

Chapter 6

Using Postmodernism to Effectively Teach in Diverse Settings

Rollin D. Nordgren
Piedmont College, USA

ABSTRACT

The challenges brought to classrooms are often exacerbated by a mismatch between teachers' cultural backgrounds and those of their students. This incongruity can be overcome through the use of culturally responsive teaching practices and the integration of culturally relevant curriculum. This chapter suggests the adoption of a postmodern mindset can also aid teachers in meeting the needs of all their students, particularly those with differing life experiences from their own. The author uses a postmodern framework for education that is adopted from Finland and aligns this with the tenets of culturally responsive teaching and also suggests the framework's alignment to culturally relevant curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

Many teachers in today's schools are challenged by a growing diversity in their classrooms, but these can be effectively vanquished, and even turned into ways to further their practice, if they use the correct strategies and mindsets. These challenges can be summarized by an *incongruity in beliefs, values, and behaviors* as the backgrounds of most teachers do not reflect those of the students they serve (Nieto & Bode, 2016). This chapter intends to show how the commonly misunderstood concept of postmodernism can help teachers address the challenges

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-1177-0.ch006

that diversity may bring to their work. Postmodernism is, in its original intent, meant to contextualize (Foucault, 1980; Lyotard, 1984), not hyper-individualize as it is so-often misrepresented today (Boboc & Nordgren, 2014; Slattery, 2013). Contextualization is a crucial aspect in teaching, especially in an environment where there is a mismatch between the teacher's and students' backgrounds (Tomlinson, 2017), allowing the teacher to better understand how to best serve her students while still fostering a collective and collaborative classroom culture (Kincheloe, 1993). The postmodern framework shown in this chapter was established by Boboc and Nordgren (2014) based on the works of 19th and 20th century scholars in both education and philosophy and, specifically, to Sahlberg's (2012) work from Finland. This framework will be shown to effectually align with the tenets of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) as established by Murrell (2002) and Gay (2012). The chapter ends with a brief section on how to align postmodernism and CRT to the content through the introduction of the concept of Culturally Relevant Curriculum.

Modernism in the Schools

When trying to make sense of their practice, particularly when addressing cultural incongruencies, teachers may wonder why their schools and, by extension, their classrooms are structured as they are—especially when teachers are frustrated by the challenges of diversity (Nieto & Bode, 2016; Nordgren, 2015). The typical school structure dates back over a century to when teaching *en masse* was deemed necessary to serve the growing number of students reaching the schools due to an increase in child labor laws and mass immigration (Spring, 2016). The structuring reflected those used in response to changing, and soon to be hegemonic, economic system (Tienken & Orlich, 2013); that is, the Industrial Age, a time that brought massification of many institutions from workplaces to schools (Northouse, 2016). Many agree this structure is not effective in meeting the needs of today's society, one that consists of a diverse population (e.g., McGee-Banks, 2016; Zhao, 2018).

As a reaction to the Industrial Age, commencing in Great Britain late in the 18th century and in the U.S. in the early 19th, philosophers and social critics recognized a dehumanization of the workplace (Foucault, 1980; Lyotard, 1984). Most notably, these included Marx and Engels but also more mainstream scholars including John Dewey (1916; 1938) who warned against treating people like cogs in a machine, a critique shared by many others (e.g., Goodlad, 2004; Morgan, 2005; Slattery, 2013; Zhao, 2018). The crux of their critiques was the loss of individual worth, that workers and, by extension, all of society were becoming mechanized, valued merely as widgets laboring within human-eating machines. A vivid example of this is provided by Charlie Chaplin in his Depression-era film *Modern Times* (Paramount Pictures, 1936) where the Little Tramp character is frantically adjusting nuts on some

17 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/using-postmodernism-to-effectively-teach-in-diverse-settings/242188

Related Content

Theorizing My Journey as a Latina Teacher and Scholar

Sanjuana Carrillo Rodriguez (2022). *Teacher Reflections on Transitioning From K-12 to Higher Education Classrooms* (pp. 46-57).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/theorizing-my-journey-as-a-latina-teacher-and-scholar/301940

Reflections of an Academic Father: A Dialogic Approach to Balancing Identity

Trevor Thomas Stewart (2022). *Teacher Reflections on Transitioning From K-12 to Higher Education Classrooms* (pp. 1-14).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/reflections-of-an-academic-father/301942

The Nature of Success in Doctoral Education: The Roles of the Student, the Advisor, and Goals

Preston B. Cosgrove (2022). *Research Anthology on Doctoral Student Professional Development* (pp. 1-15).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-nature-of-success-in-doctoral-education/300697

Supporting Learning Design as a Driver for Pedagogical Innovation Within an Integrated Model of Faculty Development

Maria Ranieri, Juliana Elisa Raffaghelliand Isabella Bruni (2019). *Handbook of Research on Faculty Development for Digital Teaching and Learning* (pp. 77-98).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/supporting-learning-design-as-a-driver-for-pedagogical-innovation-within-an-integrated-model-of-faculty-development/228366

The Turkish Academic Labor Market as an Ecosystem

Yehuda Baruchand Tuncer Fidan (2019). *Vocational Identity and Career Construction in Education* (pp. 37-57).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-turkish-academic-labor-market-as-an-ecosystem/219382