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# Die postmoderne reddingsboeikarakter van Hoër Onderwys/ The postmodern life-buoy character of Higher Education/ Go phološa thuto ye e phagamego mo lewatleng la postmodernism<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*In this article the effect of postmodern influences on higher education, linked with the metaphor of a postmodern ocean and life-buoy reactions, is examined by way of a dual approach. Firstly the main trends of postmodernism, as they are realised within the broad functioning of this postmodern 'ocean', are identified. This is followed by a determination of appropriate 'life-buoy' reactions needed in the area of higher education to ensure viability and effectiveness within this postmodern 'ocean'. Met betrekking tot postmodernisme word aanvaar dat dit manifesteer as 'n korrigerende verlengstuk van die modernisme deurdat dit die oordrewe rasionalisme van die modernisme wil uitbalanseer en aanvul met klem ook op ander funksies en aspekte van menswees. Go phološa thuto ye e phagamego 'lewatleng' la postmodernism, dinyakwa mabapi le kamano ya tsebo, bokgoni bja go phadišana mo lefaseng la boiphedišo le ilhokego ya dinyakwa tša go sekaseka dikgoplo, di swanetšego go latelwa.*

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## Inleiding

Hedendaagse tendense soos wêreldmarkte wat deur firmas met internasionale vertakkinge tot stand gebring word, die geweldige tempo van die inligtingstechnologie se herdefiniëring van ruimte en tyd en die oorskryding van haas onmoontlike grense, letterlik soos deur die talle ruimtereise, en figuurlik soos onder andere deur die moontlikheid van menskloning, is maar enkele voorbeelde van die vaarwaters waarin die onderwys tans verkeer.

These fairways form part of a postmodern 'ocean' of broad societal functioning. Within this encompassing functioning, different interrelated systems and subsystems continuously interact with one another. Likewise the education system, representing a subsystem of this broad societal functioning, is constantly influenced by stimuli from *inter alia* the economic, social and political systems.

Ka fao mekgwa ya postmodernism e tutuetša thuto. Bjale, ka mathomong re swanetše go tseba gore mekgwa ya postmodernism ke efe. Ge re tseba gore mekgwa ya postmodernism ke efe, re kgona go gopola gore thuto e swanetše go ba bjang go loka gabotse mo 'lewatleng' la postmodernism.

## Aim and purpose

The aim of this article is not to provide a detailed focus on the different perspectives on and definitions of postmodernism, an entanglement with the viability thereof, or a reflection on the exact date of its commencement. Rather, it focuses on determining the main trends within this postmodern 'ocean' and on identifying the appropriate 'life-buoy' reactions needed in the area of higher education to ensure viability and effectiveness.

Teen die agtergrond van *Perspectives in Education* (PIE) se veeltaligheidsbeleid, as bevestiging van die postmoderne akkommodasiebeginsel, is 'n gelykwerkende doelstelling 'n beligting hiervan aan die hand van Afrikaans, Engels en Sepedi.

Go na le mehlobo ye e fapanego ya batho mo Afrikaborwa, le dipolelo tšeo di boletwago ke mehlobo ye ya go fapafapana. Fela, dipolelo tšeo di a lekana. Ka lebaka leo ke rata go šomiša Sepedi, Seafrikanse le Seisimane ge ke ngwala ka postmodernism. Ke rata go thoma ka go le bontšha gore postmodernism e na le tlhohleletšo efe, ke le bontšhe gape ka moo thuto ye e phagamego e swanetšego go ba ka gona gore e tle e be ya makgonthe mo 'lewatleng' le la postmodernism.

## Die ontwikkeling van postmodernisme

Dit is noodsaaklik om eerstens te let op wat 'postmodernisme' verteenwoordig:

As korrigerende verlengstuk van die modernisme, fokus die postmodernisme op 'n herstel van die wanbalans deurdat dit die oordrewe rasionalisme van die modernisme wil

uitbalanseer en aanvul met klem op ander funksies en aspekte van menswees (Lyotard, 1984, Rust, 1991, Aronowitz and Giroux, 1993, Jencks, 1996, Jarvis, 1996). Hierdie aanvullingsrol dui daarop dat die teenwoordigheid van die postmodernisme nie die beëindiging van die modernisme vergestalt nie. Binne die wetenskapsbeoefening, politieke, ekonomiese en sosiale funksionering, kan daar nooit sprake wees van 'n afstand doen van die modernistiese vooruitgangsidee nie (Jencks, 1996, 15; Aronowitz and Giroux, 1993, 63). Die postmodernisme manifesteer egter wel as 'n paradigmatische kritiek op die verabsoluttering van die modernisme.

