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## 'Deconstructionist' as the Role of a Teacher in Postmethod Pedagogy

**Hari C. Kamali**

Associate Professor in English Education, Kailali Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

hckamali2019@gmail.com

**Abstract.** Postmethod pedagogy is the development in pedagogical practices after 1990s and is open to further developments as "a pedagogy in progress" (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). Implication of postmethod pedagogy underpinned by deconstruction has the potentials to make pedagogy more effective for which the postmethod teacher needs to play the role of a deconstructionist teacher. So in this paper I have reviewed the works on postmethod pedagogy and deconstruction and explored how they are interrelated and how they can be exploited as deconstructive pedagogy to make pedagogy more effective in context. As a result, it is concluded that when a postmethod teacher practices pedagogy as a deconstructionist teacher, any challenges emerging in the practice of pedagogy can be addressed as deconstructive pedagogy destabilizes the pedagogical practices and looks for possibilities of multiple meanings in context.

**Keywords.** postmethod pedagogy, role of a postmethod teacher, deconstruction, deconstructionist

### Introduction

'Postmethod pedagogy' as proposed by B. Kumaravadivelu through the publication of his paper "Toward a Postmethod Pedagogy" became a landmark work in pedagogy. It was actually the product of his critique on methods as they were highly centralized until the end of the twentieth century because there were "repeatedly articulated dissatisfaction with the limitations of the concept of *method* and the transmission model of teacher education" (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 537). So 1990s became the most productive period in the field of methodological practices and then there came two innovative ideas: "One emphasizes the need to go beyond the limitations of the concept of method with a call to find an alternative way of designing effective teaching strategies (Clarke, 1994; Kumaravadivelu, 1994; Prabhu, 1990), and another emphasizes the need to go beyond the limitations of the transmission model of teacher education with a call to find an alternative way of creating efficient teaching professionals (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Johnson, 2000; Woods, 1996)" (cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 537). With this background Kumaravadivelu (2001) came up with the conception of postmethod pedagogy and put it: "I use the term *pedagogy* in a broad sense to include not only issues pertaining to classroom strategies, instructional materials, curricular objectives, and evaluation measures, but also a wide range of historical, political, and sociocultural experiences that directly or indirectly influence L2 education" (p. 538). Although

he defined pedagogy in relation to L2 education, it can be generalized into general education as well because this conception of pedagogy is so broad that it includes all the aspects of pedagogy in general—classroom strategies, instructional materials, curricular objectives, evaluation measures along with historical, political, and sociocultural experiences.

With this conception of pedagogy against methods, Kumaravadivelu (2001) realized an imperative to construct a pedagogical method which could address the spirit of postmethod aspirations. So he materialized a postmethod pedagogy and proposed its parameters: "particularity, practicality, and possibility" (p. 537). He explicated these three theoretical dimensions of postmethod pedagogy and suggested how they must be executed: (a) facilitate the advancement of a context-sensitive language education based on a true understanding of local linguistic, sociocultural, and political particularities; (b) rupture the reified role relationship between theorists and practitioners by enabling teachers to construct their own theory of practice; and (c) tap the sociopolitical consciousness that participants bring with them in order to aid their quest for identity formation and social transformation.

Kumaravadivelu (2001) made a claim that these three parameters could provide a base for an alternative organizing principle for postmethod pedagogy which could "have the potential to offer the necessary conceptualization and contextualization based on the educational, cultural, social, and political imperatives of language learning, teaching, and teacher education" (p. 557). Like Kumaravadivelu's alternative organizing principle for postmethod pedagogy, Biesta and Egea-Kuhne have also conceptualized deconstruction having potential for education and commend 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 (cited in Higgs, 2002, p. 175). Both these perspectives focus on the rethinking of education from open and contextual grounds, avoiding the static, centralized and formalized form of educational system. These are also the issues discussed by Derridean educationists. So postmethod pedagogy and deconstruction are interrelated in terms of their mission in education.

