Contents

Foreword by Robert J. Starratt  ix

Preface  xv

Part I
Modern Conceptions of Curriculum and Supervision

Introduction  3

1 Can the Modern View of Curriculum Be Refined by Postmodern Criticism?  6
Linda S. Behar-Horenstein
Case Study 1: Teacher Challenged by Student Diversity Issues

2 Shifting Paradigms: Implications for Curriculum Research and Practice  34
Edmund C. Short
Case Study 2: The Role of Knowledge in Curriculum Decision-Making

3 The Common Unity and the Progressive Restoration of the Curriculum Field  54
Peter S. Hlebowitsh
Case Study 3: High School Curriculum Promotes Gender Bias

4 Supervision: Don't Discount the Value of the Modern  70
Jeffrey Glanz
Case Study 4: Assessing Gender Influences in the Classroom
5 Supervisory Practices: Building a Constructivist Learning Community for Adults 93
Sally J. Zepeda
Case Study 5: Ethical and Political Challenges of Supervision

6 Collaborative Supervision: Implications for Supervision Research and Inquiry 108
Martha N. Ovando
Case Study 6: Supervisor Challenged by an Experienced Teacher

Part II
Postmodern Conceptions of Curriculum and Supervision

Introduction 129

7 Postmodernism as a Challenge to Dominant Representations of Curriculum 132
Patrick Slattery
Case Study 7: Resisting Traditional Approaches to Curriculum Implementation

8 Informing Curriculum and Teaching Transformation through Postmodern Studies 152
James G. Henderson
Case Study 8: Assuming the Transformative Curriculum Leadership Challenge

9 Postmodern Visions in Multicultural Education Preparation and Practice 169
Geneva Gay and Pamula Hart
Case Study 9: Curriculum Activity Inspires Students to Display Multiple Perspectives

10 Complicity in Supervision: Another Postmodern Moment 190
Duncan Waite and Margarida Ramires Fernandes
Case Study 10: A Dialogic Approach to Supervision

11 Possibilities of Postmodern Supervision 212
Patricia E. Holland and Maryalice Obermiller
Case Study 11: Collaborative Visions and Challenges for the Future of Technology in Post Middle School

12 Communicative Action: A Postmodern Bridge for Supervision in School Organizations 229
Edward Pajak and Karen K. Evans
Case Study 12: Teacher Think Tank: Postmodern Supervision in Action
Contents

Part III
Practitioner Responses

Introduction

13 Modern and Postmodern Perspectives on Curriculum and Supervision: A View from the Top
Osborne F. Abbey, Jr.

14 Paradigms of Curriculum and Supervision: A Practitioner's Viewpoint
Frances M. Vandiver

15 Student Empowerment through the Professional Development of Teachers
Eric Nadelstern, Janet R. Price, and Aaron Listhaus

Afterword: Closing Reflections

Index

About the Contributors
Postmodernism as a Challenge to Dominant Representations of Curriculum

Patrick Slattery

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the various interpretations of postmodernism?
2. Can there be a postmodern curriculum in the schools?
3. How can graduate students use postmodern theory in their research?
4. Why do modern critics have such a negative reaction to postmodernism?
5. What are some of the positive contributions of postmodern theory?
6. After reading this chapter, how has your thinking about curriculum and schooling changed?
7. Finally, can the world survive without a postmodern vision?

This chapter explores postmodern theory and its influence on contemporary curriculum discourses in the university and in schools. Postmodernism challenges dominant modern conceptions of curriculum and supports the emergence of alternative forms of teaching, research, and data representation. There is no singular or simple definition of postmodernism. There are many postmodernisms: literary deconstruction, poststructuralism, postmodern art, eliminative postmodernism, and constructive postmodernism, among others. Some would contend that postmodernism is more of a mood or attitude rather than a cohesive set of principles and practices. I would agree with this analysis. The attempt to define postmodern curriculum theory is difficult, some would say impossible. However, I believe that it is possible to describe and understand many features of postmodern theory and apply these ideas to curricu-
lum. All graduate students and teachers must have some familiarity with emerging postmodern theories because these theories have captured the attention of many educators and researchers in the past fifteen years, greatly influencing curriculum philosophies and practices. Postmodern theories must be engaged, if for no other reason than to develop intelligent and thoughtful critiques of postmodern practices. However, I hope that this chapter will convince you that postmodernism has much to offer the educational community and the global society. In the upheaval and conflict of the modern world, postmodernism may offer a fresh way to look at our sociopolitical, economic, ethical, religious, psychological, ecological and educational dilemmas.

POSTMODERNISM AND DECONSTRUCTION

There has been a postmodern movement in art, architecture, philosophy, science, literature, and education in recent years. Some would say that it started in the 1960s—that it has emphasized eclecticism, parody, irony, indeterminacy, ambiguity, complexity, multiculturalism, and multiple forms of understanding the world and texts. One famous postmodern writer, Jean-François Lyotard, stated that postmodernism is an incredulity toward metanarratives (Lyotard, 1984). In other words, any theory that attempts to provide a universal, all-encompassing narrative of the way that the world works, people should behave, texts should be interpreted, governments should be structured, schools should be organized, or art should be produced must be examined, questioned, and deconstructed. Let's explore this important concept of deconstruction.

