

Thinking about learning in apocalyptic times

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Those in subordinated groups within their societies have little reason to hanker after modernism and all it is associated with – industrialism, universalism, individualism, and so on. Modernism is essentially Western in its concerns, philosophies, influences and allusions. Modernism is a label for the Western worldview, i.e. the complete set of philosophies and discourses built into a culture and its language archive and practices. If postmodernism moves beyond or away from modernism, it might reasonably be expected to appeal to marginalised thinkers in today's globalised world: a group that could include everyone who does not profit from the “bloody heirloom” of the “passive power of whiteness” (Coates, 2017). But postmodernism is yoked to modernism; it makes sense only in relation to modernism (Peters, 2008). If postmodernism is characterised by playfulness, its effects on the subjugated majority amount only to tricks played by the elite. Under postmodernism, the power relationships on which modernity depends remain undisturbed.

Some argue the movement beyond postmodernism demands a new prefix, and favour replacing ‘post’ with ‘trans’ (Epstein, 2017), ‘meta,’ ‘para,’ or ‘neo.’ The last of these signals a return to (or of) something, which makes it an unlikely contender for the purpose of seeking definitions for something new. But the other three encompass similar meanings as ‘post’ - in particular the sense of ‘moving beyond’ something. So perhaps what needs to change is the stem, not the prefix: by this reasoning, if postmodernism has outlived its usefulness, it is not because of the limitations of ‘post’ but rather because of its links to modernism as the ground or state of origin, of what is accepted as normal.

To think beyond postmodernism requires moving beyond more than just modernism: the prefix matters much less than what follows it. If the problem with modernism is that it is not universal, then it is necessary to invoke larger terms that encompass all of humanity: truth, love, ecology, the planet, or humanity itself. One modernist thinker who foresaw this impasse was C. S. Lewis, who coined the term ‘post-humanity’ in his classic essay, *The abolition of man* (Lewis, 1943, p. 51) in arguing that the extension of the scientific worldview to all aspects of social life would inexorably lead to the extinction of human life. Hence, on this view, beyond postmodernism lie the philosophical ruins of post-truth and post-humanity.

Is education possible under such conditions? As a critical indigenous scholar in Education, I have tried to think the end of social amnesia, in the community and in the academy: the end of the “immaculate conception” discourse of education; in its place the recognition of the influence of war on education (Falk, 2005, p. 204). How would unblinding ourselves to these links impact on our primary classroom practice? I concur with the final conclusions of Michael F. D. Young, who articulated the influence of social discourses on truth production in his seminal book, *Knowledge and Control* (Young, 1971). An advocate of social constructivism for decades, much later in his career Young rehabilitated disciplinary (powerful) knowledge but argued it had to be taught critically, not innocently (Young, 2008). If the era of postmodernism has come and gone, it has failed to shift a modernist school curriculum. Postmodernism has links with other ‘posts’ such as postcolonialism: indigenous scholars of education today are more interested in ‘decoloniality’ and possibly ‘demodernism’ too. There is a small move in Aotearoa-New Zealand to production of classroom resources that aim to be critical, in regard to the narratives that are taught about the racialised history of our country (e.g. see <http://cmph.cybersoul.co.nz>). Perhaps, to move educational theory beyond postmodernism will require a postmodernist approach to curriculum (Doll, 1993)?

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