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According to Leicester, “postmodernism is not a systematic theory or unified movement so much as a loose umbrella term for a perspective” incorporating reactions against “the sovereignty of science, the dominance of western traditions and the assumption of epistemological progress.” Define postmodernism and then analyze how the movement influenced the overall development of adult education. Evaluate the relationship between postmodernism and the adult education movement and delineate the central theories relevant to this movement theoretical core.

Introduction

Higher education is now in a period of great transition from the known image and presence of Ivy tower institutions to large corporate institutions like the University of Phoenix and DeVry University; from traditional delivery methods of learning to online learning and accelerated learning. A number of theorists and scholars have written and proclaimed that we now live in a postmodern world- a world better explained by theories and concepts different from those of the modern world dating from the Enlightenment and before (Linn, 1996; Milner, Thomson & Worth, 1990). The theories and concepts of postmodernism are widely applied in adult education. The Adult education movement is one that is constantly moving from traditional ideas of education where the teacher is the bearer of knowledge and the students are subjects. My experience as a student and educator is directly related to that idea of alternative delivery methods, forms of discovery, and self improvement. These ideas are part of a larger educational movement which is part of a larger philosophical movement of postmodernism. In recent years, philosophers of education have been paying a great deal of attention to trends within postmodernism in relation to our research and practice. The theories of postmodernism such as the role of learning, the relationship between the teacher and learner, and the discovery of knowledge are widely applied in adult education. Postmodernism is more

than a philosophical movement it is a cultural phenomenon covering almost every aspect of our society from art to architecture to dance, literature, etc. Since the concept covers so many aspects of human life and nature it would be impossible to give a comprehensive definition covering all the perspectives of the term in this written effort. Rather, this paper will offer a basic definition of postmodernism in relation to adult education and then analyze how the movement influenced the overall development of adult education. Second, an evaluation of the relationship between postmodernism and the adult education movement offer as a way of delineating the central theories relevant to this movement theoretical core.

Postmodernism and adult defined

Volumes and volumes have been published on the concept of postmodernism and most agree that it's a challenge to come up with concrete definition. I will not try to provide a complete definition of postmodernism, since the theory is an open one that not even its advocates can agree upon how to define it. Instead, I will concentrate on the aspect of the theory that relates to education, particularly adult education. This aspect is stated most clearly by Grenz (1995):

“Postmodernism affirms that whatever we accept as truth and even the way we envision truth are dependent on the community in which we participate . . . There is no absolute truth: rather truth is relative to the community in which we participate” (p. 8).

Postmodernism is a complicated term, or set of ideas, one that has only emerged as an area of academic study since the mid-1980s (Welton, 1995). Postmodernism is hard

to define, because it is a concept that appears in a wide variety of disciplines or areas of study, including art, architecture, music, film, literature, sociology, communications, fashion, and technology. It's hard to locate it temporally or historically, because it's not clear exactly when postmodernism begins. McLearn (1991) states that, "the term postmodernism is a slippery event and its referents are saturated with overlapping significance" (p. 13). Shapiro in his discussion of the term and popularity in our culture suggests that the term is incoherent:

"A postmodern vocabulary and consciousness seems to be insinuating itself into popular as well as intellectual discourse. It must, however, be also said that delineating and defining the meaning of postmodernism is no easy task. Its meaning is at best elusive and, at worst, utterly incoherent" (p. 112).

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) look postmodernism by comparing it to modernism. According to Merriam and Caffarella (1999), "[u]nlike the modern world, which is characterized by the scientific, industrial, and social programs, institutions, and actions, an artifacts generated by the humanistic and enlightenment search for the universal foundations of truth, morality, and aesthetics . . . in the post modernism era, things are much more diverse, fluid, illusionary, and contested, including the reality of the world itself," (p. 356). Grassie (1997) argues that postmodernism and deconstruction (postmodernism philosophic cousin) are celebrated as the end of philosophical self-delusion, a critical attack on all oppressive meta-narratives, and the final dissolution of foundational thought. Lodge (1996) identifies five basic postmodern characteristics: Contradiction, discontinuity, randomness, excess, and short circuit-- characteristics that are probably the antithesis of a well-thought-out traditional instructional design system. The attributes of contradiction, discontinuity, and

deconstruction are common in most of the definitions of postmodernism as it relates to educational theory and practice (Hemphell, 2001). Smith and Webster (1997) talks about the postmodern condition by suggesting that:

“The postmodern condition has split one big game of modern times into many little and poorly co-ordinated games, played havoc with the rules of all the games, and shortened sharply the lifespan of any set of rules. Beyond all this slicing and splicing one can sense the crumbling of time, no more continuous, cumulative and directional as it seemed a hundred years ago” (p. 24).

Leicester (2000) relates that "postmodernism is not a systematic theory or unified movement so much as a loose umbrella term for a perspective" incorporating reactions against "the sovereignty of science, the dominance of 'western traditions' and the assumption of epistemological progress" (p. 73). However, some key features "overlap and criss-cross, appear and disappear in discussions about 'postmodernism' (p. 74):

1. Plurality of perspectives. Multiple perspectives, accounts, and theories are respected. Eclectic thinking, drawing on and synthesizing multiple cultural traditions is encouraged.
2. Anti-essentialism: A text (be it an individual word, a message, a concept, or any significant structure) has no inherent, essential meaning--no "one thing in common that makes us use the same word and which would give us the essence of the concept" (Leicester, 2000, p. 74); rather, it is open to multiple interpretations.
3. Anti-foundationalism: Truth and knowledge of it are not based on a fixed foundation of objective reality. Instead, truths are located in specific socio-cultural contexts, outside of which no vantage point exists.

4. Anti-scientism: In particular, science is rejected as a foundation; the positivist assumptions that science is uniquely objective and value neutral are considered a language game.
5. End of metaphysics and ideology: Anti-foundationalism represents the end of metaphysics; if there are no fixed foundations of objective reality for truth and knowledge, there is no longer a concern with the fundamental nature of reality and with the limits and validity of our knowledge about it. Likewise, ideology is at an end--no more "grand narratives" to legitimate and provide a correct interpretation of a wide range of events.