Contemporary approaches to research in the reconceptualized curriculum field utilize postmodern theories and multiple forms of representation in order to challenge status-quo social arrangements that are destructive and unjust. Thus, many postmodernists foreground cultural studies, autobiography, arts-based inquiry, critical pedagogies, radical democracy, anti-racism, feminisms, and ecology—among other issues. Postmodern curriculum research and teaching challenges singular interpretations of data and singular methodologies for curricular organization, thus encouraging an informed eclecticism in the teaching and research process. This is done for a variety of reasons. Some postmodern theorists seek to expose the contradictions, limitations and self-serving ideologies found within hegemonic social structures and universalizing metanarratives derived exclusively from propositional language and statistics. This is accomplished by deconstruction—a strategy for reading texts and data that exposes internal contradictions and power relations—or hermeneutics—the art and process of interpretation of texts—or poststructural analysis—a philosophical commentary that exposes both the political consequences and linguistic difficulties of clear expression by centering the authority of texts (Lather, 1991; Marshall, 1992; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995; Sarup, 1989).
In short, what we see in postmodern theory is an attempt to expose contradictions and prejudices that are found in every written text and human artifact. There is no text that contains the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Various history books present different interpretations of the same historical events. Catholics and Protestants argue over which books to include in the Christian Bible—not to mention the addition of other gospels by the Gnostics and the Book of Mormon by the Latter-Day Saints church. Even within various religious denominations there are schisms because people interpret sacred books differently.

Various works of art have been either praised or censured depending on the aesthetic sensibilities of the critic, curator, or government official. Impressionism, for example, was scoffed at by art “experts” in the nineteenth century but sold for millions of dollars in the twentieth century. There is no agreement about historical, religious, athletic, musical, artistic, or educational interpretations, practices, and styles—and there never will be. In the 1960s the backward high-jump style was banned by the International Olympic Committee only to become the standard in the 1970s—the Fosbury Flop. Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in major league baseball under protest by many in the white establishment, but his success paved the way for integration of sports. Igor Stravinsky’s first production of “The Rite of Spring” in Paris in 1913 was halted by an audience riot; the music was unsettling to the sophisticated connoisseurs. By the 1930s Stravinsky was hailed as a musical genius, and “The Rite of Spring” was used by Disney in the cartoon animation “Fantasia.” Elvis Presley, The Beatles, Kurt Cobain, Marilyn Manson, Ice T, Rage Against the Machine: the list of controversial musicians whose work was critiqued or banned by authorities and later appreciated is endless. In education the philosophy of John Dewey, Maria Montessori, and others has been maligned and later revered. Oscar Romero, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Dietrich Bonhoeffer were all assassinated. Rosa Parks was imprisoned. Helen Keller was belittled for being politically naive and then sentimentalized and trivialized. Visionaries and prophets are often rejected by their contemporary societies. For postmodernists, metanarratives that attempt universalization are foolhardy, dangerous, and unjust—in part because they silence the voices of opposition, creativity, change, and prophecy.

Modern systems from the Enlightenment to Marxism to Newtonian physics have sought and promoted absolute and universal truth and natural laws. Postmodernism does not deny truth, but rather holds that there are many truths and shifting conceptions of truth, beauty, goodness, and knowledge. Postmodernism does not seek to destroy truth, only to deconstruct modern notions of metanarratives that attempt to explain a universal and unalterable truth for all people in all circumstances. This is a brief introduction to the important notion of deconstruction, which is a central feature of many postmodern theories.
DEFINING POSTMODERNISM

Just as the world has entered a new millennium, American education enters a new era. Educators are uncertain what to call it, but almost everyone agrees that, like the world, education has changed and continues to change at an accelerating rate. While modernism continues to exert its influence on social and educational practices, a new impulse has developed. Some call it “postmodernism” or “the postmodern condition.” What complicates the term, beside its assimilation of the word “modernism,” is that postmodernism has yet to replace modernism but now exists concurrently alongside it.

Understanding the failures of the medieval ways of seeing the world, modernist thinkers sought new methods to understand and control the outside environment. In due time, Cartesian science became a foundation for this new impulse, as science set out to make sense of complex phenomena by reducing them to their constituent parts before analyzing them in detail. Following this scientific orientation, an analogous socioeconomic feature of modernism came into being: capitalism with its insistent faith in the benefits of science and technology, its doctrine of progress, its cult of reason, and its logic of organization that would culminate in an authoritarian empirical science and an assemblyline mentality in the twentieth century.

Postmodernism, then, has something to do with questioning these modernist tenets and with the establishment of a new paradigm—that is to say, a new way of seeing the world. More specifically, postmodern observers analyze those social assumptions previously shielded by the modernist ethos. They admit previously inadmissible evidence, derived from new questions asked by previously excluded voices; they challenge hierarchical structures of knowledge and power that promote “experts” above the “masses,” and they seek new ways of knowing that transcend empirically verified facts and “reasonable” linear arguments deployed in a quest for certainty (Slattery, 1995; Best and Kellner, 1997).

When it is based on a critical democratic system of meaning concerned with analyzing knowledge for the purpose of understanding oneself and one’s relation to society, naming and then changing social situations that impede the development of egalitarian communities committed to economic and social justice, and understanding how world views and self-concepts come to be constructed, postmodernism provides a powerful tool for progressive social and educational change (Giroux, 1991; Kincheloe, 1991).