In the transformation of method into postmethod the concept and practice of deconstruction and pedagogy have played a significant role as both look for the possibilities of something new in education (See. e.g. Kumaravadivelu, 2001; Biesta, 2009; Kamali, 2016). Thus, teaching at present is founded on the concept of pedagogy which is perceived as a movement away from a preoccupation with generic teaching methods towards a more complex view of teaching which encompasses a multifaceted understanding of the teaching and learning process (Richards and Renandya, 2002). They further argue that in post-methods era attention has been shifted to teaching and learning process and the contribution of the individual teacher to pedagogy rather than the output of the process. In the same vein, Brown defines pedagogy as a "dynamic interplay between teachers, learners, and institutional materials during the process of teaching and learning (cited in Richards and Renandya (2002), p. 6). Here the dynamic interplay that occurs in pedagogy is like a deconstructive opening in education which has been argued by Derridean educationist, Gert Biesta (2009), because this opening is like "a deconstructive entrance, an entrance for the incoming of something new, something unforeseen (p. 400)" which would be like the result of the dynamic interplay between the teacher, learners and the institutional materials in the pedagogical process. Both of these concepts—the dynamic interplay and a deconstructive opening—suggest that pedagogy is basically a process, so there are chances of multiple responses and outcomes while this process keeps happening. In other words, pedagogy happens like deconstruction without any definite goal. This suggests that both pedagogy and deconstruction are process-oriented and regard pedagogy as a play—postmethod pedagogy.

Along with the development of method into postmethod, pedagogy got developed into postmethod pedagogy which is fortified by deconstruction. So this paper is an attempt to establish the relation between postmethod pedagogy and deconstruction and recommend 'deconstructionist' as the role of a postmethod teacher. For this I have reviewed the papers related to pedagogy in general and postmethod pedagogy and deconstruction in particular to reach the conclusion that postmethod pedagogy underpinned by deconstruction has potentials to address any educational issues at hand. Thus this paper recommends 'deconstructionist' as the role of a teacher in the practice of postmethod pedagogy.

### **Development in Postmethod Pedagogy: A Review**

As a teacher educator and a researcher, I find the efforts and appeal made by Kumaravadivelu on the conceptualization of the postmethod pedagogy similar with the efforts and appeal made by Derridean educationists (See, e. g. Biesta, 2009; Higgs, 2002; Hernandez, 2014; and Rikowski & McLaren, 1999) as they have a common concern which is to meet the emerging needs of the post-methods era in education. As Derrida deconstructed the center created through the metaphysics of presence grounded on structuralism and gave way to the development of poststructuralism and postmodernism (Lucy, 1997; Stocker, 2006; Gnanasekaran, 2015; Higgs 2002), Kumaravadivelu (2001), in the similar fashion, deconstructed the centralized practice of 'method' in language teaching and opened up the possibilities of pedagogy—the postmethod pedagogy (p. 537). Similarly, like Kumaravadivelu's critique of "*method*" as the transmission model of teacher education and the proposal of postmethod pedagogy, Biesta (2009) critiqued the "sender-receiver model" of communication in education and argued for interpretive model of communication in education founded on deconstruction (p. 400). So, in both of these developments, we can find more similarities, and the most striking point is that they are more optimistic towards the incoming of something new in education (Kumaravadivelu, 2001; Biesta, 2009). As proposed by Kumaravadivelu (2001), postmethod pedagogy has two important features—"an open-ended inquiry" and "a work in progress" (p. 537) which also go along with deconstruction because Derrida did not define deconstruction at all and resisted any efforts to define it, i. e. he wanted it to work as an open-ended inquiry and a work in progress. In this regard, following the line of Derrida, Habib (2005) puts it:

While Derrida himself has insisted that deconstruction is not theory unified by any set of consistent rules or procedures, it has been variously regarded as a way of reading, a mode of writing, and above all, a way challenging interpretations of texts based upon conventional notions of the stability of the human self, the external world, and of language and meaning. (p. 649)

The reason why Derrida did not define deconstruction is that he discovered that deconstruction happens itself in a text. So when deconstruction happens, it happens like an open inquiry as in the postmethod pedagogy and it happens like a work in progress because it eschews stability and fixity of meaning in a text. This justifies that postmethod pedagogy and deconstruction share common features and need to be unified as a single methodology to make pedagogy effective. Similarly, Caputo (2007) maintains, "Indeed, it was Derrida who emphasized that deconstruction isn't something that we *do* to things: deconstruction *happens*. And it happens in the middle voice" (p. 16). So as deconstruction happens, it materializes the first two parameters of the postmethod pedagogy—particularity and practicality, and its happening in the middle voice helps to actualize the third parameter—possibility, i.e. to assist the teachers for their quest for identity formation and social transformation as a possibility. So it is apparent that postmethod pedagogy and deconstruction are interrelated and they need to be

studied and implemented as a unified approach so as to discover an appropriate methodology to suit the social context as suggested by Holliday (1994).

