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## Educational implications of philosophical foundations of Derrida

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### Abstract

Jacques Derrida is one of the most famous postmodernists. Postmodernism in education domain explains the crises of the modern education and, in fact, it criticizes the general situation of education in the modern era. Postmodernist education lacks constant and global basis. It relies on discourse, pluralism, difference, otherness, cultural studies, antiauthoritarianism and criticism. Derrida's viewpoints have led to new issues in different realms, like philosophy, politics, art, history, literature and specially education. The main aim of this paper is to explain and draw educational implications of philosophical foundations of Derrida in different dimensions including educational aims, the teacher and student, the curriculum, teaching-learning methods, deconstruction and education. At the end, the educational viewpoints of Derrida are criticized, and their strengths and weakness are explained.

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### Introduction

Jacques Derrida was born in 1930 in Albiar (located in Algeria) who is the predecessor of post structuralism and deconstructionism movements. In the late 1960s, Derrida's ideas gradually affected large domains of the humanities including philosophy, literary theory, theory of architecture, and theory of art. It is a demanding task to recapitulate Derrida's thoughts and ideas. Derrida introduced words such as, deconstruction, presence, difference, trace, logos, and play to the lexicon of contemporary discourse in structuralism, post-structuralism, post-modernism. Deconstruction has also been applied as a strategy of analysis to education, literature, linguistics, philosophy, law and architecture.

Jacques Derrida is, arguably, one of the foremost philosophers of the humanities and their place in the university. Over his long career he was concerned with the humanities' fate, status, place, and contribution. Through his deconstructive readings and writings, Derrida reinvented the Western tradition by attending closely to those texts which constitute it. He redefined its procedures and protocols, questioning and commenting upon the relationship between commentary and interpretation, the practice of quotation, the delimitation of a work and its singularity, its signature, and its context: the whole form of life of literary culture, together with the textual practices and conventions that shape it. From early in his career, Derrida occupied a marginal in-between space -- simultaneously

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textual, literary, philosophical, and political -- a space that permitted him a freedom to question, to speculate, and to draw new limits to humanitas. With an up-to-date synopsis, review, and critique of his writings, this book demonstrates Derrida's almost singular power to reconceptualize and reimagine the humanities, and examines his humanism in relation to politics and pedagogy. ( Peters and Biesta, 2009)

As Higgs (2002), states 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 in recent years [see, for example, Biesta and Egea-Kuehne (2001), Lather (1991), Stronach and MacLure (1997), Usher and Edwards (1994)]. The major influence of Derrida and deconstruction on the practice of education originally came from the adoption of deconstruction in English departments. ( Higgs, 2002)

With respect to the Derrida's philosophy fundamentals, the following can be stated. Derrida claims that philosophy in the west was formed under the impact of the metaphysics of presence. The latter caused us neglect the depth of existence concept and be trapped in a range of current circumstances. Resulting in the camouflaging of the pure existence in ambiguity and absence. This absence in contrast to presence has become a pivotal concern in Derrida's metaphysical arguments. Derrida, in the book of *Grammatology*, provides a list of such contrastive or binary oppositions and claims that Plato has given superiority to one in each two through proposing these binary oppositions. On the whole, it can be stated that Derrida critically deals with the metaphysics of presence prior to any discussion of modern perspectives in metaphysics. He challenges the 5 fundamental approaches in metaphysics which are self-centered, ethnocentrism logocentrism ethnoculturalism, and phallocentrism. Logocentrism is regard the major aspect (Derrida, 1981). With respect to epistemology, Derrida doubts, if there exist general or holistic rules and challenges the opposition between mind and object in reaching an expression of object. He states that there is nothing beyond text that can be regarded the exclusive reference. With respect to axiology, Derrida questions the traditional approach in ethics in which ethics draws on ontology. Similar to Levinas, Derrida gives priority to ethics.

### **Derrida's Educational Viewpoint**

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. . ( Higgs, 2002)

Derrida can be regarded a great educational figure. His innovative and uncommon methods created new perspectives in education. Due to Derrida's discussions about deconstruction, some guidelines which might be useful in education are referred to below:

- to avoid over generalization in a text. Overgeneralization is senseless and nonsense. So in presenting instructional materials, one should avoid commands which are frank, strict and prevail all.

- to avoid using definitive utterances and do not use sensational and startling sentences.

- Rejection of dualness and dichotomy: Derrida states that the western metaphysics relies on the binary spectrum of presence and absence, body and mind, form and content, good and evil, speech and writing and so on, giving priority to the primary pole rather than the latter.

