

Teachers' Identity, Agency and Hope: Perspectives of Latvia Teachers' Postmodernist Uncertainty

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Abstract: The article begins with describing some of the characteristics of modernity and disastrous effects in shaping educational praxis in Latvia. This article explores the limits of modernity and the ways postmodernity affects the teaching practice in Latvia. How do teachers in Latvia address the ambiguous and an increasingly postmodern world? What are the teachers' hopes for the future of education?

A constructive critique of current situation in education can address the question of how teachers might renew their hopes and trust in themselves and teaching. The critique is oriented towards exposing false ideals, repressive practices, and exclusionary identities dictated by modernity, in order to reconstruct teachers' agency and hope.

This article delineates the problems teachers face in Latvia, and how they respond to those changes. This article draws on teachers' experience. By conducting a qualitative research, the author asserts that teacher' voices have their own validity and assertiveness which could provide them with fresh insights adding new challenges for the existing theories, as well as offering a fresh insight for the transformative education.

The author argues that postmodernity can offer no conclusive agenda on its own to solve the educational problems that we confront today. Both modernism and postmodernism have their advantages and disadvantages. These movements have taken their shape largely as a result of the perceived disadvantages of the former systems of thought. Nonetheless, a philosophy of education will retain the aspects of modernism and embrace the elements of postmodernism.

Keywords: modernity, postmodernity, agency, hope, teacher training

Introduction

The reality of postmodernism expands teachers' role and the new demands create an overload among teachers. With the collapse of moral absolutes, traditional teaching methods and purposes began to crumble. The methods and strategies which teachers use are constantly being criticized. The postmodern conceptualization of time and space is creating accelerated change, innovations, and overload. The intensification in teachers' work makes teachers' professional lives very complex and stressful. The ideological quandary challenges dominant paradigms and raises identity crises and purpose in relation to what one's mission might be.

If the existing crises of identities and certainties are looked upon as a challenge, they can disclose new kinds of awareness and new possibilities, which can have a problem - solving power.

This article opens a dialogue for refashioning ideals and practices that can inspire confidence in teachers' agency to engage in transforming their work and education. This would enable a renewed hope for the possibility of a future different from the past – where different would mean better. The author offers future oriented understanding affirming alternatives to our current

educational ideals, practices and identities that will generate a wide horizon of possibilities. The transformative critique of the modern condition is directed towards searching for solutions of problems in which crises entangle with current educational praxis.

This is not to imply that every teacher and every school has with these problems, on the other hand, there are many constructive educators, programs and reforms. However, educators need to undertake a challenge and responsibility to engage in the present that involves the play of past and *present* – involving both the capacity to reflect on the past and the capacity to undergo the meaning of the present (Kompridis, 2000, p. 42). Without a reflection on the present moment, the practice of transformation cannot be completed. Reflectivity on the past will help teachers to renew hope and meaning instead of breaking away from the past, and beginning from the scratch. Identifying with, and taking responsibility for, that which is to be transformed – both ourselves and the world - are necessary conditions of a critical practice that is free of the ‘self-consuming skepticism of ironist critique’ (Kompridis, 2000, 44). A constructive critique entails the transformation of teachers as well as the world.

The author suggests that postmodernism is the theoretical construct from which the teachers explore contemporary teaching praxis. Postmodernism provides an option for understanding the current crises in education and society. The postmodern worldview allows educators to envision a way out of the contemporary crises of education characterized by bureaucratic procedures, economic crisis, decaying of infrastructure, demoralization of personnel, and hopelessness. A crisis can lead to new kinds of awareness and new possibilities. It can also become an opportunity to surpass limitations of current educational praxis. Educators need to be engaged in constructing a future as ‘a horizon of possibility’ (Kompridis, 2000, p. 42), being aware of both the needs of the present and of a previously uncritical relation to the past.

Research methodology

The sample of the research consists of 105 teachers, both from rural and urban comprehensive schools, representing all regions of Latvia. They all were offered to fill in questionnaire on how they see their agency in making educational changes and shaping educational practice. 19 of all the teachers volunteered to participate in a semi-structured interview of approximately one hour in length. Interview sessions were open –ended discussions. They were guided by a series of questions, like: ‘Do you exercise you agency in making important decisions in your classroom?’ What are the main obstacles preventing you from active engagement in school and societal processes? ‘How do you find yourself in the situation when you are given a power to design your curriculum and choose teaching materials?’, Do you think if you opinion is significant in influencing changes in school and the society?, What are the hopes for the future education holds for you?, Do you see meaning in what you are doing?, as well as other questions. Each participant emphasized areas of work and life that they were most inclined to discuss. I have attempted to reconstruct their stories and represent them as authentic as possible.