Now more significant issues emerge regarding the roles of a postmethod teacher as a deconstructionist. To this, I have discussed them with reference to the discourses on pedagogy in general and postmethod pedagogy vis-à-vis deconstruction in particular so that the role of a deconstructionist teacher in the postmethod pedagogy can be specified. To begin with, Pryer conceives of pedagogy as “a special kind of erotic encounter” between the teacher and students (cited in Day, 2004, p. 106), it is naturally challenging for teachers because it is their duty to manage it well. For this, it requires that the teachers have “sustained amounts of intellectual, social and emotional energy” (Day, 2004, p. 107). This has been well predicted even by the practitioners of the postmethod pedagogy as Kumaravadivelu (2001) states: “The greatest challenge the emerging postmethod pedagogy imposes on the professional community today is to rethink and recast its choice of the organizing principle for language learning, teaching, and teacher education” (p. 557). That is to say, it is not only in the case of language learning, teaching and teacher education that the organizing principles of the postmethod pedagogy require rethinking and recasting; it is after all a common case in pedagogy as well. Similarly, as postmethod pedagogy has been proposed as a “work in progress,” it is open to discussion on how it can be developed to meet the challenges in the postmodern context (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 557). He further asks: “How do postmethod teachers pursue professional development involving the triple pedagogic parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility? How do they theorize from practice and practice what they theorize?” (p. 550). These issues can be effectively dealt with only when postmethod pedagogy is grounded on deconstruction for which teachers need to play the role of a deconstructionist.

### **'Deconstructionist' as the Role of a Teacher in Postmethod Pedagogy**

As the concept and practice of teaching and learning have been transformed into the postmethod pedagogy in the twenty-first century, this has created “new understandings of the social realities”; as a result, the postmethod pedagogy has gone through some “transitions” as presented by Lieberman and Miller (cited in Day, 2004, pp. 143-44): (1) From individualism to professional community; (2) From teaching at the center to learning at the center; (3) From technical work to inquiry; (4) From control to accountability; (5) From managed work to leadership; (6) From classroom concern to whole-school concern and beyond; and (7) From a weak knowledge base to a broad knowledge base. These transitions can be more challenging for the postmethod teachers to deal with as postmethod pedagogy itself is a work in progress. So it is necessary that the postmethod pedagogy develop fully so that it could address these transitions more successfully. Furthermore, when postmethod pedagogy is developed into a deconstructive pedagogy, it can deal with the emerging binaries under “pedagogical orientations” as discussed by Canagarajah (1999): learning as a detached cognitive activity vs. learning as personal; learning as transcendental vs. learning as situated; learning process as universal vs. learning as cultural; knowledge as value-free vs. knowledge as ideological; knowledge as preconstructed vs. knowledge as negotiated; learning as instrumental vs. learning as political (pp. 15-17).

Relating Derridean deconstruction to education in general and pedagogy in particular, Higgs (2002) has raised some fundamental issues which need to be considered in re-thinking education in the postmethod context or in deconstructive pedagogy. These issues are:

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 is the place of language in the educational encounter? (p. 175)

These are very important issues which need more serious concentration and developments in the pedagogical knowledge and practices. Such issues are definitely challenging but the postmethod pedagogy guided by deconstruction has the potential to solve them and make pedagogy more effective.

Similarly, things to consider seriously under the postmethod pedagogy are the points proposed by Kumaravadivelu (2001) as the third parameter of the postmethod pedagogy: “a pedagogy of possibility” and “individual identity” (p. 543). In this regard, two questions arise— what possibilities does the postmethod pedagogy expect to occur? and what type of teacher identity does it suggest for? To these issues, deconstructive pedagogy has the answer; i. e. the concept of 'difference' in deconstruction bears the potential to deal with any possibilities in postmethod pedagogy, and the role of a postmethod teacher as a deconstructionist can have the potential to improvise his/her roles because in deconstructive pedagogy teacher's role/identity is unstable. Thus the workings of deconstruction in postmethod pedagogy can make it more effective in practice.