In recent years, according to Rikowski (1999) "postmodernism has assumed an educational form – as educational theory, post-modernized modes of reflective teacher practice, postmodern educational research methods and so on (p. 63)" Adult education as a movement represents a grouping of people borne of discontent and adjustment . . . "it originates in some in some form of dissatisfaction and grows as consciousness of dissatisfaction become general." (Briton, 1996, p. 106). Postmodernism in education is a paradigm that challenges how we learn and appreciate knowledge in our lives. It questions the idea of a universal, unchanging, unified self or subject which has full knowledge of and control over what it thinks, says, and does. It has shown that the self is strongly influenced by its surrounding culture, changes with that culture, and is fragmented like that culture. To a degree, it is not we who think, speak, and act but the culture which thinks, speaks, and acts through us.

Postmodernist insights require a major shift in our conception of inquiry. No longer should we see ourselves as seeking to uncover a pre-existing reality; rather, we are involved in an interactive process of knowledge creation. We are developing a working understanding of reality and life, one which suits our purposes. And because purposes and context vary from individual to individual and from group to group, what we arrive at is in part autobiographical; it reflects our personal narrative, our particular site in the world.

Postmodernists have often attacked notions of reason, means-end thinking, theory, and teaching. But in fact there is a place for them. To appreciate the postmodern perspective we must employ reason as well as feelings, intuitions, direct social influence, and so forth. Further, we must think in means-end terms to some extent if we are to know what we want in life and how to achieve it. Theory, understood as a loose interconnection of qualified generalizations, is crucial for daily living. Teaching, so long as it is largely dialogical, is both possible and necessary. All of these can cause problems if they are understood too strictly and taken too seriously; but without them we would quite literally be lost.

The meaning of postmodernism is elusive because the nature of its central characteristics resists definition (Giroux, 1991; Kohli, 1991; Linn, 1996). However, within the body of literature on postmodernism and education, there appears to be some agreement on postmodernism's central features; it valorizes heterogeneity; difference, plurality and fragmentary (Giroux, 1991; Kohli, 1991; Shaprio, 1991). Postmodernism is unified in its critique of the Enlightenment's position such as totality, universality, unity,

representation and objective concepts of knowledge and truth, and any concept of self or subjectivity (Giroux, 1991; Kohli, 1991).

In order to appreciate the relationship of adult education in the postmodern era we must look at the theoretical implications of postmodernism and emancipatory adult education. Further we must look at the characteristics of the modern society as a way to understand the deconstruction approach that the postmodernism paradigm takes against it. Table 1 gives a summarization of educational attributes as it relates to the postmodernism paradigm:

Table 1: Characteristics of postmodernism

Truth	Questioning of all claims to absolute, universal truth
Confidence of traditional educational institutions	Loss of confidence in progress, rationality, science, and objective reality
Knowledge	Knowledge is contingent, contextual, and linked to power
Identify	Identity is fluid, changeable, and derived from multiple discourses
Power	Power is a process that enables or restricts, promotes or discourages forms of practice or thought.

Initially it is essential to situate emancipatory adult education within the field of adult education. Adult education is characterized by a plethora of theories, purposes, and programs. Rather than having a dominant philosophy that serves as a foundation for the field, adult education is marked by a wide variety of philosophical approaches, each of which is integrally connected to the various aims and objectives associated with adult education. Emancipatory adult education has a radical, political, and anti-thesis emphasis.

In this context, emancipation represents the overcoming of and separation from an un-free situation to one in which human beings can, as Freire (1970) put it, achieve their “ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human” (p. 65).

Emancipation is the movement from an oppressive and exploitative context to one in which human potential can be more fully realized. Freire’s emancipatory theory of literacy and his transformative pedagogy are built on an empowerment model that does not make distinctions between students based on gender and/or ethnicity. Paulo Freire's philosophy is fundamental because the process of learning he advocates takes into account students' experiences with the world, as well as emphasising the process of learning-teaching as a social and political activity. The role language plays within the construction of people's lives is an especially urgent topic for Freire. Within the teaching-learning process, students and teachers need to perceive that language is more than simply a vehicle of communication within society. The sense that language serves to shape, oppress, help, destroy, deform, construct, teach, and so forth is fundamental. Therefore, the main contribution of Freire's work within the development of "Critical Pedagogy in Classrooms" consists in the idea that to become literate is not a process that occurs in isolation from social struggles. Teachers of rural areas realize, despite their condition of isolation, that they cannot stop struggling toward their own emancipation. McLaren (1994) remarks that:

“for Freire, speech and language always exist within a social context which, in turn, becomes the critical referent for the transformative possibilities of his work. This social context-which exists for Freire both in and between language and the social order-

comprises the social relations obtaining among the material conditions of oppression, the exigencies of daily life, critical consciousness, and social transformation.” (p. 119).

Freire's understanding that students have the right to acquire hegemonic knowledge, since this knowledge represents an instrument of their own emancipation toward a re-creation of the world, is highly relevant within a critical approach to teaching. On the other hand, as Freire points out, teachers cannot deny students' own ways of using language, because these differences constitute their rights of being and becoming. Teachers cannot stigmatize students' language, keeping that language as a mark of their incapacity. According to Freire, students need to understand that their language is not inferior. Once they have access to the hegemonic knowledge/language, however, they can attain the necessary instruments by which to transform and re-invent the world. For this reason, my attention is turned to working with teachers toward a more meaningful way of teaching language without considering grammatical rules and nomenclatures as central aspects of written text production. This is a major idea behind the mission of [Boricua College](#), the first post-secondary educational institution in the United States specifically designed to meet the educational needs of Puerto Ricans and other Spanish-speaking people. It was the belief the founding that a college serving Puerto Ricans and other Latinos must not only employ a bilingual faculty and staff and offer courses in Puerto Rican and Latino culture and history, but must employ in all its activities, an educational philosophy and method consistent with the basic principles of Latino Culture. During my tenure at the college I was encouraged to facilitate values of culture, community, and empowerment to my students. This approach of empowerment in education and culture

went against the hegemonic nature of knowledge and value system of traditional education and further supports the basic tenets of postmodernistic beliefs. This is the basis of much criticism, yet it is a clear example of how postmodern ideas are incorporated into the purpose of education.

