

The Consequences of the Binary Opposition /Continuation Approaches to Modernism and Postmodernism : A Critical Educational Study

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Abstract

Understanding the parameters of modernism and the characteristics of postmodernism has been the goal of specialists and thinkers in the modern world. In recent years, the development of these epistemological modern and postmodern parameters and characteristics has attracted the attention of educational philosophers. In this article, an effort is made to analyze the educational ideas of some very influential thinkers such as Lyotard (1979), Frazer(1989) Penely (1989)), Hirsch (1987), Rortri(2002) and Curren (2003)as the foundations of modern and postmodern eras through a descriptive method. To this end, the relevant educational epistemological approach is scrutinized by dint of concepts such as definitions, principles, aims of education, parameters of critical and 'boundary' education, curriculum development and methodologies of modernism as well as postmodernism. The findings of this article elucidated the fact that paying attention to educational pluralism, multicultural conventions, creation of probable rather than absolute and certain knowledge are the outstanding features of postmodern educations. These features can illustrate the claim for fostering active and critical citizenship in the local, national and international arenas. Moreover, the findings of this study show that the rejection of all generalization and homogeneous perceptions and appreciations of social critical discourses are the essential building blocks and important aims of postmodern education. This leads to the practice of democracy based on interdisciplinary fields rather than on separate subjects(in the postmodern era). This aim is obtainable through the interrelated networks of group learning 'at school', and the 'university of life' as a 'small community' in critical education. Such a postmodern curriculum produces rather than consumes knowledge and it is iconoclastic not conformist and structuralism. The other result gained from postmodern education is the application of hermeneutic not dilectic modernist model. Based on the post modern criteria, the system of education must distance itself from the mere utilitarian, and instrumental criteria and embrace the postmodern touchstones of the citizen's critical and democratic attitudes, and mentalities

Key Words: Modernism, Postmodernism, Critical Education, Dialogue, Special and General Hermeneutics, Skeptical Knowledge

Modernism and Postmodernism

The term modernism is originated from the Latin word 'Modernus', it was made in the sixth century in the Roman era from the word "Modo" meaning "recent". The word 'modernity' was first used by Baudelaire (1964) in " The Painter of the modern life". In his opinion, modernity destroyed the clichéd

forms which were obstacles to the modification and evolution of thoughts and customs. If we accept the idea that the expression of modernity is the same as innovative ideas and progress, it is, therefore, in sharp contrast with classicism and traditional ideas. The authors of this article believe that modernity is a new mental

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perception and understanding of the world and of the man. Also, in the era of modernism, elitism and materialism as well as secularism have been presented as mechanistic approaches to science. In this period, the criterion for analyzing human behavior has been 'formalist rationality'.

The important point in this article is 'intellectualism' as the main parameter of modernity. With the advent of the enlightenment era, the evaluation of social problems and consequently the creation of cultural changes have been put forward as the most conspicuous manifestations of modernism.

Advent or Non-Advent of Postmodernism

There are two main perspectives in this regard:

A. The perspective of the opponents of the advent of postmodernism: Habermas (1980) refers to postmodernism as a unfinished project. This indicates that modernism has not yet ended let alone the idea of the commencement of postmodernism. The advocates of this view believe in historical harmony, symmetry, and simultaneity with the enlightenment era.

B. The perspective of the proponents of the advent of postmodernism: These thinkers claim that postmodernism emerged after renaissance. Lyotard (1997), Hirsch (1987) and Frazer (1989) are the main advocates of the advent of postmodernism. They believe that postmodernism is an amalgamation of complicated beliefs which are put forward as a critical background for scientific, philosophical and artistic studies. Postmodernism, in this view, is regarded as a discipline which includes music, literature as well as sociology, education and communication technology. One can regain the signs of the emergence of postmodernism in all the art forms and pragmatic as well as cultural domains in Jencks, (1991) works.

The authors of this article are of the opinion that the previous dreams and imaginations of modernist era have turned into realities and

practical life experiences in postmodern era. We accept the continuity of the modernism/postmodernism relationship, and the fact that latter is originated from the innermost part of the former. We believe that postmodernism is neither a school nor a scientific style rather it is the critic of modernism and the continuation of the modernist trend.

The philosophical background of postmodernism:

Since postmodernism is, strictly speaking, not a philosophical movement and it is in fact a follower of the trend of the emergence of modernism in the recent centuries in Europe, as Lyotard (1997) states in 'postmodern condition', modernity has supplanted "grand narratives" and secular mentalities have ensued. Postmodernism has either done away with all these influential grand narratives or has cast strong doubts on their comprehensiveness and validity. Therefore, we can claim that the philosophical foundations of modernism include rationalism, positivism, humanism and secularism. In addition, the philosophical bases of postmodernism encompass relativities, poststructuralism, deconstructionism and hermeneutics.

