse experienced situations in academic settings as well as to anticipate and design situations to come. Furthermore, the findings have been used to develop a reflective three-step to equally enhance teaching and learning contexts or future research designs.

The findings presented here provide educational scientists with an enriched understanding of subject-related learning theories. This understanding can be used to facilitate and comprehend learning processes in everyday teaching context; moreover, it can be used to critically reflect existing instruments in educational research regarding their (not yet explicitly named) dimensions of perceived otherness. In doing so, for example, new insights can be gathered on emotions in academic teaching and learning settings or regarding lived or emerging approaches to teaching.

**References:**

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