Educational Change Through A Post-modern Perspective

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This paper analyses postmodern theory of education writings and illustrates some of the problems and alternatives in the realm of education, through and Islamic perspective.

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Abstract

To achieve a better understanding of the theoretical foundations of educational change, I have consulted postmodern theory as a new contesting school of thought. Utilizing a socio-historical method, I have reviewed some of the most important writings by postmodernist thinkers to illustrate some of the problems and alternatives in the realm of education. My major concerns include the intellectual shift from modern to postmodern conceptualizations, the linkage between postmodernism and critical pedagogy, and possible progressing alternatives. Despite postmodern critiques, there exists a promising basis for creating a synthetic model which incorporates both modern and postmodern attitudes in educational change.

As a student of "culture and values in education," I have pursued the interrelationship of these variables. Change is the common factor that results from their impact on each other. The paradox is that although changes may take place easily, the interpretation and evaluation may be more complicated. In this paper, I shall examine educational change as it has been explained in postmodern theories. This study

is a complementary work of my previous paper about theories of socio–educational change. No modern theory remains impervious to suggestions for educational change. It is interesting to see how postmodern ideas have influenced theories of educational change.

Postmodernism has been at the core of most debated academic issues during the 1980s. Words with the prefix post like post–industrialism, poststructuralism, postmodernism and post–liberalism have been at the core of discussions among social thinkers. After an allusion to the theoretical and social origins of the formation of postmodernism and its expansion into various other disciplines, I shall deal with its impact on educational thought. Topics like postmodern offerings in educational change, postmodern educationalists, postmodernity and critical pedagogy and the evaluation of postmodern educational ideas are aspects which will be concisely discussed in this paper. Through a socio–historical analysis, I will attempt to analyze the difference between a modern and postmodern perspective in educational change. As I have realized, postmodernism has linked its language of critique to the language of struggle and educational change. However, we have to know that an appropriate balance between the "language of critique" and the "language of hope and possibilities" may help us to eradicate boring and frustrating ideas in existing educational theories.

Roots of Postmodernism (Theoretical & Social Origins)

Henry A. Giroux has alleged that postmodernism in its broadest sense encompasses both intellectual position (a form of cultural criticism) and an emerging set of social, cultural, and economic conditions which echoes the characteristics of the age of global capitalism and industrialism (Giroux 1988, 9). Postmodernists oppose philosophical systems of thought that provide some universal standard, as emerged in the works of Adam Smith, Sigmund Freud, Georg Hegel, August Compte, and Karl Marx (Rust 1991, 616). Postmodernists are strongly influenced in their philosophy by concepts of existentialism, phenomenology and hermeneutics. Clues to the influence of previous currents in philosophical thought include challenges to conventional philosophy, an emphasis on singularity and particularity and a distrust of objective determinism (Ozman & Craver 1995, 365).

On an epistemological level, postmodernists tore down the certain and transcendent claims of modernist discourse to truth. This action resulted in discrediting the reliability of prevailing conceptualizations of what constitutes knowledge and truth (McLaren 1988, 53).

To have a clear understanding of postmodernism, we have to reexamine its modern background. Although largely regarded as a Western phenomenon, modernism conveys ideals like rationalism, humanism, democracy, individualism and romanticism which gradually but continuously have emerged in different places and at different times (Elkind 1995, 9). Modernism is a faith in rationality, science and technology which reinforces a belief in permanent, continual and progressive change and the unfolding of history. Education, consequently, serves as a socializing tool which legitimates codes by which the grand narrative of progress and human development will be infiltrated into future generations.

Knowledge within the discourse of modernism portrays a Eurocentric boundary of culture and civilization. This culture and civilization has been scripted by the white males who offered models of "high culture" opposed to what the elite regarded as mass or popular culture.