Postmodernism is a anthesis of modernism and one that plays an important part in our understanding of knowledge, learning, power in the learning relationship (process), and the parts learners play in the educational process. Table 2 contrasts the differences between modern and postmodernism and how the attributes of postmodernism is critical of our traditional ideas of education.

Table 2: Differences between modern and postmodern thought

Contrast of Modern and Postmodern Thinking		
	Modern	Postmodern
Reasoning	From foundation upwards	Multiple factors of multiple levels of reasoning. Web-oriented.
Science	Universal Optimism	Realism of Limitations
Part/Whole	Parts compromise the whole	The whole is more than the parts
God	Acts by violating "natural" laws" or by "immanence" in everything that is	Top-Down causation
Language	Referential	Meaning in social context through usage

Source: <http://private.fuller.edu/~clameter/phd/postmodern.html>

Postmodern knowing and discovery

Critical in understanding postmodern learning is constructivism. Constructivism is a philosophy of learning founded on the premise that, by reflecting on our experiences, we construct our own understanding of the world we live in. Each of us generates our own "rules" and "mental models," which we use to make sense of our experiences. Learning, therefore, is simply the process of adjusting our mental models to accommodate new experiences. Constructivism looks at the following reconfigurations in the way we think we know: Reconfiguration 1- No grand truth or knowledge; Reconfiguration 2 - Knowledge is multifaceted; Reconfiguration 3 - Relocation of authority; and Reconfiguration 4 - Knowledge and power

The first major reconfiguration of knowledge is that there is no longer anything grand or universal to know and that the teacher's authority to know only exists within an authority-granting institution and by will of the members who play by its rules. Postmodernists believe that one's knowledge is lodged in social relations and shaped by discursive formations. According to Lather (1988) "what we know is but a partial and incomplete representation of a more complex reality" (p. 576). This is because all knowledge is partial; it is framed through one's social location, one's life experience, history, and culture (Rockhill, 1991). The partial nature of knowledge means that educators must be wary of universal theories and representational claims that purport that there is a truth to be represented.

The second configuration of knowing is the recognition that knowledge is multifaceted (Bagnall, 1999). According to Kilgore (1990) “we must reconcile ourselves to the idea that the teacher knows everything; in fact, the teacher knows practically nothing in comparison with the many things that might be known” (p. 47).

Postmodernism pedagogy acknowledges that many interpretations of a text (knowledge) is possible and further encourage the differing forms of language and thought adult learners may bring to the classroom based on their vast experiences.

Many institutions are now looking at student learning and academic research beyond the traditional frameworks. In his work Scholarship revisited, Boyer (1990) encourage educators to consider a range of activities in their definition of scholarship. Boyer’s definition of scholarship includes four overlapping activities:

- 1) Discovery (The investigative process) refers to our traditional definition of scholar ship. For most of us, this would be our “research”.
- 2) Integration (The Synthesis process) referring to making connections across disciplines, placing these in context and illuminating the data in a new manner. Integration seeks to interpret, draw together, and bring new insight to bear on original research.
- 3) Application (The Engagement process) referring to process of applying knowledge to consequential problems helping individuals as well as institutions. Application is really one aspect of what we mean by “Service”, particularly as it is evaluated for promotion and tenure decisions.

- 4) Teaching (The teaching process) defined as scholarship, teaching can be thought of as educating and enticing future scholars. Really encompasses or includes the other three and therefore is sometimes argued to be the highest form of Scholarship.

Boyer's thesis is that at different times in our academic lives it may be more appropriate to pursue one scholarship rather than another, but they are not separate, they overlap and draw on each other and each is necessary to the well-being and development of the whole. In a traditional setting knowledge is associated with research that often excludes the importance of teaching as a way of creating and gathering knowledge. Boyer's approach to scholarship opens up important dialogue on other ways of understanding. Boyer argues that we should let go the tired old research vs teaching argument and focus on the idea that scholarship exists in all aspects of our academic work. Boyer's work is a critical example that illustrates the multifaceted nature of knowledge and scholarship in a postmodern world.

The third reconfiguration is the relocation of where we think meaning authority lies. According to Bruffee (1999), the foundational understanding of knowledge assumes that knowledge is made up of stable, relatively static structures that exist in correspondence to a relatively stable and static world. When knowledge develops, it develops by a process of accretion whereby new structures are added on top of the old. This view assumes that there is always a stable base or foundation on which to build. From this perspective, education is seen as a process of transferring knowledge from the mind of the professor to the mind of the student. Students, in this model, are the passive recipients of knowledge 'delivered' by the educational system. Freire (1970) calls this the

"banking model" of education, since the student is expected to store up knowledge in his or her mind in much the same way that savings accumulate in a bank account. The foundational conventions that govern traditional college and university classrooms assume . . . that the authority of teachers lies in their function as curators of acknowledged touchstones of value and truth above and beyond themselves, such as treasured artifacts of art, literature, science, mathematics, and the universals of sound reasoning. The authority of college and university teachers from this point of view rests on the understanding that knowledge is a kind of substance contained in and given form by the vessel we call the mind. Teachers transfer knowledge from their own fuller vessels to the less full vessels of their students. Teachers impart knowledge that was imparted to them, as it was imparted to them. (Bruffee, 1993, p. 66). The non-foundational understanding of knowledge, on the other hand, focuses on the process rather than the content. Since the content of knowledge is only created and validated by the social process of knowing, there is no static 'truth' that is independent of the dynamic process that creates it. The creation and justification of knowledge is always 'in process,' so there is no unquestionable 'place to stand;' there are only places that have not yet been questioned. Therefore, there is no incontrovertible foundation for either knowledge or education.

