

Deconstruction and re-thinking education

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In this article, I explore Jacques Derrida's programme of deconstruction, in an attempt to indicate, and argue for, the possibilities that it might hold as a philosophical framework for educational discourse. Such possibilities are set out, not directly by way of a set of applications or methodologies to be followed, but rather by an exposition and interpretation of the Derridian text with the intention of relating deconstruction to educational discourse. I set about this, by examining Derrida's commentary on the nature of deconstruction in relation to some of the central concepts in Derrida's writings, such as, *différance*, justice, the other, and responsibility.

Introduction

In the recent past there has been an increasing interest by those involved in education, with the work of Jacques Derrida (b1930), the French philosopher, author of deconstructionism, and one of the leading figures in the postmodern movement. This interest has primarily had to do with the search for new ways of thinking about education and the challenges it confronts in today's societies. In what follows, I explore Derrida's programme of deconstruction, in an attempt to reveal the possibilities that it might hold as a philosophical framework for educational discourse. Such possibilities are set out, not directly by way of a set of applications or methodologies to be followed, but rather by an exposition and interpretation of the Derridian text with the intention of relating deconstruction to educational discourse. I set about this, by examining Derrida's commentary on the nature of deconstruction in relation to some of the central concepts in Derrida's writings, such as, *différance*, justice, the other, and responsibility.

Derrida and deconstruction

The concept of 'deconstruction' was formulated by Jacques Derrida in the 1960s out of the philosophical writings of Heidegger, and reveals a way of knowing which typifies French poststructural and postmodern thinking. Literary theorists of the 1960s welcomed structuralism with a John Hopkins University conference on the importance of the structural enterprise. At this conference Derrida gave his paper on *Structure, sign, and play in the discourse of the human sciences*, that identified paradoxes in structuralist reading. His paper is collected into *Writing and difference*, published in translation in 1978. This provocative commentary revealed the pretense of contextual stability and introduced a new term: deconstruction. In *Speech and phenomena*, originally published in 1967, Derrida addressed the reality of communication and thought modelled on the immediacy of speaking. In *Of grammatology* also published in 1976, Derrida took this further by arguing that signs themselves are unstable and changed as soon as they are understood. Derrida's ideas rapidly spread via the Yale School so that by the 1980s, English Departments in US higher education included deconstruction as a major literary theory. Deconstruction subsequently affected literary interpretation and analytical philosophy. The result was a profound change in understanding; that what is signified by a Saussurian signifier is not always constant. While language itself may be endlessly self-referential, it is still possible to continue thinking linguistically, grammatically but only with uncertainty. Thereby, all meanings are destabilised and better understandings are those which acknowledge this instability in meaning.

Derrida used deconstruction in 1966 at the Johns Hopkins conference to signal going beyond structuralism:

"It is a question of explicitly and systematically posing the problem of the status of a discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of the heritage itself." (Derrida, 1978:282)

These poststructural ideas were first printed in Derrida's (1989a) introduction to *Edmund Husserl's Origin of geometry: an introduction*, where he addresses the phenomenological authority for ob-

taining meaning that rests with readers and, as a radical critique of Western metaphysics, suggests the impossibility of determining absolute, historical truth. Derrida's critique of Western metaphysics is important in leading people away from the structuralist belief that the meaning of language at any one time is both frozen and socially constructed. Such a notion of language, Derrida (1973:53; 1978:279) believes, is championed by what he refers to as the "metaphysics of presence". This is the notion that meaning can be grasped in its entirety by language users, that the meanings of words are "present" to us in our mind when we speak or write them, such that they can be passed on to others in a fairly pure form. For Derrida (1978:281) this is a mere illusion, and he contends that discourse in the West is, in fact, founded on this illusion. We believe that the meanings of words can be pinned down, and that as long as we strive for precision in our language use, we can communicate those meanings to others in a relatively unproblematic fashion. To believe in the "metaphysics of presence" in this way, is to be committed to what Derrida (1976:3; 1983:40) refers to as, "logocentricity".

The deconstruction of logocentrism occupies a central place in Derrida's writings. In a Roundtable discussion at Villanova University on October 2, 1994, which was published in a volume by Caputo (1997), Derrida (in Caputo, 1997:30) stated that a deconstructive reading of Plato and Aristotle, for example, would entail not repeating and conserving meaning — but would entail exposing the tensions and contradictions in their texts. In other words, deconstruction aims at revealing the differences in concepts. Derrida would say that, if you think that our ideas are identities, then deconstruction would reveal a difference within identity. Caputo (1997:31) who was a participant at the Villanova Roundtable, claims that "... the very meaning of, and mission of deconstruction, is to show that things — texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs and practices of whatever size and sort you need — do not have definable meanings ... that they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy." Caputo (1997:31-31) goes on to give us a metaphor for what deconstruction is all about. A concept or an idea or a meaning is like a nutshell. It has a hard boundary. It is a gathering into a unity, a presence, a logo-centrism. Deconstruction is an effort to crack open the nut, to go beyond the boundary, to disrupt the presence and allow the other as difference to come about." For Caputo (1997:32), "... cracking nutshells is what deconstruction is. In a nutshell." Deconstruction then aims at exposing the fallacy of any metaphysics of presence and identity. For Derrida (in Caputo, 1997: 42) this means that it "... deprives the present of its prestige and exposes it to something *toute autre*, 'wholly other' beyond what is foreseeable from the present, beyond the horizon of the 'same'.

