デューイの教育実践：
モダニストそれともポストモダニストアプローチ？
Dewey's Practice of Education:
A Modernist or Postmodernist Approach?

大森　愛 OHMORI, Ai

● 国際基督教大学大学院
　Graduate School of Education, International Christian University

Keywords　デューイ，教育実践，ポストモダン，モダン
Dewey, teaching practice, postmodernism, modernism

ABSTRACT

　The rise of the philosophy of "postmodernism" in the twentieth century had influence on various fields including the realm of education. The aim of the present paper is to examine Dewey's thought and practice of education in relation to the philosophy of postmodernists. In order to do so, first, the definitions of "modernism" and "postmodernism" will be organised. The conditions of education under these thoughts will also be described. Then, Dewey's view on teaching practice and learning will be reviewed. It is true that Dewey did not live in the time of postmodern era. It is also true that there is a limit in including Dewey's expectations on the role of teachers as a postmodernist one. However, examining Dewey's thought and practice of education from postmodernist perspectives, the present paper found that there were surprisingly profound commonalities between Dewey's thoughts and practice of education and those of postmodernists' philosophy.

　20世紀におけるポストモダンの思想の興隆は，教育を含めた多くの分野に影響を及ぼした．本論文の目的は，デューイの教育思想や実践をポストモダンの思想から考察する点にある．そのため，まず「モダン」と「ポストモダン」の定義を整理し，これらの思想における教育の条件について述べる．次に，デューイの教育実践や学習に対する考えを述べる．実際デューイはポストモダンの時代に生きてはいない．また，デューイの教師の役割に対する期待をポストモダンの思想に含めることに限界があると考える．しかし，デューイの教育思想と実践をポストモダンの視点から考察した結果，この2つの間に驚くほど意味深い共通点が存在することが分かった．

1. Introduction

The amount of literature on "postmodernism" has been to an intimidating scope and depth (Peters and Wain, 2003). The term "postmodernism" is complicated and it is notorious for its difficulty in describing its origin as well as its meaning. Moreover, the term is difficult to grasp for its concept appears in various disciplines such as art, literature, fashion, music, etc. On one hand, some researchers go back as far as the beginning of the 20th century. On the other hand, researchers like Klages (2003) limit the focus of "postmodernism" in an area of academic study that has only emerged since the mid-1980s.

This new perspective was also applicable in the realm of education. Furthermore, some writers interpreted thoughts and therefore educational approaches of John Dewey as a postmodernist one (Rorty, 1982; Hickman, 2004). The aim of this paper, therefore, is to illustrate how Dewey is a modernist and/or postmodernist in educational thoughts and practices. To do so, it would probably be good to begin by saying something about how I understand the term "modernism" and "postmodernism" in education. Next, Dewey's thoughts on the aim and practices of education will be explored. Then, the paper will examine them from a postmodernist perspective. Finally, limits or differences in Dewey's view from a postmodernist perspective will be considered.

2. Modernism and Postmodernism

Both of the terms "modernism" and "postmodernism" are not given a clear definition. However, some clear distinctions are detected.

For instance, the attitude toward fragmentation, incoherence, and discontinuity is completely different between the two sorts. Modernism takes such conditions as "tragic, something to be lamented and mourned as a loss" (Klages 2003, p. 2). Postmodernism, on the other hand, celebrates those conditions.

Based on such an attitude of modernists, they try to create order and stability by placing things into categories of "order" and "disorder." When such categorization is rationalized, stability of a society is maintained. According to Jean-Francois Lyotard, one of the distinguished thinkers of postmodernism, modernists attempt to legitimate practices and beliefs through such categorizing or through "meta-narratives" (1986). The purpose of postmodernism then is to be skeptical toward meta-narratives. Postmodernism argues that by categorizing things into "order" and "disorder" through "meta-narratives," modernists "[mask] the constructedness" of contradictions and instabilities that are inherent in any societies (Klages 2003, p. 4). Therefore, postmodernism is against authoritarian views and favors "mini-narratives" that each group holds. Postmodernism insists upon the inclusion of the voices of the "other" as central to democratic debate (Sadovnik, 2002).

Nicholson (1996) provides another explanation on modernism and postmodernism. "Modernists defend traditional ideals of freedom and reason, while postmodernists question the existence of universal truths or disinterested knowledge apart from relations of power" (p. 402). In Nicholson's words, Rene Decartes (1596-1650) claimed that "all knowledge is grounded in the clear and distinct ideas of the individual rational mind, which...can accurately represent universal truths about objective reality" (1996, p. 402). Following his line, philosophers of the later times assumed the existence of "the individual rational mind" as something capable of understanding universal principles that were out there for them to quest. In short, "the truth" and "reality" were out there beyond the control of people. What was necessary then was for the people with "the individual

rational mind" to try to get close and find out what that reality was. Postmodernists, in contrast, argue that reality "does not exist objectively "out there"" (Beck, 1993, p.3). Furthermore, we are the ones who create and interpret what reality is for us based on our needs and interests. In Beck's (1993) words, "we are developing a "working understanding" of reality and life, one which suits our purposes" (p. 5). In other words, different groups arrive at one of many creations of reality that is different from any other explanations of reality.

