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□ MODERN AND POST-MODERN TEACHER EDUCATION: REVEALING CONTRASTS IN BASIC EDUCATIONAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICE

Abstract:

The researchers examine the beliefs of faculty members regarding education policy, teaching and learning, and curricula through the constructs of postmodern and modern ideologies. A 26-items survey based on a theoretical framework using Sahlberg's "Finnish Way" was administered at two colleges of education; findings provided insights into these faculty members' stances toward P-12 schooling as well as preparing teachers.

The institutions were selected, in part, for their contrasting models. One is a private, non-profit university located on the west coast of the United States; the other is public, state-supported university in the Midwest. Both have a mission to meet the needs of underserved populations of college students, especially first-generation college attendees; however, over 60% of the private university's coursework is taken online versus less than 10% at the public institution. Ninety faculty members from the public institution were surveyed, all of whom were full-time tenured or tenure-track, whereas nearly 700 faculty were surveyed at the private university, and all but 85 were adjunct faculty (70% of all classes at the private college of education are taught by adjunct faculty while less than 10% of classes at the public college are taught by part-time adjunct faculty.)

Findings indicated a general agreement within all five item categories: Standards/Standardization, Curriculum, Student Assessment, Management, and Resources. However, decided differences were found in faculty members' responses to individual items such as merit pay and collective bargaining's "grip" on teacher contracts. In this instance, the private institution held to a neoliberal approach whereas in most other cases these faculty members embraced more constructivist/progressive practices and beliefs.

One of the conclusions made by the researchers is that those holding neoliberal philosophies may be attracted to the private institution's "business-like" operation model (although they do not seem to constitute the majority), while a more progressive faculty member is attracted to the state institution with a traditional tenure system and mode of instructional delivery.

Keywords:

Post-modernism, ideology, progressivism, neoliberalism, political beliefs

JEL Classification: I29, I21, I24

Introduction

Postmodern teacher education programs, as defined by the authors, foster an awareness of the various external factors that impact teaching and learning as well as the entire schooling process. These factors are interpreted in the context of how they evolve over time by constant interactions with internal factors pertinent to individual schools or schools of education. In contrast, the modern teacher education program uses traditional approaches to professional training focused on the perceived status quo (e.g., teacher-directed instruction, prescribed curricula, basic/core knowledge, frequent use and reliance upon standardized summative assessment of student learning). These programs demonstrate a reactive manner of dealing with change and trends in P-12 schooling.

In the education of teachers and other school professionals (i.e., administrators, counselors, psychologists), a modernist approach emphasizes the utilization of teacher-centered instructional strategies, standardized curricula published by sources outside the school, and assessment systems that provide easily quantifiable data to be used to satisfy administrators who may use “data-driven” instead of “data-informed” management (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). By contrast, a postmodernist approach educates teachers to embrace student-centered instruction/facilitation of learning, teacher-developed curriculum based on research and knowledge of students’ needs, and a variety of assessments, including “authentic” assessment (Airasian, 2005). The use of the verbs “train” and “educate” is important when contrasting these two approaches. In short, the former connotes a relatively simplistic transfer of knowledge and skills from an expert or set of experts; the latter infers that a deeper understanding of the knowledge is gained by the learner, including the analysis of relevant information regarding this knowledge and the ability to intelligently evaluate its value and use.

Post-Modernism and School Reform

The accountability movement, at least since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, has underscored an emphasis on increased knowledge acquisition that has to align with a marketable transfer of skills to various workplaces. Production has become “postmodernized” by eliminating the familiar path to economic progress demonstrated by leading developed countries (Peters & Beasley, 2006). However, education policies still attempt to use modernist approaches in managing educational settings when students and the world in which they live are postmodern. There is no more dominant metanarrative (Lyotard, 1984) to structure curriculum development. Moreover, in a knowledge economy (Trani & Holsworth, 2010), higher education institutions have undergone a transformation by developing curricula that emphasize skills sets sought after by employers, while promoting alternative content delivery methods, such as e-learning.