Modernism was echoed in religion through Protestantism, in the arts through self-expression, in science by means of experimentation and in the political domain through democracy (Elkind 1995, 9). Postmodernism began as a challenge to this mentality and as a movement to restructure our social, political and cultural geography (Giroux 1988, 5–6). Although the term postmodern is primarily an American term, most of its initiators belong to European schools of philosophy, particularly France (Ozman & Craver 1995, 365). At a global level, postmodernism suggest that the world order is shifting from a bipolar to a multipolar power configuration. This has resulted in the emergence of global markets and world concern through local involvement (Rust 1991, 618–9). Postmodernism, in comparison to modernism, celebrates language rather than thought and honors human diversity as much as it does human individuality (Elkind 1995, 10).

Another concern for postmodernists was the hegemonic aspect of modernism. In opposition to premodern and modern theoretical frameworks, a new trend emerged in the Frankfurt school in Germany under the name "critical theory". This group of social thinkers and philosophers at the institute for social research during 1923–50 expressed views which contrasted with the positivism of Descartes and Saint Simon. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer led this school in its attempt to develop a new interdisciplinary approach to the study of society and culture (Ozman & Craver 1995, 365). They were also concerned with the increase of human freedom through the radical transformation of social arrangements. Critical social thinkers believe that the existing natural and social sciences are unable to provide strong solutions for human problems. The convictions formulated in the eighteenth–century Enlightenment and accepted until modern times must, in their view, be radically reviewed (Demarrais 1995, 26–7).

These critical points of view were, in fact, precursors to the formation of post–positivism with the revival of concepts like the value of subjectivity, the legitimate use of nonexperimental and qualitative methods and the rejection of absolute truth in science.

Postmodernists also envision an eclectic move toward encompassing the perspectives and methods which may advance both human knowledge and understanding. They favor a perspectivism open to study cultural clusters' narratives and ways of seeing (Paulston 1996, 24). A main concern for postmodernism is to avoid giving authority to what Lyotard calls "grand narratives" or "metanarratives". This concept, as Cherryholmes (1988) defines it, is something "similar to paradigms that guide thought and practice in a discipline or profession." Lyotard claims that postmodern skepticism toward metanarratives results from their tendency to lock civilization into a totalitarian and logocentric thought system. Metanarratives are totalizing discourses that claim universal validity. These forms of "theoretical terrorism" deny contingency, values, struggle, and human agency. They offer universal rational

structures for what counts as the good, the true, or the beautiful (Ozman & Craver 1995, 363). Instead of seeing society and history through a direct, subjective human experience, metanarratives provide a totalizing theory which depends on abstract principles and theoretical constructs (Rust 1996, 31).

Postmodernists are in favor of partiality and specificity of discourse. They are arguing for a plurality of voices and narratives. This is, in fact, a challenge toward the crisis of totality and foundationalism as aspects of the Enlightenment and Western philosophical tradition (Giroux 1988, 14–15). It is worth mentioning, however, that postmodernists do not want to trap themselves into localized frameworks that have no general validity and prevent them from comparing and integrating cultures and values (Rust 1991, 616).

Some studies with a Marxist tendency have portrayed postmodernism as the cultural skin and/or superstructure of the current form of global capitalism. This represents the cognitive mood of people who are restless, critical, unsatisfied and insatiable (Brosio 1994, 3–4). Postmodernism has also caused problems for a number of facets of modern culture. Its followers fight with the concept of a fixed universal knowledge because of the tremendous impact of information technology. As we are in the age of electronically mediated culture, cybernetic steering systems and computer engineering, the conditions of knowledge are dramatically changing. Culture and civilization can no longer be ethnocentrically centered around America and Europe. We are living in the age of the 'information society' in which, as Daniel Bell declared, knowledge and information are replacing industrial commodity production. In our postmodern condition, speed has become the most important element of life. All bonds of previous restraints have been broken and no one can fully own information or sell it independently. Information technology has created a new site and structure for schooling and education.

Education is dominated by multiplying communications apparatuses. This dramatic and overwhelming impact of electronic communications has resulted in knowledge dilemmas and complexities. Some postmodernists view our age as largely artificial. People find it difficult to distinguish the real from the image. Our privacy and our intimate lives have also been captured by electronic technology. The invasion of information has projected aspects of human life as flashing cursors in both real and imaginary monitors. We are robbed of our true humanity by fantastic images. This environment necessitates a new type of schooling, as the factory model of the modern age is no longer sufficient.

