POSTMODERNISM AND THE *WAYS OF KNOWING THROUGH THE REALMS OF MEANING*: NEW ANSWERS TO LINGERING PROBLEMS

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ABSTRACT
Increasing student achievement and success is the biggest concern of educators across the nation. Educational leaders strive for ways to ensure that all students succeed. In doing that we must develop a strategic plan. The purpose of this article is to discuss the relationship between the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (2007) by Dr. William Kritsonis and *The Postmodern Challenge to the Theory and Practice of Educational Administration* (2003) by Fenwick W. English.

Introduction

Nationwide school communities are faced with the extreme and gut wrenching task of successfully meeting state and federal accountability guidelines. Upon the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act, the onus of reaching these goals lies in the hands of district superintendents, principals, teachers and students. This has put extreme pressure on superintendents and principals to ensure that their students perform at an exemplary level.

An educator's main goal shall be to provide students with the best education possible, while providing them with the skills needed to be successful in their future endeavors. In an effort to achieve students' success and reach state and federal accountability standards, it is imperative that educators have a detailed plan to achieve these goals. To assume that these goals may be reached without Postmodernistic forethought and planning would prove to be catastrophic to the entire school community. Thus, it is the obligation of educational leaders to implement a "Postmodern" organizational plan that will assist in the success of our schools and, most of all, the success of our students.

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to express the significance of postmodernism using the six realms of meaning found in the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (2007) by Dr. William A. Kritsonis. Upon reading *The Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning*, it becomes apparent that each of the Realms explained in this text may be applied to each postmodern educational entity. Postmodernism will provide students with an educational experience comprised of strong academic skills, effective teachers and opportunities for growth.

Symbolics in Instructional Management

The postmodern principal of an effective school serves as an exceptional educational leader, who is a highly valuable and consistent communicator with parents, students, and staff. The ability for a principal to articulate well with each stakeholder is imperative for the overall success of the school. This type of postmodern leadership ability allows principals to develop relationships with students, parents, and staff in nontraditional ways, which Blankstein asserts by stating that "Relationships are at the core of successful learning communities (2004). This postmodern notion unites the knower and the known, abolishes objectivity and

subjectivity, and erases the line between fact and fiction leaders and followers (English, 2003).

"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). As stated in *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (Kritsonis, 2007), there is an ordinary language that is utilized in communications among with people. This form of language is "the forms of discourse employed in everyday speech and writing" (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 111). It is clear and concise, which allows others to have a lucid understanding of what is ex-

pected of them or what they should take away from any conversations you may have. The use of ordinary language by educational leaders' would assist in developing a clear line of communication. Communication between all stakeholders that is unambiguous and distinct is imperative to the success of the school.

Principals also provide opportunities for others to share in leadership roles in that the principal and staff must work collaboratively to articulate and stress the importance of learning, establishing high expectations for students, teachers, and principals (California Center). Likewise, English validates such communication by asserting that "Such leadership [transformation] occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and mortality" (2003, p. 42). With educators under extreme scrutiny and higher accountability standards, the determination that every child will succeed could be a postmodern thought because while we recognize the enormity of this task, we also know it can be accomplished. There is not one person (Principal) who can handle this job alone. Thus, it is important for instructional leaders to develop postmodern leaders within their school. Developing these leaders will be beneficial to the success of the entire school community. One thing that superior school administrators have in common is that they "trust and have confidence in both the capabilities and the motivation of subordinates and believe that they want to accept responsibility and work hard" (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 152). Blankstein concurs with this idea in stating that when you invest power in other people; it inevitably comes back to you (2004).

Empirics in School Organizational Moral

Bardwick's question, "What is the business of our business?" (as cited in Blankstein, 2004, pg. 65). It is an important question that should be asked by any postmodern institution before addressing students' needs. Having a clear and focused mission is vital to student success. Without such a mission, one cannot know which direction to go to address the entire school community and its stakeholders. English supports the importance of this business by stating that by "Moving into a postmodern view of theories of educational administration, the dominant scientific modality has to be decentered, pushed aside" (2003, p. 140). The concept that "Mission and purpose give guidance to what people work toward on a daily and weekly basis" (Deal & Peterson, 1996, p. 12) serves to promote the notion of establishing a focus for all stakeholders.