When a deconstructionist teacher employs deconstruction in the postmethod pedagogy, the postmethod pedagogy as a work in progress can manage most of its shortcomings because deconstruction is the driving force of all sorts of developments after structuralism/modernism: "The power of the deconstructive movement can be gauged by the fact that many other major intellectual traditions have been forced into radical reassessments" (Selden, 1985, p. 90). Accordingly, when the postmethod pedagogy is guided by “the teachings of Jacques Derrida” which are used to refine “a host of stale methodologies” in education (Trifonas 303, 306), it can be developed into a more appropriate work from “the work in progress” (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 537). With this respect, in applying the postmethod pedagogy a deconstructionist teacher is more concerned with “the Other” and “a more equitable new world picture” (Trifonas, 1996, p. 306) and “justice” which is denied to something other, to some alterity, to what is unpredictable” (Higgs, 2002, p. 171). Furthermore, the role of the postmethod teacher as a deconstructionist can make pedagogical practices more effective so as to achieve Trifonas (1996) “Archimedian point” (p. 333) and Kumaravadivelu’s (2001) “parameter of possibility” (p. 537) because the role of a deconstructionist teacher in the postmethod pedagogy is to thrive for the impossibility because “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 (Higgs, 2002, p. 171). It is because deconstruction works in the very space between the possibility and the impossibility. As Tacey (20012) states, it is “the very experience of the possibility of the impossible” (p. 8). In that it “does not exclude anything; it is the theory of inclusiveness; it is the theory of justice” (Stocker, 2006, p. 143). Thus a deconstructionist teacher makes the postmethod pedagogy all-pervasive and all-inclusive; he/she “aims to interrogate, exhibit and criticize the decidable ethics of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ practiced in the educational institutions” (Trifonas, 1996, p. 307). That is, in deconstructive pedagogy any sort of foundational concept is deconstructed and, as a deconstructionist, the teacher focuses on the issues like difference, justice, the other, and responsibility in his/her pedagogy (Higgs, 2002, p. 170). Above all, a deconstructionist teacher is more concerned with teaching the other who has been marginalized (See e. g. Scherzinger, 1995; Ahluwalia, 2013). In teaching the other he/she involves the learners in the practice of critical thinking and critical analysis through the “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” (Higgs,

2002, p. 172). Thus, teaching, for a deconstructionist teacher, is like “a special kind of erotic encounter, a meeting of teacher and student . . . is a wild and chaotic process, a struggle that is sometimes joyful, sometimes painful” (Pryer qtd. in Day, 2004, p. 106). Pryer’s conception of pedagogy exactly represents Derrida’s conception of meaning as difference in a text because both go for the free play and the endless deferral of the definite meaning like truth, being, identity, etc in deconstruction (Derrida cited in Culler, 1982, p. 97; Poovy, 2013, p. 108). Furthermore, teaching, for a deconstructionist teacher, is like a “pedagogical dance”, “a wild and a chaotic process” (Pryer cited in Day, 2004, p 106) because it always looks for “a way to think again and afresh, more strictly and more radically about the concern that has been central to the project of education” (Higgs, 2002, p. 176). In this way, a deconstructionist teacher is able to work out with any sort of challenges and make best out of them to make his/her pedagogy more effective and productive.

The most important role that a deconstructionist teacher can play in pedagogical reform is to look for something new because deconstruction does not accept the things as static. This can be observed in what Cornor (n. d.) writes, “Derrida's ideas and writings, and the writings of those who have rendered his original texts accessible to the average reader . . . have opened up new, exciting, and productive avenues of inquiry. . . .The sense of possibilities created—other ways of seeing and doing—is . . . most liberating, democratic, and consistent with what is best in any educational endeavour” (p. 246). Thus in this postmethod context the only effective way to work for equality is to empower the marginalized which can be achieved through the roles played by a deconstructionist teacher in the postmodern context as Reynolds (2001) commends: “Deconstruction and postmodernism more generally, have both associated their various criticisms of the philosophical tradition with a desire to emancipate a conception of alterity that has been marginalised by basically all metaphysics” (p. 31). So the main concern of pedagogy in the postmodern context is to emancipate the other, end social inequalities and enhance social justice (Rikowski and McLaren, 1999).