Binne die modernistiese vooruitgangsidee, byvoorbeeld, is ontwikkeling verabsoluteer as 'n hiërargiese en liniêre proses wat gekenmerk word deur verskillende stadiums (Craig, 2001, 30). Volgens hierdie stadiums is elke samelewing in 'n proses van ontwikkeling vanaf 'n primitiewe landboustelsel na 'n moderne, gevorderde industriële stelsel. Landbousamelewings, as die mins ontwikkelde, word gevolg deur nywerheidsamelewings, terwyl die samelewings wat die toon met elektroniese ontwikkeling aangee, as die hoogs ontwikkelde beskou word. Die gedagte is dat alle samelewings die behoefte ervaar, en uiteindelik daartoe in staat is, om hierdie pad van ontwikkeling, as die enigste pad, te volg. Johnston en Marcus (1998, 11) beklemtoon egter dat "... with few exceptions, such a linear progression has proved to be unrealisable in the Third World, not least of all because of the specific social and historical contexts of these societies." En hierin word die kernkaraktereienskap van die postmodernisme weerspieël, naamlik om deur aanvulling die vasstaande onder-wette-bring-benadering van die modernisme te korrigeer.

Hierdie aanvullingsfunksie, alias postmoderne tendense, is opvallend waarneembaar binne al die onderskeie samelewingsterreine. Vervolgens 'n afsonderlike blik op elke samelewingsterrein wat betref postmoderne tendense en die appèl daarvan op hoër onderwys.

## **Wetenskap en tegnologie**

### **Tendense**

Die belangrikste onderskeidende faktor van die postmoderne benadering tot kennis is dat kennis relatief geword het (Jarvis, 1996, 236). Hierdie relatiwiteitskarakter se oorsprong is te vind in kulturele uiteenlopendheid waarvolgens aanvaar word dat individue van een kultuurgroep nie die aktiwiteite, praktyke en morele waardes en norme van 'n ander kultuurgroep kan beoordeel nie. Hiermee saam ontwikkel die standpunt dat inhoude verskillende interpretasiemoontlikhede bevat en dat kennis slegs relatief waar is binne die konteks van 'n bepaalde taalspel of linguale diskoers (Lyotard, 1984, 34).

A re lebelele tlhalošo ya lentšu le 'mme wa ka' (*my ma* – Seafrikanse; *my mom* – Seisimane). Na ga se nnete gore ka Sepedi ge a nyaka go roga le go kweša lenaba la gago bohloko o le roga ka mmago lona. Ka lebaka le motho yo a tsebago Sepedi le Sekgowa o kwišiša gore ke ka lebaka la eng Bapedi ba sa rate postara ya seteišene sa Radio ya Yunibesithi ya Pretoria yeo e tsebišago kgašo ya yona ka tlhagišo ya 'mme wa ka'. Le ge go le bjalo, motho yoo o a tseba gore ka Sekgowa batho ga ba rogane ka go šomiša lentšu le 'mme'. Ka lebaka le, postmodernism e a rereša ge e re therešo ke therešo fela ge e bolelwa polelong ye itšego (Lyotard, 1984, 34).

Hierdie relatiwiteitsbenadering tot kennis is ook te vind in die geweldige tempo waarteen inligting en kennis vermeerder en verander. Vanweë die dinamiese karakter van die gesofistikeerde inligtingstegnologie is daar 'n deurgaans nuwe wyse van begrip van en navorsing oor konstant veranderende kennis (Goodenow, 1996, 198; Kenway, 1996, 217).