My intension was to choose a dynamic research epistemology that is capable of navigating and representing teachers’ experiences within its broad range. Such an epistemology is a narrative inquiry, where narratives and stories are understood as means of researching and representing teacher experiences. As Beattie (2004) explains, ‘narrative enquiry brings the voices

from inside schools into the arenas of educational research and policy making' (p.134). Interview sessions generated primary sources of data in this study, in the form of narratives about teachers' interpretation of their agency, concerns, and hopes. I have allowed the teachers' stories to determine the themes which were most relevant in their praxis. I believe that concerns related to traditional conceptions of generalizability are not meaningful for this scope of inquiry, or as Donmoyer (1990) comments, 'concerns with individuals and questions about meaning and perspectives are central' to such kind of research (p. 197).

The article begins with identifying consequences brought by modernity and its pedagogical implementations.

The limits and dangers of modernity in shaping educational praxis

Modernism is a type of worldview and mode of the cultural - historic existence of a humankind. Modernism has left its footprint in the history of humankind with its mechanistic worldview, where machine is the best metaphor to describe the essence of this view. Machines are 'value-free,' have no emotions, their 'parts can be taken apart.... and manipulated' (Oliver, 1989, 76). This view leaves no place for such elements as intuitive knowing, and experiences of the learner which are excluded from the educational praxis. The modern view of reality is atomistic and reductionistic, that underlines transmission position in teaching, where curriculum is segmented into subjects and programmed units, as well as determined by the philosophical, psychological, and economic contexts that surround teaching. The stimulus - response model of the behaviorists represents this view and implies transmission position in teaching.

A mechanistic worldview provides framework for categorization of objective knowledge generated from rational argument. Some inherent values and metaphors, such as control, order, efficiency, production, and profit, can best describe the essence of modernity. (Hiebert, 1999, p. 15).

In this mechanistic worldview a person is seen as one who 'is driven by the desire to transform organic into inorganic, to approach life mechanistically, as if all living persons were things,' and who enjoys 'having,' rather than 'being' (Freire, 1997, 58).

The modern person is characterized by a 'functional rationality' and is equipped with the 'increasing rational control' (Netland, 2001, 80). Set of categories fostered by modernism causes lots of problems for teachers who are facing reality of postmodernity. Certainties lock up thinking limiting the intellectual space with which to work. One of the corollary problems to certainty is rigidity or seeing the world as essentially unchanging and static.

Modernism is stressing power of reason, and liberation of reason from educational authoritarianism. Reason fosters universal knowledge, but for it to be feasible it is required that human reason must be universal. Overemphasis of reason excludes such powerful mode of knowing as intuition. As educational practice shows (Vaughan, 1979,), integration of intuitive ways of knowing only enhances students' thinking, particularly problem solving. Weil (1972) argues that intuitive or non linear consciousness is one of the essential drives of a person, and if not expressed, can resort in negative consequences.

Facing alienation: teachers' responses

One of the consequences of modernity is alienation on all levels - from the self, other and the environment. The alienated condition leads, first, to a sense of apathy in teaching. There are clear signs of irony, despondency and fatalism in teachers' responses in regards to teaching and education in Latvia. The second typical teachers' response is that of hatred towards the never ending reforms, bureaucracy, towards the self and the others. Majority of teachers, burdened by the routine, lost their capacity to respond to teaching and life positively, and perform their functions without any enthusiasm. As Fox (1990) has argued, when one's creativity is suppressed, one strives for power over self and others. The third response to the alienated condition, practiced by some teachers is the use of creative impulses to actively construct a more sustainable society.

The other consequence of modernity is alienated relationships in all levels. As teachers comment, heavy workload, curriculum demands, and bureaucracy leaves no space for creativity, spontaneity, and building collaborative relationships both colleagues and the students. The quality of relationships is left lacking; teachers' working life is left unscathed. The result is marginalization from meaningful work and self. Thus, relationships and work rendered meaningless, teachers either succumb to irony or apathy towards transforming one's being and teaching for better. Majority of interviewed teachers' work has been dominated by instrumental rationality. Hart (1992) argues that this leads to the passive acceptance of social relationships as normative. As a result, culture of work and life alienates self from self and leads to an existential void with little hope for meaning.

Alienation allows one to build walls, and distance from others physically and emotionally.

Teachers' responses indicate to their struggle to define and defend worthwhile selves in the situation of testing requirements, shortages of resources, and conflicting expectations. Teachers are doing their best to express their individuality in teaching, to protect and promote the moral purposes which give meaning to their work. The search for authenticity and meaning enhances the development of personal integrity, that can lead teachers to pursue their social and moral ideals.

