

Knowledge and Education from Postmodern Perspective

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Almost three decades have passed since Jean Francois Lyotard first published „The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge" (first published in French, 1979; in English 1984). His classic text has been widely cited, and now no major work on postmodernism is 'complete' without reference to it. He introduced the concept of incredulity toward grand narrative. John Stephens (1998) defined grand narrative as a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience. Grand narratives are the big stories of society.

Incredulity toward grand narratives became the main characteristic of postmodern thought. Incredulity is not denial or rejection of grand narratives; it is rather an inability to believe big theories of history, development of society and men. The doubts are the essential part of cognition and knowledge from Descartes times. Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984) gave the following examples of big theories which may be doubted at least by some people.

The examples of doubtful and questionable grand narratives

The first grand narrative example presents religious understanding of human essence. Many Christians believe that human being after the fall is sinful, however there is the possibility of redemption and experience eternal peace in heaven, and this possibility is a universal rule for all people. I like to emphasize the universal character of these beliefs, because every grand narrative has broad and universal essence of meaning.

The second example of grand narrative is Marxist-Leninist „theory" of society which based on the idea revolution, when proletariat takes power over from capitalists. The idea of struggle between antagonist classes, - bourgeois and proletariat was overwhelming. Even human development was analyzed from point of view opposites, e.g. personal mind was opposite to collective one. This Marxist-Leninist theory as struggle between opposites forces may be applied in the different fields, e.g. politics, business.

The third Lyotard's example of grand narrative is Freudian theory which holds that human history is a narrative of the repression of libidinal desires. Slavoj Zizek (1993) has found that the East-European nationalism relies on the idea of a national thing. The national thing is the perfect example of the grand theory. Estonians have *Eesti asi* (Estonian thing) as well Latvians have the Latvian Thing) what is really important thing to all Estonians and Latvians. The meaning of the national thing is hidden, and Zizek has been noticed that national thing is inexpressible collection of practices and attributes that make us who we are, that constitute our way of life. The Thing isn't the set of characteristics per se, rather a kind of underlying beliefs. The Thing cannot be understood simply as a performative effect of people's belief in it. Rather, the Thing achieves its consistency because of a certain kernel of enjoyment.

The Estonian Thing is the source of different feelings, positive ones and negative ones. The national Thing lively exists in context of ethnic tensions, because others are always trying to take our Thing (Zizek 1993). Or, that's we think because this is the only way we have a Thing in the first place; enjoyment may be stolen. Psychoanalytically Zizek is here referring to castration complex. Estonian Thing was very important during Soviet occupation and regaining independence, however nowadays only few people thing about Estonian thing. If somebody would like steal the Estonian thing, then it will be very sensitive thing.

In the context of my paper is the most important grand narrative is the Enlightenment theory. This theory claims that rational thought, allied to scientific reasoning, would lead inevitably toward economical, moral

and social progress. Modernism believed largely on the grand narrative of progress, which was considered in terms of moving up and becoming better. The basic ideas of the Enlightenment are roughly same as the basic ideas of humanism, or more exactly they are linked to humanism to be more „true“.

Grand narrative of modern self and science

The modern refers to the core values of the Enlightenment: the centrality of reason, the belief in progress, the values of individualism, and the faith in the objective scientific methods. The keywords for the Enlightenment are following: progress, truth, certainty and foundationalism, humanism, emancipation, identity (essentialism), presence (empirical fact), and universalism.

In accordance with Jane Flax (1990) modern self in modern context is described by following list of features.

1) There is a stable, coherent, and knowable self. This self is conscious, rational, autonomous and universal.

2) This self knows itself and the world through reason, or rationality, and only in objective form.

3) The mode of knowing produced by the objective rational self which can provide universal truths about the world, regardless of the individual status of the knower.

4) The knowledge produced by science is „truth“, and is eternal.

5) The knowledge/truth produced by science will always lead toward progress and perfection.

6) Reason is the ultimate judge of what is true, and therefore of what is right, and what is good. Freedom consists of obedience to the laws that conform to the knowledge discovered by reason.

7) In a world governed by reason, the true will always be the same as the good and the right (and the beautiful), there can no conflict between what is true and what is right.

8) Science is neutral and objective; scientists produce scientific knowledge through their unbiased rational capacities, and not be motivated by other concerns (such as money or power).

9) Language must be rational in producing and disseminating knowledge. There must be a firm and objective connection between the objects of perception and the words to name them (between signifier and signified).

These features are considered as objectives that should be achieved by universities (see Ruttkamp 2003). Our universities are rooted in modernist views of self and science, and as institutions they are products of modernism... The university's educational goal, in rhetoric and often in reality, is modernist one - the building of autonomous and critically thinking individuals. These ideas are followed in university world, and also outside of academia may be even more strongly outside of academia than in university, regarding the core values of Enlightenment (see list at top).

