Modern vs. post-modern teacher education: Revealing contrasts in beliefs and practices
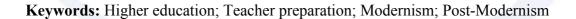
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Upon analysis of teacher preparation programs, those using a modernist approach to curriculum and instruction focus on training teacher candidates to utilize instructor-centered pedagogical strategies, standardized curricula published by sources outside the school, and assessment systems that provide easily quantifiable data to be used to satisfy administrators who may use "data-driven" instead of "data-informed" management (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). By contrast, a post-modernist approach educates teachers to foster student-centered instruction/facilitation of learning, teacher-developed curriculum based on research and knowledge of student needs, and a variety of assessment strategies, including formative assessment designed to support assessment for learning (Chappuis, 2009). The use of the verbs "train" and "educate" is important when contrasting these two approaches. The former connotes a relatively simplistic transfer of knowledge and skills from an expert to novices, while the latter infers a gradual acquisition of a knowledge base leading to the development of associated skills and professional dispositions.

The accountability movement, at least since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, has underscored an emphasis on increased knowledge acquisition that has to align with a marketable transfer of skills to various workplaces. Production has become "post-modernized" by eliminating the familiar path to economic progress demonstrated by leading developed countries (Peters and Besley, 2006). However, education policies still attempt to use modernist approaches in managing educational settings when students and the world in which they live are post-modern. There is no more dominant metanarrative (Lyotard, 1984) to structure curriculum development. Moreover, in a knowledge economy (Trani and Holsworth, 2010), higher education institutions have undergone a transformation by developing curricula that emphasize skills sets sought after by employers, while promoting alternative content delivery methods, such as e-learning.

- Description of the approach to the given problem:

Cunningham and his colleagues (as cited in Peters and Besley, 2006, p. 25) outline several traits of what they label as "borderless education":
a) globalization;
b) new instructional technologies (more of which capitalize on virtual communities that use and produce knowledge);
c) transferable best practices;
d) adaptability to new learning paradigms and content delivery modes;
e) increasing cost of education (both for the public at large and individual students);
f) stricter certification or licensure requirements derived from redefining professionalism in various fields of activity; and
g) Generation Xers.

Current curriculum work is still derived from content and skills that are connected in a prescriptive manner (Alba, Gonzalez-Gaudiano, Lankshear, and Peters, 2000). As far as teacher education is concerned, policy affects it in terms of curriculum as well as credentials offered upon graduation from such programs.

From this review of the literature and based on Sahlber's (2011) work on schools in Finland, we have developed the following table that contrasts a modern and post-

modern teacher education program in terms of for what the program prepares its graduates to do in their practice:

Modern/Post-Modern Teacher Education Contrasts

Modern advocates in theory and/or practice	Post-Modern advocates in theory and/or practice
1. Standardizing teaching and learning a. Setting clear, high, and centrally prescribed performance expectations for all schools, teachers, and students to improve the quality and equity of outcomes. b. Standardizing teaching and curriculum in order to have coherence and common criteria for measurement and data.	**1. Customizing teaching and learning** a. Setting a clear but flexible national framework for school-based curriculum planning. b. Encouraging local and individual solutions to national goals in order to find best ways to create optimal learning and teaching opportunities for all. c. Offering personal learning plans for those who have special educational needs
2. Focus on literacy and numeracy a. Basic knowledge and skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and the natural sciences serve as prime targets of education reform. Normally instruction time of these subjects is increased.	**2. Focus on creative learning** a. Teaching and learning focus on deep, broad learning, giving equal value to all aspects of the growth of an individual's personality, moral character, creativity, knowledge, and skills.
3. Teaching prescribed curriculum a. Reaching higher standards as a criterion for success and good performances. b. Outcomes of teaching are predictable and prescribed in a common way. c. Results are often judged by standardized tests and externally administered tests.	**3. Encouraging risk-taking** a. School-based and teacher-owned curricula facilitate finding novel approaches to teaching and learning, and encourage risk-taking and uncertainty in leadership, teaching, and learning.
4. Borrowing market-oriented reform ideas a. Sources of educational change are management administration models brought to schools from the corporate world through legislation or national programs. b. Such borrowing leads to aligning schools and local education systems to operational logic of private corporations.	**4. Learning from the past and owning innovations** a. Teaching honors traditional pedagogical values, such as teacher's professional role and relationship with students. b. Main sources of school improvement are proven good educational practices from the past.
5. Test-based accountability and control a. School performance and raising student achievement are closely tied to processes of promotion, inspection, and ultimately rewarding schools and teachers. b. Winners normally gain fiscal rewards, whereas struggling schools and individuals are punished. Punishment often includes loose employment terms and merit-based pay for teachers.	**5. Shared responsibility and trust** a. Gradually building a culture of responsibility and trust within the education system that values teacher and principal professionalism in judging what is best for students. b. Targeting resources and support to schools and student who are at risk to fail or to be left behind. c. Sample-based student assessments.