To understand the nature of education as it takes place in both schools and cultural sites, we must understand the nature and effects of the postmodern condition. First of all, be careful to avoid confusing postmodernism as a social critique with postmodernism as a social condition (“hyperreality” is a familiar synonym for “the postmodern condition”). To describe the emerging new era I use the postmodern critique to isolate the special features of the postmodern social condition. The postmodern critique and the postmodern condition may be closely connected, and in the attempt to distinguish them, many educators
get lost in the landscape. Modernists fail to understand that they no longer tell
their stories from an omniscient perspective, but being human, they must now
tell human stories from a particular social and historical vantage point. Reason
was undermined; it was usurped by those in power who spoke with the author-
ity of a disembodied science unrestrained by self-analysis (Giroux, 1991).

POSTMODERN PARADIGMS

Exploring postmodern paradigms offers an opportunity for scholars to pro-
vide new visions to address the tragedies of recent history that have not been
ameliorated in the modern era—the Holocaust, slavery, genocide, environ-
mental degradation, racism, apartheid, homophobia, nuclear destruction, po-
itical and religious inquisitions and persecution, child labor abuses, colonialism, vulgar materialism, economic class warfare, and other absurdities
of the modern era. Many scholars contend that postmodern visions not only
deconstruct the logic and philosophies that have contributed to worldviews
that foster a climate for these tragedies but also provide an alternative to such
destruction. Some go further and insist that the postmodern vision of curricu-
ulum research and classroom practices can influence changes that will lead to
justice. As we explore possible postmodern alternatives, we must constantly be
reminded of Derrida’s (1972) clarification, “I was quite explicit about the fact
that nothing of what I have said had a destructive meaning. [Deconstruction]
has nothing to do with destruction. [I]t is simply a question of . . . being alert
to the implications, to the historical sedimentation in the language we
use—and that is not destruction” (p. 271). I agree. We must be vigilant in our
efforts to deconstruct all texts—including postmodern texts themselves—be-
because there are ambiguities, internal contradiction, and prejudice within every
narrative and text.

Another concern of postmodernists is the way that intolerance and tyranny
are perpetuated in the name of reason and certainty, and they seek to redress
unjust power arrangements and maximize democratic participation (Har-
roway, 1997; Pinar, 1997). Constructive postmodernists seek to create a just,
caring, and ecologically sustainable culture in the aftermath of modernity and
deconstruction (Bowers, 1997; Griffin, 1988; Orr, 1992). Some postmodern
scholars foreground liberatory ethics—following from liberation theol-
ogy—to challenge the complicity of social and economic arrangements in sus-
taining status-quo power arrangements (McLaren, 1997). Finally, moderate
postmodernists combine modern and postmodern discourses and interpret
the postmodern primarily as a modality of the modern rather than a radical
rupture or paradigm shift (Harvey, 1989; Rorty, 1991). While the variety of
postmodernisms confounds critics, as I said at the outset, there remains no
concise or singular definition of postmodern research. However, postmodern-
ism does provide a powerful tool for progressive social and educational change
when it is tied to a critical democratic system of meaning, the identification of
injustice, action to challenge hegemonic social structures, and appreciation of multicultural worldviews.

MULTIPLE UNDERSTANDINGS

Postmodernism is itself understood in multiple ways. Poststructuralism and deconstruction, as associated with names such as Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault, Guattari, Jameson, Lacan, and Kristeva, open the possibility of criticizing the theories, institutions, and practices that are culpable in the brutalization of contemporary life. Critical and cultural theorists such as Anyon, Apple, Carlson, Fine, Giroux, hooks, Kincheloe, McLaren, Steinberg, and West utilize postmodern theories to promote antiracist, antihomophobic, and liberatory social and educational practices. The poststructural and feminist perspectives of Britzman, M. A. Doll, Ellsworth, Grumet, Lather, Noddings, Pagano, Pinar, and Sears foreground gender in the postmodern dialogues. In contrast to Lyotard, who critiques the notion of grand narratives, constructive postmodernists such as Griffin, Kung, W. E. Doll, and Jencks create a narrative that interfaces with emerging ecumenical and liberation theologies to construct a just, caring, and ecologically sustainable culture in the emerging historical epoch. In the postmodern spirit, some researchers utilize an eclectic mix of these and other theories to propose a radically new vision of art, music, literature, philosophy, and education. Critics who attempt to universalize or harmonize all postmodern theories are operating within the modern obsession with control and reason.