Universities are the citadels of conservative hopes to preserve university as it has been from the very beginning, and columns are symbols of old and good university. Tartu University is excellent example of university' grand narrative. The great history (past) of Tartu University is foundation of big story which allows to have the special national law of university and classify other universities as quasi or non-universities in Estonia. The function of grand narrative is to explain what is „true“ and what is „false“ university. It is presented of course as objective truth about university, not wonderful story about university.

Knowledge from modern and postmodern perspective

Same time the world as well university has changed (Scott 2005). These changes of knowledge are schematically presented in table 1.

Table 1. Modern and postmodern knowledge and self (Kolga 2002; Szkudlarek 1993).

Modern	Postmodern
The one single reality exists what is needed to discover.	The various realities, and their variations. Plurality.
Knowledge is as a copy of reality.	Knowledge is constructed, result interactions.
To discover general laws, which are hidden; man as all - knowable person.	To make world the better place; different sources of truth, not only science.
A global and holistic knowledge.	A local and fragmenting knowledge.
Knowledge is pure, disciplinary oriented. Psychologist is studying psychological phenomena, e.g. study economical phenomena is forbidden.	Knowledge is interdisciplinary. Psychologist is studying problems, and may use different methods, e.g. psychopharmacological or sociological ones.
Knowledge is objective, not dependable from context.	Knowledge is subjective, dependable from context.
Knowledge and science is value free.	Knowledge is value laden, indissoluble from social power relations.
Traditional modernists believe that educators are legitimate authorities on values, and therefore they should train students in universal values.	Education should help students construct diverse and personally useful values in the context of their cultures. Values are considered useful for a given culture, not true or right in any universal sense.
Knowledge is coming from empirical research.	Knowledge is coming from hermeneutical, critical, or emancipated study.
Modernists generally believe in a stable, inherent self that can be objectively known. Education helps individuals discover their identities.	Students have no „true self' or innate essence. Rather, selves are social constructs. Postmodern educators believe self-esteem is a pre-condition for learning.
Educators ideally should be authoritative transmitters of unbiased knowledge.	Educators are biased facilitators and co-constructors" of knowledge.
Individuals and society progress by learning and applying objective knowledge Goals of education: minimize the alienation.	Individuals and society progress when people are empowered to attain their own chosen goals. Aims of education is to raise the individual and collective well-being.

The left side of table 1 seems to be perfect, and excellent goal to achieve, however Jiirgen Habermas (1997) claimed that modernity is unfinished project. The project of modernity is failing /has failed because of the domination of objective science under capitalism. Science is not directed by universal human goals, but by capitalist demands to discover something „new" and marketable. By the way Habermas's this statement sounds badly in Estonian context because to capitalism should be attributed only positive characteristics ... after Estonia being part of communist system. Good example what means „a global and local knowledge".

If modern project failed then no choice: it is needed to move towards postmodern university. Lyotard (1984) already affirmed that knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorised in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange. Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, it loses its use-value.

Postmodern university

Students of postmodern university are finding ways to combine professional school and liberal arts education. Science, engineering, and business students are studying foreign languages, going on study abroad programs, or seriously pursuing interests in the arts, religion, or political and social concerns. It is possible to mix „education for skills" with good general (old-fashioned) education.

There is no secure and one-way modernist progression from basics to applications, from knowledge to action. Many of the real educational opportunities are in idiosyncratic mixes of studies that no one may have thought of before, the student needs to be encouraged from the beginning to confront this openness. Thus interdisciplinary knowledge and approaches are learned and experienced. Postmodern universities are open to society and typically have community and outside learning projects (Britzman 2007).

There is also noticed that for scientific knowledge the goal is no longer truth, but performativity, that is, the best possible input/output equation. It was found that there is no correlation between teaching and research (Robertson, Bond 2005). The main argument to favor to combine teaching and research does not work as it was founded in quantitative studies, there may be even conflicts situation between these activities. Even professor death in university is in case (Kolga 2002; Nuyen 1992).

Knowledge is fused to the identification of means desired ends. Truth search is subjected to environment, to concrete reality. It does not seem rational to study matters that have no evident practical purpose. The research should be directed by practical needs.

Applying performativity principle does not mean that truth does not matter, truth is still essential criterion of scientific knowledge. In natural science replication of research is needed to do generalizations, however dealing with interpretative disciplines as psychology generalizations has a less central concern. The principal formal criterion of such knowledge is coherence.

Steven Seidman (1994) thought is appropriate to finish this paper: purpose is not to accumulate knowledge ... but to be part of the ongoing conversation ... over the present and future shape of the social world. The idea of a general cultural discourse transcending academic specializations permits a holistic conception of scholarship that connects a family of different intellectual activities.

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