Education Seen through the Postmodernity „Grid”

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Abstract: The postmodern culture is a concept imposed by theoreticians to express and delimit the contemporary cultural universe from that of the modern age. The postmodern culture would be the cultural equivalent of post-industrial societies, information societies, a knowledge-based economy, societies dominated by the new electronic information and communication tools. We see a coexistence of different values and ways of thinking, cultural and educational practices (a situation sometimes defined as multiculturalism), an articulation of ideas and styles. From the perspectives of postmodernists, the constructivism is the most important theory of learning. Knowledge, ideas and language are created by people, not because they are true, but especially because they are useful. As far as value reporting is concerned, the modernist paradigm promotes educators as legitimate authorities and mandates by the state to bring students into spiritual values universally. The most important values are rationality and progress. From a postmodern perspective, education must help students constructing different values and use them in the context of their own cultures. Among the important values that desirably should be cultivated through education, we mention diversity, tolerance, care, freedom, creativity, emotions, or intuition. In this study I will try to identify the main features of postmodernism and its applications in education.

Keywords: postmodernism, postmodernity, values, learning, education.

How to cite: Ceausu, F. (2018). Education Seen through the Postmodernity „Grid”. *Postmodern Openings*, 9(1), 22-34.
<https://doi.org/10.18662/po/03>

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to clarify the differences between the characteristics of modern education and postmodern education. Ioan Cerghit (Cerghit, 1983) argues that one of the challenges already present in the contemporary society is the need to rethink schooling, the formal education, together with the non-formal and informal education, in their varied forms of articulation. As a sub-system of the education macro-system, the education system, by its educational offer, contributes to the structuring of (self)-training and (self)-development trajectories of the personality of the individual, training him or her to be a be a pretentious beneficiary of permanent education.

From such a picture of a postmodernity of resignation, what sort of future is there indicated for research in education? From the postmodernist presentism may be expected research directed to addressing concerns of a relatively immediate nature. The research would, accordingly, be relatively ephemeral in its meaning and relevance. Surveys of opinions, feelings, problems and wants are strongly indicated. From the postmodernist surfacisation may be expected research of a superficial nature - both in terms of the ends that it pursues and in terms of the scholarship that it brings to the task. The objects of research would be seen as events to be questioned, read or observed, and the conceptual tools necessary for the task would be seen as straightforwardly performing those tasks. From the postmodernist fragmentation may be expected the fragmentation of research in discrete projects, for discrete purposes, each separately justified, supported, undertaken and reported. From the problems, interests or concerns driving the research, to its reporting and dissemination, it would be seen and justified not in terms of any overall pattern of understanding or ideology, but as a situated, isolated, immediate reality. From the postmodernist changeability may be expected a constant shifting of the research agenda. As the interests and influence of those who drive that agenda change, so too will the agenda itself. The prevailing ideological fetish - whether managerialism, socialisation, work-place training, outcomesdriven training, individual responsibility, humanisation, or whatever - would be expressed in the projects addressed. Since none of those ideological fetishes has any legitimation beyond its own discourse, its acceptance and rejection would be as unpredictable and ill-founded as the cultural context of which it is a part.

As the professor Emil Paun observed, that the contemporary school operates to a great extent in a space opened and delimited by the paradigm

of modernity and the postmodern influences are still timid in the educational practice even though theoretical evidence interested by the proposed orientations of postmodernism is increasingly felt. The term modern is used in education usually in order to show the advanced situation of the present in relationship with the past which was surpassed by development. For some, modernity is opposed to the traditional practices and is characterized by change, innovation and dynamism.