Dit dra daartoe by dat die postmodernisme die wetenskap se vermoë om objektiewe, vasstaande kennis te genereer, bevraagteken. Voorbeelde van sodanige modernistiese 'vasstaande kennis'-uitsprake wat verkeerd bewys is, is byvoorbeeld die volgende (SAACE, 1998, 9):

- In 1876 word in 'n interne memo van Western Union die volgende mening gehuldig: *This telephone has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication.*
- In 1920 reageer David Sarnoff se vennote as volg op sy pleidooi om in die radio te belê: *The wireless music box has no imaginable commercial value. Who would pay for a message sent to nobody in particular?*
- In 1950 huldig Thomas J Watson, raadsvoorsitter van IBM, die volgende opinie: *I think there's a world market for about five computers.*

Hierdie relatiwiteitskarakter vanweë kulturele diversiteit en tegnologiese dinamiek gee aanleiding tot die ontwikkeling van spesifieke verwagtingstendense van hoër onderwys.

## **Demands on higher education**

The postmodern characteristic of relativity of knowledge on account of cultural diversity has led to an increased plea for more differentiated provision in order to be able to accommodate the widely divergent needs that exist in a multicultural society. This represents a first life-buoy reaction introduced into higher education, namely the provision of diversification with regard to the accommodation of diverse perspectives within the teaching/learning situation. For the heterogeneous United European Community, for example, Coulby and Jones (1996, 182) suggest a homogeneous core curriculum with wide heterogeneous interpretations at the local level. For the South African situation, Horak (1998) confirms a starting point from the student's own background and technology as a linkage with extended knowledge. Noteworthy in this regard is the example of the Structural Design module of the Civil Engineering course in which the fibre-reinforced mud structures of the indigenous tribal village homes are meaningfully linked to steel-reinforced concrete structures.

This confirms the expectation of meaningful connection with a view to active participation and better understanding, which represents another life-buoy for higher education, namely the importance of meaningful contextualisation of all programmes. However, globalised competition on the world market still requires an eventual Western-Eurocentric orientation, in which regard Craig (2001, 30) stresses that *whatever is available is available to all, regardless of its origins*.

A re tšwele pele ka go lebelela gore mekgwa ya postmodernism mo ekonoming ke efe.

## **Ekonomi**

### **Mekgwa**

Bohlokwa bja ekonomi matšatšing a lehono ke gore e buša lefase ka moka. Ka lebaka leo ekonomi ya lefase ka moka e laola nako, felo le kgopolo ya dilo tšohle. Botha (1998, 2) o bolela gore Clem Sunter o dumela gore go na le seo re ka se bitšago lephodisa la lefase ka moka. Leo le le be le tšego mosepelo wo mongwe le wo mongwe wa naga ye nngwe le ye nngwe, gomme ge lefase le sa rate mosepelo wo le tla otlala naga yeo. Go fedišwa ga aparteiti ke mohlala wo mokaone wa maatla a ekonomi ye ya lefase ka moka.

Pertinent in hierdie postmoderne wêreldmarkeconomie is die aanwesigheid van post-Fordistiese nywerheidstechnologie en -produksie (Lewin, 1995, 208). Waar die Fordistiese nywerheidsproduksie gekenmerk word deur 'n volgehoue produksielyn wat oorskotbergings in reuse stoorkamers tot gevolg het, fokus post-Fordistiese nywerheidsproduksie op aanbod toegespits op aanvraag. Die Fordistiese 'net-vir-ingeval'-benadering verskuif na 'n post-Fordistiese 'net-betyds'-benadering waarin vervaardiging op spesifieke aanvraag en behoeftes afgestem word (Green, 1997, 11).

Die arbeidsmag as 'n groot bate met baie potensiaal word binne die post-Fordistiese produksie optimaal, maar buigzaam, aangewend ter wille van verbeterde kwaliteit en verhoogde doeltreffendheid. Kwaliteit, betroubaarheid en geskiktheid vir die spesifieke behoefte, as aspekte van toegevoegde waarde, is in die produksieproses ingebou (Lewin, 1995, 209). In die proses word genoegsaam belê in die verbetering van die gehalte van arbeid deur middel van verdere en heropleiding. Vanweë die dinamiek van tegnologiese ontwikkeling verloor die beroepstruktuur sy statiese karakter en die beoefening van dieselfde beroep met konstant dieselfde beroepsvaardighede word 'n groot onwaarskynlikheid (Green, 1997, 74).