Deconstruction, therefore, according to Derrida (in Caputo, 1997:43), is to put a concept "... under erasure" (*sous rature*). It is to write a word, cross it out, and then print both the word and the deletion. Why? Because the word or signifier does not contain the full meaning. The full meaning is not present. Hence, the word is inadequate. Yet necessary. To place a word under erasure, therefore, is to say that the meaning signified by the words which we use cannot easily be pinned down. Meaning and essence can never be fully

present in any one sign. This implies that meanings have histories of textual relations. All meanings are necessarily occupied by residual traces of other meanings. No meaning is ever simply present or present; every meaning is derived from and owes its significance to meanings that exceed the immediacy of any setting. With the question of meaning there is, therefore, always a difference, an occurrence of *différance*.

Deconstruction and *différance*

The basic assumptions of deconstruction can, therefore, be said to be the following:

- that language is ineradicably marked by instability and indeterminacy of meaning;
- that given such instability and indeterminacy, no method of analysis can have any special claim to authority as regards textual interpretation;
- that interpretation is, therefore, a free-ranging activity more akin to game-playing than to analysis.

These assumptions arise from Derrida's (1978:279) reaction to what he sees as the primary goal of Western metaphysics, namely, the naming of "truth", which depends on the assumption that words are capable of referring accurately to a transcendent reality existing outside of language. In response to this claim, Derrida (1982:26) argues that there is no "transcendental signified", no reality external to language. Instead words have meaning only in their relation to other words. As a result, meaning and reality itself are inseparably integrated with the "play" of language; are intersections of meaning rather than sites of meaning, and the project of writing "the truth" is always a programme in accord with a particular value or belief system. For Derrida (1981:43), there are always gaps in communication, and no way that meaning can be present in its totality at any one point. Meaning is to be considered, instead, as a process in a constant state of change, never quite all there when a word is used, but always differed from itself, as well as deferred from reaching any sense of completeness.

Our use of language is, therefore, according to Derrida (1982:7; 13) marked by what he calls "différance" (a neologism coined by him from the French word "différence", the latter carrying the meaning of both "difference" and "deferral"). The fact that the latter meanings cannot be distinguished in speech, but only in writing, demonstrates for Derrida the inherent instability of meaning, which, as he puts it, is always both "differed" and "deferred" (and the words "différance" and "différence" are indistinguishable in speech too). Deconstruction as movement of thought, is primarily concerned to draw our attention to the fact of linguistic instability. Différance, the manifestation of that instability, is to be found, Derrida (1982:21) argues, everywhere in our discourse, serving to disrupt our conventional conception of language as a stable medium for the communication of meaning between individuals.

Sim (1999:36) notes that one of the consequences of Derrida's views on language is that all discourses are seen to depend heavily on rhetoric and the play of language. Philosophy, therefore, has no greater claim to truthfulness than say, literature, since it is no less subject to the slippage of meaning. Philosophers may well strive for precision of meaning in their arguments, both written and spoken, but they are no more able to achieve this ideal than is any other language user, and the widely held idea that philosophy can stand as a final court of appeal on questions of meaning and truth value is, from a deconstructionist perspective, merely another illusion that we allow ourselves to be taken in by western culture. All writing is to be considered as marked by the operation of *différance* (differed from/deferred from), and none can claim to have any greater authority than the rest.

Following on from this, Derrida (1976:3; 1983:40) goes on to challenge the assumption that spoken language, the most immediate of communication media, can be accepted as the closest representation of thought. It is a non neutral medium shaped by ideology and bias. No way of communication, whether in speech or writing, for example,

is more or less direct or unequivocally better. Language has become endlessly self-referential, and this belief is unlikely to be reversed, even if the authority of the text is restored. The tradition of searching for an author's intended meaning in a text has been reduced to a mere preconception.

This position does not however invoke irrationality, because as Derrida (1988:136) states:

"What is called 'objectivity', scientific for instance, (in which I believe firmly, in a given situation), imposes itself only within a context which is extremely vast, old, powerful, established, stabilised or rooted in a network of conventions (for instance, those of language) and yet which still remains a context One of the definitions of what I called deconstruction would be the effort to take this limitless context into account, to pay the sharpest and broadest attention possible to context, and thus to an incessant movement of recontextualisation."