Cunningham and his colleagues (as cited in Peters & Beasley, 2006, p. 25) outline several traits of what they label as “borderless education”:

- a) globalization;

- b) new instructional technologies (more of which capitalize on virtual communities that use and produce knowledge);
- c) transferable best practices;
- d) adaptability to new learning paradigms and content delivery modes;
- e) increasing cost of education (both for the public at large and individual students);
- f) stricter certification or licensure requirements derived from redefining professionalism in various fields of activity; and
- g) Generation Xers.

Current curriculum work is still derived from content and skills that are connected in a prescriptive manner (Alba, Gonzalez-Gaudio, Lankshear, and Peters, 2000). As far as teacher education is concerned, policy affects it in terms of curriculum as well as credentials offered upon graduation from such programs.

Based on this brief review of the literature regarding postmodernism and teacher education, the authors provide five “tenets” to act as guide for this study.

Tenets of Postmodernism in the Context of Education

1. **Customizing teaching and learning** according to individual needs and the context in which teaching and learning take place
2. **Focus on creative learning** both in how students gain knowledge and how teachers improve their professional practice
3. **Encouraging risk-taking** in both student learning and teaching practice, accommodated by the organizational and leadership structures within the school and school district.
4. **Learning from the past and owning innovations** in that both teaching and school leadership practice is based on the field of education and other social sciences rather than borrowed from business.
5. **Shared responsibility and trust** within the internal school community as well as to the greater community to which the school serves.

These tenets informed the authors when developing their theoretical framework shown in Appendix A. This is an adaptation of Pasi Sahlberg’s (2012) Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) and Finnish Way contrast.

Methods and Context

The question that the survey administration was helping answer is as follows:

- How do teacher educators’ beliefs about teaching and schooling practices correspond to the five tenets of Post Modernism in the context of education?

The school of education in this study has approximately 9000 students in 36 programs at the bachelor’s and master’s levels. It is one of six professional schools at a private university on the West Coast of the U.S. Surveys were sent out via university

email to the 90 full-time faculty and 550 adjunct faculty employed by the school. One hundred forty-five were completed using an online survey administrator. The survey consisted of 26 items, half of which were geared toward the Post Modern and half toward and Modern ideology toward education practices and policies (see Appendix B).

Findings

The survey items were categorized by the following themes: 1) standards or standardization, 2) curriculum, 3) student assessment, 4) management, and 5) resources. Table A shows the categories and the mean scores for each (categories are color-coded). Flipping the Modern items so that the data give a Post Modern view ("Adj. Mean"), it is found that the respondents were most favorable to a Post Modern approach to management (1.37) and resources (mean=1.38) and less emphatic for the Post Modern approach toward curriculum (1.69), student assessment (1.61), and standards/standardization (2.02). These adjusted mean scores are used as the basis for the discussion section.

Table A: Item Analysis

(Strongly Agree: 1; Agree: 2; Disagree: 3; Strongly Disagree: 4; *Items in red denote modern, while black postmodern*)