The preoccupation only with the personal and the neglect of social is a condition of postmodernity. Dominant philosophies of personal growth and human potential with their delusion of omnipotence of a subject only diminishes personal power of a change, and personal change has been constantly frustrated by the organizational constraints. Self-development and change can be seen within social and political contexts, connecting their selves with the broader histories of which they are a part. As Taylor (1991) puts it: 'the culture of self-fulfillment has led many people to lose sight of concerns that transcend them. It seems obvious that it has taken trivialized and self-indulgent forms'(15).

Participation in societal and political processes entails inviting and empowering teachers in shaping and defining the ideals of a sustainable society. The Latvia context indicates the decline of participation in all spheres of life, such as religion, politics and social life. Narrative interviews with teachers indicate a number of causes for the fall of teachers' initiative to make changes in education and societal processes.

Problems which undermine teachers' initiative and meaningful work, as mentioned by the teachers, can be classified in the following categories:

The 1st category: the policies and procedures:

- discrepancy between educational standards and a real situation;
- a gap between what Ministry requires and a real life situation;
- frequent changes in requirements initiated by the Ministries;
- never ending reforms in the country;
- no time been given for self-reflection about the necessities of changes.

Irresponsible and closed policy-making leads towards passive society and teachers' low self-esteem. Teachers, firmly place all the effective forms of public influence, in last place, among a broad scope of alternatives available.

The 2nd category: inadequate resources:

- shortage of resources,
- low financing of schools,
- low technical supplies for schools and classrooms;
- economic hardships (primarily teachers energy has been directed in making ends meet);

The 3rd category: bureaucracy:

- high, unrealistic testing requirements set by the state;
- conflicting expectations;
- the bureaucratic structures of their work;
- models of teaching imposed from above;
- bureaucratic inflexibility to change among the staff.

The 4th category: job related responsibilities:

- loads of paperwork;
- overload among teachers;
- imposed changes and the timeliness for their implementation;
- innovation overload;
- lack of confidence in one's power and doubts on the significance of one's actions;
- unrealistic demands for teachers.
- teachers feel uncomfortable with ever changing educational policy

The 5th category: teachers' motivation to make changes in education:

- low motivation;
- Teachers do not believe that they can make significant impact upon the educational policy processes.
- teachers perceive school as a political corporation geared to no higher ideals than its own maximized rates among other institutions;
- teaching job prestige is very low, social guarantees are minimal,
- low financing of teachers' further education

Alienated social relation is another cause for impeding teachers' initiative and causing low participation in educational reform processes.

Teachers become involved in educational reform processes for three reasons: 1) because they can, 2) because they want to, or 3) because they are asked. The first refers to the level of resources that contributes to an individual's ability to participate. The second element refers to positive attitudes and motivation towards societal engagement. Teachers' passivity in Latvia can be explained by the following historical circumstances and conditions:

First, since the Soviet era, passive resistance was a form of institutional opposition against the public policy. The generation of teachers that grew up under the circumference of Soviet regime, has no experience of initiating changes, since teachers' action was restricted to the complementary demands of the unified state-supervised academic system. The communist regime systematically eroded these elements to varying degrees through tight control of their citizens. Resources, such as free time or disposable income, were restricted and limited. The totalitarian nature of the regime lowered attitudes of efficacy and empowerment. Communist regimes discouraged or tried to control any form of collective action. As teachers commented, they had few opportunities for pursuing their own interest through collective action.

The fall of communism and increase economic inequality, the processes of liberalization, are the factors erode public motivation for societal action.

Secondly, state activity depends upon people's ability to ultimately attain culpability for their action. The critical deficiency of liable policy-making impedes the ongoing development of the country, and does not permit the formulation of a sequential and goal oriented educational policy. Irresponsible policy-making is an example and a justification for a cynical teachers' and parents attitude against state institutions.

As respondents comment,

“Educational Ministry offers state standards which are far off from a real situation.”

“There is a big gap between what Ministry requires and a real life situation.”

“Sometimes I can not follow frequent changes in requirements initiated by the Ministry.”

Thus, teachers adopt an instrumental mentality, coming to see education merely as a means for an increased salary.

Thirdly, many teachers do not participate actively in educational processes, because they do not believe that they can make significant impact upon the educational policy processes. They see school as a political corporation geared to no higher ideals than its own maximized self-perpetuation according to optimal input/output rates. Irresponsible and closed policy-making leads towards passive society and citizens with low self-esteem. Teachers, firmly place all the effective forms of public influence, in last place, among a broad scope of alternatives available.

Teachers who were interviewed lack philosophical vision for revitalizing and reunifying education and country. This is contrary to the true function of education, that is, leading oneself to the core of ones being. Instead, educational system accustoms teachers to the educational system.