The final reconfiguration involves the relationship between knowledge and power. In the postmodernists perspective, "no one individual or group holds power over another; power is ever present in the relations among them" (Kilgore, 1990, p. 48). The adult education classroom is situated within an institution with normative rules of behavior; but teachers (facilitators) and learners activity establish, maintain and reinforce,

and break these rules (Kilgore, 1990). Knowledge itself is the exercise of power (Kilgore, 1990; Martin, 1998). To know is to produce meaning, and the production of meaning is the production of power.

Postmodernism is a deconstruction of ideas which are traditional and otherwise restricted. According to Kilgore (1990), “in moving toward a postmodern pedagogy, we must bring into clarity the ideological context of the adult education classroom by questioning, critiquing and sometimes even rejecting the social positions of teacher and student” (p. 51). A postmodern pedagogy would include the recognition that adult education is a situated, collective learning process with difference at its core. Important for adult learning is the postmodern notion of self. Under postmodern conditions, learners exist in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction. . .”each reality of the self gives way to reflexive questioning, irony, and ultimately the playful probing of yet another reality” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 356). Because of this teachers, are to serve as facilitators and:

- 1) Involve adult learners in sharing and critiquing their life experiences in the classroom. By combining theory and practice, instructors can provide meaningful learning experiences for adults through the use of constructivist learning strategies that integrate their previous knowledge and experience with new information (Kasworm &Blowers 1994).
- 2) Be sensitive to individual differences. Adult students want instructors who understand their special concerns and who can address differences related to learning styles and cultural and racial background. Instructors need to understand differences based on race and culture, but they should not

generalize this information by neglecting to recognize students as individuals. To prepare faculty and staff for working with adult learners, institutions should provide professional development opportunities on diversity and equity (Ross-Gordon and Brown-Haywood 2000). Such programs should address issues related to power and its manifestations in the classroom, particularly as experienced by people of color and women.

3) Adopt curriculum that is inclusive and culturally relevant. Curriculum should include materials and examples that are relevant to adults and to different cultural groups. The historical and cultural experiences of all groups of learners should be reflected in materials used in the classroom.

4) Use instructional strategies that enable adults to form relationships. Instructional strategies that enable adult students to form relationships with other learners are especially valued. Because the classroom is the focal point for the collegiate experiences of many adult students, instructors can foster the development of peer connections through the use of small groups, discussion, and other strategies (Donaldson et al. 2000). Peer work should be monitored to avoid exclusion based on race and/or gender (Aiken, Cervero, & Johnson-Bailey 2001).

Challenge to traditional ideas and institutions

Higher education is faced with a dynamic tension caused by the restraining forces of decades of tradition being confronted by the driving forces of rapid change. Current trends of change seem to be probing the very core of who does what work in higher

education, what that work is and how it is rewarded, how and when that work is accomplished, and where it happens. Different campus environments certainly experience a different emphasis (e.g., community colleges have used many ongoing part-time faculty for years while this practice is newly expanding at research universities). The traditional collegiate ideas of Ivy towers, professors publishing for tenure, and students living, working and taking courses according to a structure formula is now at odds with a new type of learning community where the student is directing learning needs. This changing trend in the nature of work in higher education include is forcing higher educational institutions to change in the following ways: moving toward a more adaptable work force, the adult learner dynamic, and the creation of alternative learning methods and schools.

Higher education is moving toward a more adaptable work force: The rapid pace of change, the expansion of knowledge, and the increasing demands for technological competence create a press for enhanced work force adaptability. Technology alone has brought many of these changes creating an impact on the very nature of all forms of work in higher education. For example, teaching takes new forms in distance learning and traditional student services have to be reframed for those in off site locations.

Work force adaptability has also taken the form of changing the nature of how employees are attached to the institution. Increased uses of a contingent work force have brought a more transient group of employees. The American Council on Education (El-Khawas & Knopp, 1996) reported that nearly half of all institutions make "extensive use" of part-time faculty for more than one-fourth of their courses; this trend is particularly apparent in almost three-fourths of all community colleges. Part time faculty, contract

staff, and seasonal classified staff clearly have less knowledge about the institution and thereby contribute to a lack of continuity of service and to diminished institutional loyalty. Conversely, the institution is seen as less loyal to this contingent work force.

The 1990s emphasis on strategic planning, visioning, accountability, re-engineering, environmental scanning, and continuous quality improvement have clearly influenced institutions to become more adaptive to change. Many liberal arts colleges and research universities now seek a higher capacity for flexibility -- more like community colleges that have been more adaptable since inception.

The adult learner dynamic is student population: The increasing complexity of students' backgrounds and educational goals is reflected in the varying approaches students take to higher education. El-Khawas (1996) reports that enrollment in graduate and professional degree programs is growing, as is enrollment in certificate programs of less than two years. Diverse educational goals, as well as varying life and economic circumstances, produce different attendance patterns. Part-time enrollments continue to grow, and while institutions vary in the balance of part-time and full-time enrollment, part-time students make up approximately 40% of the undergraduate enrollment (El-Khawas, 1996). Intermittent study is expected to grow as family, work, and economic resources constrain students' abilities to attend college on a continuous and regular basis. Transfers among institutions are also increasingly prevalent. Thus, higher education tends to be a part of students' lives, but in many cases college attendance is not the central or defining activity of their lives. For these students, college must compete with employment and family obligations. Distance learning and increasingly sophisticated technology will also change the possibilities for engaging in higher education and the

nature of the experiences encountered. Four or five years of full-time study in a residential college are no longer the most frequently traveled road to a college education.

Forcing the creation of alternative schools and methods of learning: As traditional universities struggle with soaring costs and plunging taxpayer subsidies, the eight largest publicly listed for-profit schools (see table 1) have already grabbed more than a half million students.