Postmodernism is a complex set of reactions to modern philosophy and its presuppositions rather than any consensus on substantive doctrines. Thus, it is impossible to universalize postmodern curriculum practices for research and schooling. However, postmodernism does typically challenge foundationalism, essentialism, and realism. For Rorty (1989) the presuppositions to be set aside are foundationalist assumptions shared by sixteenth- to eighteenth-century philosophers. For Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida, the presuppositions to be set aside are as old as metaphysics and Plato. Some, such as Lyotard (1992) and Griffin (1988), have even suggested that postmodern philosophy preceded modern philosophy in the sense that the presuppositions of philosophical modernism emerged out of a disposition whose antecedent beliefs are postmodern. For Lyotard this might include a sense of the interconnectedness of the universe rather than the fragmentation of information into fields of study. Lyotard (1984) explains:

Didactics does not simply consist in the transmission of information; and competence, even when defined as a performance skill, does not simply reduce to having a good memory for data or having easy access to a computer. It is a commonplace that what is of utmost importance is the capacity to actualize the relaxant data for solving a problem "here and now," and to organize the data into an efficient strategy. As long as the game is not a game of perfect information, the advantage will be with the player who has
knowledge and can obtain information. By definition, this is the case of a student in a learning situation. But in games of perfect information, the best performativity cannot exist in obtaining perfect information in this way. It comes rather from arranging the data in a new way in what constitutes a “move” properly speaking. This new arrangement is usually achieved by connecting together series of data that were previously held to be independent. This capacity to articulate what used to be separate can be called imagination. (p. 51–52)

Here Maxine Greene’s (1995) conclusion that the principles and the contexts of education have to be chosen by living human beings against their own lifeworlds and in the light of their lives with others, “by persons able to call, to say, to sing, and—using their imaginations, tapping their courage—to transform” (p. 198) is affirmed. Constructive postmodernism seeks such transformation.

While the postmodern movement in education and philosophy certainly has affinities with opposition to the spectator theory of knowledge that emerged in Europe before the term “postmodern” became commonplace—such as Dewey’s early opposition to positivism, Wittgenstein’s insistence on the language-game character of representation, and Sellars critique of “the myth of the given”—current postmodern thought moves beyond such opposition. Griffin’s (1988) *The Reenchantment of Science* and Greene’s (1995) *Releasing the Imagination* both provide examples of such a transformation. I argue along with Lyotard (1984) that modern movements—in society and in curriculum research—are efforts to return to terror:

It must be clear that it is our business not to supply reality but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented. . . . We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience. We can hear the mutterings for a desire for a return of terror. . . . let us wage war on totality. (pp. 81–82)

The postmodern curriculum, in Lyotard’s spirit, wages war on totality of representation that reduces learning to information transmission, disciplinary structures, grand narratives, and concepts of “reason” that continue to foster the bifurcations that perpetuate racism, patriarchy, environmental degradation, homophobia, colonialism, and classism. The postmodern curriculum refuses to be bound by rigid modern bifurcations and the divisive linear logic that follows.

**POSTMODERN DISCOURSES**

The concepts of the death of the author (Derrida, 1976, 1981) and the death of the subject (Foucault, 1972a, 1972b, 1975, 1977) foreground self-deception and the limitations and contradictions of truth statements by individuals, thus revealing a “fictional self” capable of many complex meanings rather than an “authentic self” capable—in the Enlightenment sense—of being wholly knowable and rational. In other words, we never fully “know” our-
selves because we are always in the process of learning and are continually influenced by many complicated factors that we are not even consciously aware of. Thus, the idea of a singular author or a cohesive individual is impossible because we are all made up of a complex interrelationship of many people and ideas.

Postmodernism repudiates depth models of psychology that provide a body of disciplinary knowledge to explain the world while assuming to remain detached and objective—thus, we cannot escape our context and speak with absolute certainty.

It rejects grand narratives or universal explanations of history that propose to have the whole story and final solution because there are many different versions of any event, depending on who is telling the story and from what vantage point (Lyotard, 1984).

Postmodernism points to illusion of the transparency of language, where words are merely signs always pointing with precision to the signified object (Foucault, 1983). Thus, the possibility of linguistic certainty is eliminated because ambiguity and uncertainty will always be present as words have many interpretations and nuances.

It sees a communication and media revolution in which the distinction between reality and the word or image which portrays it breaks down into a condition of hyperreality and signs—“simulacra”—which come to replace reality (Baudrillard, 1988).

The impossibility of any final meaning to any idea arises because words have no fixed or stable relationship to the concepts or things that they are meant to signify—the meaning of words can only be described by more words—meaning is endlessly deferred (Derrida, 1976).

The effects of power on the objects it represents (Ellsworth, 1997; Rouse, 1987) is associated with “Identity Politics”—movements that represent the empowerment and civil rights agenda of groups marginalized by their racial, gender, sexual, physical, and other identities—and “Queer Theory”—philosophies that investigate notions of identity by “refusing normal practices and the practice of normalcy,” by “exploring those things that education either dismisses or cannot bear to know,” and by “imagining a sociality unhinged from the dominant conceptual order” (Britzman, 1995). Queer Theory can be understood as protesting the idea of “normal” behavior, emphasizing instead diverse forms of individual and social identity.

Postmodernism considers the failure of pure reason to understand the world (Pinar, 1997) along with the importance of intuition, emotion, arts, and spirituality in understanding complex issues.

It looks to the de-centering of the Western logos and with it the dethroning of the “first world” so that multicultural global communities are validated along with Western cultures (Banks and Banks, 1997).
It foresees the end of a belief in progress as a natural and neutral panacea that assumes that things are always getting better as a result of technology or communication (Bauman, 1992; Lyotard, 1992).