Fourthly, the majority of teachers live under conditions of economic hardships. Interviews with educators reveal that the majority of teachers are preoccupied with ensuring means of subsistence for themselves and their families. In fighting with their daily problems, they experience that they do not have the time and the energy to become involved solving issues affecting the whole society, or even making small changes in education. It is seen very clearly in teachers' responses:

“Sometimes I feel I need a secretary to fill in all the papers. I have no time for working creatively”

“The lack of finances and resources is one of the most serious obstacles for me.”

Teachers' passivity is a sign of alienation and marginalization from the public sphere. Other responses of educators' underline this marginalization:

“I am a small figure, I can do nothing in the country, and nobody wants to take my opinion into account”

“Nobody will ever listen to my suggestions neither on a state level, nor governmental, what can I do?”

“I am not an influential person; I need to follow the curriculum set by the state.”

On the average, an overwhelming majority of interviewed teachers (83%) do not believe that they can affect neither school politics, nor the landscapes of country's policy-makers. In contrast, a vaguely small percentage of all interviewed teachers (16%) believe that they can impact processes in the country, though they still see the dominant political model as one of closed policy making, in which teachers do not play a vital role. Their motivation is driven by the sense of duty and caring for fellow human beings as the most meaningful drives for involvement in public activity.

78 % of 105 teachers responded that they are concerned about local community issues;

89% indicated that they have confidence in their ability to help others;

6 % of teachers asserted that they could make difference in the society and in the educational system;

5% have mentioned that they have a positive impact on educational processes, however;

58 % of teachers wrote that they could make a difference in their lives.

In times of uncertainty, three different teachers' reactions in Latvia can be singled out:

- 1) Teachers who adopt the attitude to regularity and order;
- 2) The second perspective can be called one of creativity/innovation. Where the teacher acts as an innovator by replacing old ideas and systems by a better ones, does not believe in fixed truth, but believes that there are different truth that co-exist with one another, that that new truth is in process of making.
- 3) The third response undertaken by the teachers is that of chaos.

Blurring borders of the identity

Latvia like many post-communist countries face a complex crisis of identities where old certainties no longer exist and the process of political, economic and social transformation causes insecurity and anxiety. Identities that come from different sources - nationality, ethnicity, religion, community, and gender are often in conflict and contradiction. The fall of communism brought about the desire of people for national self-determination. The overall identity crisis that develop during the course of the disintegration of society is the crisis of old collective values and

symbols, a multiplication and split of identity frames from cosmic communist to frames of ethnicity, locality, family and other intermediate groups.

The development of national identities has been seriously complicated by the countries' objective of integrating into the European Union and NATO. The 'return to Europe' has often been interpreted and perceived as a threat to national identity, national interests and sovereignty, fear of losing common roots, and the homogenization of culture. As Zake (2002) asserts, fear of threats from Russia makes government to put lots of efforts into Latvia's rapid integration into the European Union and NATO, on the other hand, a considerable segment of Latvian society and political elite maintains ideas about restoring the idealized 'agricultural paradise' of the First Republic of Latvia -- the pre- Soviet nation state.

Identity is also understood as a stable social-psychological construct that enables individuals to locate themselves and distinguish from the other. On the other hand, the postmodern view of identity has become problematic, since it is not located in the concept of stability. Because of this postmodern problematic, in Latvia the question: "who am I" has been replaced by the ambivalent feelings and a sense of insecurity. This insecurity most often is transformed into xenophobia, segregation, and violent confrontation. In times of big transitions people become socially disembodied and lose their faith in traditional cultural guidelines.

Berger (2001) points out that identity is not something given. Yon (2000) identifies the fluidity of identity: "A view of culture as elusive and fluid, rather than rigid and determining, helps us to understand the multiple strategies and shifting positions that one takes up in these different and shifting positions" (p. 122). This helps one to understand how one constructs identities in relation, and often in opposition, to the constraints imposed by gender, race, culture and religion. Belonging to a community of faith means, that part of the cultural identities one brings into collective configuration would be challenged and changed through communal processes of mediation and negotiation, relation and opposition. A community of faith becomes what Yon (2000) has defined as 'a new community of interest and identification' requiring 'new forms of subjectivity' as it engages in what has been termed 'identity politics' (p. 122)

Teachers' identity is not static, handed on from generation to generation, but it is a dynamic process through which religious and cultural meanings are interpreted, reconstructed, and changed over time in the light of new, ever changing historical and social circumstances (Berger, 2001). It is always relational, forged in a constant process of negotiating boundaries, always fluid and complex, its meaning contested by different interpretations and definitions, ever subject to multiple understandings (Berger, 2001). In Latvia one can observe a common failure to note the dynamic character of culture and religion. Identities become defined as possessive properties of individual rather than fluid and processual social relations. Most often a static and historical nature of identity definition has been reinforced in Latvia by the Christian churches.