As a result, postmodernism has got a critical opposing stance towards modernist mentalities such as scientism, rationalism, and objectivism. Also, subjectivism instead of objectivism and probable knowledge instead of absolute certain knowledge are stipulated. In addition, adoption of interdisciplinary approaches not separate disciplines is opted for in post modern view. In the epistemology of postmodernism, the eternal, global, constant knowledge of modernism is rejected and supplanted by a temporary, changeable and skeptical one. What's more, the traditional epistemology of modernism is superseded by the 'sociology of epistemology'.

In the axiology of postmodernism, the unchangeable perpetual comprehensive ethical value systems of the past (modernism) are falsified and the following values are disseminated and inculcated: change,

personal innovation and creativity, individual difference, variety of philosophical thoughts, freedom of human beings from the shackles of slavery, abuse, class difference, racial, and sexual discrimination. Moreover, it encourages the mentality of "otherness".

Different kinds of postmodernism

a. historical postmodernism which claims the summation of the modernist era. In this historical period, man confronts and is in conflict with the past values and norms and is anticipating new global horizons.

b. Negative postmodernism: this view denounces all foundations and solid bases, and casts doubts on all the 'binary oppositions' regarding the dichotomous categorizations of real/ideal, objective/subjective, etc.

c. Positive postmodernism: it is in sharp contrast to the negative postmodernism which is, in a way, a new interpretation of the phenomena and recycles and regains everything. As opposed to the negative postmodernism, which fails to offer a substitute, this approach presents a supplement for each parameter and category.

Principles of postmodernism

Principle1: Lack of validity and reliability of the customary knowledge

Principle2: denial of reality, that is, there is no ultimate reality and man sees whatever he fancies behind the surface of things

Principle3: pretension and copies not originalities and authenticities

Principle4: meaninglessness, skepticism, doubt, uncertainty even a paranoid and circumspect mentality

Principle5: valuelessness of all experience, grand theories and absolute reason as well as truth

Educational Perspective of Postmodernism

Educational philosophy designs and presents the theories of educational trends and puts these theories into practice in the process of

'teaching-learning' which is based on goals, principles and structures dominant over the system of education of every society (Shekari,1383:21). Here, it is necessary to analyze the definitions, principles and goals of modernism and postmodernism.

A. Educational Definition and principles of postmodernism

According to postmodern thinkers, education is a multidimensional and interactive process for the purpose of familiarity with skeptical and uncertain probable knowledge through critical thinking. Educational philosophers such as Giroux, Hirsch, Welch, Laclau, Aronowitz, Fraser, Hooks believe in critical and 'boundary education' rather than scientific positivist education prevalent in modernist era. They go beyond the idealist class-conscious, aristocratic, naturalist, as well as socialist education and embrace critical education. They present the following principles for critical education:

1. Critical education is not only deemed as the producer of knowledge but also of political subjects or actors and the language of critical education must establish schools in the manner of general democratic atmospheres (Giroux,1991,p466). In the same line of arguments, John Dewey states that critical education does not reject the language of political trends rather it should blend public education with the necessity of a critical democracy(Dewey, 1916). This viewpoint is corroborated by Giroux's ideas on postmodern education (Giroux, 1991, p47)

2 In the critical postmodern education, students are given the chance to enhance their critical competencies to fight against and try to change the political and social structures and practices instead of the sole adaptation and acceptance of the current state of affairs. Moreover, they are given the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills, prove their roles in history, find their voice, and create the opinions and empathy for the purpose of civil responsibility and bravery. They also need to go through risks. As some politicians, educators, and philosophical

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educational groups have reasoned, critical education can by no means lead to forcing students to show and express their faithfulness at the beginning of the school day. Neither is it reduced to producing students with good mastery of a foreign languages like English or German in terms of speaking or thinking.

3. In addition, ethics must be regarded as the main issue in modernist, postmodernist, and even feminist education. Simon points out that in educational language, an ethical discourse must be selected based on power relations, citizens' conditions, and social activities (Simon, 1996). Educators must also deem ethics and politics as the relationship (link) between themselves and the others. Another significant issue is that ethics is not the subject of personal selection or relativist ideas rather it is a social discourse based on objections and movements which denounce any unnecessary suffering, manipulation, and abuse. This issue is neither an inherent ethics nor a relative one but an ethical discourse originated from and contingent upon the structure of social conventions devoid of any injustice. The nature of the ethical discourse is based on the question of how justice was produced out of real historical conditions (Shapiro 1990).