How does postmodern education differ from more traditional versions of education? The ideas of truth, knowledge, and attitudes of teachers and students toward learning vary.

In postmodern perspectives, reality is not out there for us to learn. Similarly, in postmodern education, knowledge and what needs to be taught in school does not exist universally nor determined by authority. Instead, the past knowledge will not disappear but what should be taught and learnt will continually be reframed "in the light of an ongoing, changing present" (Doll, 1993, p. 157) by curricularists, teachers, and learners themselves. Postmodern curriculum is flexible and transforming in order to meet the needs and interests of its local people.

In postmodern education, learning and understanding are not transmitted as it would be in more traditional education, but they are "made as we dialogue with others and reflect on what we and they have said...[and] between ourselves and our texts" (Doll, 1993, p. 156). The role of teachers then is no longer that of a dictator or authority that controls what goes on in the classroom. Moreover, teachers are not someone who decides values that "are away from the practicalities of life" (Doll, 1993, p. 167) of its people. Instead, in transformative, postmodern education, teachers too become part in making decisions for procedure, methodology, and values that education should take to suit the interests of local people.

A misconception of more traditional versions of education was that it assumed students will "best develop... planning skills by being a passive receiver or copier of another's plans" (Doll, 1993, p. 170). However, students are viewed as active participants of knowledge in postmodern education. The aim of postmodern education, therefore, is not to equip students with a certain set of knowledge but to make them "learn how to learn" as expressed in Beck's (1993) words.

3. Dewey's View on Teaching Practice and Effective Learning

Let us now turn to Dewey's view on education. As Hickman (1996) describes, "for Dewey, education is both a tool and an outcome of democratic practice" (p. 151). Dewey pursued for more democratic education than how it was done by modernists. He tried to do that by altering views on the aim of education as well as practices of teaching and learning. The aim of education is to expand democracy by cultivating within students ability to obtain genuine freedom. Genuine freedom for Dewey is no longer "the ultimate reward of the quest for truth" as seen in the mind of God (Nicholson, 1996, p. 402). Instead it rests "in the trained *power of thought*, in ability to "turn things over," to look at matters deliberately, to judge whether the amount and kind of evidence requisite for decision is at hand, and if not, to tell where and how to seek such evidence" (Dewey, 1910, p.66-67). In other words, Dewey's aim of education is to let students be able to think, gather and utilize knowledge that is meaningful to them.

In order to successfully realize education that Dewey pursued, some of the underlying notions need to be ascertained. They are 1) mind, 2) knowledge, 3) students and 4) teachers. First, on mind, Dewey does not view children's mind immature nor lacking in desired traits simply

because they do not possess what adults do. Holding Dewey's view prohibits teachers to perceive themselves as superior to students. Furthermore, Dewey does not perceive mind as "something existing in isolation, with mental states and operations that exist independently" (1916, p. 130). Rather, mind is something that could be enhanced through training or education.

Second, Dewey's perception on knowledge is illustrated in his position against the following statement:

> Knowledge is...regarded as an external application of purely mental existences to the things to be known, or else as a result of the impressions which this outside subject matter makes on mind, or as a combination of the two. Subject matter is then regarded as something complete in itself; it is just something to be learned or known, either by the voluntary application of mind to it or through the impressions it makes on mind (1916, p. 130).

In short, knowledge is not something that exists in a complete and objective state. Similarly, subject matter is not something fixed and independent that students simply pick up to learn. As Dewey puts nicely, by abandoning the notion that both mind and knowledge as something independent from learners, "we are also forced to surrender our habit of thinking of instruction as a method of supplying...lack[s] by pouring knowledge into a mental and moral hole which awaits filling" (Dewey, 1916, p. 51).