Die postmodernistiese arbeidsmag word gekenmerk deur 'n snelgroeiende groep kennisswerkers, bekend as simboolanaliste (Reich, 1991, 178). Die beroepe in hierdie beroepsgroep berus op 'n hoë standaard van kennis en kreatiwiteit wat betref die identifisering en oplossing van probleme, die insig in en produktief maak van kennis en die gebruik van simbole vir die abstrakte wêreld van inligting, finansies, kennis en vermaak (Gibbons, 1998, 29).

## **Demands on higher education**

In the higher education system, the postmodern, post-Fordist 'just-in-time' approach is accommodated by way of a modular system, according to which small quantities of knowledge, offered in the form of modules, are continuously refined and evaluated (Gibbons, 1998, 48). The purpose correlates with the timely reaction to specific market-related needs and the 'just-in-time' provision of a potentially urgent market-related demand. Higher education is to achieve this life-buoy effectively by means of a close liaison with the industrial and business sectors as the value and applicability of course contents need to be tested continuously.

Closely related to the post-Fordist 'just-in-time' approach and the dynamics of technological development, is the increasing need for further training and re-training, i.e. life-long training. Higher education must answer sufficiently and timeously to the needs of the various knowledge worker career groups with their continuously changing learning needs within the demands of a global labour market (Jarvis, 1996, 241). In this regard Gibbons (1996, 12), for example, confirms that "... the only skill that does not become obsolete is the skill of learning new skills". This confirms a next life-buoy for higher education, namely the adequate provision of re-training and further training.

The need for viability, learner-centred mobility and institutional survival demands optimal technological implementation in the teaching/learning situation (Goodenow, 1996, 200). Within higher education such viability is achieved by means of the life-buoy of a telematic teaching model, which implies the linkage of distance and contact education via interactive satellites. Numerous possibilities of this kind are already being offered by various non-educational institutions (Perelman, 1992, 32). With that in mind, and in the light of increasing self-funding, it is essential that institutions of higher education enter into this market of distance education programmes offered by way of multimedia packages which include sound and images.

## **Die politieke terrein**

### **Tendense**

Die fasilitering van internasionale ondernemings deur middel van die gesofistikeerde inligtingstechnologie kortwiek die pogings van nasionale regerings om hul eie ekonomie effektief te beheer. Die gevolg is die toenemende aanmoediging van privatisering van staatsvoorsiene dienste, insluitende die onderwys. Die enigste maatstaf waaraan 'n regering se statuus nog gemeet kan word, is die mate waartoe dit daarin slaag om inligtingstechnologie te verkry en te ontwikkel ter wille van 'n verstewiging van die plaaslike produktiewe kennis - en inligtingskapasiteit (Gibbons, 1998, 20).

Tesame met hierdie magsbeheer van die internasionale wêreldmarkeconomie manifesteer die tendens van 'n eksponensiële verspreiding van demokrasieë (Jencks, 1996, 64).

Sodanige demokrasieë word gekenmerk aan vrye verkiesings, die beklemtoning van menseregte, en 'n relatief vrye pers. Gelykwerkend hiermee ontwikkel die beklemtoning van deursigtigheid en deelnemende besluitneming gepaardgaande met verdraagsaamheid en die tendens van 'n akkommodering van alle groepe binne dieselfde samelewing. Jencks (1996, 60) noem dit 'n kosmopolitaanse 'lewe-en-laat-lewe'-houding. Hierdie akkommodasie, openheid en verdraagsaamheid het tot gevolg dat ondergeskiktes, onderworpenes, en moderne tyd uitgebuite groeperinge soos vroue, kinders, homo seksueles, gekleurdes, gevangenes, en ekonomies agtergeblewenes, in toenemende mate erkenning geniet (Van Niekerk, 1996, 211).

## **Dinyakwa mo thutong**

Ka lebaka la boipiletšo bja postmodernism bja gore go akaretšwe bohle, tšhomišanommogo e bohlokwa. Se se ka tliša dipoelo tše kaone le go šoma ka mahlahla go dira gore merero e phethagale. Green (1997, 186) o re thuto ye e phagamego e swanetše go no fela e le bohlabanelo bja batho ka moka moo kgotlelelo, thlomphano le kwišišo le bokgoni bja go šomišana dibjalwaga gona.