Slattery (Slattery, 2015) makes a systematization of the postmodernism versions as he considers it can be understood from different perspectives: The historical period following the modern industrial and technological era; The esthetic style in arts and architecture characterized as eclectic, kaleidoscopic, ironic and allegoric; The cultural analysis critiquing the negative impact of the new technologies on the human psyche and on the environment while promoting the building of a global ecologically sustained community; A movement which tends to go beyond the materialistic philosophy of modernity; A spectacular historical period marked by a paradigm shift transcending the fundamental assumptions, the operating models and the cosmology of the previous modern era;

To make a claim that postmodern education can be associated with Stanley Cavell's (Cavell, 1979) work would require that one analyzes what Cavell means by education. And a Cavellian understanding of education cannot be far removed from his claims about philosophy, as the way he understands philosophy would reveal some of his thoughts on education. More specifically, Cavell claims that an individual stands in relation to herself and makes herself intelligible to others ... [in her] capacity to present ... [herself] for acknowledgement. So, as in a postmodern view of education, an individual acknowledges herself and engages with others in a relationship in which she and others experience one another "endlessly" and "continuously".

Stone argues that the relationship of modernism to postmodernism is "up for grabs" with minimal agreement only that something in the world today seems significantly different from yesterday (both literally and figuratively). Whether there has been a "real" paradigm shift is a matter of debate. Jean-Francois Lyotard (Lyotard, 1984) calls the era and its circumstances a new "condition." In contrast, Jurgen Habermas (Habermas, 1983) asserts that there is no such shift, but that finally modernity is continuing in its best sense, in a renewed attention to critical emancipation. Separate from individual theorists is the playing out of postmodernism in the day-to-day. What does seem apparent is that there are two postmodernisms, one conservative and the other radical - a part of the

multiplicity (Shapiro, 1992). The conservative strain calls for a romantic return to local politics and community, a return to exclusive particularized beliefs, attitudes, values (of formerly marginalized indigenous groups, for instance). The radical strain calls for a turn to particularized meanings in a different sense: Although these beliefs, attitudes and values are all there is, they do not exhaust meaning that is always dispersed and differed and more than language reveals (Cherryholmes, 1988) The radical strain gives up a longing for "roots and anchors" that the conservative strain cannot relinquish. The latter charges the former with nihilism and the former charges the latter with authoritarianism.

Educational strategies focused on the student. Conceptual clarifications

The educational strategy represents an organizational way of methods and resources (human and material) in a given learning situation in order to reach an objective. Its meaning is to provide the connection between the teaching and the learning activity.

A lesson created in the spirit of **active-participative strategies** has the following characteristics:

1). Re-updating the anchoring notions by the oral examination of several students at the beginning of the lesson is replaced with effective work made by the entire classroom; 2). The learning or independent work activity of the students represents a great part of the time allotted to the lesson (50%); 3). When solving difficulties, the students have the possibility to cooperate and to ask the teacher for additional explanations; 4). The activity is well organized and coordinated; 5). The teacher's intervention is prepared beforehand and it is carried out as: a succinct presentation of the topic or the problem to be solved, leading and guiding the activity of the students, conclusions and final assessments; 6) The students have the possibility to make cursive presentations within which they can express their own opinions.

Focusing on the student is the educational approach which, in the end, represents the optimal capitalization of the student as a subject of learning. Focusing on the student is an active strategy which needs the creation in real time of a positive and significant learning experience in a non-directive democratic relationship. Before the practical demonstration of the superiority of the lesson focused on students, I consider necessary to point out a short comparison of the two educational strategies: the traditional one – focused on information and the experiential one – focused

on the subjective experience of the student. Otilia Ștefania Păcurari (Pacurari, 2009) said that from an ontological point of view, the traditional paradigm refers to an objective reality, to objective and measurable educational values and truths; the one focused on the student takes into account a constructed social reality, relative, negotiate, socially constructed truths and values.

From a methodological point of view, the traditional paradigm uses external criteria, evaluation objectives and the experiential paradigm uses subjective criteria and values the learning experience and encourages self-evaluation.

From an ethical point of view, the traditional perspective operates with external, imposed, “objective” values and the one focused on the students operates with internal, assumed, “subjective” values. Apud Ausubel, G. U. and Robinson, F. (1982) regarding the teacher – student relationship, in the first perspective, the relationship is directive and hierarchically authoritarian and in the new one, the relationship is non-directive, democratic and transactional.