Also, this does not mean the end of communication for Derrida (1998: 146) also states:

"Within interpretative texts (that is, within relations of force that are always differential — for example, socio-political — institutional — but even beyond these determinations) that are relatively stable, sometimes apparently almost unshakeable, it should be possible to invoke rules of competence, criteria of discussion and of consensus, good faith, lucidity, rigour, criticism, and pedagogy."

The description of deconstruction thus far would seem to indicate that deconstruction cannot be presented as a position, and that in that sense it is not a philosophy. Deconstruction has to be understood as an occurrence or even more precisely: it has to be understood in its occurrence. As Derrida (1999:280) explains,

"... it (deconstruction) is not simply a doctrine, not a system, not even a method, but something which is tied to an event. When I have to summarise very briefly what deconstruction is, and should not be, I often say: deconstruction is quite simply what happens. It is not simply the theoretical analyses of concepts, the speculative desedimentation of a conceptual tradition, of semantics. It is something which does something, which tries to do something, to intervene and to welcome what happens, to be attentive to the event, the singularity of the event. That is why deconstruction happens as soon as something happens. It did not appear in the twentieth century, nor as a modern movement in the academy in the West. No, I think in every event, not only philosophical, in every cultural event there is some deconstruction at work, something which displaces and opens a structure, a set of actions, to singularity, to something other, to some alterity, to some unpredictable future."

In this sense, Biesta (2001:46) notes that deconstruction can be regarded as an activity which attempts to bring into view the impossibility to totalize, the impossibility to articulate a self-sufficient, self-present centre from which everything can be mastered and controlled. In fact, deconstruction reveals that every inside has a constitutive outside which is not merely external but always in a sense already inhabits the inside, so that the self-sufficiency or self-presence can only be brought about by an act of exclusion. What gives deconstruction its motive and drive is precisely its concern for or, to be more precise, its wish to do *justice* to what is excluded, to something other, to some alterity, to what is unpredictable.

Deconstruction, justice and the other

Derrida (1992a:6) confesses that ethical and political issues have not occupied a prominent place in most of his writings. He (1992a:7) acknowledges that "there are no doubt many reasons why the majority of texts hastily identified as 'deconstructionist' ... seem, I do say seem, not to foreground the theme of justice (as theme, precisely), or the theme of ethics and politics". Yet, Derrida (1992a:10) admits that, it was normal, foreseeable, and desirable that studies of a deconstructive style should culminate in this problematic, and even that deconstructive

tion has done nothing but address this problematic, if only "obliquely," since "one cannot speak *directly* about justice, thematize or objectivise justice, say 'this is just' and even less 'I am just'." That is to say, one cannot do all this "without immediately betraying justice". Why is this so?

The clue to Derrida's answer lies in the contention that justice is always directed towards the other. Justice, Derrida (1992a:11) argues, is the relation to the other. Saying, therefore, that something is just, or that one is just, is a betrayal of the very idea of justice to the extent to which it forecloses the possibility for the other to decide whether justice has indeed been rendered. If justice is a concern for the other as other, for the otherness of the other, for an otherness that, by definition, we can neither foresee nor totalize, if justice, in short, always addresses itself to the singularity of the other (Derrida 1992a:20), we are obliged — in the very name of justice — to keep the unforeseen possibility of the in-coming of the other, the surprise of the "invention" of the other, open (Derrida 1989). This means, however, that the very possibility of justice is sustained by its impossibility. Justice, Derrida (1992a:16) summarizes, is therefore "an experience of the impossible," where — and this is crucial — the impossible is *not* that which is not possible, but that which cannot be foreseen as a possibility.

The implications of this insight are not restricted to the determination of whether a situation or a person is just, but extend to the very definition of justice itself. Here again we can say that it is for the very sake of justice as a concern for the otherness of the other, that we can never decide once and (literally) for all what justice is. Justice is, therefore, not a principle or a criterion (as this would mean that we would know right now what justice is), nor an ideal (as this would mean that we would now be able to describe the future situation of justice), nor even a regulative ideal (which would still imply a description of what justice is, although with the implication that the ideal is not expected to be ever present in some future). It belongs to the very structure of justice itself that it never can be present (and, therefore, never will be present). It is by necessity, according to Derrida (1992a:27), a "justice to come," which means that it is *always* to come in the anticipation of the in-coming of the other. For Derrida (1992a:28) justice is born out of attention to many particular others. It is defined by its very plurality. Derrida (1992a:29), for example, writes that, "... the condition of all possible justice" would be "... to address oneself to the other in the language of the other." Justice, then, is an openness to the other before reflection or reason. It is an engrossment with the other. But this openness to every other at the same time is impossible, Derrida (1992:34) tells us, in that it is excluded by law — in that law assumes a universality by which it can be applied to everyone. We live in a world where there is always more than one another. We are surrounded by different voices, different tongues. When we do not address ourselves to every singular voice, justice is denied. Yet, this plurality cannot be collapsed into any unified narrative. It responds only to the singularity of the other, of each and every other.