Adapted from Sahlberg, P. (2011, p. 103). *Finnish lessons: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland?* New York: Teachers College Press.

- Results, including how findings relate to previous work:

Based on the feedback collected from more than 140 instructors in an educational leadership program at a private university in Southwest U.S., there is an apparent "tension" stemming from the disconnect between what seems to be the belief sets and practices of the respondents. There are encouraging signs that these individuals favor flexible curricula that allow for teacher autonomy in identifying appropriate pedagogies to meet the needs of specific groups of students. At the same time, there seems to be validation of a systematic (or "centralized") approach to student learning assessment based on which academic progress could be made and demonstrated. By grouping the survey items that relate to either one of the poles of our theoretical model included in the preceding table, 12 out of the 26 items relate to the post-modern tenets listed above, while the remaining 14 support the modern stance in terms of teacher education. A majority of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (ranging from 52% to 99%) on all of the 12 post-modern items. On 7 of the 14 modern-leaning items a majority of respondents (ranging from 60% to 91%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the survey statements. Of particular interest are 6 items from the modern category where most of the respondents (ranging from 55% to 90%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statements, which would place them outside the modernist approach to teacher education when it comes to prescriptive school curricula, market-driven reform initiatives, and assessment/accountability.

These findings correlate with earlier work related to the student-centered ways in which school curricula (and, by extension, teacher preparation programs) structure learning opportunities for all students as a flexible, contextualized manner to support the development of 21st-century skills (Hayes Jacobs, 2010). The researchers' intent is to use the findings from this survey to further investigate specific examples of successful teacher preparation programs that integrate the various meanings and applications of teacher candidates' knowledge bases, skill sets, and dispositions to transition effectively to the first years of classroom practice.

- Implications or relevance of work for others (including how generalizable the findings are):

These findings are intended to support further contributions to the literature related to the impact of economy, technology, and curricula on the strategic planning processes in teacher education programs across the United States. A particular focus will be placed on critical issues that are an integral part of the fabric of effective programs in the field of teacher preparation, such as student population diversity, self-expression, creative and critical thinking, metacognition, as well as professional dispositions.

- Final paragraph in which to indicate what has been concluded:

The analysis of our data indicates that the participating American teacher educators align their professional beliefs with post-modernist tenets related to teacher preparation in terms of customizing teaching and learning, focusing on creative learning, encouraging risk-taking, and promoting innovations in education. However, when it comes to shared responsibility and trust (closely associated with student

assessment and teacher accountability), there is a stronger presence of a modernist stance in the participants' responses.

- Reference of proposal:

The proposal centers on a comparative analysis of teacher educators' responses to a survey dealing with two theoretical stances to teacher preparation. A modernist approach emphasizes instructor-centered pedagogical strategies, commercial standardized curricula, and highly quantitative assessment systems that meet "data-driven" management requirements. By contrast, a post-modernist approach promotes student-centered instruction, teacher-developed curricula based on research and knowledge of student needs, and a variety of assessment strategies, including formative assessment designed to support assessment for learning. The application of findings is intended to inform professional conversations aimed at restructuring teacher education programs in the U.S. as a way to connect teacher candidates' knowledge, skills, and dispositions with the increasingly diverse reality of the classrooms where they are going to be teaching in the 21st century.

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