Item	Theme	N	Mean	Adj. Mean	Agree N	%	Some- what N	Agree %	Some- what N	Dis- Agree %	Dis- agree N	agree %
1	Standardization	145	1.43	2.57	98	68%	34	23%	10	7%	3	2%
4	Standardization	142	2.13	1.87	33	23%	67	47%	33	23%	9	6%
10	Standardization	142	1.72	2.28	55	39%	76	54%	11	8%	2	1%
2	Standardization	144	1.6		74	51%	55	38%	13	9%	2	1%
5	Standardization	145	1.76		54	37%	75	52%	13	9%	3	2%
Standardization Mean				2.02								
6	Curriculum	143	1.76	2.24	61	43%	58	41%	21	15%	3	2%
9	Curriculum	143	1.96	2.04	34	24%	81	57%	25	17%	2	1%
3	Curriculum	145	1.28		107	74%	36	25%	1	1%	1	1%
7	Curriculum	142	1.51		78	55%	55	39%	9	6%	0	0%
8	Curriculum	142	1.52		79	56%	54	38%	10	7%	0	0%
11	Curriculum	144	1.72		50	35%	63	44%	27	19%	3	2%
12	Curriculum	143	1.49		79	55%	58	41%	4	3%	1	1%
Curriculum Mean				1.69								
13	Student assessment	142	2.6	1.4	12	8%	48	34%	67	47%	15	11%
14	Student assessment	142	3.06	0.96	2	1%	24	17%	79	56%	37	26%
21	Student assessment	144	2.31	1.69	24	17%	64	44%	47	33%	11	8%
25	Student assessment	144	2.4		14	10%	60	42%	63	44%	4	3%
Student Assessment Mean				1.61								
16	Management	144	3.03	0.97	3	2%	25	17%	81	56%	35	24%
18	Management	143	3.21	0.79	2	1%	12	8%	84	59%	46	32%
19	Management	144	2.86	1.14	4	3%	40	28%	75	52%	26	18%
15	Management	142	1.58		72	51%	64	45%	5	4%	3	2%
17	Management	144	1.68		52	36%	85	59%	6	4%	0	0%
20	Management	145	1.93		40	28%	76	52%	26	18%	2	1%
22	Management	144	1.51		78	54%	68	47%	3	2%	0	0%
Management Mean				1.37								
24	Resources	144	2.54	1.46	29	20%	36	25%	51	35%	28	19%
26	Resources	141	3.21	0.79	5	4%	9	6%	81	57%	50	35%
23	Resources	144	1.88		48	33%	66	46%	29	20%	1	1%
Resources Mean				1.38								

In general, the respondents lean toward the postmodern ideology for education as depicted in the theoretical framework found in Appendix A. Post-Modern non-adjusted mean: 2.45; Modern non-adjusted mean: 1.68). The adjusted mean scores (scores for statements made to support the modern approach were reversed) for the five themes are 2.02, 1.69, 1.61, 1.37, 1.38—clearly indicating a support for a postmodern stance. From these scores, several items stand out as evidence of this support while a few seem to contradict other items' scores.

Two items of special interest are from the Curriculum theme:

6. *Teaching and learning should focus on deep, broad learning.*
7. *Teaching and learning should give equal value to all aspects of the growth of an individual's personality, moral character, creativity, knowledge, and skills.*

None of the participants disagreed with these statements which lean toward a postmodern approach to education, and the vast majority (94% each) agreed or somewhat agreed. Also of interest are the following items where more than half of the respondents disagreed, all of which are written to be agreed with by supporters of a modernist viewpoint; therefore, the responses can be classified as pro-postmodern:

18. *Business models should be mandated for schools and school districts by legislation and/or national programs (59% disagreed).*
26. *Schools and districts that score well in achievement measures should receive fiscal rewards, whereas struggling schools and individuals should not (57% disagreed).*
16. *The primary source of educational change should be management models brought to schools from the corporate world (56% disagreed).*
14. *Standardized tests and externally administered tests are the most important way to measure learning (56% disagreed).*
19. *It would benefit schools and local education systems to use the operational logic of private corporations (52% disagreed).*

This apparent support for postmodern ideology in the way of education policy, teaching and learning, could have implications for the curricula within the School's 37 programs as is discussed below.

Discussion

Although it appears that support for the postmodern approach is close to a 3-to-1 ratio, one would think that there might be a tension between the perspectives. After all, 33% of a faculty who may be diametrically opposed to the beliefs of the other 67% could create profound disagreements in curricula and student assessment. For instance, curricula (defined as what is to be intentionally learned) are ideologically driven (Schiro, 2008). Modernists favor "truths" in that knowledge is set; therefore, curricula should be factual. Postmodernists are likely to be constructivists who advocate learning to be a process where knowledge is filtered through the learner's experiences as espoused by

Lev Vygotsky (Wink & Putney, 2002). This postmodern belief would lead to more fluid curricula where knowledge is constantly changing and is based on context rather than rigid “truths”.

The Accountability Movement in education, spawned after the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) uses a modern approach to education reform, market-driven (school choice/vouchers), prescribed curricula, and frequent, standardized tests of factual knowledge (Wagner, 2011; Wolk, 2011). Accountability is highly relevant in this discussion of modern and postmodern education principles. Below, the five categories/themes identified in the survey are discussed using the survey data against the tenets of Accountability.