Deconstruction, as justice, is, therefore, primarily concerned with the question of alterity, that is, with the question of the concrete other, of "the other, which is beyond language" (Derrida 1984: 123). Far from being a philosophy which declares that there is nothing beyond language and that we are imprisoned in language, deconstruction can be seen as a *response*, for as Derrida (1984:118) declares: "Deconstruction is, in itself, a positive response to an alterity which necessarily calls, summons or motivates it. Deconstruction is, therefore, a vocation — "a response to a call".

This ethical emphasis in deconstruction has been ignored or overlooked by Derrida's critics, such as, Ferry and Renault (1990), Fleming (1996), Habermas (1997) and Hoy (1989), who all argue that deconstruction is a form of critical analysis which aims at tearing apart everything it finds on its way. They characterise deconstruction as a form of textualisation with hyper-relativistic and nihilistic implications and go onto claim that it is ethically void, politically impotent, and utterly dangerous.

Biesta (2001:33) argues that Derrida's critics seriously miss the point of deconstruction when they accuse it of adopting an extremely relativistic position. Deconstruction is not a sceptical or relativistic position, but rather, it has a distinct ethico-political motivation, or as Bernstein (1993) so aptly puts it, it has a distinct ethico-political *horizon*. Over the past few years there has been a growing recognition of this horizon, which has led some commentators, such as, Baker (1995), and Critchley (1999a, 1999b), to speak about the "ethical turn" of deconstruction.

In its most general formulation, the ethico-political horizon of deconstruction can be described as a concern for the other. Rather than being destructive, negative, or "an enclosure in nothingness", deconstruction is, as Derrida (1984:124) states: "... an openness towards the other". For that reason deconstruction can best be characterised as *affirmative*. The deconstructive affirmation of the other is straightforwardly positive. It is not merely an affirmation of what already exists and, for that reason, can be known and identified. Deconstruction is, Derrida (1992a:27) argues, an affirmation of what is wholly other. It is affirmation, according to, Caputo (1997:42) and Gasché (1994:122) of what is unforeseeable from the present, of what is beyond the horizon of the same. It is an affirmation of an other, Derrida (1992a:27) maintains, that is always to come, as an event that exceeds calculation, rules, programs, anticipations and so forth". More, therefore, than simply being an openness toward the other, deconstruction is an openness toward the unforeseeable in-coming (invention) of the other. As Caputo (1997:42) has suggested, deconstruction might therefore best be thought of as an "inventionalism". The encounter with the other is, however, according to Derrida (1992a:15), impossible. But it is the very "experience of the impossible" which makes the invention, the in-coming of the other, possible. An invention, Derrida (1989: 60) argues, "... has to declare itself to be the invention of that which did not appear to be possible; otherwise it only makes explicit a program of possibilities within the economy of the same". For Derrida (1992c:9-10), this all means, that it is only through our encounter with the singularity of the other, with the "the otherness of the other", that we can further our understanding by "... reaching out to the impossible." In fact, Derrida (1992c:xlvi) affirms that, "... identity is constituted by the other in the experience of the impossible."

The experience of the other is, therefore, always a particular one. And in this regard, Derrida (1992a:28) goes onto claim that it cannot be generalised into the recognizable language of ethics. The particularity of the other, according to Derrida (1992a:28), will always be betrayed by any foray into the universal domain of language, namely, the language of ethics. Rather, he argues that, the particular experience of the other and the universality of language are complexly inter-related in a dynamic tension. Edgoose (2001:127) notes in this regard, that the relation of particular others to universal language, is a central theme of education — students turn experiences into knowledge; mentor teachers explain how they handle classroom situations to student teachers; and teachers struggle to treat students fairly or to be agents of justice. Throughout his critical analysis of writing and culture, Derrida constantly engages with questions about what it means to think, to learn, to teach, to know, and more specifically what it means to teach the other as other. In so doing, Derrida (1992a:35) makes it clear how deconstruction counteracts the "irresponsible drive" to secure a teleological trajectory of the subject for its "just completion" along the lines of a teaching of a normative ethics. In this regard, Edgoose (2001:119) raises the question as to what it means to create a more just classroom and concludes that it is anything but an attempt to show how a normative ethics can be taught. Using Derrida's (1992a) discussion on justice in his essay, "Force of law", Edgoose shows that justice cannot be reached through formulas or programs but, rather, that it involves a loss of fluency and understanding. He argues that an educator cannot lead a class toward justice, for justice depends on the loss of linear control. Justice demands that the voice of every student be heard. But while the educator feels that there is no

right choice for his/her attention, sh/e understands that a decision must be made. This *aporia* of urgency reveals that there is no smooth path to justice. In education, Edgoose (2001:132) concludes, that there are only and necessarily frustrating hesitant steps.

