

Re-Politicising Education - Interpreting Jean Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* in a Contemporary Pedagogical Context

Jean-Francois Lyotard's text *The Postmodern Condition* is consistently cited as the key text which pushes culture, society and pedagogy into the 'postmodern' moment, thus opening the floodgates for the substitution of ethics with instrumentalisation across all spheres of life and work. In an Irish educational context, much has been made of how such developments have put more humanistic forms of pedagogy in jeopardy through league tables for schools, performance and competence based approaches to teaching evaluation, increased privatisation of the universities etc. It is certainly the case that Lyotard's text gives much credence to such views in his emphasis on a new technical regime of understanding and a radically fragmented conception of self and society.

However, in this paper, I will seek to re-situate Lyotard's seminal text in the current Irish educational debate re. 'ethics and instrumentalisation'. Drawing on Lyotard's own more sustained work (*The Postmodern Condition* is in many respects very unrepresentative of his wider oeuvre, having been written for a specific remit), I will argue that his oeuvre provides us with a fascinating example of a lifelong philosophical 'scepticism' which involves conflicts with Marxism, psychoanalysis, deconstruction and postmodernism itself. Far from being simply a bolster for 'postmodern' instrumentalisation, Lyotard's work provides us with rich resources to enable a critical perspective on the gap between 'ethics and instrumentalisation' in education and beyond. However, drawing on connections between Lyotard's work and that of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, I will argue that there are dangers in simply opposing ethics to instrumentalisation. What Lyotard's work points towards rather is the need for a 're-politicisation' of both philosophy and education – what Mouffe has termed 'the return to the Political'. I will conclude with a discussion of how we might see such a philosophical reorientation as it relates to contemporary trends and crises in the Irish educational system.

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Bio

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