Table 3: For-profit colleges (Publicly traded, for-profit colleges)

	Apollo/University of Phoenix	University of Phoenix Online	Career Education Corp.	Corinthian Colleges
Year founded	1973	1989	1994	1995
Current enrollment	200,000	79,400	79,500	57,600
2003 Revenues	\$1.3 billion	\$527 million	\$1.2 billion	\$517 million
Market value	\$11.4 billion	\$6.2 billion	\$5.4 billion	\$2.9 billion
Description	The U.S. largest private university offers degrees in business, technology, education, health care and criminal justice	The university's online arm, which offers similar degrees to working adults, is separately listed as a tracking stock.	75 campuses and an online network, including American Intercontinental, Gibbs, and Int'l Academy of Design & Technology.	Growing via acquisitions, health, business, criminal justice, and technology at over 125 campuses in U.S., Canada, and online
	Kaplan Inc.	Educational Management Corp	ITT Educational Services	DeVry Inc.
Year founded	1968	1962	1946	1931, but began granting degrees in 1969
Current enrollment	40,000	40,000	37,000	54,500
2003 Revenues	\$360 million	\$640 million	\$525 million	\$680 million
Market value	\$2.5 billion (est.)	\$2.4 billion	\$2.3 billion	\$1.7 billion
Description	Part of Washington Post Co., runs 60 colleges, including Kaplan and all online Concord Law the No. 2 part-time law school.	Art institutes offer design, fashion, culinary and media. Also Argosy, which offers psychology, health sciences, and education.	Technology oriented degrees, with 76 campuses in 29 states. China joint venture to offer tech in English to Chinese students.	Includes DeVry, Keller graduate school, and Ross Medical school.

Source: Business Week, November 17, 2003

Schools like the University of Phoenix, Capella University and others have been successful in recruiting adult learners by creating a curriculum that is focused on careers and market needs. These schools are successful because they create teaching methods (collaborative, self-directed, online learning) that meets the day to day demands of the adult learner; services that are focused on customer service, and they offer services beyond the classroom such as job placement. Cohen and other traditional educators argue that these schools go against the liberal traditions and missions of higher education (Cohen, 1998). According to Cohen, higher education has the responsibility of shaping the minds of the learner and getting them ready for a democratic society (Cohen, 1998). Traditional educational leaders argue that the students are now directing the educational agenda as argued by Levine:

“Increasingly, students will come from diverse backgrounds and will have a widening variety of educational needs. New technologies will enable them to receive their education at any time and any place -- on a campus, in the office, at home, in the car, on vacation. Each student will be able to choose from a multitude of knowledge providers the form of instruction and courses most consistent with how he or she learns. . . How can colleges retain and provide services for students with such heterogeneous backgrounds and individualized educational goals? What, specifically, can an institution do to create a strong sense of identity and community? What can brick-and-mortar campuses do that online education can't? And, beyond merely anecdotal information, can we document what those activities might be (Levine, 2003).

Adult learners comprise a remarkably heterogeneous group (Cross, 1981), differing in experience, learning style and needs. Adult learners have two additional characteristics that drive the need for constructivist learning environments: Adults tend to be self-directed learners with a relatively high need for autonomy over the learning

process. And adults require more flexibility in their education due to career, family, and personal constraints (Caffarella & Barnett, 1994).

Much of college instruction is behaviorist in nature, with students viewed as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge delivered by the faculty member. A major theme of constructivist theory is that learning is an active process in which learners construct new ideas based upon prior knowledge and experience (Bruner, 1966). Learning occurs by synthesizing new information into extant knowledge and adjusting prior understandings and beliefs to assimilate new experiences. Constructivism differs from behaviorist views towards knowledge, teachers, and learners (Bruner, 1966). According to Honebein (1996) there are seven goals needed in designing constructivist learning environments: 1) provide experience with knowledge construction process; 2) provide multiple perspectives; 3) embed learning in realistic, relevant contexts; 4) encourage ownership and voice in the learning process; 5) embed learning in a social context; 6) encourage multiple modes of representation; and 7) encourage self-awareness of the knowledge construction process. Behaviorists, on the other hand, consider knowledge to be inert, transmittable, and largely automatic with students as passive, empty vessels ready to receive knowledge. In the constructivist view, knowledge cannot be transmitted from teacher to learner, but must be actively acquired and self-constructed by the learner. Learning is thus very individualized: The meaning that each learner derives from a particular learning experience is unique (Bruner, 1966) and will be enhanced when learners are socially engaged in discussion or problem-solving activities (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Constructivist learning environments are successful in facilitating learning since their programs are organized around life application, problem-

based and competency development. Further, these institutions also train their faculty on adult learning styles and curriculum needs and development. Most traditional institutions of learning operate using the behaviorist approach. Because of poor retention rates and the increase of adult learners in higher education, many of these institutions are changing their approach to learning but they are slow in meeting the challenge presented by these dynamics. Further, these efforts are Because of this we have had a proliferation of non-traditional institutions taking the lead in filling the void of constructivist learning for adult learners.

While non-traditional institutions do not have the full range of social activities available as the traditional institutions, there are ample opportunities for social growth and clear differences in learning approaches, as shown in table 4.

Table 4: Behaviorist and constructivist approaches compared

	Traditional Institutions Behaviorist Approach	Non-traditional Institutions Constructivist Approach
Application of knowledge	Knowledge to be inert, transmittable, and largely automatic with students as passive, empty vessels ready to receive knowledge.	Knowledge complexity is reflected in an emphasis on conceptual interrelatedness and interdisciplinary learning.
The learner's experience	Of little worth Teaching is didactic	A rich resource for learning. Teaching methods include discussion and problem solving

Type of Student	Teacher directs what is learned, how the subject is taught. The teacher encourages and nurtures this and acts as the sole arbitrator to see if what was taught was learned.	The learner moves towards independent self-direction.
Type of Instructor	Lecturer, researcher, feels that teaching basic need of memorization and comprehension Instruction is not student centered	The learning experience is based on problems since learners are performance-centered when learning
End product	Longer period to complete degree	Shorter more directed programs, career advisement and job placement

The idea of constructivism has gained increasing currency as a way of viewing learning. This view holds that the learner actively constructs new ideas or concepts based on current and past knowledge. Some suggest that what the learner already knows may be the most important factor influencing new learning. The learner actively makes connections between his/her previous knowledge and new information. New meanings are assigned as a result of these connections, and new knowledge is generated. In relation to this idea, Mezirow (1991) suggests that it is not so much what happens to people, but more importantly, how they interpret and explain that experience that influences their beliefs and their performance.