Derrida's deconstruction of logocentrism, and his incisive commentary on the concept of *différance*, all lead to deconstruction's concern for the other — a concern which Derrida (1992: 35) refers to as "justice" in even claiming that deconstruction is justice. Deconstruction's concern with the other and justice are further developed in Derrida's commentary on deconstruction and responsibility.

Deconstruction and responsibility

In his ongoing commentary on the nature of deconstruction, Derrida (1978:10) is careful to point out that deconstruction should not at any point be mistaken for destruction or demolition. For instance, when applied to a text, it is not concerned with emphasising flaws or weaknesses, or with returning the text to some meaning existing necessarily outside its apparent boundaries, or even to some ultimate signified. In fact, Derrida (1978:11) declares that deconstruction, "... inaugurates ... not the demolition but the de-sedimentation, the deconstruction of all the significations that have their source in that of the logos, particularly the signification of truth." Deconstruction as "de-sedimentation" suggests the desedimentation of sedimentary dregs and would seem to be an activity directed at enumerating various layers of meaning; the focus being on layers, and not on what they together form.

Deconstruction, then, is a questioning of all assumptions, not as an act of demolition, but as a striving for an awareness of what is involved in a text. However, Derrida (1987:20) also goes on to say that: "... the form of the questions, the questioning syntax, is not taken for granted, not taken for the first and last form of thinking; so we have to question the form of questioning." In this regard, Derrida (1987:20) believes that deconstruction is affirmative rather than questioning; this affirmation goes through some radical questioning, but is not questioning in the final analysis. This, in turn, leads Derrida (1992a:23) to conclude, that deconstruction is not "... a parade of irresponsible or irresponsibilising destruction ...".

But what then is the ultimate purpose of deconstruction? Where are we heading with deconstruction? For Derrida (1995:324), the answer to this question does not rest in the domain of knowledge, but in the domain of responsibility or rather responsibilities, for as he states: "Responsibilities are at stake which, in order to elicit decisions and events, must not follow knowledge, nor proceed from knowledge like consequences or effects. Otherwise we would unfold a program and behave, at best, like intelligent' missiles. These responsibilities, which will determine as you say 'where it is heading' are heterogeneous to the order of formalizable knowledge, and probably or no doubt to all the concepts upon which was built, I would even say arrested, the idea of responsibility or decision [conscious self, will, intentionality, autonomy and so on."

What Derrida is getting at in this instance, is a rejection of a theoretical approach to responsibility. The tradition of Western ethical thought, from the Christian appropriation of the Ten Commandments through Kant to the present day, offers moral direction. If one is used to turning to ethical theories in search of such direction, then, these theories are the definers of responsibility. They clarify when one is responsible to someone, or they work out which of one's obligations is the more important. They try to articulate when we are responsible for the other and when we are not. Derrida rejects this foundation and attempts to develop a quite different understanding of responsibility.

The concept of responsibility can be found explicitly or implicitly in most of Derrida's texts. Derrida (1992b:23) establishes a close connection between deconstruction and responsibility when he declares that deconstruction requires, "... a new questioning about responsibility, an inquiry that should no longer necessarily rely on codes inherited from politics or ethics." For Derrida (1992b:7-11), such a

new notion of responsibility will no longer make an appeal to a pure ethico-juridical agency, to pure practical reason, to a pure idea of law. Rather, he prefers to think of responsibility as a summons, that is, requiring a response, a summons to reconsider the foundations of what, throughout Western history, has been deemed responsible or ethical, and how it was determined, attained and imposed. In this instance the notion of responsibility would have to be re-elaborated within an entirely novel problematic in which to respond, what to respond about, and to whom, is a question perhaps more lively and legitimate than ever. However, not only would the what and the who have to be thought entirely otherwise, it might also be necessary to consider what once they might have been. In this regard, Derrida (1992b:12) stresses that responsibility like deconstruction must also go through antinomic injunctions, aporiatic forms, through a kind of science of the impossible. In this sense, deconstruction and responsibility merge in their attempt to apply critical rigour. Not with the intention of dismissing, discarding, or destroying what might appear or be deemed "wrong" or "untrue", but with a serious intent to uncover and reveal dilemmas, and the very impossibility inherent in these dilemmas to be avoided, reconciled, or ignored. Stated in another way, deconstruction is not an exposure of error, certainly not other people's error. The critique of deconstruction, the most serious critique in deconstruction, is the critique of something that is extremely useful, something without which we cannot do anything.

This theme was developed by Derrida (1992c:41-44) when he suggested that if responsibility does exist, it can start only with the experience and experiment of the *aporia*, that is, the possibility of argument for two inconsistent positions. In this regard, Derrida (*ibid.*) discusses the question of European identity, which is caught, he believes, in an injunction which seems double and contradictory, caught in the double bind of the necessity to retain past values while responding to the equally compelling necessity to distance itself from its past. The choice is impossible, in fact, as Derrida (1992c:41) observes, "... the condition of possibility of this thing called responsibility is a certain experience and experiment of the possibility of the impossible: the testing of the *aporia* from which one may invent the only possible invention, the impossible invention."