Identity exists only in context. The reality of a postmodern world requires one to be open to other identities. As Archer (2004) argues, while theorizing about pluralistic society, neither commonly used terms such as 'multiple identities' nor 'hybrid identities' is an appropriate term to be used. The term 'multiple identities' fails to engage with power differentials between forms of social difference and 'maintains the idea of homogenous, bounded, 'additive' social categories

that might be adopted by will' (p. 463). *'Hybrid'* identities indicate a fusing together of axes of social difference into a new, composite identity which 'displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives which are understood through received wisdom.' Instead, it can be understood in a light of a new terminology, adopted from the Urdu term *'ajnabi'* that means 'a stranger, a new-comer whom one does not yet know but who hold the promise of friendship, love, and intimacy' (In Archer, 2004, p. 463). Anthias (2002) suggests the term 'translocational positionality' which can be referred to the complex nature of positionality, since each subject is at the interplay of a range of locations and dislocations in relation to gender, ethnicity, national belonging, class, race and religion. A 'translocational positionality' points to the interplay of the different locations and their contradictory effects. It tells that, each individual is located in potentially contradictory positionalities, and those individuals who experience advantaged position in one location, may occupy a different position in the other categories. For example, a white woman who experiences subordinate position in gender relationships may be in domineering position in a race grid. This leads one to acknowledge the role of the local and the contextual in the process of building a pluralistic society.

Therefore, the boundaries should be constantly re-negotiated, and social differences and identities should be viewed as contextual. 'Pure differences are only an illusion. Since diversity envisages the continuous development of socially justified and viable forms of social interaction and mutual understanding in a world of constantly changing differences where diversity should be perceived not only as the object of learning but as a social condition. The issue of identity is closely related to issue of boundaries.

Postmodern condition and a shifting nature of boundaries

Today we recognize that we are in time of transition towards a different epistemological conception of the world, namely, post-modernity. This process of transition is characterized by a search for a more holistic and inclusive view of human beings and their relationships with others, with creation, and the Deity. This shift is from a rationalistic, conceptual, and dualistic understanding of a reality, influenced by the Cartesian supremacy of reason to a more inclusive view of reality that contains many challenges.

Postmodernity challenges a number of myth underpinning modernity: the myth that rational knowledge as the only form of knowing, the myth that autonomy is the realization of the individual's fullest potential; the myth that language is a neutral conduit; the myth that a person is separate from nature; and the myth that change, when rationally directed, is progressive (Miller, 1993).

Postmodernism is a multi-faceted and complex intellectual and cultural formation, 'a form of skeptical consciousness' that grew from the ontological, epistemological and socio-cultural conditions of modernity (Kompridis, 2000, p. 30).

Postmodernism can be viewed as both reaction and a manifestation of this crisis to certainties, ideals and individual and collective identities. Kompridis (2000) interprets postmodernism as a form of skeptical consciousness that grew from the premises of modernity. Postmodern thinkers defined Progress, Culture, Science as 'dead gods' that have failed in the course of the twentieth

century. Now they no longer play the role of 'great metanarratives' about reality that legitimize the 'totalization' of the most widespread conception of reality. Postmodernist thinkers claim that the ontological meaning of all is finite and consists in its temporality, its momentary and transitory character. Teachers are facing radical instability of the educational reforms.

Radical pluralism leads to radical relativism. Cynicism and irony towards life take such relativism as their point of departure. The processes of pluralization lead to chaos, relativism, and amorality. Other terms often associated with these processes include individualism, superficiality, and cynicism.

Postmodernism defines this reality not as a static state of affairs but as a constant process of transformation. **Process cosmology** can best describe postmodern reality, where nothing is static, 'every thing is in the process of becoming' (Oliver, 1989, 199). 'Reality is a process of unity in which opposing forces are inseparable, and at the same time that they are oppositional' (Baxer & Montgomery, 1996, 19).

The elements of **novelty and creativity** becomes the catalyst that perpetuates constant change. Novelty blurs accepted boundaries rather than appeals to traditional categories. Teachers who used working within the dominant atomistic framework find it difficult to accept that knowledge is no longer a fixed body of systematized information handed to them by the authority of approved, ready - made curriculum, but amorphous and constantly changing. Moral and scientific uncertainty caused my postmodernity reduced teachers' confidence in certainties of what is taught, decreased dependency of scientifically correct teaching methods. In response, some teachers become more involved in developing their visions, but some cling to the standards and traditions of ill-remembered past. The challenge for teachers is to develop situated rather than scientific certainties in their schools. But still they need to be attentive to broader moral frameworks that extend beyond their particular schools.