Third, Dewey views students as active learners who, with the appropriate training of thinking, can examine and select knowledge that could be utilised. In Dewey's book *How We Think* (1910, 1933), he presents five logical steps to effective learning. In the first stage, a student feels a

problem or a perplexity, and causes emotional disturbance in him or her. In this situation, the student is under irritation and his or her equilibrium disturbed. In the next stage, "observations deliberately calculated to bring light just what is the trouble, or to make clear the specific character of the problem" (p. 74) become necessary. In other words, an intellectual response will take place in order to alleviate the confused situation. In the third stage, a suggestion, a guiding, or a hypothetical idea will be reached. Although a suggestion here is more or less a speculative and adventurous idea, it is certainly distinct from a random suggestion. It is a suggestion made after children's interpretation and selection of what was relevant and what was not. In the fourth stage, the previously made suggestion is experimented in thought to examine whether it is subjected to reasoning. After such examination, in the final stage, "experimental corroboration" of the suggestion or the hypothesis will be achieved. When results turn out as predicted, a student's irritation disappears and his or her equilibrium is regained.

As one can comprehend from these five steps that learners need to take, for Dewey, students are the ones who take initiatives in learning through transactions with teachers, and it is the students that do the thinking with the help of teachers. Unless students are active learners, Dewey's aim of education will create a meaningless condition in which a student "cannot devise his own solution and find his own way out...even if he can recite some correct answer with one hundred per cent accuracy" (Dewey, 1916, p. 160).

Fourth, Dewey attaches teachers with transformative power and control, who can alter undemocratic classroom into a more democratic one. This transformative power is to be carried out successfully by directing students into "proper" paths of thinking through activities that appealed to

the interest of each student. The task of teachers therefore is in:

> discovering and arranging the forms of activity (a) which are most congenial, best adapted, to the immature stage of development; (b) which have the most ulterior promise as preparation for the social responsibilities of adult life; and (c) which, at the same time, have the maximum of influence in forming habits of acute observation and of consecutive inference (1910, p. 44).

Consequently, Dewey believes that effective learning is possible by teachers holding proper insight into habits and tendencies of individual student.

4. Discussion: Examination from a Postmodernist Perspective

In the previous section, Dewey's notions regarding the aim of education and practice of teaching and learning were described. When Dewey's approach is compared with a postmodernist approach, commonalities arise. The first common aspect is on a "perturbation." Doll (1993) believes that it will be around the notion of "self-organization" if postmodern education is to flourish. "Perturbation" is a requisite for developing "self-organization" because "a system self-organizes only when there is a perturbation, problem or disturbance — when the system is unsettled and needs to resettle, to continue functioning" (p. 163).

Very interestingly, Dewey raises reflective thinking as an important factor in good thinking because "it involves willingness to endure a condition of mental unrest and disturbance" (1910, p. 13). He continues to stress endurance as the following:

> [T] he most important factor in the training of good mental habits consists in acquiring the attitude of suspended conclusion, and in mastering the various methods of searching for new materials to corroborate or to refute the first suggestions that occur. To maintain the state of doubt and to carry on systematic and protracted inquiry — these are the essentials of thinking (p.13).

It is fascinating to discover that a difficulty or a perturbation is viewed indispensable by both groups in order for good mental habits to take place.

Another aspect that both Dewey and postmodernists share is the attitude toward authority and its effect on people's behaviour. Dewey's view on the training of mind is against the notion that the truth, reality and knowledge exist beyond our control waiting for us to be reached. In short, Dewey's approach does not let the state or the authority delimit and control the behaviour of learners. Rather, learners and teachers become the creators of their own reality and knowledge that are meaningful to them. There is no doubt that both Dewey and postmodernist views had a profound impact on the way we perceive authority and how that manipulates our belief and action.

The times Dewey lived and the arrival of postmodernism are two separate periods in history. Therefore, some researchers include Dewey as modernists because he lived in the time of modernism (Giroux, 1991; Sadovnik, 2002). It is also true that Dewey could not have foreseen the development of present technology, transportation, etc. and have made claims based on those future insights. Thus, Dewey could not have imagined two things: 1) the degree and condition of how knowledge has become commodity, and 2) technocratic rationality has become the new

authority to decide the value of knowledge of today (Marshall and Peters, 1994). Based on this fact, some may argue that Dewey's view is not related to postmodernist thoughts. This is because Dewey's suggestions toward more democratic conditions do not assume conditions of a postmodern society. However, what is being emphasized in the present paper is the surprisingly similar effect both philosophies have on education. In short, they provide us with a new way to look at education that will help us transform undemocratic situation into a better one. Not only that. What postmodernists are claiming that seem to be new perspectives have actually been pointed out by Dewey already in the early twentieth century. As Rorty (1982) puts it, "James and Dewey were not only waiting at the end of dialectical road which analytic philosophy traveled, but are waiting at the end of the road which, for example, Foucault and Deleuze are currently traveling" (xviii).