Derrida (1995:325) gives two examples to illustrate his point and underscore the fact that any responsibility implies a dual obligation, whose aspects are both contradictory and conflictual. These two examples draw on ethnic and political conflicts in the 1990s: one deals with minority rights and the necessity of communication and understanding on the one hand, and respect for the majority law on the other; the second addresses international law and the Office of the United Nations and its Security Council. In both cases, it is necessary to go through *aporias* in order to take into consideration the uniqueness of each situation and its complexity. Each time, it is necessary to reinvent what responsibilities are involved in order to respond to the singularity of the event, not by ignoring previously developed concepts, but by going beyond them. This dual obligation, contradictory and conflictual, seems inherent to Derrida's concept of responsibility, as opposed to a sheer moral or political approach. In facing such responsibilities, there is no guarantee, no certitude of a unique, pat, successful solution.

A striking example of this concept of responsibility is found in Derrida's (1986:9-31) reference to the "antinomies of philosophy". They are what he calls "the seven contradictory commandments" written in an attempt to give a shorter and more convenient exposé to the polemic which he believes possible within a community willing to assume the responsibility of analysing and questioning such antinomies — in this instance, a philosophical community. Derrida (1986: 10) points out that these commandments entail *aporias*, which, in turn represent a "double imperative" and, at the same time, cautions that they are neither final nor comprehensive, that this list could be shortened or lengthened and that the number seven is somewhat arbitrary. The list reads as follows:

1. • We must object to the submission of philosophy [its ques-

tions, its programs, its discipline] to any external finality.

- We should not, at any cost, renounce the critical and, therefore, evaluative and hierarchizing mission of philosophy.

How can these two regimes of finality be reconciled?

- We must protest against the closure of philosophy.
- We should demand the unity which we deem proper and specific to philosophy.

How can this localizable identity and overflowing ubiquity be reconciled?

- We believe we have the right to demand that philosophical research and questioning never be dissociated from teaching.
- We also feel entitled to recall that, perhaps for the most part, something in philosophy is not limited to, has not always been limited to, teaching acts, school events, its institutional structures, or even the discipline of philosophy itself.

Within the same moment of this discipline, how can we maintain both limit and excess? That these very limits and excesses must be taught? That they cannot be taught.

- We deem normal to demand institutions on a par with this impossible and necessary, indispensable and useless discipline.
- We postulate that the philosophical norm cannot be reduced to its institutional appearances.

How can the respect of the institutional limit and its transgression be reconciled?

- In the name of philosophy, we require the presence of a master.
- If the master must be another, formed then appointed by others, this heteronomous dissymmetry must not encroach upon the necessary autonomy, or even the essentially democratic structure of the philosophical community.

How can [the philosophical community] reconcile and harmonise within itself this heteronomy and this autonomy?

- The discipline of philosophy, the transmission of knowledge, the extreme richness of its contents, normally requires time, a certain rhythmical duration, even as much time as possible.
- The unity, even the architecture of the discipline, requires a certain organised gathering of this duration.

How can this duration and this quasi instantaneous contraction, this limitlessness and this limitation, be reconciled?

- Students as well as teachers must be given the opportunity, that is the conditions, to access philosophy a master must initiate, introduce, form his discipline.
- The master is nothing but a mediator who must disappear.

How can the necessity and the dismissal of the master be reconciled? What incredible topology is required to reconcile the heterodidactic and autodidactic?

Eg ea-Kuehne (1995:304-305) points out that when the word "education" is substituted for "philosophy" these antinomies become:

- We must object to the submission of education [its questions, its programs, its discipline] to any external finality.
- We should not, at any cost, renounce the critical and therefore evaluative and hierarchizing mission of education.
- We must protest against the closure of education.
- We should demand the unity which we deem proper and specific to education.
- We believe we have the right to demand that educational research and questioning never be dissociated from teaching.
- We also feel entitled to recall that, perhaps for the most part, something in education is not limited to, has not always been limited to, teaching acts, school events, its institutional structures, or even the discipline of education itself.

- We deem normal to demand institutions on a par with this impossible and necessary, indispensable and useless discipline.
- We postulate that the educational norm cannot be reduced to its institutional appearances.
- In the name of education, we require the presence of a master.
- If the master must be another, formed then appointed by others, this heteronomous dissymmetry must not encroach upon the necessary autonomy, or even the essentially democratic structure of the educational community.
- The discipline of education, the transmission of knowledge, the extreme richness of its contents, normally requires time, a certain rhythmical duration, even as much time as possible.
- The unity, even the architecture of the discipline, requires a certain organised gathering of this duration.
- Students as well as teachers must be given the opportunity, that is the conditions, to access education a master must initiate, introduce, form his discipline.
- The master is nothing but a mediator who must disappear.