The strategic plan must have a postmodern school mission that is clearly stated. It shall include postmodern campus level goals, expectations and standards. It

is important to have the school's mission clearly stated, but we must also ensure that others are knowledgeable and understand the postmodern mission.

"The second realm empirics, includes the sciences of the physical world, of living things, and of man" (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 12). By implementing this postmodern realm, educational leaders will ensure that they provide each stakeholder with the information necessary for the implementation of their postmodern goals and mission. Kritsonis further states that "The essence of physical science is the discovery and formulation of general patterns among quantities derived from the process of physical measurement" (p. 178). In establishing a clear and focused mission it is important that what is determined to be necessary must be measurable. To have a goal that can

not be measured would be irrelevant and unnecessary. Blankstein's (2004) idea that effective missions are measurable and define learning coincides with Kritsonis' statement that "Precise calculations depend on precise data" (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 188). The ability to measure a school's success and its mission depends on concise data; otherwise, your school and the success of your students will be catastrophically affected.

Ethics in Safe School Environment

In recent decades we have noticed an increase in the amount of instances of school violence: "Since the 1992-1993 school year, 270 violent deaths have occurred in schools within the nation. However the number of deaths in 1999-2000 was almost one quarter the number that occurred in 1992-1993 (Kelly, 2009). School violence has moved from just a couple of kids having a fist fight on the playground to one or more students armed with weapons killing teachers and fellow students. This has caused extreme concern and caution among school personnel. Educational leaders across the country are participating in postmodern mock drills, bus evacuation, and shelter in place, in an effort to prepare students and staff in the event that there is a threat on the school. Although it is important to have such drills, it is even more important to provide students with the skills needed to prevent possible violence. Educational leaders should be advocates for programs that implement Character Education or Conflict Resolution strategies. Skills developed through these programs provide students with the tools needed to handle conflict with the absence of violence. This type of strategic plan works because, according to Kanigel (1997) "The concept of *best practice*, which is the equivalent of Taylor's *one best way*, are both derived from empirical work of the match between methods and means and determined not by teachers (workers) but by experts (researchers)" (as cited in English, 2003, p. 65).

According to Kritsonis (2007), "The fifth realm, ethics, includes moral meanings that express obligation rather than fact, perceptual form, or awareness of relation" (p. 452). To implement programs such as Character Education and Conflict Resolution alone would not assist in the success of a schools safety. We must address the moral and ethical issues of our students. We must teach them to be empathetic and caring of others, as Kritsonis further states in saying that students must be able to relate with others and with oneself in acceptance and love, to act with deliberate responsibility, and to coordinate these meanings into an integrated vision and commitment (2007).

It is imperative that educational leaders of effective schools create a postmodern safe and orderly environment. It is not a surprise that students who are in

a safe and conducive environment will be more successful both academically and socially. Incorporating each of these will in turn provide the type of school culture necessary for academic success.

Synoptics in Student Management

Many educators scream with conviction that "every child can learn" when among their educational counterparts. Do they, however, really believe that every child can learn? Do they have these same convictions when in their own home,

community, or classroom? Do they exhibit the mentality that every child can learn among their students, despite their diverse backgrounds whether low socio-economic, cultural or linguistically?

It is important as instructional leaders for us to ensure that students and staff members alike understand that their past circumstances do not have to dictate their future, which Kritsonis further supports in asserting that "The appropriate mode of discourse for history is the past tense" (2007, p. 41). Yes, every child can learn, and will learn under postmodern leadership.

"The sixth realm, synoptics, refers to meanings that are comprehensively integrative. This realm includes history, religion, and philosophy" (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 484). The postmodern strategic plan will exhibit a climate of expectation in which the staff believes and demonstrates that all students can attain mastery of essential academic skills. This is a postmodern philosophy among effective schools.

The school climate will also be affected by the way administrators carry out their postmodern administrative duties. According to Kritsonis, "a primary role of school principals is to be a child advocate, manager, instructional leader, disciplinarian, human relations facilitator, educator, conflict manager, collective bargaining agent, staff developer, change agent or innovator, and community relations liaison" (Kritsonis, 2002, p. 252). To maintain a postmodern environment and climate that is conducive to learning, principals must not dismiss the importance of each of these roles. To neglect one of these primary roles will have a catastrophic affect on the school climate and effectiveness of the school.