As a result of globalisation, education systems are becoming more and more porous with regard to the absorption of international influences. In the case of higher education this realises in the increased mobility of students and academic personnel, in the widespread application of adopted policy, and in efforts to improve the international character of curriculums (Green, 1997, 171). This life-buoy of higher education in the form of an international competitive curriculum is strengthened by the increasing need among world-citizen students to obtain qualifications that are internationally acceptable.

Linked to this, and in order to comply with international standards for quality, collaborations with international institutions represent a next essential life-buoy for higher education (Gibbons, 1998, 13). This is mainly realised through exchange programmes and joint pre- and post-doctoral research. Collaboration at the national level is equally important to address limited capacity and resource shortages. Cowen (1996, 161), however, emphasises that all these forms of collaboration, whether they are nationally or internationally based, are first and foremost inspired by the globalised world market economy "... which becomes a crucial definer of the purposes, efficiency and effectiveness of the educational system".

A next crucial life-buoy for higher education is increased provision for students trained in the areas of the natural sciences. This also relates to a satisfactory channelising of students undergoing teacher training to post-Fordist natural science programmes. The reason for this is to be found in the fact that natural science and technology skills are essential skills for the sophisticated information-oriented economy. Carnoy (1998, 17), for example, emphasises that "... those countries with more scientists and engineers and whose eighth graders score higher on international science and maths tests are likely to be the 'winners' in the newly-defined world economic competition". The reason for this is that the source of productivity

is becoming increasingly dependent on expendable knowledge and information, which is primarily *science-based* (Carnoy, 1998, 5).

## Die sosiale terrein

### Tendense

Die onbeperkte kommunikasiemoontlikhede van die inligtingstegnologie het tot gevolg dat tyd en ruimte as beperkende faktore ten opsigte van sosialiseringsmoontlikhede verdwyn. Dit realiseer in die totstandkom van 'n wêreldkultuursituasie van globaliseringskommunikasie waarin sosiale ongelykhede ten opsigte van ras, geslag, ouderdom en posisie vervaag. Tegelykertyd egter is 'n nuwe vorm van elitisme, bekend as *cyberocracy*, soos verteenwoordig deur die 'information rich' simboolanaliste, vinnig besig om te ontwikkel (Goodenow, 1996, 202; Kenway, 1996, 221). In aansluiting by wat reeds oor simboolanaliste gesê is beklemtoon Lewin (1995, 209) die toenemende noodsaak aan 'n holistiese gevormdheid van sodanige wêreldburgers ter wille van produktiewe buigzaamheid en kragdadige kreatiwiteit.

Die postmoderne afwys van die moderne rede-beginsel, met gepaardgaande relatiwiteitsbenadering tot kennis, binne 'n tydvak gekenmerk aan snelle verandering, neig tot die moontlike ontwikkeling van nihilisme (Aasen, 1993, 10; Van Niekerk, 1996, 214). Tegnologiese ontwikkelingsdinamiek wat verantwoordelik is vir die snelle tempo waarteen die wyse van lewe en vaardigheidsbehoefes verander, veroorsaak byvoorbeeld dat niks vir lank dieselfde bly nie. In hierdie verband beklemtoon Gibbons (1998, 12) dat:

*... educational training in advanced industrial societies has the paradoxical task of preparing people to perform difficult jobs competently while bringing them to accept that they will have to change their jobs and skills quickly and often.*

Dit kan tot gevolg hê dat die postmoderne mens homself vreemd en oorbodig in die samelewing begin voel, met 'n gebrek aan sinbeleving en 'n gevoel van 'alles-tevergeefs' (Van der Walt, 1989, 189). Jencks (1996, 70) vra byvoorbeeld die vraag: "Is a strong belief in anything possible today?"