Derrida (1992c:44-45) suggests that these antinomies constitute a matrix that provides, " ... all the statements which may possibly be produced today about 'School and Philosophy'". Derrida's "antinomies of philosophy" can, therefore, also be seen as an illustration of the call for responsibility in education. In fact, Eg ea-Kuehne (1995:305) is of the opinion that education and responsibility are tightly linked in Derrida's work, which is often concerned with a call to responsibility, and a continual questioning of what responsibility represents. Her observation is confirmed in Derrida's (1992c:20) declaration that a deconstruction of responsibility calls for an increase in responsibility for education, that is, in responding to the other. The deconstruction of responsibility, therefore, makes it possible to think of education as a response, a responsible response to the other. Such a response involves education in protecting the singularity of the individual against its social functionalisation. This in turn means that only when the concept of education itself is deconstructed can the irreducibility of the other evoked in all education become recognisable, and can justice become a possibility.

Deconstruction and educational discourse

In recent years educators, educational theorists, philosophers of education, and curriculum theorists around the world have shown a mounting interest in Derrida's work and in his concept of deconstruction [see, for example, Biesta and Eg ea-Kuehne (2001), Cherryholmes (1988), Lather (1991), Stronach and MacLure (1997), Usher and Edwards (1994), Pinar *et al.* (1995) and Pinar and Reynolds (1992)]. The major influence of Derrida and deconstruction on the practice of education originally came from the adoption of deconstruction in English departments. As "a theory of reading and writing" deconstruction had found its way in the teaching of English, both in writing instruction and composition, and in the practice of teaching literature [see, for example, Atkins and Johnson (1985), Crowley (1989), Gilbert (1989), Henricksen and Morgan (1990), Miller (1983), Neel (1988) and Ulmer (1985)].

Although some scholars, such as Biesta and Eg ea-Kuehne (2001) and Knoper (1989), have acknowledged the possible political and ethical implications of deconstructive writing pedagogy, it would seem that the reception of deconstruction in education, in the first instance, was primarily 'technical' in its narrow focus on literary analysis [see, for example, Johnson, 1985], and has only minimally been concerned with the political and ethical possibilities of deconstruction in relation to education.

Biesta and Eg ea-Kuehne (2001:4) in attempting to bring to the fore the ethico-political potential of deconstruction for educational discourse, note, that what Derrida's texts have to offer is not a set of guidelines, rules, or prescriptions which can be applied to education

to remedy whatever ails it. The point is not to reduce the profound arguments which form Derrida's work to trivial statements used to talk about implications for schooling. Any attempt to summarise complex concepts, to recall them more or less exactly, more or less precisely in order to try and draw some specific implications to be applied to education would not carry much meaning, and would amount to a misreading of Derrida. Nor is it a matter of relating Derrida's thought to issues in education. Reading Derrida in the context of education calls for an engagement with his forms of reasoning in analysing educational issues. Such an engagement needs an attentive and respectful reading " ... through work which actually requires time, discipline, and patience, work that requires several readings, new types of reading, too, in a variety of different fields" (Derrida 1995:401). All in all, Biesta and Egea-Kuhne (2001:5) conclude that deconstruction can engage a thoughtful reader in some powerful rethinking of education, analysing all the hidden assumptions which are implied in the philosophical, or the ethical, or the juridical, or the political issues related to education. In short, a consideration of Derrida's seminal works, reveals the necessity and the possibility of thinking again, through deconstruction, about education in terms of language, justice, the other and responsibility.

Cahen (2001:12) is of the opinion that, not only is the question of education at the core of Derrida's writings, but that this is also not a coincidence. It is not a case of deconstruction and education having accidentally come together in Derrida's writings. Cahen (2001:25-26) argues that, if we acknowledge the radically affirmative nature of deconstruction, then, the question of deconstruction is the question of education. Cahen makes it clear that deconstruction is not just about profoundly educational questions such as, 'who is coming when I speak to the other?', and, 'where am I going when the other speaks to me?' Cahen emphasises that in raising the question of how we can educate 'the other as other', how we can let the other be, deconstruction moves the whole cluster of questions about education, about teaching, from the plane of techniques and methods to a level which is deeply concerned with the ethical, the political, and ultimately, with the destination of life, history and humanity.

Much of present day educational discourse is vulnerable to an ideologically driven educational practice which emphasises that persons be educated for the maintenance and development of environmentally and sociologically determined functions, as well as for the promotion of the economy (Higgs:1998). In such a context, education becomes the handmaiden of the state, and, at the same time, serves the state's programmes of political intent. Educational discourse which poses fundamental questions, has, as Aronowitz (2001:ii) notes, virtually disappeared from the mainstream literature. Present day educational discourse, no longer sees the need to interrogate the givens of education, or the social and political contexts in which education functions. As a result, nearly all educational discourse is reduced to what Aronowitz (2001:xvi-xvii) describes as the application of " ... technologies of managing consent, where teaching is increasingly a function of training for test taking." All this can be regarded as an aberration of education, as the mystification of education in the service of dominant ideologies that see education as a process of information transfer (mainly of a scientific, technical and legislative kind), and which, in turn, aim to ensure conformity to political and economically acceptable norms.