The finality of instruction in the traditional paradigm is the student as a product of the educational system and in the paradigm focused on the students, the student is the beneficiary of the actions of education and he/she is prepared to take personal decisions. Gibbs (Gibbs, 1992) offers a useful definition of learning focused on the student. He states that the learning focused on the student offers a larger autonomy to the students and an increased control regarding the subjects, the learning methods and the studying rhythm. This perspective underlines the fundamental characteristics of the learning focused on the student, promoting the idea that the students must be offered an increased control on learning by assuming responsibility regarding to: What it is learned, The way of learning and why, The moment to learn.

An important consequence of this definition represents the need that the students have to assume a high degree of responsibility in the context of learning and to actively choose their purposes as well as to manage learning. They cannot rely anymore on the fact that the teacher or the one teaching in class will tell them what, how, where and when to think. They are the one who must start doing it.

The recommendation regarding the transfer of responsibility from teacher to student is disseminated in contemporary pedagogy. In a succinct presentation regarding the characteristics of those who learn efficiently, from Harpe, Kulski and Radloff (Harpe, Kulski, & Radloff, 1999), a person who learns efficiently:

- Has clear purposes regarding to what he/she learns,
- Has a wide range of learning strategies and know when to use them,
- Uses the available resources in an efficient way,
- Know his/her strengths and weaknesses,
- Understands the learning process
- Controls his/her feelings in a proper way,
- Assumes responsibility for their learning process and
- Plans, monitors, evaluates and adapts the learning process.

In a parallel debate regarding continuous learning, Candy (Candy, Crebert, & O'Leary., 1994) suggests that the persons who learn continuously have, among others, the ability to make the correlation between various aspects of knowledge as well as the ability to manage learning. Knowles (Knowles, 1994) shows the elements of learning which are necessary in working with adults, a process that also identifies the role of the teacher which places his/her students in the center of learning. The students must be actively involved and have to assume a high degree of personal responsibility in this regarding. Knowles considers self-orientation as the essence of learning in adults and states that the needs and experiences of the person who learns must be more important than the expertise of the educator. He considers that the adults are persons who guide themselves in the learning process and each adult is unique due to his/her personal experiences (Knowles, 1994).

Characteristics of the educational practices in postmodernity

From a postmodern perspective; however, the axiomatic idea is that all knowledge is created or "constructed" in the minds of individuals. Constructivism is the main underlying learning theory in postmodern education. Knowledge is not to be discovered as modernists would claim. In other words, the ideas teachers teach and students learn do not correspond to "Reality," they are merely constructed in human minds. Postmodernism is heavily under the influence of Darwinian evolution because Darwinism calls for eradication of forage for the knowledge basis. Darwinism claims that all existence includes nature, time and chance. Put differently, our ideas, conceptions and perceptions are based on nature plus time plus chance. Accordingly, post-modern view claims that the responsibility of learning should reside increasingly with the learner. Since the focus of the classroom, in postmodern education, is the student's construction of knowledge, teachercentered classrooms should be transformed to more student-centered

classrooms. Students' need and creation of useful liberated Self are two major pillars of post-modernist education. Post-modernist theory of education discussing the characteristics of different offshoots of modernist and post-modernist philosophies towards education are out of scope of this paper; however, it is imperative to note that objectivity, rationality, certainty, foundationalism and universalism are the main inheritances of modernist educational philosophy while creativity, freedom, diversity and flexibility constitute the main foundations of post-modern education.

The postmodernist movement in education requires the individual to get closer to the real world with its contradictions and complexity, with its dysfunctions and unbalances in order to find optimal solutions to challenge and rebuilt it. Regarding the desiderata of the postmodernist education, Annette Gough (Gough, 2001) mentions the fact that it is necessary to recognize and stimulate the development of cognitive constructs in children whose origin is in the social and their socio-genetic process should be of special interest. She imperatively states the fact that we need a (post)modern science of education, an education which is democratic and recognizes the social constructs and the multicultural nature of science in its global context. We also need an education which highlights the direct process in which knowledge is created and recognized, in which the agents of knowledge are concrete, visible and socially placed.