Beyond all, we are victims of exploitative commercial interests. We need new educational sites able to emancipate us from multinational corporations which push us toward markets and force us into a materialist culture that encourages us to consume more and more commodities. Our schools should be free from the invasion of the capitalist economic advantage (Rust 1991, 620–2). After all, while we have to be more sensitive to the dangers of communications technology, we must also reconsider its emancipatory potential (Rust 1991, 26).

In addition, postmodernists persist in proclaiming the crucial need to engage the 'Other.' They argue that these challenges are rooted in the complex role of electronic mass media in constituting individual

identities, cultural languages and social formations (Giroux 1988, 17).

A New Trend or Merely the Continuation of Modern Theories?

An important question is whether postmodernism is a continuation of the modern age or whether it is something new and different? It is not easy to give the final answer because we are too close to the postmodernity that surrounds us. Like its emphasis on diversity as the key element in cultural representation, postmodernity itself does not represent a single clear theory. Some scholars, therefore, are seeking a theoretical syntheses out of new trends and social conditions (Kellner 1988b, 32). Jurgen Habermas, in a 1980 paper, initiated the idea that postmodernism is not a new concept; it is merely an anti–modern sentiment. Later he attacked postmodernist claims that it represents a rupture in history and viewed it as a form of neo–conservative ideology (Kellner 1988, 241). He remains supportive of the "project of Enlightenment" claiming that we should not give it up to those who wish to "negate modern culture." (Rust 1991, 613). Some scholars, however, allege that postmodernism is a new historical epoch after the demise of modernism while others claim that it marks a clear change in artistic and literary styles within the modern era (Ozman & Craver 1995, 361).

The third group adopts Max Horkheimer's idea and regards posmodernity as a 'society in transition' rather than a completely new social formation (Kellner 1988a, 267). Fredric Jameson (1984) views postmodernism as both progressive and regressive, both positive and negative. Apart from Jameson and some others, most scholars have considered postmodernity from a one–sided perspective and passed judgment upon it either positively or negatively (Kellner 1988b, 31). Postmodernism, according to many scholars, reflects a withdrawal from the authority and the conceptual systems of Western culture. In 1954, Toynbee contended that the modern age of western authenticity was beginning to be replaced by a new postmodern age advocating the coexistence of different cultures (Nicholson 1989, 198). Ernesto Laclau stated that "postmodernism cannot be a simple rejection of modernity , rather, it involves a different modulation of its themes and categories." (Giroux 1988, 6 quotes from p.65). A mild version of posmodernity appeared in the statement that it is not a revolt against modernity but is a set of attitudes and efforts to modify and correct modern ideas that are too narrow or too broad (Elkind 1995, 10).

Followers of the concept of postmodernity as a distinct era claim that postmodernism represents an era characterized by new cultural features, a new type of social life, and a new economic order. Others take postmodernism not as a sharp break in Western political and cultural life but as another theoretical discourse which competes against other theoretical orientations of the modern age (Rust 1991, 611). The consequences of these various attitudes have emerged in policies of educational change. Revolutionary tendencies in educational reforms could be the final outcome of periodizing perspectives in postmodernism.

The Scope of Postmodernism

Posmodernism has influenced a wide variety of fields including music, fiction, film, drama, architecture, criticism, anthropology, sociology and the visual arts (Giroux 1988, 7). The term postmodernism is an umbrella term for the diverse critical theories and practices of late twentieth–century. Poststructuralist criticism, feminist and postcolonial criticism, reader–response theories, new historicism and cultural–value studies all convey the nature of postmodernity in questioning traditional Western claims and assumptions (Keith 1995, 42).

The French stream of postmodernism challenges mainly the strcuturalists' conception of the fixed relationship between words and meanings. Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jean–Francois Lyotard have questioned the structuralists' asserted ultimate meanings to words. This challenge is referred to by postmodernists as 'deconstruction.' Deconstruction, "questions all that we take for granted about a language, experience and 'natural' systems of human communication." (Norris, 1982, p. XII). It also alleges that "there is a proliferation of interpretations, and no interpretation can claim to be the final one" (Sarup 1989, p. 58) [Keith 1995, 42–3].