In the light of this, it can be concluded that, what is needed today, is an awakening of the educational or a return to education. In short, present day educational discourse must re-think itself. The philosophical challenge of re-thinking education, of deconstructing education, does not consist in changing, replacing, or abandoning education. On the contrary, to deconstruct is first and foremost to undo a construction with infinite patience, to take apart a system in order to understand all its mechanisms, to exhibit all its foundations, and to reconstruct on new bases. To be sure, it is a matter of transforming our relation to education, to reflect on the conditions of such a transformation, and to give ourselves the theoretical and practical means to

do so. In this regard, Derrida's reflections on deconstruction and related concepts such as *différance*, justice, the other, and responsibility, can provide a powerful paradigm to develop a greater awareness of the issues at stake in education; for his texts suggest new ways of thinking about education and of assuming responsibility in education in relation to the other, and in the name of justice. I would suggest that in re-thinking education in terms of a Derridian discourse, we should address such questions as: how can we educate the other as other?; in which space can education be realised?; how can we let the other be as other in the educational encounter?; what, and whose knowledge, should be transmitted in the educational encounter?; how can we know in the educational encounter?; what form of instruction should mark the educational encounter? what is the nature of an educational encounter? what of the place of language in the educational encounter? All these questions, I believe, are constitutive of at least two challenges that Derrida's works hold for educators. On the one hand, educators should deconstruct the ideological influences that imprison educational discourse and in so doing allow the nature of education to unfold and speak for itself; and on the other hand, educators should affirm education, and attempt to determine what it can and should do today in our society, in the face of new forms of knowledge in general and the advances of technology.

Too often trapped within the walls of a dominant ideology, or social practices and beliefs, education should be allowed to think for itself, expose itself, teach itself. This constitutes the Derridian imperative in its programme of deconstruction with its concern for justice, the other, and responsible action.

Furthermore, as a particular mode of mind for experiencing ideas, deconstruction can significantly change the nature of educational discourse. Regarding instructional messages as language means considering them in the context of the Western philosophical tradition, from Plato to Rousseau to Kant, where all communication media are representations of how people think. It is a logocentric tradition that valorises speech over writing. Derrida's programme of deconstruction refutes the assumption that spoken language, the most abstract of communication media, can be accepted as the closest representation of thought. For Derrida it is a non-neutral medium shaped by ideology and preconceived bias. No way of communicating, whether in speech or writing is more or less direct. No way of communicating is unequivocally better for obtaining a convergence of minds than any other. It is a fallacy to think of thought as language because in itself, language is undecidable. In this mode education deconstructs like language and also differently from language. For as Standish (2001:77-97) argues, in education, learners always go beyond fixed meanings, beyond curriculum objectives, beyond aims, in fact beyond the stable authority of the teacher. This "going beyond" for Standish is far from being a threat to meaning and a hence a threat to education. Rather, Standish (2001:95) argues that it is the very condition for education, because education only exists, only comes into presence, as a result of the necessary disruption of the learner. The anxious preoccupation with clarity, control and containment runs the risk of stifling what is most important in education, namely, the "going beyond" in the establishment of the singularity of the individual.

Conclusion

I have set out to explore Jacques Derrida's programme of deconstruction, in an attempt to indicate the possibilities that it might hold as a philosophical framework for educational discourse. Such possibilities were alluded to, not directly by way of a set of applications or methodologies to be followed, but rather by an exposition and interpretation of the Derridian text with the intention of relating deconstruction to educational discourse. Such an exposition and interpretation involved an examination of Derrida's commentary on the nature of deconstruction in relation to concepts such as, *différance*, justice, the other, and responsibility. In examining these concepts, I have tried to show that deconstruction can deepen our understanding of education as an activity concerned with the singularity of the other

as other, and also as an occurrence which acknowledges responsibility for an other who, as other, is always to come.

Biesta (2001:34) argues that deconstruction should not be conceived as a theory or a philosophy that can subsequently be applied to education. Deconstruction rather, provides a way to think again and afresh, more strictly and more radically about the concern that has been central to the project of education at least since the Enlightenment. The relationship between deconstruction and education, to put it differently, is not an accidental relationship. In so far as education exceeds enculturation, socialisation, and domestication, it is precisely concerned with otherness with justice, with responsibility. If education is as Arendt (1968: 196) claims "... where we decide whether to love our children enough not ... to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us", then there is every need to think again and again about what this might mean for those who have the courage to educate. Although deconstruction will not provide a clear-cut answer to this question, it might well help us better understand what it means to raise this question today.

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