Standards/Standardization: This theme may provide the most interesting data, overall, in that the modern statements (1, 4, and 10) were supported by a substantial majority (1: 91% agreed or strongly agreed; 4: 70% agreed or strongly agreed; 10: 91% agreed or strongly agreed). The authors hypothesize that this overall agreement could be due to the general acceptance of standards-based curriculum, and standardized testing across both major political parties. Item 4 is an example of this acceptance of standardization: *Standardizing teaching and curriculum in order to have coherence and common criteria for measurement and data will improve education outcomes for all.* One would not expect someone who embraces the postmodern ideology to accept standardization of curriculum and teaching. As seen in this study’s theoretical framework (Appendix A), postmodernism in education shuns rigid standardization in favor of flexibility and personalization (Sahlberg, 2012).

Curriculum: Accountability’s favored approach to curricula focuses on factual knowledge that easily translates to a machine-scored test (Wolk, 2011) rather than what a postmodern advocate would prefer: demonstrated ability to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate existing knowledge and to create new knowledge (Wagner, 2008). The survey data suggest that the 140+ faculty who participated in this study lean slightly toward what the postmodern stance (1.69 mean for the theme). This is exemplified by item 3 where 98% agreed or strongly agreed to this statement: *It is important that schools offer personal learning plans for those who have special educational needs.* Personalizing curricula as well as instruction is a common theme among postmodern schooling models such as Big Picture Schools (<http://www.bigpicture.org/schools/>), Waldorf (<http://www.whywaldorfworks.org/>), and Sudbury Valley (<http://www.sudval.org/>); this is in contrast to Core Knowledge schools (<http://www.coreknowledge.org/>) espoused by E.D. Hirsch who outlines the “core knowledge” model in his seminal piece *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1988). This latter model has a strong focus, if not singular, on basic knowledge and skills as defined by Hirsch. The others support a deeper understanding of content that does not forget the oftentimes confounding variable of *context*, each learner’s experiences, their interactions with other learners and the teachers, the physical state of the learner when the lesson is to be learned, etc. The learning process for the postmodern educator is more complicated than simply transferring information from teacher to student.

Student Assessment: The respondents aligned with a postmodern view of student assessment with the exception of item 21 (*School performance and raising student achievement should be tied to processes of promotion, inspection, and ultimately rewarding schools and teachers*). Sixty-one percent agreed or strongly agreed with this statement which may be another reflection of the effects of the accountability movement which advocates a market mentality toward schooling (Apple, 2001; Wolk, 2011), one that would not be accepted by the postmodern perspective on education. Essentially, measures of learning are turned into a commodity in order to both reward and punish those in the schooling cycle. How learning takes place is key to assessment as well as instruction: is learning merely a transferring of knowledge from teacher to student? If one believes this to be so, then traditional tests may be valid forms of assessment. The postmodern educator would insist upon more “authentic” assessments that allow for the learner demonstrate or apply knowledge to a real-world situation. These types of assessment are not easily measured and can provide “messy” data, not clearly reported “hard” data such as are delivered through standardized testing. A market approach to education requires quantifiable data so that comparisons between and among students, teachers, principals, schools, and school districts can be made (Apple, 2001).

Management: The way schools and districts operate is contingent upon the management style and philosophy the leaders employ (Northouse, 2004). A modern style is more structured in its view of schooling, requiring a clear delineation among the levels of the organization. This is the foundation of a bureaucracy: many levels with explicit roles and responsibilities and chain of command. The following statement was supported by only 9% of respondents:

18. *Business models should be mandated for schools and school districts by legislation and/or national programs.*

It could be that teacher education faculty believe a business model to be top-down and bureaucratic; therefore, they do not see this as beneficial in P-12 schooling. On the other hand, it may be the respondents did not like the word “mandated” as they believe teachers and schools should be granted significant autonomy. This is a statement that needs further investigation through focused interviews. Yet, only 69% disagreed with item 19 that states that schools would benefit by employing operational logic of private corporations.