In architecture, postmodernists dismiss the universal and international style of modern architecture which leads to repetitious, dogmatist and artistic poverty. Postmodernists also strive to revive the modern pragmatic philosophy through challenging the major tenets of modern physical and social sciences (Rust 1991, 611). Giroux outlines the extended influence of postmodernism on social thought. Major themes on his list include a refusal to accept grand narratives, a rejection of universal reason as a foundation for human affairs, a decentering of the humanist subject, a radical problematization of representation, a celebration of plurality and the politics of racial, gender, and ethnic difference. This vast manipulation of ideas has provoked major debates among conservatives, liberals and radicals in various fields (Giroux 1988, 8).

Postmodern Educationalists

Reviewing the entire postmodern discussions, we realize that educational thinkers have only recently entered into postmodern discussions. The limitations of modern theories motivated educationalists to examine postmodern educational findings. The rapid growth of critical theory in education is, in fact, simply feedback on the shortcoming of modern theories. The advocates of critical theory are one of the major sources for postmodern educational examination. Writing on postmodern education, Stanley Arnowitz and Henry Giroux observe that we can have a radical approach to education and democracy when they are replaced by the old–style master narratives found in the liberal arts, modern science, and philosophical positivism (Ozman & Craver 1995, 363). Peter McLaren is another figure who developed the concept of "critical pedagogy". Critical pedagogy deals with the politics of power relations on the side of the oppressed. William Stanley, among other numerous contributors juxtaposed critical postmodern pedagogy with social reconstructionlist tradition (Ozman & Craver 1995, 374–5).

Educational Change or Educational Reform

I realize that postmodernists may prefer to use the term 'educational change' rather than 'educational reform.' The term 'reform' for them, always carries moral, political and cultural connotations. Postmodernists approach education and educational theories with the same approach they take to other disciplines, using a deconstructionalist approach. This approach leads them to question any final interpretation or authentic meaning. They may argue that if one looks up the term reform in the dictionary and then connects it to the technical usage of the term, she/he understands postmodern sensitivity to the term. For them, any signifier can only direct us to another signifier, not to a final signified. In educational or non–educational reform processes, the person deals with correcting an error or removing defects.

This process will result in a sort of authenticity of a specific meaning or interpretation in a given theory. The term also conveys a type of non–revolutionary process and moral treatment. In all these cases, we will face the problem of final interpretation. In establishing educational reform, we are facing questions like: 'who defines what is right and what is wrong?' or 'who determines what is correct and what is an error?'

We also face the question of who decides efficiency and deficiency. This problem also appears in cases dealing with moral values. Some immoral values and practices could definitely be moral for another person or another culture. Another problem is that educational reform may sometimes need a dramatic revolutionary change of what we have previously taken for granted. Student movements, for example, or critical and revolutionary theories of educational change may necessitate dramatic changes. Therefore, I prefer to use the term 'change' instead of reform throughout my examination of educational change according to the postmodern perspective.

Postmodern Ideas in Educational Change

To respond to educational change through a postmodern perspective, some scholars believe that since schools are mirrors of family and society, change emerges in schools as a reflection of what has already happened in family and society. Therefore, prior to any conscious and planned change/reform agenda, schools must have undergone a major transformation. (Elkind 1994, 8). To provide a picture of postmodern schools, Elkind sheds light on the postmodern condition of family and society. He assert that schools are already postmodern and we simply have to acknowledge changing conditions. For Elkind, a postmodern school echoes the sentiments, values and perceptions of postmodern family and society. The emergence of a permeable family instead of a nuclear family, has changed school sites into places for acknowledging shared parenting, consensual love and urbanity with open and flexible boundaries between home and workplace, public and private life and child and adult– multicultural and anti–bias curricula, self–esteem and para–pedagogical roles. Therefore, it is the reformers –not the schools– who need to be reformed. (Elkinds 1994, 12–4).

