

# **National Agenda: Implementing Postmodern Strategies to Guide Educational Leaders in Creating Schools for Quality Learning in Public Education in America**

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## **ABSTRACT**

**“How do we recapture the magic and myth of education? ... to enable teachers to believe in their importance...so teachers and the public can rediscover the hope schools once held” (Deal and Patterson). The magic must continue in education in order to ensure that schools maintain a strong structure. Postmodernism views the world in such a way that boundaries are rejected and goals are reached in nontraditional ways. Educators often get wrapped up in the everyday functions of the school; we forget to ask teachers, parents, and community for their input. This article utilizes *Ways of Knowing through the Realms of Meaning* by Dr. William A. Kritsonis (2007) as a framework of constructing recommendations of how educational leaders can take the day to day normal operations of a school setting and implement a postmodernism approach.**

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## Introduction

What is the ideal school? Is it a school that is very organized with sets of guidelines and rules? For some that is the case, however the ideology of postmodernism would beg to differ. Our educational system is ever-changing and as the years go by, the struggles to meet the needs of the system are becoming more challenging for educational leaders. Postmodernism provides the educational leader the opportunity to not only change with the times, but to create an educational environment that embraces creativity and to move away from the mundane day to day activities that most educational institutions possess.

## Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to discuss implementation of postmodernism in our educational institutions. It will explore *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* by Dr. William A Kritsonis (2007) and the postmodern challenges to the theory and practice in educational leadership according to Dr. Fenwick W. English. It may be difficult to have a school that is completely postmodernistic, however, implementing postmodern views will allow for change within the educational institution, thus challenging the current educational practices. To begin the discussion an explanation of the six realms of meaning will be provided. These are as follows: symbolics, empirics, esthetics, synnoetics, ethics, and synoptics.

## Realms of Meaning

The first realm, **symbolics**, “comprises ordinary language, mathematics, and various types of nondiscursive symbolic forms, such as gestures, rituals, rhythmic patterns, and the like” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.11).

**Empirics**, the second realm, “includes the sciences of the physical world, of living things, and of man. It provides factual descriptions, generalizations, and theoretical formulations and explanations” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.12).

**Esthetics** is the third realm. It contains the various arts, such as music, the visual arts, the arts of movement, and literature. “Meanings in this realm are concerned with the contemplative perception of particular significant things as unique objectifications of ideated subjectivities” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.12).

The fourth realm, **synnoetics**, embraces “personal knowledge.” Synnoetics signifies “relational insight” or “direct awareness.” This personal or relational knowledge is concrete, direct, and existential (Kritsonis, 2007, p.12).

**Ethics**, the fifth realm, “includes moral meanings that express obligation rather than fact, perceptual form, or awareness of relation. Morality has to do with personal conduct that is based on free, responsible, deliberate decision” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.13).

**Synoptics**, the sixth realm, “refers to meanings that are comprehensively integrative. This realm includes history, religion, and philosophy. These disciplines combine empirical, esthetic, and synnoetic meanings into coherent wholes” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.13).

### **Morality and the Postmodern Leader**

Before the educational leader can have a school of quality learning, the leader must exhibit postmodern characteristics. Postmodernists view mankind as essentially moral and good. “Educational leaders must display the fifth realm, ethics, which includes moral meanings” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.13). Early on, educational administration actively decentered morality and values in the quest for a science of organization. In addition, “leaders were short of their humanity as well as the study of leadership was transformed into managerial principles” (English, 2003, p.28). These principles support the philosophy of axiology, which is the study of what is of value. It attempts to examine the rules of proper conduct. “Everyday society views rewards or punishes behavior as it deviates from or conforms to perceptions of what is of most value” (Kritsonis, 2002, p.100). Postmodernism believes that leaders possess a sense of morality and values. “A study of educational administration will have to push the decentered human and morality back from the margins into a more dynamic view that leaders are storytellers and that in the complexity of storytelling they become the stories they tell” (Gardner, 1995, p.9) (English, 2003, p.29).

Management style has become an important component in educational institutions because it sets the expectations of schools and staffs. The Administrative Management Theory provides school leaders with five functions: plan, organize, lead, coordinate and control. This theory emphasizes the manager and functions of management. It follows the relationship of the manager to the subordinate, working from the top down, thus holding everyone in the organization accountable for their decisions. Although this is a theory, it is not a mandate of management style. There is no “right” or “wrong” way that leaders should lead.

For a leader, power, communication, integrity, fairness, and being ethical are very important in school leadership. Power is limited to the influence of one individual over another individual (Rahim, Antonioni, & Psenicka, 2001). Postmodernists are concerned with power. The true language of power is theory, because theory embraces both the structure of language, and its ability to describe things in order to communicate and influence others (English, 2003). Theories work to reinforce existing power relationships. They do this by taking place within the existing mechanism of social control in a society in which political control depends upon “a common social-moral language and in which one concept of reality is dominant, informing with its spirit all modes of thought and behavior” (Femia, 1987, p.24) (English, 2003, p.15). This method coincides with the realm of symbolics, which comprises ordinary language (Kritsonis, 2007). The dominant reality deals with metaphysics, or our ultimate reality, that forms our behavior.

Educational institutions should consistently practice using reward power, being rewarded for a desired behavior, expert power, the belief that the leader has knowledge

and expertise, and referent power, which is based on the admiration and liking of the superior. Studies show that expert power and referent power were positively correlated and proved to be effective due to the fact that the subordinate respects and appreciates the leadership power structure and doesn't feel coerced into completing assigned tasks (Rahim, Antonioni, & Psenicka, 2001).

### **The Postmodern Building**

In order to receive a quality education, must all school buildings look similar? If the answer to this question is "yes," then the "idea of postmodernism is far from thoughts. Postmodernism is about understanding that a posture of exclusivity is rejected, that is, the idea of their being one right way or one right science or one right method of inquiry to pursue truth as it is constructed" (English, 2003, p.3). The beauty or esthetics of postmodernism is that the constructs of the actual facility does not have to fit the norm, but can promote differences. The educational leader who has free reign to create an ideal postmodern school may consider a building that is dome shaped with many windows. This allows for students to use nature's beauty to foster creativity. The building is lit with natural lighting in order to preserve energy. The facility will feature partner space, including joint use with a local community college. Within the building will be an information mall, including an area for parents and students to discuss graduation and post-high school planning with counselors. The facility will also have a cyber café, equipped with wireless technology, where students will be able to have snacks as they catch up on the latest news. The doors of the building remain locked at all times and students and staff access the building via computer generated badges. This ensures that only students and staff that belong at the school will be admitted on a daily basis provide a safe school climate.

### **Communication and the Community**

Most educational institutions have an open system organization. The open system concept provides the organization with structure and process. "An open system is a set of interacting elements that acquires inputs from the outside, transforms them, and produces outputs for the environment" (Hoy and Miskel, 2005). Although the structure that the open system provides does not necessarily fit into the postmodernism view, the use of inputs from the outside does.

Communication, the use of symbols is affixed in language (symbolics) for understanding. It is vital for educational leaders to communicate with stakeholders and understand their needs. Teachers, students, administrators, counselors and the community serve as inputs for the educational institution; the students are transformed by the implementation of postmodernism through specialized curriculum and an overall well roundness environment into educated graduates, who in turn contribute to society. This epistemology or nature of knowledge that comes from the community can add to success of the school. English (2003) expresses that "postmodernity does expand the idea of community" (p.26). The postmodern school communicates with its parents, teachers, and

students in order to receive feedback so that any problems that lie within in the school are corrected. Postmodernism constructs a way of looking at the world of ideas, concepts, and systems of thought through the historicity of context and the shifting nature of linguistic meaning and symbols as they are manifested in discursive practices which run through educational administration and related fields. Discursive practices represent all forms of human communication, verbal and non-verbal, and the context and culture in which they are embedded (English, 2003).

Educational institutions must concentrate on finding solutions to problems by taking into account all internal and external environmental factors. These factors have an influence on the success of the educational institution.

### **No More Bureaucracy**

Educational institutions are by far one of the most well known bureaucracies. Bureaucratic structure is a pervasive theme in the organizational life of schools. Indeed, virtually all schools have the trappings of bureaucracy (Sweetland, 2001). The purpose of the bureaucracy is to specialize and to clarify specific roles. "According to the Weberian model of Bureaucracy, most bureaucracies have a division of labor and specialization, an impersonal orientation, a hierarchy of authority, rules and regulations and career orientation" (Hoy and Miskel, 2005).