4. Welsh (1991, pp.83-89) points out that critical education should encourage ethically sensitive agents and politically challenging modifiers and it should focus on difference. Difference means the manner in which the students' identities, mentalities and attitudes are shaped in a multifarious pluralistic and contradictory fashion. Moreover, it means the manner in which the difference and conflicts among the groups occur in terms of internal and external relationships. Also it addresses the question of how teachers as part of 'language of critic' and 'language of possibility' can search for an opportunity for creation of power/knowledge relations in which plural narratives and social performances are shaped in line with politics and education which evolve around the concept of difference.

Critical education requires a language which enables opposing correlations and political terms which do not relegate the power relations, opposing the educational and social inequalities to a single recipe, or metanarrative which destroys a probable daily and historic event. (Cherryholmes, 1988).

5. Critical Education is a campaign for removing the suffocating restrictions and boundaries and creating novel situations for 'recycling and reproducing' knowledge. It is regarded as a cultural and political phenomenon which is able to produce skills, habits and mentalities different from those of the past and irrespective of epistemological issues. This is in itself a campaign which gives depth and profundity to 'educational meaning' of politics and the "political meaning" of education (Popkewitz, 1998). This is the reason why such different and multifarious mentalities cause worries and tensions and render the relationship between education and politics both insightful and problematic.

6. A new formation of the concept of rationale harmonious with illuminator should be carried over inside the critical education. Since postmodernist thinkers believe that reason is not free from mistake and the signifier and the signified are specified in the conflict between power, knowledge and politics; therefore, the domain of rationale must be expanded. This way the other ways by which people learn new situations of citizenship are recognized by the rationale. This is akin to a "cultural recipe" which familiarizes the students with small elements of logic and reason. This can shape their lifestyles in the future. (Gramet, 1988).

7. Critical education must obtain a new meaning from the reasoning through the combination of 'language of critic' and 'language of possibility'. In a way that post modern feminists have shown this combination both in the critic of patriarchal ideas and a discovery of new forms of identity and social relations. Hence, it is pointless if teacher can obtain new meanings

from reasoning in the following areas:

First, the issue of freedom must be utilized not only as a personal right but also as a part of discourse of social responsibility.

Second, the program of the language of possibility is absolutely necessary in critical education since it can be a prerequisite which can provide a different and more just world for the students and can prepare them for the challenge. Giroux (1991) and Frazer (1989) explain this feeling emphasizing the importance of the language of possibility for designing social change. This discourse provides the possibility of a democratic policy in which internal criticism and a tendency for progress and evolution are combined.

8. Critical education must produce theories about teachers as evolutionary intellectuals who occupy very important and sensitive socio-political positions. Moreover, critical education must not specify the teachers' tasks through a vague language, it must not restrict their roles to professional skills rather it must elucidate their roles as cultural agents and producers of ideologies and social functions (Walzer, 1984). In this perspective, teachers are involved in innovation, critical discourses and social democratic relationships which demystify and illuminate the unfair distribution of power and offer some guidelines to object to and remove these power relations.

9. Critical education favors both maintaining individual and international identities as well as multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is supporting variety of nations against the unifying harmonizing effect of global culture (Wiora, 1978: 84). In this regard, Castel states: "an education catering to different cultures must foster parameters such as cooperation, avoidance of specific identity prejudices, good citizenship, "collective" reasoning and argumentation, creation of new identities and internalizing social roles in individuals .

B. Educational Goals:

1. Expanding insight through the sociology of

understanding the processes of teaching, and learning are among the important goals of education, this is known as *boundary education*.

2. Paying attention to modern learning processes which are intimately connected with innovative citizenship and their goal is creating an ethical, political and democratic society (Giroux, 1991).

3. Going beyond the theory of "autonomous individual liberalism is tantamount to removing the "autonomous self" and replacing it with " socio- cultural" actor.

4. Prompting learners to participate in critical discussions, discourses as well as dialogues and avoiding conservative individual talks.

5. Advocating cultural pluralism (Harris, 1992:109), variety in education and artistic rituals for the purpose of a multi-purpose comprehensive nurturing of people rather than a monolithic one-sided limited training.

6. Teaching students critical thinking in order to turn them into active critical citizens not citizens who only dream of their future (Penely, 1989.p.122)

7. Trying to create probable uncertain and important knowledge not certain unequivocal unchanging and absolute knowledge (Dal, 2001).

8. Socialization and citizenship (Rorty, 2002) as well as collective learning are the main goals of elementary education and individualization is regarded as the chief objective of higher education in a way that postmodern thinkers involved in higher education have tried to provide people with the hope of recreating themselves (Rorty, 2002)

9. Giroux refers to postmodern education as "boundary" education and believes that postmodern education has an inherently "political" trend and its goal is 'the development of a democratic and just society'.