As I understand it, postmodernists are crucially concerned with what we teach, how we teach, and why we teach. They want to be sure that students are provided with democratic, open, heterogeneous, non-sexist, non-racist and self-reflexive cultural identities. (Keith 1995, 48-9). Other scholars observe that since education is a tool to building culture and transmitting it to the next generation, it is extremely important to re-inquire and rethink current educational theories and practices. Conscious educational change is, nonetheless, a multi-dimentional phenomenon which must be addressed comprehensively. To bring about educational change, postmodernists have challenged various aspects of education. The aim of education for some of postmodern educationalists is to teach students to struggle against inequality and emancipate themselves from oppressing relationships. Others maintain that education should result in self- and social empowerment (Ozman & Craver 1995, 376-7).

Postmodern critical ideas like redrawing maps of meaning, desire and difference and questioning traditional forms of power associated with modes of legitimization can help us to have a broader theory of schooling and critical pedagogy (Grioux 1988, 25). Educators can restructure the context of learning by redefining authority. This change will give voice to subordinate, excluded and marginal groups. Postmodernists also offer educators ideas about liberating and empowering pedagogy. For postmodernists all narratives are partial and any form of knowledge and pedagogy wrapped with legitimizing sacred and priestly authorities is refuted (Giroux 1988 26-7). Students must be given opportunity to speak up and to locate their identities in a proper social context.

It is vital to remember that scholars like Giroux insist that postmodernism can never dismiss the emancipatory possibilities of the language and practice of a revitalized democratic public life which is an important concept in modernism. Concerning curriculum, postmodernists view it not as a set of separate subjects and materials but as a means of empowering people and transforming society through an inside-out process. Postmodernists have also sided with an interdisciplinary approach that replaces disciplinary boundaries (Ozman & Cravery 1995, 379-80).

Richard Rorty, who is influenced by the ideas of Nietzche, Gadamer and American pragmatism, argues against the Platonic assumption that "Truth" exists apart from Man and assumes a new goal for education, saying: "We need to see education not as helping to get us in touch with something non-human called Truth or Reality, but rather in touch with our own potentialities (Nicholson 1989, 200). Truly, Nicholson concludes that according to a postmodern feminist, pedagogy is not to destroy tradition but to give students the opportunity to reinterpret it for themselves in the light of new problems and perspectives (Nicholson 1989, 204).

Dealing with similarities within differences as a major concern in postmodern educational contributions, Kanpol stresses the practical aspects and advises teachers to take into account students' differing cultural experiences. This should be combined with drawing out the similarities across these experiences. Therefore, decision-making in school sites should be based on mutual cooperation rather than on the traditional top-down authoritative style (Kanpol 1992, 226). Inspired by the postmodern idea

of seeing the 'Other', parent associations and students rights groups presently demand to participate in school management policy and decision making (Rust 1991, 617). Cooperation is also a key element in the learning process and is aimed at stopping various forms of oppression, subordination and alienation (Kanpol 1992, 228–9).

Another contribution of postmodernism is its calling attention to moral and ethical aspects of education. Including differences and traditionally marginalized groups and opening room for "the Other" silent in a learning environment is, in fact, a part of morality in postmodernist theory. Other moral aspects include helping students to be able to recognize cultural differences and emphasizing diversity and social discourse direct education toward a pluralistic democratic society.

Postmodernists have also highlighted the political nature of education. In educational institutions only certain types of knowledge or world views or ways of thinking are legitimate and worth teaching. Kieth articulates that acquired knowledge in a given time or place is not necessarily a system of thought that directs students to some truth, but mostly is something that fits with the existing social conditions (Keith 1995, 50). Postmodernists have discovered the subtle impact of 'hidden curriculum' in shaping personal and social identities. Postmodern writings on language, discourse and narrative as major elements in forming people's minds have facilitated our understanding of the role of curriculum and the teaching–learning process in liberating or oppressing the population (Ozman & Craver 1995, 384–5). The suggested term "border pedagogy" in Giroux's essay advises educators to move toward the peripheral borders from the dominant central culture to see the margins (Brosio 1994, 24).