It sees a celebration of difference and multiplicity, leading to a revolutionary multiculturalism that unites critique and action in liberatory practices (Giroux, 1997; McLaren, 1997) and affirms diversity from an antiracist position (Nieto, 1996) as we move toward equity in both the process and outcomes of education (Gay, 1994).

This brief introduction to some of the postmodern concepts may seem difficult. However, remember that any new idea is often challenging. Think of great musicians, sports figures, educators, scientists, religious leaders, and inventors, like those introduced earlier, whose creative work was ridiculed or rejected because it challenged long-held beliefs and practices. Just as Copernicus and Galileo provided a new perspective on the position of the Earth in the universe over five hundred years ago, twentieth-century space exploration and photographs of the Earth from space have provided a stunning perspective of the relation of human life to the cosmos. The Italian religious and political leaders who silenced and excommunicated Galileo did not stop the emergence of the modern cosmology, so why should we expect negative reactions to silence the emerging postmodern worldview?

RESEARCH REPRESENTATION

Now that we have looked closely at various postmodern discourses, let’s examine the implications for curriculum and research in the schools and university.4 As many universities explore alternative forms of research and data representation in both undergraduate and graduate education programs, a number of important questions are raised about the nature of educational research by postmodern inquiry. Ellis (1997) contends that the “crisis of representation provoked by postmodernism challenges some of our most venerable notions about scientific knowledge and truth” (p. 115), which in turn results in a loss of faith in the theory of language as a clear and concise economy of writing on which scientific inquiry has been based. Ellis explains that the postmodern critique undermines any social science research devoid of intuition and emotions and questions the usefulness of rigid disciplinary boundaries that separate the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and the arts. Eisner (1997) recently presented the “promise and perils” of alternative forms of representation, particularly as related to arts-based research:

One of the basic questions scholars are now raising is how we perform the magical feat of transforming the contents of our consciousness into a public form that others can understand. The assumption that the language of the social sciences—propositional language and number—are the exclusive agents of meaning is becoming increasingly problematic, and as a result, we are exploring the potential of other forms of representation for illuminating the educational worlds we wish to understand. . . . The concept of
alternative forms of data representation presents an image that acknowledges the variety of ways through which our experience is coded. (p. 4)

I support Eisner’s critique of the hegemony of propositional language and number in educational research—as well as McLeod’s (1987) insistence that word, number, image, gesture, and sound are all equally valid forms of research representation and Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis’s (1997) development of “portraiture” as an alternative method of inquiry blending aesthetics, narrative, and empiricism in order to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of experience and school life. These multiple approaches to educational research in the realm of the visual, literary, psychoanalytic, musical, and theatrical arenas must be encouraged and legitimated not just in the academy but also in research practices in classrooms and in schools. Traditional social science research in both quantitative and qualitative varieties is no more or less rigorous, insightful, or useful than informed eclectic postmodern alternatives. Novellas, plays, musical compositions, film documentaries, narratives, allegories, paradigm parables, portraiture, readers theater, art installations, or multimedia projects can be valid forms of research and data representation (Diamond and Mullen, 1999). Their validity is reflected partly in what Eisner (1994) calls “structural corroboration”—the interpretation of data corroborated by the way in which all artifacts support one another consensually—and “referential adequacy”—a phenomenological experience of the object of study in a new, more adequate way (pp. 236–242).

However, postmodern theories provide additional ways to understand and validate contemporary curriculum research. Lather (1991, 1997), for example, contends that validity refers to how we are able to improve the lives of those we study. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) and Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) remind us that validity in art is not based on replication and generalizability, but rather demands the idiosyncratic, anecdotal, and autobiographical. Kincheloe (1991) even suggests that “validity is probably an inappropriate word in the non-positivistic context” (p. 135), preferring to assess the trustworthiness of postmodern educational research by examining the credibility of portrayals of constructed realities. Kincheloe (1991) even suggests that “validity is probably an inappropriate word in the non-positivistic context” (p. 135), preferring to assess the trustworthiness of postmodern educational research by examining the credibility of portrayals of constructed realities. Kincheloe (1991) writes:

Our goal in research is not merely to validate the statistical relationship of variables, but it is to understand, to make intelligible, and to preserve the cohesiveness of the phenomenon being studied. . . . This process may better be accomplished by portraying patterns rather than by discovering causes. As a result, a researcher may be more concerned with choosing a language where signification and the concern with meaning take precedence over statistical significance. (p. 133)

Kincheloe conceives of critical postmodern research as more emotionally empathetic and artistic with an emphasis on participant reflection. Richardson (1994) argues that the debates about contemporary educational research and multiple forms of data representation emerge from postmodern theory:
The core of postmodernism is the doubt that any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal and general claim as the "right" or privileged form of authoritative knowledge. Postmodernism suspects all truth claims of masking and serving particular interests in local, cultural and political struggles. . . . No method has a privileged status. The superiority of [social] science over literature—or from another vantage point literature over [social] science research—is challenged. (p. 517)

While considerable attention has been given to debates about the merit of quantitative versus qualitative research methods, postmodern inquiry challenges the superiority of any methodology and exposes the contradictions in traditional methods of identifying issues for inquiry, selecting modes of analysis, and inscribing data into transmittable form. Postmodernism situates the researcher and the research subject in a historical and social context where knowledge is co-produced between the two, with results that are always contingent, tentative, and open to further interpretation. Since there are multiple ways of knowing and interpreting data, discovering a universal transcendent truth outside of a specific context—or for that matter a replicable and final solution to any research question—is impossible. Postmodernism resists the positivist urge for universal and unalterable objectivity, contending instead that we come to understanding through experiences that evoke rather than simply represent and replicate.