In a postmodern school, you must continuously monitor students' progress by utilizing different methods of assessment. The school's ability to make improvement plans is directly tied to the quality of its data. Without clear, quantifiable information, leaders will find it very difficult to create focused improvement plans (Blankstein, 2004). Blankstein further asserts that the value of any instructional practice should be judged according to its results.

Although standardized tests and other state level assessments (summative) are beneficial, in a postmodern school it shall not be the only method of assessment utilized with the monitoring of student progress. Educational leaders must establish a current (postmodern) way of assessing student progress. "This postmodern notion unites the knower and the known, abolishes objectivity and subjectivity, and erases the line between fact and fiction, leaders and followers" (English, 2003, p. 130). It is important for administrators to know that frequent monitoring of their students goes beyond the collection of data. They must disaggregate that data and make observations collectively with staff. Based upon this collection and disaggregation of the data, they will use the date to target intervention and prevention strategies for the needs of their school (Blankstein, 2004). Educational leaders must utilize the data

that is collected; to allow it to sit on a shelf and collect dust will not assist in the success of a postmodern school.

The collection of such data will provide educational leaders with clear and concise data on where their students are, where they are, and where they are going. "Each event begins, proceeds toward its end, and is completed" (Kritsonis, 2002, p. 257). English (2003) concurs with this point by affirming that "In the act of creating accountability for results, it becomes important to focus on data that will be used to enable accountability to become a reality. One facet of accountability is the capability of tacking results (as indicated in data trends) to those who manage (make decisions about the work) to those who do the work" (p. 165). This information is essential to

the development, continuance, or termination of programs or strategies that are used within a school.

Esthetics in Positive Community Relations

"The third realm, esthetics, 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 perceptions of particular significant things as unique objectifications of ideated subjectivities" (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 275). Esthetics is based on one's senses or feelings, which makes having a positive community relationship a postmodern essential to student success. "Postmodernity does expand the idea of leadership to broader perspective than has usually been the case. But English suspect that it will be stoutly resisted as "irrational" or "subjective" (English, 2003, p.26).

Principals who have established Postmodern Relations will endure the benefits of such a partnership. They will notice and increase in student achievement and motivation and thus academic success. In an effective postmodern school, parents are provided with a clear understanding of the school's mission and are provided with a strategic plan to support the mission.

The age old proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child", plays an intricate part in the education of our students. The education of our students is a shared responsibility and should be treated as such. Educators must not view children as simply students. If educators view children in this way, "they are likely to see the family as separate from the school. That is, the family is expected to do its job and leave the education of children to the schools. If educators view students as children, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners…" (Epstein, 2009, p. 20). To establish this partnership would be to honor and acknowledge that we share common interests and goals.

Synnoetics in Organizational Improvement

In a highly effective school, postmodern teachers allocate an ample amount of time to relevant instruction. This allows students to have an increase in their opportunities for learning because relevance make rigor possible for most.

Although direct instruction plays an essential role in the success of student learning experience, students' motivation to complete the task assigned is as important. Those who have taught know and understand that keeping a child motivated is not always an easy task. With an increase in environmental issues such as poverty, abuse, and domestic violence (to name a few) violating the lives of many

of our youth, it is of no surprise that they are not always motivated. It is our duty and obligation as educators, however, to ensure that we make every attempt to increase students' motivation.

It is in the fourth realm that engagement is required. "The fourth realm, synnoetics, embraces what Michael Polanyi calls " 'personal knowledge' " and Martin Buber the " 'I-Thou' " relation" (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 394).

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, in an effort to increase student achievement and effectiveness of schools, the utilization of the six realms in relation with postmodern thinking will provide a framework that will assist in the achievement of those goals. Remarkably, the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (Kritsonis, 2007) may be applied to any aspect of education.

It is the obligation of each educational leader to provide students with the tools needed to succeed; this may not be done on a whim. We must plan to reach our goals, thus we must have a postmodern strategic plan. Blankstein states,

> The research is abundantly clear: Nothing motivates a child more than when learning is valued by schools and family/community working together in partnership…These forms of involvement does not happen by accident or even by invitation. They happen by explicit strategic intervention. (2004, p.167)

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