In reviewing postmodern educational ideas, we realize that it is difficult to integrate postmodern premises and critiques of education. Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist, for instance, believes that problems always are rooted in the hegemony of a dominant state. Jurgen Habermas and Michel Foucault insist that the evaluation of knowledge as a by–product of the educational system will only be accurate when we discover its connection to power. For them, the acquisition of reliable knowledge is possible when an open, free and uninterrupted dialogue takes place. They argue that facts are always interrelated with values. Human knowledge is shaped by the impact of social and historical contexts (Demarrais 1995, 27–8).

To sum up, I want to rephrase Keith's words about the key themes of postmodern education. For her, elements like self–reflexivity, self–examination, critical questioning, and locating things in their socio–political contexts are central in planning any critical and postmodern educational policies (1995, 53).

Postmodernism & the Critical Pedagogy

As a form of "new" postmodern sociology of education, critical pedagogy deals with topics such as the subjectivity of knowledge, the existentiality of knowledge experience, the socio–economic and political interests provided by schools and finally the conflicts and contestations which emerge in school sites. This body of literature has constituted the major concern for Giroux's writings, particularly, one of his

recent books Teachers As Intellectuals. Giroux attempts to elucidate the impact of language both in schools and other educational settings. Language for him, is something more than merely a reflection of the relationship between words and meanings. He views systems of language and ideas as the foundation for systems of power (Goodman 1988, 142–3).

To initiate any change in schools, Giroux places an emphasis on two major elements. Restructuring schools as 'democratic public spheres', and repositioning teachers as transformative intellectuals are critical alternatives to traditional and conservative practices (Goodman 1988, 146). Critical pedagogy, according to McLaren and Hammer, is an opposition toward empiricist and traditionalist approaches. It advocates concerns such as how to live meaningfully in a world confronted by pain, suffering, and injustice (1989, 39). The two scholars describe critical pedagogy as:

"In short, critical pedagogy is about the problematization of language, experience, knowledge/power, and culture, how they are mutually constitutive of subjectivity... That is, critical pedagogy wrestles with the question of how individual subjectivity is produced through language and also by social, historical, and economic relations. (1989, 40)."

Critical pedagogists insist on making pedagogy more political and politics more pedagogical. This interrelated process requires schools, on the one side, to enter directly into the political sphere through a struggle to define meaning and also a struggle over power relations. On the other side, schools should utilize an emancipatory form of pedagogy which treats students as critical agents competent to analyze and investigate knowledge (McLaren & Hammer 1989, 40). Another key component in critical pedagogy is to teach students to be counter–hegemonic. Students must be able to know how their desires and needs, their identities and dreams are shaped through dominant cultural forms (McLaren & Hammer 1989, 51).

As Giroux maintains, critical theorists advocate a social structure which is not hierarchical and exalted (McLaren & Hammer 1989, 55). Postmodernists always prefer a critical pedagogy which views educators as socio–cultural workers. Rather than a limited professionalism, teachers and educators are looked upon as engineers of appropriate ideologies and social practices. They are responsible for helping students to develop a critical consciousness of the connections between culture, history and politics. (Ozman & Craver, 1995, 382–3).

Students, according to postmodernists, need to learn critical thinking rather than simply storing facts or information. Critical thinking is an ability to question the facts or a given system of knowledge. Therefore, both students and teachers enjoy the ability to reexamine the underlying reasons of conventions and provided ways of knowing (Kieth 1995, 52). To give a more concrete suggestion to educators, critical thinkers ask educators to stop seeking solutions out of their own environment even if they are carefully formulated. Educators should collaborate in analyzing and examining the contextual conditions of their own classrooms and communities in order to build empowering pedagogical models.

In his discussion about postmodern critical pedagogy, Kellner focus on 'critical literacy' as another key theme which gives learning process a broader sense. Students who grew up with critical literacy are able to read popular and media culture critically. Critical literacy is in fact a means of empowerment. Empowerment in this context means that students are capable of comprehending and critically evaluating the taken-for-granted aspects of their cultures (Kellner 1988b, 47). Critical pedagogy educates students to become active citizens and participants in making and remaking society.

After all, it is crucial to know that ideas of any critical pedagogist cannot provide "cook book" descriptions of "what are the best ways of viewing and acting in schools." Once critical pedagogists have inspired us, we no longer want to be passive consumers of ideas and blind imitators of what others have offered. We need to rethink ideas and make what we see compatible with our own possibilities and limitations. If we do so, we have both understood and applied critical pedagogy.