5. Limit of Dewey's View as a Postmodernist Perspective

Many commonalities are found in thought and approaches adopted by Dewey and postmodernists. On the view of teachers, however, one may require a caution in interpreting whether what Dewey claims and his underlying notion are identical. Dewey claims students as active and independent learners. Teachers are not the ones to take control over them. However, Dewey's expectation toward teachers is very high resulting in attaching a strong power that may turn teachers into authority for students. For instance, Dewey (1910) states:

> [A teacher] needs to recognize that method covers not only what he intentionally devises and employs for the purpose of mental training, but also what he does without any conscious reference to it —

anything in the atmosphere and conduct of the school which reacts in any way upon the curiosity, the responsiveness, and the orderly activity of children (p. 46).

What Dewey expects from a teacher is not only the teacher be capable of employing appropriate tasks for children's mental training, but also have an idea of all possible matters that will have impact on children's interest in a precise way. A "proper direction" of gearing children's mind is the major concern for Dewey (1910). In other words, if teachers are expected as well as could do all of this, teachers are in fact in control of his environment including the learners. Although students may be doing the thinking, that thinking will only be within the control of what teachers believe as "proper direction." In short, from Dewey's writing, one gets the impression that students are viewed as naïve beings that are always given the "right direction" from teachers.

6. Conclusion

The definition of modernism and postmodernism is far from being clear and unified. On one hand, some researchers distinguish postmodernists from modernists simply based on the periods of history. Clearly John Dewey in this sense is a person who lived and pursued for more democratic education in modern society, not in postmodern society in which technology and information network developed vastly. On the other hand, the present paper has attempted to examine Dewey's thought and educational approaches in relation to postmodernism. As a result, Dewey and postmodernists share many things in common. Furthermore, it could be said that many of what has been claimed by postmodernists have in fact been already pursued by Dewey in modern times in history.

References

Beck, C. (1993). Postmodernism, pedagogy, and philosophy of education. Online at http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-Yearbook/ 93_docs/ BECK.HTM (Last accessed on 28 August 2003).

Carr, David. (1998). *Education, knowledge, and truth: beyond the postmodern impasse*. London: Routledge.

Dewey, J. (1910 / 1991). *How we think*. Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books.

Dewey, J. (1916 / 1944). *Democracy and education*. New York: The Fee Press.

Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think*. New York: D. C. Heath and Company.

Doll, W. E. Jr. (1993). *A postmodern perspective on curriculum*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Giroux, H. (1991). *Postmodernism, feminism, and cultural politics: redrawing educational boundaries*. Albany, New York: SUNY Press.

Hickman, L. A. (1996). John Dewey. In: J.J. Chambliss (Eds.), *Philosophy of education: an encyclopedia* (pp. 146-153). New York: Garland Publisher.

Hickman, L. A. (2004). Pragmatism as postmodernism. In E. L. Khalil (Eds.), *Dewey, pragmatism, and economic methodology* (pp. 87-101). London: Routledge.

Klages, M. (2003). Postmodernism. Online at http://www.colorado.edu/ English/ENGL2012Klages/ pomo.html (Last accessed on 28 August 2003).

Lyotard, J. F. Translated by Kobayashi Y. (1986 / 1979). *The postmodern condition: a report on knowledge*. Tokyo: Shoshikaze no Bara.

Macke, F. J. (1995). Pragmatism reconsidered: John Dewey and Michel Foucault on the consequences of inquiry. In Langsdorf L. and Smith A. R. (Eds.), *Recovering pragmatism's voice: The classical tradition, Rorty, and the philosophy of communication* (pp. 155-176). Albany, New York: SUNY Press.

Marshall, J. and M. Peters (1994). Postmodernism and education. In Husen T. (Eds.), *The international encyclopedia of education 2nd eds.* (pp. 4639-4642). Oxford: Pergamon.

Matsudaira, R. (2003). Posutomodan shakai to Dewey [Postmodern society and Dewey]. Sugiura H. (Eds.), *Gendai Dewey shisou no saihyouka* [Reevaluation of modern philosophy of Dewey]. pp. 244-246. Kyoto: Sekai Shisousha.

Nicholson, C. J. (1996). Modernism and postmodernism. In Chambliss J.J. (Eds.), *Philosophy of education: an encyclopedia* (pp. 402-403). New York: Garland Publisher.

Peters, M. & Wain K. (2003). Postmodernism / Post-structuralism. In Blake N. et al. (Eds.), *Philosophy of education* (pp. 57-72). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Rorty, R. (1982). *Consequences of pragmatism*. Essays: 1972-1980. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Rorty, Richard. (1989). *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rorty, R. (1998). *Truth and progress, philosophical papers*, volume 3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sadovnik, A. R. (2002). Sociology of education. In Levinson D. L. et al. (Eds.), *Education and sociology: an encyclopedia* (pp. 605-612). New York: Routledge Falmer.