Ninety-eight percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed to the following statement:

22. *It is important that a culture of responsibility and trust is gradually built within the education system that values teacher and principal professionalism in judging what is best for students.*

Trust is often lacking in a bureaucracy that employs top-down management (Darley, 1998). Intrinsic motivation may also be lacking in such organizations which may negatively impact creativity and morale (see Pink, 2011).

Resources: Of significant interest in this thematic area are the data from the following statement:

24. Merit-based pay for teachers and a loosening of collective bargaining's grip on teacher contracts will make low-achieving schools and districts better.

While little support was generated for schools with high achievement getting more funding (item 26 with only 10% strongly disagreeing or disagreeing), a surprising 65% agreed or strongly agreed to item 24 above. The logic would be as follows: higher funding levels for schools would not increase learning, but increasing payment to specific teachers would. Whereas collective bargaining distributes salaries across various levels and educational achievement of the teachers, merit pay would (more than likely) be based on student test scores. This appears to contradict the respondents' opinions about the validity of standardized tests as measured by item 14 (see below) which was supported by only 18% of the respondents.

14. Standardized tests and externally administered tests are the most important way to measure learning.

The concern may not be with standardized tests to be used to measure a teacher's value rather than a deep concern for the work of teachers unions in the state in which this university is situated; a state whose workforce is highly unionized relative to most other states. According to the 2013 PKD/Gallup poll of the general public, 58% believe test scores should not be used to evaluate teachers (Bushaw & Lopez, 2013). Item 24 will be further examined in the interview phase of this research project.

While there does appear to be a definite majority of faculty members who agree with postmodern statements, the one-third who do not may provide enough friction to be detrimental to the work of the school. Dissent is valued in higher education, but when a significant minority's beliefs run directly counter to the majority, the organization may suffer from those who may wish to undermine progress toward a vision that is not held by all. Senge reminds us that a vision is not simply an idea, but is a "force in people's hearts, a force with impressive power" (1990, p. 206). The vision of P-12 schooling that one holds may dictate the curricula one teaches as, even if teaching from an approved text or set of materials, the instructor has the power to determine what is included, not included, and what is emphasized in these curricula. This vision may also dictate instruction as the style of teaching can indicate one's vision (i.e., student focused or teacher focused), and it may determine assessment, as well. Does the assessment allow for student interpretation or is there one correct answer that is expected and accepted?

Next Steps

The authors are collecting survey data from a mid-sized public university in the Midwest to be compared with these survey data. In addition, follow-up interviews examining the identified items in the Discussion section will be conducted fall 2013. The interview data will be analyzed for themes and compared with the survey data.

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Appendix A

Modern/Post-Modern Teacher Education Contrasts

(modified from Pasi Sahlberg's *Finnish Lessons*)

Modern advocates in theory and/or practice:	Post-Modern advocates in theory and/or practice:
<p>1. Standardizing teaching and learning</p> <p>a. Setting clear, high, and centrally prescribed performance expectations for all schools, teachers, and students to improve the quality and equity of outcomes.</p> <p>b. Standardizing teaching and curriculum in order to have coherence and common criteria for measurement and data.</p>	<p>1. Customizing teaching and learning</p> <p>a. Setting a clear but flexible national framework for school-based curriculum planning.</p> <p>b. Encouraging local and individual solutions to national goals in order to find best ways to create optimal learning and teaching opportunities for all.</p> <p>c. Offering personal learning plans for those who have special educational needs</p>
<p>2. Focus on literacy and numeracy</p> <p>a. Basic knowledge and skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and the natural sciences serve as prime targets of education reform. Normally instruction time of these subjects is increased.</p>	<p>2. Focus on creative learning</p> <p>a. Teaching and learning focus on deep, broad learning, giving equal value to all aspects of the growth of an individual's personality, moral character, creativity, knowledge, and skills.</p>
<p>3. Teaching prescribed curriculum</p> <p>a. Reaching higher standards as a criterion for success and good performances.</p> <p>b. Outcomes of teaching are predictable and prescribed in a common way.</p> <p>c. Results are often judged by standardized tests and externally administered tests.</p>	<p>3. Encouraging risk-taking</p> <p>a. School-based and teacher-owned curricula facilitate finding novel approaches to teaching and learning, and encourage risk-taking and uncertainty in leadership, teaching, and learning.</p>
<p>4. Borrowing market-oriented reform ideas</p> <p>a. Sources of educational change are management administration models brought to schools from the corporate world through legislation or national programs.</p>	<p>4. Learning from the past and owning innovations</p> <p>a. Teaching honors traditional pedagogical values, such as teacher's professional role and relationship with students.</p> <p>b. Main sources of school</p>