It seems appropriate to me here to repeat the motivating words of McLaren and Hammer where they state: "The future does not belong to those who intend to remain as they are, and those who (unintentionally) unlearn the meaning of hope, but to those who can think and act as critical remarkers of history, and who choose to do so" (1989, 56).

A Critical Evaluation of Postmodernism

As a new, confusing, and multi-dimensionally untested theory, postmodernism has received few critiques. Some scholars complain that the postmodern language of educational alternatives is too academic to be interpreted and applied in the 'real' world. Postmodernists are also challenged for merely refuting what modern theorists rather than providing new options. They have discoursed their message in an overwhelming negative tone rather than in a positive and normal tone which ordinary citizens can understand. (Ozman & Craver 1995, 385).

Others maintain that postmodernists have neglected self-critique. If all theories are political and ideological, how can postmodernists exclude themselves from this principle? When postmodernists are antagonistic against other theories for being totalizing and subtly legitimizing power and control, how can they evaluate their own theory as un-laden? Although it is important to see the differences, we must not close our eyes to commonalities. An overemphasis on differences, particularly from critical theorists and an oversimplification of commonalities mean that postmodernists may risk an unhealthy extension of separatedness in human life (Ozman & Craver 1995, 386).

Concluding Remarks

The examination of educational change through a postmodern perspective has caused me to question my own theoretical knowledge. The acquired paradoxical ideas have created an internal challenge in my mind. Although I have realized the inevitable progressing impact of elements which are promoted by postmodernists, I am still pessimistic toward some other findings. Elements like the impact of power

relationships, dominant and high culture, metanarratives, language of critiques and possibilities and information technology on human knowledge, the giving voice to silent groups and a promotion of critical thinking are promising aspects of postmodern thought. However, a total rejection of universality and the authenticity of any sort of human knowledge and an oversimplification of human commonalities will move us toward a "world at risk!" The rejection of a single and final authentic knowledge or interpretation should not lead us to the relativity of human knowledge. If we lack any authentic criterion, we will have unlimited infinite possibilities of assertedly authentic knowledge.

I also have to mention that postmodern consideration of subjectivity and images as oppose to objectivity and reality have called attention to a neglected aspect in human knowledge. This, however, should not move us toward another type of one-sidedness. I think human knowledge is a result of the juxtaposition of both image and real, subjectivity and objectivity. Therefore, if we neglect the real in favor of the image, we are weakening the realistic aspect of human knowledge and revealing it to be a myth.

If one accepts that a part of human knowledge is the result of divine inspiration and the gifts of the prophets to humankind from God, we will then possess a kind of universal and authentic knowledge. This type of knowledge can be neither oppressive nor elite-centered. As I have discussed in my previous paper about the Islamic view of social change and social justice, since the very purpose of prophethood was to establish social justice, the knowledge provided by the prophets can be neither oppressive nor elite dominating. Religiously, if we believe that apart from the frustrating and oppressing realities in the history of all religions, there had been Godly instructions to direct human life toward social justice, then we have already accepted a universal and authentic belief. The total rejection of universality precludes postmodernism itself to a generalization of non-Anglo-American cultures.

Moreover, if we deny universality even in moral values, we will never be able to gather human multiple cultures under one umbrella accepted worldwide. If moral values are specific and particular due to the authenticity of various cultures, the value in one culture will be anti-value in another one. Additionally, if postmodernism and critical theory are reactions against recent capitalism and its related theories, we must not extend it to incorporate all of human knowledge. As I understand it, postmodern critiques of the origins of human knowledge must be addressed only to humanities and social science. The formation of math and parts of natural science could be value-free and apolitical.

In education, although the postmodern tone and language is mainly negative and contesting, its critiques are alarming and awakening.

Finally, postmodernism is not a tested theory. It is also difficult to bring about a synthetic version from diverse ideas, nonetheless, its various ideas, once tested, may improve dimensions of educational thought. As in other modern theories, the present tendency is to deal with particular aspects of education instead of inventing a single synthetic theory.

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