Jipson and Paley (1997) write, "As forms of this newer kind of practice continue to erupt in multiple ways, in multiple locations, for multiple reasons, inside and outside the grids of defined research categories, the sphere of scholarly inquiry has become an extraordinary animated site for a diverse and experimental analytic production by a number of thinkers not hesitant to situate inquiry in a vaster epistemological space" (p. 3). Tierney and Lincoln (1997) contend that we must provide such multiple forms of data representation for multiple audiences because "multiple texts, directed toward research, policy, social change efforts, or public intellectual needs . . . may better represent both the complexity of the lives we study, and the lives we lead as academics and private persons" (p. xi). They conclude that "how we present our work, and to whom, is more up for grabs today than at any other time in this century" (p. vii). Postmodern curriculum discourses contribute to our understanding of the multiplicity, complexity, and ongoing paradigm struggle in education.

Some scholars argue that the bifurcation of progressive education versus postmodern education only makes sense within the framework of modern dualisms. For example, Carlson (1995) reconceptualizes the terms "progress" and "progressivism" from a postmodern perspective:

A new democratic discourse can only be built by constructing some provisional notion of directionality in social development, and thus some idea of progress. Of course, such an idea of progress cannot be grounded on a linear, monolithic, or overly predetermined sense of direction. Rather, progress in a postmodern sense must be consistent with the notion of "bricolage," the path laid down by walking [as in the open-ended anthropological research of Claude Levi-Strauss]. (pp. 337–338)
Carlson concludes, along with many postmodern theorists, that democratic progressivism in education will have to live with certain tensions, ambiguities, chaos, and contradictions that are not fully resolvable. Working comfortably within ambiguity and complexity rather than lusting after certainty and reason is a postmodern response to questions of progress and justice.  

CURRICULUM IMPLICATIONS

The general field of curriculum, the field interested in school subjects, the relationship between school subjects, and the relationship between the curriculum and the world, is no longer preoccupied with development—writing behavioral objectives, evaluating with standardized tests, proposing universal school reform practices, and so on. “The field today is preoccupied with understanding. To understand curriculum does not mean that many of us do not want to change curriculum, both theoretically and institutionally; we do want change. However, many degrees of complexity have entered our conception of what it means to do curriculum research. In general, we are no longer technicians” (Pinar, et al., 1995, p. 6, emphasis in original). Postmodern curriculum research, as exemplified here, does not have a direct application to school subjects or a causal relationship with schooling practices. Rather, postmodernism contributes to school reform by reconceptualizing the very nature of the debate and allowing educators to challenge assumptions and envision alternative possibilities for change. Direct classroom applications emerge from within a specific context rather than from the imposition of universal principals.

As an example, consider the curricular reform initiative of block scheduling. I have served as a consultant for many school districts investigating scheduling alternatives, and I attempt to help educators understand that changing a time schedule does not directly correlate with curricular improvement. Some teachers and students flourish in the new block schedule, others languish. Experiences of time are complex and diverse. Unlike time management experts who present school districts with universal methods of organizing instruction, as well as expensive software and training guides for implementing block scheduling, my goal is to help educators explore the philosophy of time and multiple scheduling alternatives within the context of their local community. We must investigate the philosophical nature of time and visions of time and space before attempting to impose a comprehensive scheduling reform in schools. However, too often educators attempt to reform before they reflect. I have witnessed many schools in turmoil after quickly adopting a block schedule only to encounter unexpected—and sometimes unresolvable—conflicts after implementation of the program. This results from the modernist assumption that a universal solution to the question of time and space allocation actually exists.

Postmodern discourses can empower educators to explore and envision the complexity and ambiguity of schools and society and their interrelationship. This creates an approach to research and representation called “a general econ-
omy of writing” by Bataille (1991). He explores open-ended questions and the “excesses of energy” produced by inquiry. Thus, ambiguity and uncertainty become integral to the research process. Bataille challenges the model of an “efficient economy of writing” in modern scientific inquiry, because it destroys the possibility of meaning making.

POSTMODERN IMPLICATIONS FOR CURRICULUM

As noted in the poststructural concept of “the death of the subject,” the cohesive, unified identity of an individual that is fully capable of self-presence is an illusion of modern rational thinking and the scientism of modern psychology. Descartes’ Cogito continues to be undermined as postmodern psychology investigates the nature of language and human existence. Sarup (1989) contends that the autonomous subject has been dispersed into a range of plural, polymorphous, subject-positions inscribed in language, thus emphasizing diverse forms of individual and social identity. Bakhtin (1993) locates “self” within the dialogue between self and others, creating a relationship of simultaneity in difference. Wang (1997) explains, “The self, while distinguishable to itself, is always seen in relation to others and to the world of lived experience. At the same time, for Bakhtin, the sense of self is not only relational, but unfixable...self is engaged in its continuous becoming and transforming” (p. 20). Usher and Edwards (1994) present the postmodern case when they contend that the idea of self-presence as perfect representation is replaced by the “decentered subject, where the subject of consciousness, the reasoning, thinking, transparent subject, is displaced by the opaque subject of the unconscious” (p. 57).