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Postmodern education strongly objects to marginalizing some social groups on the grounds of racist and sexist motives and tries to provide the students with an empirical understanding about people who consider students' formal culture as the culture of "Others" (Cohen, 1981, 721 quoted in Giroux, 1991:45) Hence, it can be stated that politics and ethics play indispensable roles in the boundary education.

10. The teacher is a cultural agent who creates changes and the student is a changing force moving from a small community (school) towards a big community (society). Also, school authorities try to foster a collective learning free from the restrictions of time and place.

C. The theory of School as a Small Community

From the perspective of postmodern thinkers, school is a small community in which the class differences are discarded, and in which different voices are heard. In the postmodern school, multicultural rituals gain a lot of attention and new and free information are received from all the directions for the purpose of collective criticism. Furthermore, its goal is the creation of comprehensive multilateral relations.

In 'the theory of school as a small community' the following ideas are very important:

Practicing democracy, tolerating the opposing views, defending the rights of the minorities against the dominance of the majority, considering the general democratic domains (Parker, 2001).

In the postmodern school, critical thinking is a fundamental principle of education, and school is the center of general domains of uncertain knowledge rather than certain and absolute modernist concept of knowledge. Teacher is regarded as a popular, illuminating, evolutionary intellectual who plays the role of a cultural agent or actor (Walzer, 1987).

In this trend of thought, students are looked upon as social actors in a state of flux developing from the school (the small

community) and moving towards larger communities of the nation and, later on, even larger communities of the whole world.

According to Parker (2001), in the postmodern school, people have a sense of belonging and security. Generally, according to postmodernism, education is not restricted to school and university rather the university is the 'university of life' and school must be free from the shackles of instrumentality and effectiveness.

D0 Postmodernist Curriculum

Postmodern curriculum is elucidated in this manner:

In the postmodern world, we need to expect unexpected, complex, multilateral, communicational networks. Such networks are always in a state of change and 'becoming' just as the life itself is. These networks are emerging and changeable. This condition encourages people to hold talks, share their views and develop relationships among themselves. Since certainty and absolute knowledge are supplanted by skepticism and doubt, this prompts people to link to each other, interact and negotiate their opinions. This type of relationship is conducive to a different social outlook and, as a result, students are able to recognize and value the other people's rights.

Edwards claims that the postmodern school must be the center of research and knowledge production, and no preplanned theory or principle must infiltrate the educational organizations. What's more, there is no obligation in putting them into practice. Each approach or method must be analyzed in the new postmodern school and it must be discussed and negotiated.

Generally, in the postmodern classroom, there is no curriculum consisting of isolated distinct subjects and disciplines, rather an interdisciplinary curriculum is designed and administered. Moreover, in the postmodern school a dynamic and active education takes

place due to the ease of accessibility to the internet search engines, electronic mails, and other digital facilities. In fact, everything is 'digitalized' and all sort of knowledge must be digitalized to be understandable and valid. Postmodern learning is interactive as well as creative and involves great mental developments. This kind of education, no doubt, increases the effectiveness and productivity of pedagogical activities and offers golden opportunities to enhance collective (without any time and space constraints) or group learning. Therefore, we can summarize the parameters of postmodern education in the following way:

1. Emphasizing interdisciplinary approaches and rejecting the curricula consisting of distinct unrelated subjects and disciplines.

2. Focusing on a curriculum in line with pluralism of voices, narratives, critical thinking and removing any preplanned written apriori curriculum which is developed by erudite elites who consider themselves above history

3. Valuing political education and social discourse rather than modernist curricula which is founded upon objective knowledge

4. Rejecting generalization and holistic approaches and emphasizing learners' differences through developing and sharing specific stories of subordinates marginalized peoples and minorities as the essential building blocks of postmodern materials development. Also, educators must get some help from history and real, ordinary and personal experiences to direct their mentalities towards to more abstract meanings in history and culture

5. Scientific knowledge is a kind of discourse which makes the fulcrum of educational materials (Refer to Lyotard, 1979)

6. Emphasizing the multicultural education to free the students from limitations and unduly strict treatments. These are the undeniable factors of postmodern curricula.

7. Evaluation of the teaching materials is not carried out through the quantitative criteria of modern period; instead, assessment of educational achievement is carried out through comparison of the previous records. This way the learner can compensate for his weaknesses.

E. Educational Method of Postmodernism

Postmodernist thinkers have adopted 'dialogue' as their educational method and deem the teacher as a cultural agent who is intellectual, critical, changeable, insightful and inspiring. He is the provider of newer ideologies and social trends. Post modernist thinkers do not consider the teacher as merely the consumer of knowledge; instead, they point out that the teacher must be a researcher and promoter of critical dialogues in the classroom (Giroux, 1991). Modernists, conversely, adopt scientific and logical positivism as their methodology while postmodern thinkers utilize general and specific hermeneutics as their educational methodology.

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