Personal anxiety and the search for authenticity becomes a continuous quest in the world without secure moral certainties. In teacher training programs where teachers' self-development is linked to actions which address contextual realities of teachers' work and orientation to seek transforming them, gives a powerful empowerment for teachers' work.

Postmodernism was seen succeeding in breaking free from the Cartesian and empiricist picture of **reason** pervasive in our life. Reason was an instrument by which one objectifies and controls inner and outer nature and masters the world. Postmodern critique of reason by Adorno, Foucault, Heidegger denied reason's claim for self-determination. Postmodernist thinkers refer to different understanding of reason compared to that initiated by Kant. This is a kind of reason that is free of the Cartesian and empiricist view of reason as an instrument by which one objectifies and controls inner and outer nature, and masters the activity that allows one to firm mental representations of oneself and the world (Kompridis, 2000)

Kompridis (2000) critiques this postmodern definition of reason, since he views reason as a necessary tool for justifying one's beliefs, actions and judgments for which one is responsible, both epistemically and ethically. By reasoning one is able to change one's beliefs, actions and judgments in a light of new experiences. Reason's claim to self-determination refers to teachers'

capacity to learn and unlearn, and to transform themselves and their practices. Thus, reason as one of the components needs to become essential part of teachers' reality.

In modernity, the mind used **language** as a relatively fixed set of rules and definitions to reflect this reality. In postmodernity, language is a construction of the mind and a socialization process, and the meaning of words comes from their relation to other words (Hiebert, 1999, 41). Words contain not only the wider context of paragraph and sentence but the deepest context of one's life. Postmodernity come with its distrust in 'metanarratives,' 'metastories,' or 'metahistories' which provide one with a set of definite prejudgments that impel thinking in a strictly definite direction. There is a widespread recognition that life is made up of a multiplicity of narratives and that no single narrative has the right to claim that it can transcend this multiplicity. Narrative is always a specifically-situated and bound to a certain place. The uniqueness of one's own narrative compels one to take them seriously.

Learning to live in a postmodern world and coping with ambiguity makes one to locate themselves at the various borders, the borders between religious traditions, between faith communities, and among different personal identities. Education demands exploring boundaries that differentiate as well as connect with others. Traditional religions in Latvia put their efforts in guarding boundaries and strengthening borders, while the reality of a postmodern world requires improving the interior of ones meaning system rather than defending the boundaries.

The author is in line with Veverka (2004) who suggests the way of educating children by giving them 'roots and wings' (p. 40). Students need to know their tradition, to appreciate it, to know where does one belongs, 'to have a center', to explore beyond the particular horizons.

Veverka (2004) suggests putting focus on 'bounding', since 'bounds' bind, connect peoples by their memories, practices, experience, geography, ethnicity, ideology, and gender. A number of examples can be mentioned from the history of Latvia when being a community with strong and stable borders can foster alienation and disengagement. When the integrity of communities is under the stress, the more one needs to shape differences within particular tradition and those of other faith traditions.

Moore & et. al. (2004) suggests alternative view on borders, borderlines, centers and margins by using multidimensional hermeneutics as a tool. She prompts that neither inclusion nor co-existence can be viewed as an appropriate approach for building a pluralistic, multicultural and democratic world. She points to the existence of multiple centers and margins both 'within the center and within the margins'. It is also essential to comprehend the complexity of centers and margins. Anthias (2002) points to three related aspects concerning boundaries: (a) the shifting and contextual nature of the boundaries; (b) the processes which give rise to particular symbolic manifestations of social categories; (c) and the ways in which different categories intersect in producing social outcomes for individuals (p. 278). Thus, gender, religion and ethnicity cannot be seen as fixed but involve shifting constellations of social actors, depending on the ways the boundaries of a denoted category are constructed.

Pedagogical challenges of building bridges across translocational positionalities

Anthias (2002) is using the term ‘translocational positionality’ referring to the interlocking and potentially contradictory positionalities relating to social identities. It is referred to the complex nature of positionality faced by those who are at the interplay of a range of locations and dislocations in relation to ethnicity, national belonging, class and religion. It is structured by the interplay of the different locations and their contradictory effects. The full unified, completed, secure and coherent identity is a fantasy. Instead, each of us is confronted by ‘a multiplicity of possible identities’, any one of which we could identify with – at least temporarily (Hall, et. al. 1993, p. 273). Individuals if placed in separate categories may occupy a different position in the other category. Therefore, it becomes possible to pay attention to spatial and contextual dimensions, treating the issues involved in terms of processes rather than possessive properties.

Mead (1964) saw intersubjectivity or dialogue as the basis for the construction of self and society. In dialogue one is faced with the ‘other’ and has to negotiate meaning. Alternatively, Habermas’s ethics of communicative action (Habermas, 1984) involves rational minds orient to understanding. Bakhtin’s (1986) dialogical sociality insists not on generalized other but the social as heterogeneous, as having no unified core.