What might this mean for educational research and classroom practices in the university and in K–12 schooling? Usher and Edwards (1994) offer this insight:

[1]t is impossible to be a teacher without also being a learner, that in order to be a teacher it is first necessary to abandon the position of the “one who knows,” recognizing both one’s own lack of knowledge and of self-transparency and mastery and that one’s own learning is never, and never will be, complete. (p. 80)

It follows here that the distinction between teachers and students is never so clear-cut as it is conventionally assumed, particularly in schools. Postmodern theorists such as Usher and Edwards contend that psychoanalysis provides the means to reconceptualize this aspect of authority in the teacher-student relationship. However, this deconstruction does not imply an advocacy of chaos in the classroom without any structure or a move to destruction. On the contrary, it means the discovery of limits, ambiguity, contrasts, multiplicity, irony, layers of interpretations, uncertainty, and shades of differences. Teachers and students must therefore continue the learning process indefinitely and defer final explanations. Usher and Edwards (1994) explain:
It is important to stress that what we are talking about here is not the humanistic conception of "lifelong learning" as the continual adaptation to the needs of the existing socio-economic order. Nor is it merely a restatement of the notion of learner centeredness. Rather it is an argument for teachers to continually question the ground upon which they stand, to question their own ready implication in the discourse of mastery. For this, teachers need to be trained to analyse what is repressed in order to foreground the affects, release the emotions [and imagination], and broaden the sense of fulfillment. The pupils would then be allowed to extend their analysis to their environment. To create the space they live in rather than just fit in with the set rules. Literally. To paint. To build. To co-operate. To participate. The limit then would be the analysis of the transference. (p. 80)

Here Usher and Edwards address the critiques of postmodernism directly. They admit that postmodern theories resonate with certain strands of progressive education but without its teleology of emancipated free expression and its containment within the overall framework of modernist educational theory and practice. They write that psychoanalysis in the Lacanian mode, then, is itself radically self-subversive and a process that does not simply examine its own ground but systematically cuts the ground away from itself.

What I propose is that the very concept of expertise, like Lyotard’s grand narratives, Usher and Edwards’ all-knowing teacher, and Eisner’s hegemony of propositional language and number in educational research must all be vigorously challenged. In order for this to occur, autobiographical, psychoanalytic, phenomenological, aesthetic, and multicultural perspectives must be foregrounded. Thus, postmodern researchers explore new lines of inquiry in this vein, aware of the necessity of deconstructing both traditional methodologies and postmodern inquiry itself. These are uncharted territories. Postmodern curriculum research is therefore often dismissed as nonconformist, unverifiable, unreliable, or simply incomprehensible.

As postmodern curriculum discourses move to expand research practices, alternative forms of representation such as phenomenological narratives, arts-based experiences, and autobiographical excavations are being utilized. Jipson and Paley (1997) describe this current research climate:

Increasingly, this production has pushed beyond conventional formulations and has linked the construction of research knowledge to alternate models of representation including performance art, personal conversation, nonobjective artistic practice, signifying presentation, journal entry, dream narrative, deep subjectivity, and fictional production. . . . It is about efforts to re-create structures and disclosures of knowledge that are responsive to, but unconstrained by, the weight of traditional research protocols. (p. 3)

CONCLUSION

The postmodern curriculum is challenging the modernist assumptions about the meaning and validity of educational research, as well as traditional
teaching and learning practices. As students are allowed to deconstruct and reconceptualize education within the postmodern paradigm, they carry this capacity for complexity back into their schools and classrooms—no longer fearful that the chaos, paradox, and indeterminacy they experience must be suppressed or erased. As more and more educators are empowered to explore alternative forms of representation within a postmodern context, reconceptualization will continue to characterize our schools and research communities. With Tierney and Lincoln (1997), I concur that research philosophies and methodologies are dramatically changing in the postmodern era and are more inconclusive than at any time in this century.

