

Exploring the position of Rorty's ironist in Education through deconstruction and redescription.

By Nick Stock
School of Education

WHAT IS IRONISM?

To use ironism, or be an ironist:
He has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary he currently uses, because he has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books he has encountered;

He realizes that argument phrased in his present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts;

Insofar as he philosophizes about his situation, he does not think that his vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not himself.

Rorty, Contingency, Irony and Solidarity, 1989

FELLOW PHILOSOPHERS

So what are vocabularies? Rorty was implying that they are the language that we use for both communication and reasoning in life. But they are not our own; they come from grand institutions of power and control.

The questioning of vocabularies in ironism mirror Heidegger's writings around metaphysics - the unanswerable questions of our existence. His questioning of 'Being' (1927) was part of a process of questioning thought, evidencing an early ironism.

This is furthered by Derrida; he proposed the systematic deconstructions of final vocabularies and thus excellent examples of ironism in action. He does this by explaining the ways language functions only through systems of deference to other words and difference from other words. Therefore, when examining vocabularies it is important to consider their differences/deference from other vocabularies.

Education is an institution controlled by its language, as if it was gifted to us from above. But have we stopped to question this language? What may we find? And what do we do, once we have questioned it?



Progress

OFSTED

Outstanding

C-Grade

Progress

Teaching

Classroom

and

Learning

Assessment

IRONIST EDUCATION

Hunter (1994) in Rethinking the School has ironised about the vocabulary of Education and demonstrated how we can trace ideas about Christian discipline. Why does Christian pastorality exist in an institution that faith is irrelevant to? Are we training students to be a Christian flock?

Foucault's ironism about Education evidences a potential system of control and social manipulation at the heart of the vocabulary. In deconstructing ideas such as 'classroom', he noted the deferred meaning to a panoptic prison (seen below).

We see questions such as 'what is Education?' and 'what are the aims of Education?' haunting modern research, but none challenge Education and its language themselves.



REDESCRIPTION

The ironist believes that after deconstruction comes redescription; starting again with something by describing it in a completely new way.

Berger (1990) has stated how fictions can be a more effective form of social science research than conventional methods. I intend to write a fiction, therefore, to explore the issues in Education's vocabularies through allegorising and personifying the different aspects as exposed in previous parts of my thesis, therefore encouraging people to consider my redescription.



UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM