

Applying Postmodernism: Solutions to all our Educational Problems

Kashan Ishaq, M.Ed.

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PhD Student in Educational Leadership

Whitlowe R. Green College of Education

Prairie View A&M University

Principal

Iman Academy SW - Houston, TX – Private SACS Accredited School

William Allan Kritsonis, PhD

Professor & Faculty Mentor

PhD Program in Educational Leadership

Hall of Honor (2008)

William H. Parker Leadership Academy

Whitlowe R. Green College of Education

Prairie View A&M University

The Texas A&M University System

Visiting lecturer (2005)

Oxford Round Table

University of Oxford, Oxford, England

Distinguished Alumnus (2004)

College of Education and Professional Studies

Central Washing University

ABSTRACT

Can postmodern theory help fix our educational system today? This question will be answered in this paper as it highlights significant aspects of postmodernism related to strategic planning in educational leadership. Humans have made major accomplishments over the last century from landing on a moon to the development of nuclear technology, yet the major problems of the educational system remain. Who is to blame? Should we continue to blame our educational leaders or are we going to do anything about it? We often envision looking to the future but we seldom look to the past and learn from the mistakes of yesterday. In order to fix today's educational problems, we have to rationally analyze the problems of the past and introduce the theory of postmodernism into our educational system. Educational leaders must escape out of their fear to bring change and take it as a challenge to fix educational system but it does require a passion for change, meeting the needs of all stakeholders of school.

Introduction

There are too many lives and livelihoods at stake. This is not about politics and neither is it about who can reinvent the wheel and become famous for their efforts. This is about our educational system that is breaking America's families' future, prosperity, values and beliefs. With state legislature's days away from finalizing the plan for educational reforms, it is time to reflect on our loss and stand up against traditional and bureaucratic leaders who continue to work in their comfort zone and never bring change that our educational system desperately needs today.

Ineffective leadership is the inability of the leader to learn from the past mistakes rather learning from them. In today's educational system we have too many so-called leaders unfortunately most of them are very ineffective in dealing with the problems of the educational system. When the educational leaders defined educational philosophy doesn't include epistemology (nature of knowledge), metaphysics (cultivate reality) and axiology (values), educational system is set for failure. Fearless educational leaders can bring change but with a strong belief for change to make a positive difference in the lives of every stakeholder of a school.

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of the article is to discuss postmodernism and its implementation in the school administration. Dr. Fenwick W. English has described in his book, *The Postmodern Challenge to the Theory and Practice of Educational Administration*, the theory of postmodernism and how it can change the educational system today. Educational leaders must believe in postmodernism theory in order to bring change in the educational system.

Modernism vs. Postmodernism

What is Postmodernism? According to English (2003), "Postmodernism is originally a critique of modernism in the arts and architecture. Today it can be characterized by "... a state of mind, a critical, self-referential posture and style, a different of seeing and working" (English, 2003, p. 249).

Postmodernism demands for innovative and creative ways to improve the educational system. School administrators with a post modernistic approach can take the school so many years a head, where all students are successful and schools are technologically advanced. According to English (2003),

Postmodernism is about constructing 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. (p.3)

We must think beyond modernism ways of dealing with students and stakeholders of schools. We need to meet the needs of all stakeholders while ensuring that they are part of a decision making process during campus improvement planning. Educational leaders usually get in their comfort zone and never think beyond changing the system of their school. They have a fear to align everyone's vision as they see obstacles; school administrators stop and continue operating in their comfort zone.

English (2003) states: "The mental baggage of modernism is represented in the way it conceives of itself as a compelling singularity: total, final and absolute" (English, 2003, p.62). Educational leaders with a tunnel vision, directs them to never think beyond modernism ways, they find everything absolute to not make any changes.

English says, "Postmodernism is not so much interested in the answers as the questions" (English, 2003, p.4). The question we must ask ourselves and our educational leaders, "Why problems still exist in our educational system today?" Demanding for solutions and collaboratively seeking solutions as a learning community develops innovative thinking that postmodernism enforces. English (2003) states: "Postmodernism reveals this blind spot, and as it does so, new directions, possibilities, and understanding about people, leaders, schools and society can be forged" (English, p. 59). This leads us to ask ourselves where went wrong with a modernistic approach. What is modernism?

According to English (2003),

Modernism is a distinctive perspective, which arose in the seventh century and is captured by a faith in rationality and its principal method, Science. Modernism can be characterized as a pursuit of grand theories or grand narratives (metanarratives) which, following the principle of parsimony, attempt to explain the greatest number of phenomena in the smallest set of laws, axioms, or theories. (p. 248)

Modernists do not want to discuss the issues that postmodernists highlight because modernists are comfortable with their acquired beliefs which they believe are superior. Modernists believe that postmodernism is not practical in a sense that it cannot guide daily classrooms, or administrative work. Modernists believe that modernism (Science) is defined by its methods. They believe that postmodernism lacks new concepts and definitions and it proposes nothing new and has no solid foundation.

As effective educational leaders, we have to ask questions such as where we went wrong, and seek solutions instead of continuing to play the blame game.

Strategic Planning for Educational leaders

For educational leaders to be successful at creating effective schools where all stakeholders are highly involved in an attainment of the school's vision, school administrators need to know how to apply steps of strategic planning in communicating vision of the school to all stakeholders. According to the Center of Organizational Development and Leadership (2007), there are six planning phases:

1. Mission, Vision, and Values,

2. Environmental Scan,
3. Goals,
4. Strategies and Action Plans,
5. Plan Creation,
6. Outcomes and Achievements. (pp.3-4)

Each step of strategic planning relates directly and indirectly to the six realms of meaning. Kritsonis said, "Of all the branches of philosophy the two which are the most comprehensive in scope and hence the primary basis for synoptic function of philosophy as a whole are the theory of knowledge (or epistemology) and metaphysics" (Kritsonis, 2007, p.546-547). Educational leaders must have an extensive knowledge (epistemology) and understanding of metaphysics understanding to align the school community's vision. History allows the educational leaders to interpret and compare past events with the current, to build an effective learning community, and to help plan accordingly for improvement of the school. Effective educational leaders continuously assess and analyze data from the past to the present. "The educational leaders can work to a largely influence synoptics while developing the Campus Improvement Plan and heavily define the school's culture" (Cloud & Kritsonis, 2006, p.7). Educational leaders must be highly involved in the planning of a Campus Improvement Plan working closely with stakeholders of the school, to modify and improve programs, which did not support the school's vision and mission in the past. Campus Improvement Plan should focus on ways to improve parental involvement, decrease student drop out rates, and retain effective teachers.

Is it Possible?

In the past, the idea of landing on the moon was impossible, it was a fantasy but it became a reality today. The idea of creating effective schools where all children are successful can become a reality with post modernistic approach applied by the school leaders. If men have accomplished so much in a relatively short period, fixing the educational system today can be possible. There are no leaders who do not face resistance but once a leader touches the heart of the people with his/her strong beliefs and actions which are marching towards a change, a sense of trust is established between a leader and the people, the resistance will be minimized and eventually disappear. A leader believing in postmodernism has the power to wipe out the past undesirable memories of the people, and make it a reality, which can be seen by one's five senses. Postmodernism approach is accomplished when anyone who enters in to a school building can see with his or her five senses described below.

A visitor can see with their eyes an educational leader with a vision that is not traditional. They can see an educational leader teaching and applying new innovative ways to provide support to the teachers. Postmodernism approach is accomplished when a visitor can hear interactive ways of teaching going on in classes where all students are engaged in the lesson. Postmodernism approach is accomplished when a visitor can touch the walls of the school and feel the strong educational foundations of the school. Postmodernism approach is accomplished when a visitor can smell a positive climate of the school. Finally, a visitor can

see postmodernism is applied in a school by tasting lunch provided by the cafeteria that is very nutritious and nourishing for the students.

Tomorrow's Education

Current methods in our education have not solved the major sociopolitical and instructional problems of race or class, and our educational leaders have done nothing to solve so many other issues that exist today in our educational system. Let us think for a moment as to why we have such high student drop out rate, why so many students are sent to the alternative schools for discipline purposes, why there is a lack of parental involvement in our schools across the nation and why teachers' turnover rate is increasing rapidly? Answers and solutions to all these questions and issues can be resolved if the leadership at all levels come together, putting away the politics and working towards establishing holistic programs and curriculum catering to the needs of all stakeholders (parents, teachers, students, community members) of school, and implementing highly effective programs in schools to bring a positive change. If modernists continue looking for flaws in postmodernism to justify their methods, it will take strong post modernistic leaders to wipe out the bureaucracy that still exists today in the state legislatures' administration office where all educational policies and procedures are formed.

How about putting the politics away for a moment and focusing on the future of our students? Schools where teachers are empowered and satisfied are the type of schools that practice postmodernism. Every year we lose quite a chunk of money in hiring new teachers in schools because of the ineffective mentoring programs established by traditional leaders. Traditional leaders can automatically be replaced once post modernistic culture and climate is fully embraced into the educational system. Traditional leaders will not have a chance to survive in such an educational system that promotes postmodernism. There will be no place for them to continue practicing such leadership styles. Schools can be established where students are respected at all times and in their minds and hearts there is a shared belief that their teachers are passionate about educating and seeing them successful. Passionate educators can help lower the drop out rate of students. Educational leaders need to develop teachers who have a passion for not only teaching but also have an ability to build such rapport with students that impact them greatly preventing them from dropping out of the school.

Why are there so many theories and conceptual ideas that become the vision of the schools? They seem to be replaced quite rapidly by new theories and conceptual ideas. Is it about money? Changing the name of the theory would not improve the educational system while the concepts remained the same. Why are school leaders never able to achieve the vision? A written vision looks great on a piece of paper and on a website; however, if it is not achieved at the end of the academic year, then who are we fooling? Achieving great results on standardized state assessments does not make a school exemplary. Schools are considered exemplary where all stakeholders of a school are working towards the shared mission. An

exemplary school is where students are successful contributing citizens and community builders.

Developing our Students and Teachers

The character of the students can be developed through the implementation of effective extra curricular programs including extra ordinary fine arts activities and programs. We have to question the vision of our school's extra curricular programs and how it will impact our students' character development. Are the fine art classes just placed in schools to meet the minimal state requirements? Postmodernism is best practiced in schools where students are self-paced learners, teachers and students are technologically advanced, and there are passionate educators with advanced technical degrees. A twenty-first century exemplary school should have educational study trips for students where students complete exigent activities on the trip. Are Art classes taught in schools preparing students to have meaningful experiences and connecting life with Art? Do we have qualified Art teachers in schools with excellent Artistic skills? According to Kamhi (2006), "Postmodernists blurring of the distinction between art and life has inevitably affected their attitude toward the relationship between subject matter and content, on one hand, and form and style on the other" (Kamhi, 2006, p. 34). Teachers must have post modernistic views in teaching any content, but they must be able to guide students' thinking towards higher levels of blooms taxonomy and connecting lessons with life experiences, as described by Kamhi in the above quote. When the entire staff at all levels apply post modernistic approach in their respective roles, the schools' vision will be accomplished collaboratively. Students of today are the future of tomorrow; there will be a vast majority of students that will become teachers, administrators, and superintendents. Are we developing our schools of tomorrow? Our students today must be developed and guided to take over the leadership roles and lead the people of tomorrow. They are the ones who will be establishing schools and guiding our future generations. People are not born as leaders, they are to be guided and their values and believes must be nurtured to develop the charisma in them and the love and passion for change. According to Searby and Shaddix (2008), Dr. Charles Mason, superintendent of Mountain Brook Schools, developed a list of how teachers could lead without being in a formal leadership position:

1. Leaders ask the right, tough questions.
2. Leaders can set the tone for meetings and discussions with their energy level, attitudes, and encouragement.
3. Leaders are mentors, one-on-one, to others.
4. Leaders anticipate needs and meet them without being asked.
5. Leaders support other leaders emotionally and professionally.
6. Leaders establish their own credibility through competence.
7. Leaders learn what they need to know and are willing to share it.
8. Leaders interpret reality for others.

9. Leaders always ask, “What is our purpose?”
10. Leaders ask the question, “Is this consistent with our values and beliefs?”
(Searby & Shaddix, 2008, p. 2)

Programs such as *teachers as leaders* should be supported and encouraged by our educational leaders today. It is necessary to develop leadership skills in teachers because they will eventually become the principals, administrators and superintendents of our schools tomorrow. It also helps promote collaboration among members of the staff in schools leading different programs and projects. It helps promote a sense of ownership among teachers, creating a positive culture and climate in schools when the teachers are empowered by the leaders of the school. Searby and Shaddix (2008) conducted surveys to gather teachers' feedback about teachers as leaders program and most teachers were extremely appreciative of being selected for the program, as is depicted in the following survey comment:

Having been in the classroom for more than 15 years, I have seen teachers move from teaching in isolation to being true leaders who enact change. In the past, teachers have thought that becoming a leader in their building meant that they must come out of the classroom and become an administrator. The Teachers as Leaders program made me realize that not only can I be a leader in the classroom, but also through my professional development, my sphere of influence can reach beyond the classroom and into school wide leadership activities. (p. 4)

Teachers as leaders program must be established in every learning community, where community members are also taking part in the process of becoming teachers in their neighboring schools and eventually guiding and directing them in a direction to become leaders of the school and the community. It is the awareness and opportunity that must be created for the entire learning community to grow as contributing and effective citizens.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, there are many deficiencies in our educational system today. Facing these deficiencies requires the educational leaders to be fearless in bringing change. They must analyze in depth, the educational problems and strategically plan on integrating postmodernism approach to solve the problems. Postmodernism approach must be applied in schools today to improve our educational system, meeting the needs of all stakeholders. School leaders have a major responsibility to guide the schools by becoming effective instructional leaders, administrative leaders, and the school community leaders.

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