

National Focus on Postmodernism in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The integration of postmodernism in higher education is a widely debated issue. Critics of postmodernism in higher education hold the position that postmodernism breeds an unruliness of knowledge. Academicians in higher education often choose to educate students through means of prescription rather than implementing innovation in classroom delivery and instruction. By placing more emphasis on what is commonplace in the classroom and less focus on what is of interest to the 21st Century adult student, higher education institutions will begin to experience a rapid decline in enrollment. The purpose of this manuscript is to examine challenges in implementing postmodernistic strategies in higher education.

Introduction

It is at best difficult to use conventional means of educating higher education students when we are experiencing "...extraordinary and rapid changes taking place in our society" (Bloland, 2005, p. 122). Edwards and Usher further state that "...institutionalized education at all levels is becoming increasingly more diverse in terms of goals, processes, organizational structures, curricula, and pedagogy" (2000, p. 2). Given this assessment, it is incumbent upon professors of higher education to integrate postmodern strategies in teaching styles to prepare students for a new era.

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to review aspects of postmodernism strategies used in higher education. Understanding the need for innovation in higher education is critical. Modernistic approaches to teaching adult students are practices that should continue, but it should be a widely accepted view among educators to give students what they need to be successful in the global world that is taking shape.

Educational Entrepreneurialism

Research indicates that postmodernism has sparked numerous academic controversies. This intellectual trend is seen by many social theorists as the new wave of educational philosophy. Take for example, the use of the term sustainability in education now as opposed to a decade ago. Sustainability is a term I have heard throughout my professional career. Primarily, this term has been used by educational and non-profit institutions to describe a program's ability to survive in spite of the challenges it faces in implementation. Peter Senge's, *Learning for Sustainability*, offers insight on stabilizing business, education, industry, government, and other institutions for future survival. Each author examines social and environmental perspectives as part of useful concepts to implement in business decision making. Two articles in Senge's book piqued my interest: "Lexicon: Sustainability" and "The Sustainability Engineer." In order to effectively and critically review "The Sustainability Engineer," I chose to use "Lexicon: Sustainability" as the basis for defining sustainability. "Sustainable means capable of continuing indefinitely without depletion or diminished return" (Senge, 2006, p. 44).

"The Sustainability Engineer" chronicles the life of a sustainability manager whose primary job responsibility is "helping to define sustainable management concepts and put them into practice in a large industrial company" (Senge, 2006, p. 68). Having studied social and environmental curricula in graduate school, this manager clearly has the knowledge base to perform optimally at her job. Her interest in international societal and environmental problems took flight in high school, and she became consumed with solving issues of environmental degradation. In her current capacity, the sustainability manager analyzes product efficiency in order to make products more environmentally friendly. She embraces the philosophy that creating a better planet means educating business leaders, co-workers, customers, and the general public on the importance of sustaining our environment.

The fact that there are now collegiate programs that focus on protecting our environment is a testimonial to our nation's growing appreciation for and awareness of sustainability and environmental issues. It is also a testament to the growing acceptance of postmodernism in education. For example, Maharishi University in Fairfield, Iowa, offers a Bachelor of Science degree in Sustainable Living and Environmental Science. Its mission is to "build communities of the future" (Maharishi University, 2006, p.1).

Institutionalizing a change in behavior in order to preserve the future of many nations demonstrates a commitment to help society thrive forever. This is only possible through the development of programs such as the one offered at Maharishi. Emphasis on self-sustainability is at the hub of this program's curriculum. The idea that society is a "network of relationships" encourages the notion that it is important "to give the maximum to others without getting drained or overshadowed by circumstances" (Maharishi University, 2006, p.1). Another topic covered in this curriculum is maintaining perfect health by identifying environmental threats to human physiology and learning how to protect against those threats. Obviously, academia now embraces the importance of teaching students how to be environmentally engaged.

Fenwick W. English (2003) asserts that "...school administrators should think about schools, what they should do in them to improve them, and how children might benefit from their actions" (p. 121). English's position that engaging in traditional bureaucratic procedures and rules could "...pose a threat to a radical departure from current practices" (2003, p. 121).

Organizational Diversity vs. Educational Disparity

Much disparity exists in education as it relates to racial and ethnic groups. The more multicultural our society becomes, the more we need to apply postmodern theory. Schools of higher education have not adequately adapted their structures to compliment race consciousness and appropriately educating the underserved. Underrepresented educational societies, namely Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), lack the exposure necessary to compete with students graduating from majority institutions. This is largely a result of the lack of resources available at minority institutions. A clear example of this exists in the segregation of public funds allocated to the only two HBCUs in the State of Texas compared to other majority institutions in the State.

Concluding Remarks

The decision to seek private funding sources from individuals and corporations comes as the competition for limited educational dollars intensifies, especially when local and state governments are facing shrinking revenues and growing public needs. Consequently, the need for alumni support is at an all-time high. Without external funding, HBCUs and HSIs will be good institutions, but they will not have the quality that is essential for underrepresented students to compete successfully in the global new world that is taking shape. Lack of essential funds in the future will also place limitations on deserving high school graduates. It would be a tragedy for a young man or woman to

work hard for college admission and then not be able to attend because they cannot afford it. The future of these institutions and the leaders of tomorrow will be determined to a large degree by the success of raising funds from the private sector.

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