<p>b. Such borrowing leads to aligning schools and local education systems to operational logic of private corporations.</p>	<p>improvement are proven good educational practices from the past.</p>
<p>5. Test-based accountability and control</p> <p>a. School performance and raising student achievement are closely tied to processes of promotion, inspection, and ultimately rewarding schools and teachers.</p> <p>b. Winners normally gain fiscal rewards, whereas struggling schools and individuals are punished. Punishment often includes loose employment terms and merit-based pay for teachers.</p>	<p>5. Shared responsibility and trust</p> <p>a. Gradually building a culture of responsibility and trust within the education system that values teacher and principal professionalism in judging what is best for students.</p> <p>b. Targeting resources and support to schools and student who are at risk to fail or to be left behind.</p> <p>c. Sample-based student assessments.</p>

Appendix B

Survey of Schools of Education Faculty Members' Beliefs about Educational Reform and the Work of Teachers

(uses a 4-point scale with 1: strongly agree, 2: agree, 3: disagree, 4: strongly disagree; italicized items are geared toward modern beliefs)

Directions: Select the answer that best expresses your views and beliefs.

1. *Setting clear, high, and centrally prescribed performance expectations for all schools, teachers, and students will lead to improved quality and equity of outcomes.*
2. Encouraging local and individual solutions to national goals is the best way to create optimal learning and teaching opportunities for all.
3. It is important that schools offer personal learning plans for those who have special educational needs.
4. *Standardizing teaching and curriculum in order to have coherence and common criteria for measurement and data will improve education outcomes for all.*

5. Setting a clear but flexible national framework for school-based curriculum planning will lead to improved quality and equity of outcomes.
6. *Basic knowledge and skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and the natural sciences should be the prime targets of education reform.*
7. Teaching and learning should focus on deep, broad learning.
8. Teaching and learning should give equal value to all aspects of the growth of an individual's personality, moral character, creativity, knowledge, and skills.
9. *Instruction time for reading, writing, mathematics, and the natural sciences should be the primary foci of classroom practice.*
10. *Reaching higher standards is an important criterion for success and good performances.*
11. It is important that curricula be school-based and teacher-owned curricula.
12. Curricula should facilitate finding novel approaches to teaching and learning.
13. *Outcomes of teaching are predictable and should be prescribed in a common way.*
14. *Standardized tests and externally administered tests are the most important way to measure learning.*
15. It is important that schools are encouraged to take risks in the areas of leadership, teaching, and learning.
16. *The primary source of educational change should be management models brought to schools from the corporate world.*
17. It is important that teaching honors traditional pedagogical values, such as teacher's professional role and relationship with students.
18. *Business models should be mandated for schools and school districts by legislation and/or national programs.*
19. *It would benefit schools and local education systems to use the operational logic of private corporations.*
20. The main sources of school improvement should be proven, good educational practices from the past as demonstrated by successful teachers.

21. *School performance and raising student achievement should be tied to processes of promotion, inspection, and ultimately rewarding schools and teachers.*
22. It is important that a culture of responsibility and trust is gradually built within the education system that values teacher and principal professionalism in judging what is best for students.
23. Resources and support should be targeted to schools and students who are at risk to fail or to be left behind.
24. *Merit-based pay for teachers and a loosening of collective bargaining's grip on teacher contracts will make low-achieving schools and districts better.*
25. Sample-based student assessments are the best assessments.
26. *Schools and districts that score well in achievement measures should receive fiscal rewards, whereas struggling schools and individuals should not.*