Derrida rejects any hierarchy and he is after its collapse and deconstruction. Hence in education, one should not be after a rigid interpretation of issues. To Derrida, interpretation is shaky and transient, excluding the ones which are imposed by force and authoritatively (Pinar, 1996). Charyholmes declares that to Derrida, interpretation is disperse, variant and ever changing (Cherryholmes 1988)

Trifonas (2002) states, Derrida has pondered the birth and death of the philosopher and, thus, the thinking and teaching of the child through life that he considers to be associated with the themes of writing and memory. In Glas, we read a quite startling answer to a familiar, but difficult, question:

What is education? The death of the parents, the formation of the child's consciousness, the *Aufhebung* of its consciousness in(to) the form of ideality. (Derrida, 1986)

## **Aims**

With a look at Derrida's arguments, one may draw some rough aims for education. One of such aims can be the creation and nurturing of some critical analysis in learners. Derrida urges the readers to read texts critically, elevating their critical potentialities so that they can incur political and social changes.

## **Curriculum**

One might deduce from reading Derrida's that he supports an interdisciplinary curriculum in one way or another. He does not regard natural, the cultural isolation of various disciplines such as, psychology, sociology, anthropology, politics, and history. Derrida opposes defining concepts in instructional materials. He claims that definition itself is rooted in Aristotle's metaphysical presence, and it cannot lead to an understanding of issues and phenomena. According to Derrida's viewpoint structure, integrity, logical sequence, and the meaning aspect of instructional materials are unreal and imaginary. In instructional materials, you cannot seek the real truth. Reality is formed by the power of language, wording, and intertextual relationships. (Cherryholmes, 1988) Derrida states that there is no neutral place in instructional materials. In contrast, he states that there is no hypertext in a curriculum. What seems apparent has been created by and depends on language and other semiotic systems.

## **The pupil & the tutor**

According to Derrida, tutors should encourage pupils to interact with texts rather than teaching them a series of constant interpretations so that they can have their own interpretation of the texts. Hence, pupils should be encouraged to become critical readers and pay attention to contradictions and gaps in texts and do not be indifferent towards such contradictions and inharmonious (Derrida, 1974). Finally, Derrida asks pupils to pay attention to the fact that texts have various possibilities for interpretation. Tutors are not information transfer agents but rather they are facilitators so that it is the pupil who acquires knowledge, they coordinate pupils' learning experience. Derrida's philosophy has this message for the pupils and tutors that they should not entangle themselves unquestioningly in definitive concepts. In fact, deconstructionism in a sense is to reveal the lower meaning layers in a text which have either been denied or have taken their present form because of the kind of attitude.

## **Teaching method**

Jacques Derrida is indeed a most profound thinker of matters educational, addressing in highly provocative and original ways through, more or less, "unconventional" readings of the history of Western metaphysics, some of the most basic philosophical questions of teaching and of learning (Trifonas, 2002 ) Perhaps, one can consider Derrida's deconstruction as a type of teaching method. In this procedure, which is sometimes spoken of as a substitute for a scientific procedure, a text has an infinite number of interpretations and no interpretation has superiority over the other. Here, emphasis is on feeling and personal experience. Interpretation is a significant concern in deconstructionism. Postmodernist interpretation is introspective and antiobjectivist. Regarding textuality, Derrida speaks of two procedures: 1) Deconstruction 2) Double-reading. In one, the strategy applied is criticism. In double reading of a text, the message is that how a discourse is formed and established. However, it reveals at the same time how discourse is under the threat of failure.

## Conclusion

What can be stated in a summation of Derrida's viewpoints can not be denied with respect to education is that Derrida's role, among other scholars, in enhancing critical thinking in education. It seems that the reactions towards Derrida are either too pessimistic or optimistic. To be neutral, we have to evaluate his viewpoints fairly. One of the main aims of Derrida's deconstruction is to neutralize and defeat the dominant metaphysical thoughts which regard education void of established global foundations. The deconstruction method teaches us to abandon the long standing empathically tendencies which put partitions among and between various phenomena and subdivide them into acceptable and nonacceptable, right and wrong (truth and lie), central and subsidiary, wiseness and nonwiseness, and their reflection. However, there is always the danger that by being trapped at the latter pole of such contrasts (i.e. to disappear in the written form subsidiary, plurality, abstraction and difference) and neglecting the first pole we face the same type of problem that the deconstructionists attempted to escapes from.

Actually one of the problems of such a philosophical approach in education was its extremist perspective towards problems in a way that too much attention to one issue sacrifices another. It might be concluded that the deconstruction approach in education as a critical method and a kind of text analysis procedure can be useful to some limited extent. Too much emphasis on or use of it would downgrade the problem at hand to a few metaphors and symbols.

The following inferences might be drawn from an overall summation of the discussions on Derrida's philosophical bases. However before stating the inferences it should be stated that basically postmodernism does not necessarily give us anything. It is just stated that certain thing should not be admitted and certain others should be considered. Hence in discussions on Derrida we should not expect an exclusive thorough description or complete explanation of education. Some of the educational inferences follow.

Education is:

1. without global changeless bases;
2. Based on dialog;
3. Pluralistic and cares for individual differences;
4. Antiauthoritarian
5. Critical thinking

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