The postmodern individual is relaxed and flexible, oriented towards emotions and internal feelings, manifesting a "Be yourself! attitude" (Rosenau, 1992). In educational approaches, the individual must be seen in two aspects: as a subject of his/her own development and as an agent of social influence and, by it, an agent of self-development. The purpose of post-modernist education sciences is – according to Matthew Weinstein (1998) – not only to understand science but also to feel the emotion to study it; education must determine the individuals to be in a continuous problematizing state, a state in which the individual must permanently ask questions and seek answers.

Teaching involves the assurance of synergy between the information from formal ways with those of non-formal and informal sources, interconnecting the learning experiences by trips, presence of some guests in the classroom, museum visits, watching of movies. Return of the students to the world, promoting investigations, interrogations and discussions. The idea of control is dropped, emphasizing the process. The teacher is an animator and a moderator.

A comparison between modern education and postmodern education

Crt. No.	Traditional pedagogy	Postmodern education
	Educators are the transmitters of knowledge. Knowledge means power.	Educators are the facilitators of knowledge and participate in the construction of knowledge.
	Excessively emphasizes and capitalizes the informative, training function in relation with the formative-educative function.	The important aspect is how the student uses what he/she learned, the emphasis is made on the formative aspect, on developing the cognitive processes.
	Focus on the instrumental dimension of the educational process with the risk of rigidity and routine and extreme rationalization from the teacher.	Takes into account the structural dimension of the education process, emphasizing the adaptation of the educational resources in order to increase the quality of the teaching activity.
	The lesson is designed as a succession of standardized moments, a result of the determinist-mechanical perspective between objectives and learning situations that are created.	The lesson is a dynamic process which is modeled according to the specificity, needs, preferences and resistances of students.
	Culture becomes a subject matter about which the students must learn, however, it can be an obstacle in learning.	The cultures are respected not only because they have an equal values but also because they are created in realities with the same importance.
	The traditional school trains the students to be the masters of one field or several fields, emphasizing self-esteem.	The postmodernist school considers that self-esteem is a precondition for learning and education can be understood as therapy.
	The teaching-learning is carried out usually in the classroom. The teacher is the one who dominates, controls and ranks the students.	The activities have varied locations; learning is not done only in class but also within the community.
	Evaluation is standardized. Multiple choice tests are used.	In evaluation, the negotiation processes are favored which involve

	The teacher has the control on the way in which, when and from which the evaluation is carried out.	decisional cooperation between students and the evaluating teacher.
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Why is postmodernism important for education?

- It formulates crucial questions regarding the hegemonic aspects of modernism and implicitly regarding the way in which it affects education;
- It offers a variety of discourses in order to question not only the cultural models of the West but relocates us inside a world that resembles very little with what inspired the great narrations of Marx and Freud;
- It points out on the influence of mass communication electronic media and the information technologies on the social dynamics, on the transgression of limits between life and arts, popular culture and high culture, image and reality;
- It builds the field of everyday life as a field of contestation. Resizes the teacher-student relationship, emphasizing the dialogue, the negotiation processes. The student intervenes continuously in the decisions regarding what he/she wants to learn, how he/she will use what he/she has gained and which evaluation ways should be used.

Those opposed to the aspect of a postmodern educational system emphasize the need for a basic structure in education. If there is no universal truth to follow then what is the purpose of learning if all of our individual thoughts could be considered true? Aspects of learning would not progress into the vast discoveries that have occurred today if we just accepted any persons individual beliefs or realities. Science is a form of thinking where there is one defined truth and if we were taught to think postmodernly, discoveries would cease because there would be no use in finding one defined truth. Because of the fact an individual believes in their own truth without questioning it, there would be no motivation for research. Postmodern education would cease the desire for knowledge and discovery in science.

I personally believe that a postmodern perspective could be quite beneficial to today's education system. Before this class I had always believed in the modern perspective of education where there is one teacher instructing and lecturing to a classroom. In this class, however, we each teach the class in our own way through a lecture assignment and I think that is a very postmodern way of teaching and has also proven helpful. By

teaching others and going outside of my role as a student I actually learned more about the topic. However, I do believe in the modern way of teaching as well. Some aspects of education are better learned by a simple lecture and written information. In many of my science classes I learn much better when the teacher just gives us the facts as opposed to them trying to incorporate activities where we teach ourselves or others. Overall, I now believe in the use of a postmodern look on education, but I do believe that there is a time and a place for it and it only benefits certain types of learning.