As Anthias (2002) argues, dialogue means ‘going beyond merely seeing the other person’s point of view and entails’ going beyond one’s point of view so that both parties shift their position, not coming closer to each other but developing an alternative vision which is transformative’ (p. 282).

Dialogue is a means of finding a creative and sustainable balance or interaction between dominant values and openness to even contradictory values. The person finds himself/herself torn between the forces of cultural and economic globalization – anonymous, transnational, homogenizing market forces and values that roots and anchors one in the world. There is a widespread tendency in Latvia instead of fostering a dialogue to characterize and stereotype other communities and cultures, usually by focusing on their worst features. It is especially difficult for any traditional confession in Latvia which claim ultimacy and completeness to accept the possibility or even probability that they are partial, incomplete, or even wrong in their interpretation of what their faith requires. Sometimes it is difficult for representatives of one religion to believe that representatives of another religion or cultural group can be authentic, moral, and with integrity. On the contrary, anyone who has had deep contact with people of other religions knows the absurdity of such thinking. As Dickinson (2002) points out, these are the games one plays with ones pretenses, uncertainties which one covers up with loud proclamation of certainty.

Here narratives of belonging can be fostered that means the process of discovering and rediscovering belonging and a place where one can feel ‘at home,’ within ethnic, national or religious community. Narratives of belonging is not just an existential question but is related to ideas of what one shares with others and where one feels comfortable. Part of the construction of belonging within a boundary involves knowing that one does not belong to another from which it is constructed as a binary. From this point, identity is always framed within difference. Narratives of belonging also construct difference, otherness and diversity.

Renewing teachers’ agency and hope

In conditions of modernity, the subject is suppressed or denied, while in a postmodern society, the very nature and integrity of self is placed in doubt (Giddens, 1991). As Giddens

(1991) suggests the boundaries between the self and the world beyond become progressively blurred. The fragile self becomes a continuous 'reflexible project' (Lienberger & Tucker, 1991, 55). It has been constantly remade and reaffirmed.

In modern tradition, the independent human subject is a creator of his/her history and meaning. Therefore, meaning can be discovered in a narrative way by individuals who use or create free spaces to express their experiences, feelings, and thoughts. In education, teachers have to realize the potentialities inherent in timeframe for transformation.

In postmodernism, the human subject is moved away from the center of reality. It brought about the crises of a person to identify oneself as an accountable participant in remaking and redesigning one's world. Instead, the person assumes the stance of a detached observer who freely consumes. Charles Taylor calls it 'ontology of disengagement' (1995, p. 61).

The subject is decentered by asking critical questions. Person's freedom is no any longer absolute, but situated and limited. Postmodern thinkers (Foucault, 1975,) speak of the death of the modern subject and of the impact of institutions and epistemological schemes on the process of subjectivation. The self-crippling skepticism in which postmodern ironist stance culminates leads to one's inability to identify oneself as an accountable participant in transforming the world, but contrary, 'to take a stance of a detached observer who freely plays with the cultural resources of the world.' Thus irony is committed to what Charles Taylor (1995) calls, 'ontology of disengagement' (p. 61). This ironist's conception of meaning-creating and meaning-destroying power still remain ensnared in Cartesian skepticism. The shift should take place from ironist theory to transformative practice, from the teachers' role of ironic observer to that of critical participant in a culturally pluralistic social world.

The deconstruction of the subject whose actions is of the one of a situated **subject** are contextually embedded in a world in which alone they are intelligible, initiated by postmodern thinkers, causes extensive critique. According to postmodern thinkers, there is no place in the world for a subject to act freely any more, there no locus of agency from which actions originate. Return to the subjectivity and the agency is a necessary condition for teachers to talk about educational politics and reforms, to make sense of societal processes and of what they are doing. Instead of being dissolved and situational subjects, the best term suggested by Butler (1995, 46), is 'plurality of subject positions' (p.46). Thus, agency and subjectivity are neither eliminated nor denied. As moral subjects, teachers have to be able to justify their conception of themselves as self determining agents, who could have confidence in themselves and in their practices, by exposing false ideals, and repressive practices.

By regaining agency, one will be able to complete one's life project by optimizing the personal and situational potentials available to one as being – in the world fully, committing oneself to the quest for *ontic* realization and authenticity (Heidegger, 1962). Frankl (1959) argues that the primary driving force in human life is the search for meaning, and this is our striving towards *ontic* realization. Thus, to be human is to make an attempt to construct meaning. If this aim is not reached, this leads to an existential tension or emptiness. The goals of being human, according to Fromm (1955), are freedom, spontaneity, and genuine expression of self. Failure to realize these goals is indicative of 'sick society.'