---

**Case Study 7: Resisting Traditional Approaches to Curriculum Implementation**

A graduate student in one of my classes who studied the concepts of curriculum presented in this chapter appreciated my perspective, but she could not imagine implementing a postmodern classroom. Her principal demanded daily lesson plans with specific outcomes outlined in the curriculum guide. The district administered proficiency tests in math, reading, science, and English. Her tenure depended on how well her students performed on these tests, and her pay scale followed a merit system that rewarded compliance with the traditional program. She resented the environment the system created, but she saw no realistic chance to deviate. Additionally, her students behaved so disruptively and their participation was so sporadic that she doubted they would accept a contextual and experiential curriculum. In short, she considered postmodern curriculum philosophy too idealistic and impractical. But for her final course project she explored the possibilities. Since the district did not test social studies and since most teachers skipped the thirty-minute social studies block to spend more time on the "important" subjects, she decided to experiment with her relatively safe social studies curriculum. She videotaped her lessons for a two-week unit on deserts. Instead of writing lesson plans in advance with specific objectives and evaluation requirements, she introduced the lesson with this simple statement: "Today we begin our next unit in social studies. Our topic is deserts." Bored and distracted faces appeared on the video. A few took notes. Most sat silently waiting for instructions. Then she dropped her bombshell: "I do not know very much about deserts. I have never been to a desert. We are going to have to figure out how to learn about deserts together." Immediately, one student raised his hand. "I went to a desert in California last summer." He described his trip enthusiastically, but he struggled to remember the name of the desert. Another student suggested that they look at a map and find its name. The class moved to the map. Another student pointed to Africa and said that her father once went hunting on a safari. "What's a safari?" another student asked. The class consulted to the dictionary to find the answer. Over the next few days, the students decided to divide themselves into groups to investigate deserts. One group selected animals of the deserts. They made a small-scale model of a desert and a safari. Another group made maps of the various deserts of the world. Other groups investigated plant life, human habitation, and survival. The teacher reported that she had never seen such enthusiasm for a unit of study in her career. Students who formerly presented severe behavior problems emerged as group
leaders. Another group of students went to the library every day at recess to find more information about their topics. She became convinced of the power of the postmodern ideas and reconceptualized curriculum when she completed this experimental project. The maps and models of deserts were displayed in the corridor and caught the attention of other teachers. I suspect that she will find ways to resist a steady dose of the traditional approach to curriculum and instruction in the future. Is this an example of postmodern curriculum? I do not know. However, it was one teacher’s attempt at implementing the things she had learned in her graduate class on postmodern theory. She began to shift her way of viewing curriculum as she deconstructed the modern curriculum in her school district.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

1. Do you have any beliefs that you consider to be absolutely true? What should be done about people who hold a different view than yours?

2. Some people believe that their religious text contains the absolute truth. Should there be only one Bible with only one interpretation for all Americans? For all human beings? And if so, which one? Can we affirm and celebrate the diversity of religious beliefs, political philosophies, sexual orientations, ethnic customs, racial heritages, and linguistic patterns in the world? What does postmodern theory teach us that can allow us to affirm diversity without splintering into warring factions?

3. Can the same be said for historical interpretation, teaching methods, and curriculum philosophies? Is there a metanarrative that applies to teaching and learning? Or are there multiple styles, approaches, methods, techniques, and outcomes?

4. What distinguishes postmodern theories from progressive education, social reconstruction, and critical pedagogy?

5. How might postmodern theory influence your school and classroom? What changes in your teaching could you make in order to move toward a postmodern vision? Was the fourth-grade teacher in the case study above actually moving toward a postmodern vision?

NOTES


2. I use the term hegemony here to mean ideological social control imposed on the general population either by force or psychological manipulation by power elites in business, the media, government or other institutions.

4. At this point you may want to revisit the discussion "Defining Postmodernism" in this chapter that set the stage for this discussion.

5. Kincheloe offers two dimensions of critical postmodern validity in *Teachers as Researchers: Qualitative Inquiry as a Path to Empowerment* (New York: Falmer Press, 1991). The first is Credibility of Portrayals of Constructed Realities. "Critical researchers reject the positivistic notion of internal validity which is based on the assumption that a tangible, knowable reality exists and research descriptions accurately portray that reality. The world is not explicable in terms of simplistic cause-effect relationships. The universe can be viewed from multiple perspectives which are constructions of the human mind. There is no absolute benchmark to which we can turn for certainty and comfort—we award credibility only when the constructions are plausible to those who constructed them" (p. 136). The second is Anticipatory Accommodation. "Here critical constructivist researchers reject the positivistic notion of external validity. The ability to make pristine generalizations from one research study to another again accepts a one-dimensional, cause-effect universe. Time or context factors are irrelevant in the positivistic context. If we accept a Piagetian notion of cognitive constructivism, we begin to see that in everyday situations humans don't make generalizations in this positivistic way. Piaget's notion of accommodation seems appropriate in this context as it asserts that humans reshape cognitive structures to accommodate unique aspects of what is being perceived in new contexts. We learn from our comparisons of different contexts. Researchers will always have to decide whether a research generalization is relevant to a particular student, whether the generalization needs to be fine tuned to accommodate the student's uniqueness, or whether the generalization is irrelevant to certain students in certain classrooms" (pp. 135–136). Kincheloe concludes that the notion of validity is transcended because the way we compare our action research to other groups is more in terms of a heuristic (a means of furthering investigation, questioning our practice) rather than in terms of mathematical probability. And what is ultimately the purpose of reconceptualizing the notion of validity? Kincheloe, like other postmodern theorists, turns to the notion of power. The hegemony of number and propositional language in positivist research creates a dominant ideology that blocks our recognition of exceptions and attempts to modify the assimilated understandings of the world of education. Postmodern research is necessary, I contend, in order to challenge modern ideologies and offer different ways of understanding education.


7. My commitment to justice and improvement in schooling and society inspires my work as a teacher and researcher. I often use the phrase "just, caring, and ecologically sustainable" to describe my vision of educational communities. I believe that understanding more so than prescriptive problem-solving in the modernist tradition will effect such change. This is true despite the ranting of recent critics like Constan and McCarty, who contend that postmodernists are more interested in maintaining the pretense of avant-garde theorizing than in promoting the value of practical change in education.


REFERENCES


Foucault, M. (1983). This is not a pipe (J. Harkness, trans.). Berkeley: University of California Press.