Conclusions

The implications of the postmodernist movement in educational practice have in view the sensitization and awareness of students from the earliest age towards training and application of concepts about life and surrounding reality. Learning and school must highlight its applicative character, combining theory with practice, the concrete with the abstract. This is the reason why teaching and learning of isolated facts, skills and abilities without validating them through practice become boring and lacks interest. It is necessary to create for the students, as often as possible, opportunities for making connections between the things learned in school and those that are acquired by non-formal and informal ways, understanding their utility. Another implication which postmodernism has in the world of education is related to the democratic way based on dialogue adopted by the teachers in the activities carried out with the students. The movement proposes that “the teachers and students to work together”, in contrast with the practice by which the all-knowing teacher is the one telling the students what to learn. This fact aims to replace the dominating, authoritarian, even dictatorial style of teaching which is still practiced in schools. Postmodernism promotes dialogue based methods favoring the guiding and negotiation processes. However, the cooperation between teacher and student does not mean diminishing the respect towards the teacher but underlines the need of reshaping this relationship by taking into account the double meaning of the instructive-educative flow, of the reciprocity of learning since the teachers have also something to learn from the students. The activism of the student involved by the strategies used by the teacher in carrying out the teaching-learning activities is carried out as an imperative of the postmodernist direction in education. The postmodernist school must know how to motivate the student in learning and how to facilitate the process of learning by organizing and developing interactive working strategies, emphasizing the utility of knowledge and the need of their

assimilation in order to succeed in life. The educational agents must be interested in what the students wish to learn and what they can do with this knowledge. The role of the teacher is not to cram the students with various facts but to show them what they should with it.

In my opinion applying a postmodern perspective in a classroom may prove to be beneficial in creativity and a more diverse outcome. The way I see the implication of postmodernism is through lower education such as elementary schools. With elementary schools, typically students are taught by a single teacher and they work on activities provided by the instructor. By adopting a posternmodern outlook, the school day could adopt a creative period during the day for students to express themselves and enhance their creativity.

In higher education, postmodernism could play a factor in more expressive classes like art, literature, music and creative thinking. Here the students could express their own views and opinions in a sort of reversal scenario where they teach and the instructor listens. By having the students give a lesson about the material in their interpretation, they will use postmodern methods by showing their perspectives, or realities, on the pertaining information.

From the postmodernist perspective, modernism's claim to authority partly serves to privilege Western patriarchal culture, on the one hand, while simultaneously repressing and marginalizing the voices of those who have been deemed subordinate or subjected to relations of oppression because of their color, class, ethnicity, race, or cultural and social capital. In postmodernist terms, the political map of modernism is one in which the voice of the other is consigned to the margins of existence, recognition, and possibility. At its best, a postmodernism of resistance wants to redraw the map of modernism so as to effect a shift in power from the privileged and the powerful to those groups struggling to gain a measure of control over their lives in what is increasingly becoming a world marked by a logic of disintegration. Postmodernism not only makes visible the ways in which domination is being prefigured and redrawn, it also points to the shifting configurations of power, knowledge, space, and time that characterize a world that is at once more global and more differentiated. One important aspect of postmodernism is the recognition it imposes that, as we move into the twenty-first century, we find ourselves no longer constrained by modernist images of progress and history. Within an emerging postmodern era, the elements of discontinuity, rupture, and difference provide alternative sets of referents by which to understand modernity as well as to challenge and modify it.

In concluding, it is appropriate to make a provisional attempt at declaring our own positions as writers of this text - provisional because we do not claim to be fully aware of our own positions as its "authors". In a paper which attempts to incorporate discussion of the possibilities for a dialogue between postmodernism and action research, we are mindful that this interpretation (as is any in the postmodern), is open to re-interpretation by the reader. The point of this paper is not to prove or hypothesise the possibilities for dialogue between the modern and postmodern, but to communicate our interest in both action research and postmodernism, and to attempt to illuminate the strengths of both.

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