Mezirow incorporates these ideas into his "transformative learning theory" when he writes that the meaning of ideas exists within ourselves rather than in books (Merirow, 1991). That is, we interpret what we learn in our own unique way which is influenced by our past experience and our interaction with others. He claims that "making meaning" is central to what all learning is about. In this view, all people have a need to understand their experiences and this understanding, in turn, guides their future thoughts, feelings, and actions. The process of coming to an understanding or making sense out of our experiences is called "making meaning" or "disorienting dilemma." The transformation process, according to Merzriow, is set into motion by a disorienting dilemma, which is a particular life event or life experience such as death or a job change or an illness that a person experiences as a crisis (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). There is much debate on whether this is a gradual or a rapid sudden process. Paradigm changes can be both in the scientific process and so maybe the same can be said for Mezirow's ideas.

Non-traditional schools have adapted a constructivists approach not just in their educational approach but in their total operation from recruiting to curriculum development and faculty training.

Admissions: Marketing and recruiting efforts are targeted for more mature learners since they tend to be serious and motivated toward achieving higher goals, i.e.: obtaining a degree.

Curriculum Development: Curriculum is designed that is focused, career orientated and, in many cases, allow for life credit. This gives the adult learner a sense that their experience is apart of the learning process. Non-traditional institutions survey and market their curriculum to attract adults who are looking for relevant degrees to

enhance their respected careers. The educational programs are organized around life application sequences and competency development categories (Brookfield, 1987).

Instruction: Adults have a rich repository of experience from which to draw. How successful a learner will be in the classroom may depend upon how well the learner can integrate new knowledge into his existing schema and amend prior misconceptions. For optimal learning to occur, four educational needs of adults must be met: Adults need to know why they are learning something; they need to have responsibility for that learning; they need to incorporate their experiences into their learning process; they need to see the relevance of the learning to their current situation so as to be ready to learn; they learn best when internally motivated to do so (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). Non-traditional learning centers have meet these basic needs by emphasizing learning over teaching, encouraging learners to engage in peer dialogue, supporting collaborative learning while encouraging learner autonomy, emphasizing the context in which learning occurs, and anchoring learning to real-world, authentic tasks, so as to link to student's prior experiences (Savery & Duffy, 1996).

Student Services: Support services for the non-traditional student should be maintained to provide the nurturance necessary for academic achievement (Allen, 1993). Traditional schools have created services with staff members who are trained in dealing with adult learners. In addition to having the necessary staff these schools have extended hours to make themselves available at night since a large percentage of adult learners attend classes in the evening. This makes the adult learner feel that they appreciated and not just a number in the student body.

Placement and Career Advisement: The primary objectives of programs offered by non-traditional schools were to prepare students for jobs and place them in appropriate positions or to enhance career advancement. Most campuses offering entry-level programs reported job placement rates for graduates of 85% to 95%. These schools also placed emphasis on employers as customers. In most cases, the focus was on a broad industry or occupational field and not necessarily local employers in the communities where campuses were located. The campuses had little flexibility to change or introduce programs in response to local needs, although most could make minor adjustments or develop a limited number of electives.

Adults have a rich repository of experience from which to draw. How successful a learner will be in the classroom may depend upon how well the learner can integrate new knowledge into his existing schema and amend prior misconceptions. This is a critical part of postmodernism – the idea that learning is a process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action (Welton, 1995). For optimal learning to occur, four educational needs of adults must be met: Adults need to know why they are learning something; they need to have responsibility for that learning; they need to incorporate their experiences into their learning process; they need to see the relevance of the learning to their current situation so as to be ready to learn; they learn best when internally motivated to do so (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). Constructivist learning environments have met these basic needs by emphasizing learning over teaching, encouraging learners to engage in peer dialogue, supporting collaborative learning while encouraging learner autonomy, emphasizing the context in which learning occurs, and anchoring learning to

real-world, authentic tasks, so as to link to student's prior experiences (Savery & Duffy, 1996). According to Jonassen (1994), anchoring learning to larger, relevant, complex, challenging tasks can help the learner develop learning strategies for problem solving through scaffolding. Scaffolding is a strategy in which support is provided to help the learner accomplish a task he would be unable to achieve on his own; support is gradually removed as the learner takes more responsibility for his own learning (Duffy, Dueber, & Hawley, 1998).

Adult needs can be met through constructivist learning environments. In constructivist learning environments, learning is experientially based: Adults have a rich source of life experiences that should serve as the basis of learning. Constructivist learning environments should be anchored in authentic tasks: Adult learners want learning to be purposeful, practical, relevant, and immediately applicable (Caffarella & Barnett, 1994). This idea is core to postmodernist ideas of self and emancipatory learning. The kinds of knowledge, pedagogy and educational relationships encouraged by emancipatory learning are those which are formed in solidarity with the interests of the least powerful in society. The reason for collaboration is to work with the least powerful to gain more autonomy and independence, more control over their own lives, and to bring about change in the interests of greater equality and social justice.

Emancipatory learning is relevant today because of the stark realities of increased material poverty and inequalities - not simply within societies but also between societies in the context of globalization. This includes growing inequalities of income and wealth, massive inequalities in relation to cultural recognition and social diversity, and huge inequalities arising out of access to information. In this context, adult educators have a

choice - if they do not take the side of the poor and powerless, then, by default, they contribute to preserving the status quo on the side of the rich and privileged. For those who want to contribute to creating a more informed, egalitarian and socially just society, the ideas and practices associated with emancipatory learning may be a place to start (Martin, 2000).