Postmodernism rejects the ideas of structure and roles (English, 2003). "Educational administration has been historically grounded and continues to be centered in theories that are compatible with bureaucratic order and control" (English, 2003, p.57). "Bureaucracy is an attempt to make administration automatic, not dependent on the comings and goings of personalities" says Gary Wills (1994). An educational institution based on postmodernism views has no place for bureaucrats. "Moving into a postmodern view of theories of educational administration, the dominant scientific modality has to be decentered, pushed aside" (English, 2003, p.24).

The educational leader will no longer sit at the top of the hierarchy. In fact, the hierarchy is non-existent. "Postmodernity rejects the idea of differentiation based on order and hierarchy" (English, 2003, p.42). There should be an oval structure where the student is in the center and the stakeholders, such as: the educational leader, the assistant principals, department heads, counselors, teachers, and all other faculty and staff is circled around them; whereby representing that the student is the center of education. The first segment of the oval should be the teachers because they are the ones in the trenches with the students on a daily basis and know first hand what needs should be met. The students should be the first priority because as educators we are here to meet the needs of each individual student in order to maintain success.

The next segment of the oval is where the breakdown in associate principal, assistant principals, department heads, and teachers takes place. In traditional school setting this is known as the division of labor and specialization. The division of labor and specialization basically means that some people have one function and others have another function. The division of labor was designed to produce specialization, which is supposed to lead to employees that are to become knowledgeable at performing their

duties. In schools, these positions are viewed as critical and each has its own set of expectations.

The principal is expected to be the over seer of the building. The principal has always been viewed as the head of the building and this view has been misconstrued as being the way it is “supposed” to be. Postmodernism overlooks the way that things have always been. Postmodernism is very flexible. The dynamics are constantly changing. The associate and assistant principals usually have their distinct roles, which include being responsible for specific grade levels. The department heads have direct influence upon the quality of teaching and learning within a subject area, and teachers are responsible for planning learning. “Postmodernists reject such claims as preposterous, asserting that what the conflict represents is merely a façade for a continuing monopoly of privilege posing as science” (English, 2003, p. 9).

### **Postmodernism and the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium**

According to Standard 1 of the *Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium: Standards for School Leaders*, “A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.” If the leader does not support the staff, the staff will not back the leader or the school. This metaphysical belief could be the demise of the institution. For example, the teacher and school are like an offensive line of a football team and the principal/leader is the running back. If the running back mistreats the offensive line, the offensive line will not block for the running back and the running back is “going down,” just as the structure of the school. Postmodern views the ISSLC Standards as the “deskilling and deprofessionalization” of educational administrators. The school administrator as expert is empowered to be a “social architect.” The school administrator as expert is empowered (and licensed via the ISSLC test) to do things for and to persons (English, 2000a). “The concept of social architect is implicitly hierarchical” (English, 2003, p.107). Many times this standard for administrators will be followed and delegated to associate and assistant principals. There would not be any “dumbing down” of the roles of educational administrator via job deskilling (English, 2003, p.107).

Empowerment will be given to all staff so that they can make constructive decisions. This allows a cohesive team that is vested in all aspects of the success of the school. The staff will also be respected for their knowledge and their contributions. Perhaps the most devastating critique of the ISLLC standards is that they rest on the untested and invalidated assumption that the current state of knowledge regarding the operation of schools is at some sort of apex so that they can be embodied in an apparatus which awards and denies licensure to practice.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, postmodernism forces schools to implement creative changes to the mundane traditional educational practices that have always been in place. The school should be a place of rigor and excitement, where learning takes place, while meeting the educational need of all students. The culture that the school possesses is unique to each and every school and this culture empowers students to take an active role in their learning. They learn to build bridges from present understandings to new, more complex understandings (Brooks and Brooks, 1993). Educational leaders must be very mindful of how they manage the school. The educational institution must be managed in a way that produces the greatest efficiency. The postmodern educational institution provides the efficiency and leadership that quality schools need to be successful. School curriculum should create a higher level of learning that challenges students. Postmodernism will prepare students for college and beyond, thus making them productive members of society.

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