Now the question arises—how does a deconstructionist teacher emancipate the other and do social justice? To this, my argument is that it is the prime responsibility of the deconstructionist teacher to do so because he/she works like a cosmopolitan individualist as the theory of deconstruction does not exclude anything; “it is the theory of inclusiveness; it is the theory of justice” (Stocker, 2006, p. 143). With this attitude of inclusiveness a deconstructionist teacher deconstructs the established binary oppositions in the pedagogy like acceptable and non-acceptable, right and wrong (truth and lie), central and subsidiary, wiseness and non-wiseness etc. (Farahari, 2014, p. 2497). Similarly, in Kamali’s (2018) experience it is necessary for a teacher in the postmethod pedagogy to identify the binary oppositions active in the operation of the pedagogy and address them effectively. He gives the example of how the binary oppositions are used to centralize certain thoughts and practices and how the others are marginalized:

The method-led practices encouraged students to think and behave in terms of binary oppositions and hierarchy they created, e.g. 'teacher versus students', 'texts versus students' interests', 'exam versus learning', 'pass versus fail', and so on. So students always put one thought and practice as more dominant than the other which resulted in exclusion of certain thoughts and practices. (p. 52)

In these binaries the first concept and practice would deserve more attention than the second one. But for a deconstructionist teacher both of them are interrelated and supplementary to each other; both of them are equally significant for the process of learning and have the potential for multiple meanings because deconstruction works as “a strategy that opens a text up into the possibility of the multiplicity of meanings” (Hernandez, 2014, p. 12). Deconstruction

as a strategy can help to implement postmethod pedagogy effectively as Kumaravadivelu (2001) has envisioned the role of a postmethod teacher:

The postmethod teacher, like the postmethod learner, is an autonomous individual. Teacher autonomy in this context entails a reasonable degree of competence and confidence on the part of teachers to want to build and implement their own theory of practice that is responsive to the particularities of their educational contexts and receptive to the possibilities of their sociopolitical conditions. (p. 548)

With regard to this concept of the role of a postmethod teacher, my recommendation is that this role becomes more autonomous and effective when he/she performs pedagogy like a deconstructionist teacher because in deconstructive pedagogy the teacher is free to implement the pedagogy as it is not guided by any foundational concept and not targeted to any definite learning point; it is process-oriented and learning takes place naturally while taking part in pedagogical discourses or playing with texts. So in deconstructive pedagogy the teacher can theorize what he/she has reflected from practice and implement what he/she has theorized as it deconstructs the oppositional relation between theory and practice. This process actually boosts up both competence and confidence in the teacher, and he/she becomes capable of improvising the pedagogy to suit the context and meet any emerging challenges because deconstructive pedagogy is always open to transformation.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

To conclude the discussion above it is appropriate to employ deconstruction in the application of postmethod pedagogy leading to the development of *deconstructive pedagogy*. So it is essential for a postmethod teacher to practice pedagogy as a deconstructionist teacher so that he/she can implement it more effectively. The nature of postmethod pedagogy as 'an open-ended inquiry' and 'a work in progress' can be further advanced when postmethod pedagogy is enacted along with the principles of deconstruction. For this the role of a postmethod teacher needs to be transformed into the role as a deconstructionist one.

A deconstructionist teacher can fully act as an autonomous practitioner because he/she is not guided by any foundational theory and method. For him/her any result of practice is acceptable as there is no concept of good or bad, right or wrong as presence; the result of practice goes on leaving traces as a movement—a progressive movement, so a deconstructive pedagogy is like a wild and chaotic process as it looks for no ultimate and definite meaning; there is only free play of meanings.. So a deconstructionist teacher believes that pedagogy gets much better when teachers and learners, as autonomous individuals, are involved in pedagogy which goes like a wild dance.

A deconstructionist teacher can develop a reasonable degree of competence and confidence in performing pedagogy because in deconstructive pedagogy he/she acts like a critical reader and analyzes a text/lesson critically looking for multiple meanings. This enhances competence in the teacher which, in turn, helps to boost up his/her confidence as well. Thus being involved in such critical practices, a deconstructionist teacher can enhance his/her level of competence and confidence to make pedagogical process more process-oriented rather than product.

More importantly, a deconstructionist teacher not only critically implements theories into practice but he/she also builds theory out of practice because in practicing deconstructive pedagogy he/she deconstructs the traditional hierarchy created by the binary—theory versus practice, and he/she actually works out of the rupture in-between them while accepting them as complementary to each other and reflecting on them. As a result, he/she can theorize the reflections out of practice which, however, goes on changing in the process of addressing

emerging issues at hand as a movement creating different traces--difference. Thus a deconstructionist teacher focuses on the interplay between theoretical and practical dimensions of pedagogy and lets it open to any possibilities to make the pedagogy effective in context.

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