Postmodern adult education

Postmodernists in adult education claim that all forms of adult education are animated by the modernist notion that human beings can achieve true knowledge of the world through rational inquiry; and that such knowledge will lead to both individual and social betterment. From the postmodernists' perspective, the Enlightenment view that reason leads to development and liberation is pervasive throughout adult education. According to Lindeman, "adult education represents a grouping of people toward recognition. . .it is an education movement born of discontent and adjustment, and being a movement is social; it starts from somewhere and moves in permeating fashion through the social mass; it originates in some form of dissatisfaction and grows as consciousness of dissatisfaction become general" (cited in Briton, 1996, p. 106). While adult educators are emancipatory in their approach there is very little agreement on theoretical basis. In his discussion of the functions of the modern university Smith (1995) presents a postmodern perspective that fits with the goals of adult education:

[i]f postmodernism means. . .the opening up to critical discourse of lines of enquiry which were formerly prohibited, of evidence which was previously inadmissible so that new and different questions can be asked and new and other voices can begin asking them; if it means the opening up of institutional and

discursive spaces within which more fluid and plural social and sexual identities may develop; if it means the erosion of triangular formations of power and knowledge with the expert at the apex and the masses at the base, if, in a word, it enhances our collective (and democratic) sense of possibility, then I for one am a postmodernist. (Smith & Webster, 1995, p. 53).

Marx believed that the educator and the pupil educate themselves together in a revolutionary praxis, though the intermediary of the world which they are transforming (Gadotti, 1996). Marx believed that that the way individuals manifest their lives is due to their acts. Education or reeducation was a way to empower and break from the strings of oppression and of the capitalist system. Emancipatory education does this in a postmodern world and basic concepts of self and lifelong learning guarantees continuation of such a process. This educational approach helps facilitate qualitative changes in a learner's consciousness. For example, Clark (1993) argued that Freire's emancipatory philosophy of education and Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation both attempt to create a critical consciousness that will transform the learner's understanding of the world.

Bagnall (1999) identified the distinctive elements of a postmodernist adult education practice in this emancipatory process:

- 1) Given that plurality and contingency characterize knowledge and reality, postmodernist adult educators should emphasize diversity and heterodoxy in their curricula and pedagogical.
- 2) The extent that in the postmodern world there are less rigid roles for adult educators, learners, and institutions, decision-making authority and responsibility need to be more dispersed, decentered, and indeterminate.

- 3) Postmodernist adult education must be more expressive, it must recognize and value emotions, attitudes, and inclinations.
- 4) Postmodernist educators must reject hierarchical relationships between educators and learners in favor of a more participatory approach.
- 5) Postmodernist adult educators must be radically skeptical of all knowledge claims; it therefore should emphasize critique and deconstruction of all theories and social practices as part of an educational experience.

Emancipatory and transformative education is key aspects of postmodernism and of adult education. The next sections talk about external forces leading to individual “self” change. The question here is whether external dynamics such as career, family structure, and technology will continue to foster postmodern criticism of traditional ideas regarding education?

Postmodern framings and adult education

The location of adult education within a postmodern space, has been, and continues to be a problematic one. The creation of non-traditional schools, the use of multiple delivery methods, and the increased importance of technology all illustrate changes in how we view education but really core of the postmodern condition. Life long learning is as old as society itself but adult and continuing education has been an important part of many lives since the beginning of American society. Early on, life long learning was a necessity because of the continued need for skilled people and because of

the struggle for maturity as a country (Hiemstra, 2002). But the concept has greatly changed due to changing nature of American society, the changing family structure, the role of technology and employment security, and the older adult.

The changing nature of American society: Hiemstra (2002) best describes the changing American society by stating that:

“[t]he dynamic quality of societal change is a reality faced by most people every day of their lives. The "Future Shock" theme, the problems of the cities, increasing bureaucracy and institutional complexity, rising crime rates and social disorder, and the frustrations of inflation coupled with ever looming energy or environmental crises are all grim reminders of the rapidity and complexity of social change. September 11, 2001, even brought a stark reminder of the vulnerabilities existing for everyday life.”

We have moved from a rural to urban population. In the early 1900s 90 percent of the population lived in rural area, now it is the reverse. Further nearly 90 percent of all the people in the United States live on about 1 percent of the land. This along with the events of 9-11 has created a sense tenseness and fear among all segments of the population.

The changing family structure: According to Hiemstra (2002) the structure of the American family is in an apparently constant stage of evolution. The mobile nuclear family, the disappearance of the extended family, the ever-increasing divorce rate, the large number of married couples with only two, one, or even no children, and the variety of experimental family arrangements being tried are some of the current features of this change. Many of today's senior citizens formed such families and many middle-aged adults grew up in them, but the composition and characteristics of families have changed

considerably since World War II, especially in the last two decades. Although close to 75% of U.S. citizens still live in family-based households:

- Only 9% of U.S. households fit that old definition of the "normal" family.
- A majority of families have no children under age 18.
- More than 25% of all families with children are single parent families; almost all of these have a female head of the household.
- 72% of women in the child-bearing years are employed. By 1995, labor force statisticians predict the proportion will increase to 81%.
- Out of wedlock births (often by older women) are now about 20% of all births and virtually all such children are kept by the mother rather than put up for adoption.
- For the first time, the U.S. is generationally top-heavy: there are more grandparents than grandchildren.

The role of technology and employment security: In the not to distant past households consisted on of one "bread winner" and most workers were able to retire after many years at one company. Now people are living longer, working longer and in a normal employment span make on the average 5 to 7 job changes. Employment security is important and not job security. Technology has also played an important role in how we do work. New work communications include voice mail, menu choice automated messages, integrated data bases, records accessible by computer, electronic mail, web site course readings, and web site services to mention just a few. These new modes give rise to the need for new norms and work practices. Traditional work practices built on older

technologies like the use of office phones for personal business, use of photocopy machines, and methods to distribute information may not adapt well to new technologies. What are the expectations of the rapidity of answering e-mail? What web site use is appropriate at work? Is posting a form on a web site sufficient access for students and staff? Who has access to restricted data bases? Is tele-commuting a privilege of those in powerful management positions or can the system also accommodate other service workers who could work off site (e.g., the room assignment clerk)?