This involves taking teachers' voices in the account. As Harvey (1989) puts it, 'the idea that all groups have a right to speak for themselves, in their own voice accepted as authentic and legitimate, is essential to the pluralistic stance of postmodernism'(48).

Teachers' voices are rooted in their lives, their lifestyles, and their point in the life-cycle. Teacher's voice articulates the meaning of life and education as understood by the teacher. To understand teaching it is essential to listen to the voice of the teacher, and the meaning it articulates. Making teachers to conform to the meaning imposed above will only minimize the opportunities for collaborative work and a sustainable vision of education. As schools move into the postmodern age where teaching are experiencing overload, intensification, guilt, uncertainty, cynicism, and burnout, the best way to face pressures of time and space, is through collaboration. Therefore, the collaboration for the administration and teacher training institutions and in-service teaching should put forward the following challenges:

The challenges for the administration of the educational institutions for renewing teachers' hope and meaning in their work and life:

- Fostering collaborative working relationships that will: 1) permit vulnerabilities, frustrations, and failures to be shared when facing educational reforms, 2) reduce overload by sharing among teachers the burdens and pressures that come from intensified work demands, 3) it will enable teachers to interact more confidently with multiplicity of reasonable and unreasonable innovations;
- Increasing teachers' capacity for reflection;
- Supporting dynamic networks among teachers and beyond the school as well;
- Encouraging collaborative responsiveness;
- Assisting teachers in collaborative planning;
- Involving teachers in goal setting;
- providing opportunities for learning and continuous improvement.

The challenges for teacher training institutions in renewing teachers' avenues for hope are the following:

- Providing spaces for teachers committing themselves to the quest for *ontic* realization and authenticity;
- Encouraging teachers' commitment to maximizing their capacity to learn about themselves;
- Encouraging teachers' creativity in designing educational curriculum,
- Fostering a positive orientation towards problem-solving;
- Enabling teachers' entrepreneurial skills;
- Accustoming teachers to ever changing and blurred roles;
- Teaching about the positive dynamic and shifting forms of collaboration through networks and within the school community.

To counter the trivializing reality of the postmodernity educators need to become people of hope and should engage in the process of fostering hope. They do not need to be driven to despair by postmodern critique, but need to be people who point to the positive potential of the present, and who are able to affirm and develop those aspects of their lives and work that remain life - giving and life - sustaining. They need to 1) have hope in themselves, 2) hope in youth they educate, and 3) to the future of education.

Deconstructed understanding and practices of the past need to become the raw material for making meaning in the present. Teachers need to be open to altering, changing and transforming the school of the past, so that it is relevant to the present. Teachers need to have hope in sustaining critical and yet respectful collaborative engagement with other colleagues. Only then teachers can contribute to building a sustainable future instead of being another sign of trivializing tendencies of our society.

Concluding remarks

The epistemology of modernity shaped by the Newtonian philosophy of science, Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, B. Skinner's behaviorism still dominates practice on all levels of teaching. Now it has been shaken by the new paradigm. Economic, ecological, environmental, ethical and educational equilibrium are all being called into question. The constructive critique of modernity's dysfunctional assumptions offers an opportunity for the reconstruction of meaning and other future alternatives.

Educators need to be critical thinkers: they can not hold neither in the factual certainties of modernism, nor naively embrace all of what postmodernity offers. A philosophy of education for the future will retain aspects of modernism and embrace elements of postmodernism. Transformation of teacher's consciousness means general rethinking of processes in education, leading one to understand that contemporary education as it is now alienates a person from life in the name of progress, fragments instead of unifying, separates feeling from intuition, and unlashes minds ignorant of their ignorance.

Teachers need to be engaged in the postmodern hermeneutic process of uncovering layers of meaning, deconstructing master narratives, creating ecological sustainability, engendering post-structural sensitivities, and ultimately experiencing hope in their agency. Teacher's agency implies identifying oneself as an accountable participant in the making and remaking of one's world, being able to determine for who one is and what one does, as well as being a transformative agent of intersubjective structures of collective forms of life.

Postmodernity cannot be rationally defined, since it rejects fixed ideas, categories, or schemes of thought. Postmodernism as a term covers a whole range of tendencies, from 'individualism' to 'romantic traditionalism,' which is clearly seen in teachers' attitudes and practices.

Postmodernity offers no agenda of its own to solve educational problems and problems of meaning. Postmodernism cannot be imposed uniformly, but it can provide the philosophical support for a change in consciousness that will necessarily lead to new practices. Both modernism and postmodernism have their dysfunctions and elements of value. Both movements have taken their shape in large part as a result of reacting to the perceived dysfunctions of their predecessors.

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