### Demands on higher education

In this context of a postmodern temporality approach, the higher education life-buoy of contemplative thinking, combined with calculated arguments in order to arrive at a broader concept of rationality, becomes essential. This broader concept is crucial to ensure the curtailment of total relativism leading to possible nihilism (Van Niekerk, 1996). Such an individual critical approach, seen against the background of the leavening function of higher education, could contribute to the development of a society characterised by true democracy, a positive work ethic and the establishment of a joint pursuit of excellence at all levels of humanity.



Closely linked to the need for contemplative thinking, and against the background of a holistic perspective, is the need for a multidisciplinary approach. This stems from the postmodern total-image concept of reality with its underlying assumption of a supplementation of all aspects of being human. It also results from the holistic belief that the development and solution of life-world problems involve various disciplines and never occur within the boundaries of just one single discipline (Goodenow, 1996, 213). In this regard Horak (1998) and Johnston and Marcus (1998, 13) admit that the engineering student is taught to function analytically and technocratically without also focussing on the human aspect of this career. Horak (1998) says: "Hulle (ingenieurs) weet nie hoe om hulle produkte in die gemeenskap te verkoop nie, hulle verstaan nie die behoefte van die gemeenskap nie, hulle kan nie hul verhewe wiskundige modelle aan die gemeenskap interpreteer nie en daarom kan hulle nie by die behoeftes van die gemeenskap aansluit nie." This confirms the need for a holistic preparation of all students in all programmes with regard to all possible future careers. This multidisciplinary life-buoy of higher education, however, needs still be based in a specific area of knowledge to ensure depth of content.

## **Kakaretšo**

Ka fao re kwišiša gore meetseng ya lewatleng la postmodernism go bjang. Bjale, go thibela gore barutwana ba gagešo ba betwa ke meetse ye ya postmodernism, re kwišiša gore thuto ye e phagamego e swanetše go ba bjang. Re bona gabotse gore ka ditaba tše tša mekgwa ya postmodernism go na le dinyakwa tše nnete. Gape, re kwišiša gore thuto ye e phagamego e swanetše go hlokomela a theetša mme ya dirigatšwa dinyakwa tše tša nnete. Ka mokgwa wo, thuto ye e phagamego ya lefaseng la Afrikaborwa e tlo tšwela pele, mme barutwana ba gagešo ba tlo ipshina ka thuto ya kgonthe, ka thuto ya khwaliti.

## **Summary**

The effect of postmodern influences on the higher education system is examined by means of a dual approach. Firstly, the pertinent postmodern trends, as they are realised within the broad functioning of society's postmodern 'ocean', are identified. Secondly, higher education 'life-buoys' are postulated to be 'cast' within this postmodern 'ocean' with the purpose of establishing an effective and viable higher education system which will be able to survive the currents of our time. This is done by means of Afrikaans, English and Sepedi, which confirms a postmodern accommodation of all groups and which adheres to the multilingual policy of PIE.

With regard to postmodernism it was stated that it manifests as a corrective extension of modernism insofar as it attempts to rectify, by way of a complementary approach, the imbalances caused by the extreme rationalism of modernism. This corrective extension role of postmodernism is executed within the broad 'ocean' of society. In the fields of science and technology, postmodernism results in an increased relativism of knowledge, mainly as a result of the demand for an accommodation of all perspectives and the influences of the dynamic way in which knowledge increases and changes. Regarding the economic area,

postmodernism is visible in the increased power of the international world market economy, the existence of post-Fordist production and the demand for symbolic analyst skills. Within the political sphere postmodernism embodies the demand for the accommodation and inclusion of everyone and the demand imposed on governments to ensure the implementation and development of information technology within their societies. In the social sphere postmodernism promotes the development of a world culture due to the unlimited options with regard to time, place and equality of communication via the sophisticated communication technology. The development of a degree of nihilism can be attributed, apart from the critical approach to relative knowledge, to the dynamic nature in which knowledge constantly changes and increases.

The 'casting out' of higher education 'life-buoys' to ensure the survival of an effective and viable higher education system within this postmodern 'ocean' is recommended. These 'life-buoys' relate to a response to the postmodern interpretation of relative knowledge, a response to the possibility of competing effectively within the international world market, a response to the demand for the accommodation and inclusion of everyone, and compliance with the postmodern need for the experiencing of meaning in life to counter nihilistic tendencies.

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