The generational affect of technology leaves many campuses with older faculty and staff who refuse to learn or adapt to new electronic processes. Likewise, technologically-adept faculty and staff quickly find their computers, software, and other systems out-moded and insufficient for their work.

All employees need technology support staff to assist with computer problems from viruses to network development. Some campuses are creating student technology peer supports (similar to resident assistants) provided for student technological assistance in residence.

In a meta-frame, the possibilities of technology require all campus educators to examine which of their core functions and processes can best be handled by technology and which are essential for human interaction. Distance learning is clearly an option and demands that campus-based educators understand the value-added component of in-person human interaction in the learning process.

Postmodern concepts of self and lifelong learning

The dominant learning paradigm for centuries is information transfer. It considers the aim of learning as the acquisition of information. Universities, schools, training activities, and much informal learning are based on this paradigm. The major delivery techniques are the lecture, video, and the book. Assistance to students in trouble is provided perhaps via office hours and discussion sections, and a few questions during lectures.

In the history of higher education we saw colleges responding, willing or otherwise, to challenges against its traditional practices and institutions. These challenges forced these institutions to increase access to those who did not have such access. Change at first was not quick nor widely accepted but in time university administrators felt that they have an obligation to open its doors and diversify its student body. Many felt that it was the mission of the university to educate and socialize the student into becoming democratic citizens.

Recent changes socially, economically, and otherwise have placed institutions of higher education in a phase of transition. This phase in our history suggests that traditional institutions are slow in meeting the external dynamics of the globalization of values, a population explosion, the idea of life long learning, the power of the entertainment industry, and technology.

The idea of lifelong education was first fully articulated in this century by Yeaxlee (1929). He along with Lindeman (1926) provided an intellectual basis for a comprehensive understanding of education as a continuing aspect of everyday life. Field (2000) has argued that there has been a “fundamental shift in the behavior of 'ordinary citizens', 'who increasingly regard the day-to-day practice of adult learning as routine,

perhaps so routine that they give it little explicit attention” (p. 35). Economic, social and cultural changes mean that many now live in 'knowledge' or 'informational societies' that have strong individualizing tendencies and a requirement for permanent learning. As a result, Field goes on to suggest, many adults now take part in organized learning throughout their lifespan; that the post-school system is populated by adults as well as by young people; and that 'non-formal' learning permeates daily life and is valued (pp. 38-49). Typical of the last of these has been a substantial increase in activities such as short residential courses, study tours, fitness centres, sports clubs, heritage centres, self-help therapy manuals, management gurus, electronic networks and self-instructional videos (p. 45).

The new adult learning is part of a much broader process. As individuals come to rely less on traditional institutions and the authority figures associated with them - church leaders, parents, aristocracy - to guide their behavior, so they become more self-directed. At least in principle, they can select from a variety of possible role-models; traditional role models certainly do not disappear (indeed, they are an important if little-understood resource for fundamentalist movements), but to select any role model requires that individuals face up to an increasing range of biographical options. (Field, 2000, p. 57) . Traditional philosophy of education was confined to the aims of education within academic disciplines. Lifelong education goes beyond that by including those incidental and intentional activities that society uses to pass on values, attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Elias & Merriam, 1995). Dewey argues for an education that was life long:

“Education must not be reconceived, not as merely a preparation for maturity but as a continuous growth of the mind and a continuous illumination of life. In a

sense, the school can give us only the instrumentalities of mental growth; the rest depends upon the absorption and interpretation of experience. Real education comes after we leave school and there is no reason why we should before death” (Dewey, 1916 inside Elias & Merriam, 1995, p. 55).

Cross in providing a definition of lifelong learning argues that lifelong learning has three basic ideas: 1) Formal education from elementary school on up should be restructured to develop life long learners; 2) Learning occurs in and out of the classroom. The world is full of people, organizations, and other learning resources that can be “marshaled” on behalf of life long learning; and 3) Life long learning helps learners become self-directed learners and active agents of their own education (Cross, 1981).

Life long learning embraces the ideas that learning goes beyond the traditional boundaries of the classroom, beyond a certain grade span of elementary – high school and the first four years of college, it goes beyond youth. Life long education is a reflection of circumstance in technology, career, family structures, and individual transformative needs. It is empowering in that the relationship in the learning process is not directed by the teacher but is a contract between the facilitator and the learner.

Conclusion

Postmodernists believe that the modernist goal of making adult education a humanizing force with which to perfect progress must be abandoned. The purpose of postmodern adult education is to accept the fact of uncertainty and the lack of any universal goals for human beings or history. Adult education must therefore aim at facilitating universal liberation, but should help adult learners understand the multiple sources of power and change within a complex, pluralistic society. In the future, as our

population ages, lifelong learning, including adult learning, will be the "tail that wags the dog" for all learning (Hiemstra, 2002). All learning will use it as a model. This may take some time since it will be a while before traditional institutions of higher learning to accept this notion. One of the criticisms of lifelong learning and the core ideas of postmodernism is that there is uncertainty of epistemological markers for knowledge. Traditional educators believe that life long learning losses mastery as a condition of education. Yet, the notion of mastery inscribed in modernist educational discourse is subject of postmodernism criticism that traditional education frames and limits the educational process and the notion of knowledge.

Knowledge is created based on experience and needs not dictated in top-down power structure. Lifelong learning as a postmodern condition of education as an inter-related sign and substance that we can engage with, and be engaged by those openings/closings and the ambivalence and resistances they provide.

Finally, like adult education, postmodernism does not have a comprehensive agreed upon but theory but powerful assumptions that question power relationships, processes, outcomes, images, and so many other things. Perhaps the most powerful relationship between postmodernism and adult education is the focus and development of self and as a concept it develops and learns throughout the challenges of life.

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