

## ‘To save the honour of thinking’: a slightly petulant response to Griffiths

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### Abstract

This is a response (a reply? a riposte?) to Peter Griffiths (Int. J. Nurs. Stud., in press, doi:10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2004.11.004) that attempts to answer some of the charges, which he levels at our book ‘*Deconstructing Evidence-based Practice*’ (Routledge, London, 2004). It begins by countering Griffiths’ mistaken assertion that, in deconstruction, ‘anything goes’. It argues that Griffiths is wrong because he has *literally* mistaken the meanings of certain words; that is, he has taken them wrongly. His biggest mistake, on which all of his others rests, is to mistake the word ‘deconstruction’ to imply a form of extreme relativism in which there are no right or wrong readings. In this, he is simply wrong. He is wrong in his assumption that there are no wrong readings, and the fact (yes, fact) that he is wrong demonstrates that some readings can be wrong. In particular, he mistakes the word ‘challenge’ to mean ‘deny’, and the word ‘authority’ to mean ‘legitimacy’. This is not simply *our* reading of what *we* took him to mean (which could, by our own argument, be mistaken). It is *his* reading and *his* writing, there on the page in black and white. And this misreading, this mistake, inevitably leads him to a wrong conclusion.

Having clarified the small matter that, in deconstruction, anything *does not* go, and that deconstructionists *are not* constrained to accept everything that is written about them, we then attempt to point out some other mistakes in Griffiths’ non-review. Most importantly, we reject Griffiths’ accusation that postmodernism is a strategy to ‘save us from thinking’ and instead, with Lyotard, advocate it as an attempt ‘to save the honour of thinking’.

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### 1. This is not in doubt

I will reject, that is, whatever admits of the least doubt, just as if I had found it was wholly false; and I will go on until I know something for certain—if it is only this, that there is nothing certain (Descartes, 1970, p. 66).

Where to begin? At the end, perhaps. At the end of his self-confessed ‘not-a-book-review’, Peter Griffiths offers

a ‘friendly riposte’ to the effect that too much doubt (of which we stand accused) leads inevitably to a lack of thought (of which, presumably, we also stand accused). We could, perhaps, have devoted this entire paper to a deconstruction of just those two words. We might have enquired how a ‘friendly riposte’ compares to, say, an unfriendly riposte or an emotionally neutral riposte. We might have questioned why Griffiths is appearing to be so friendly towards us (we don’t even know him!). We might have pondered on how one could/should respond to a ‘friendly riposte’ whose content is hostile. We might have wondered whether a ‘friendly riposte’ is the academic equivalent to ‘friendly fire’, and in what ways

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it restricts any attempts to fire back. We might also have wondered whether his ‘friendly’ gesture is in any way connected to his assumption elsewhere that Rolfe is ‘a touch petulant’. Just a touch? We shall see. He also attributes to us a number of views, which we do not hold and for which we can find no support in our writing. It is with some of these that we intend to begin.

## 2. This is not true

To say that we should drop the idea of truth as out there waiting to be discovered is not to say that we have discovered that, out there, there is no truth (Rorty, 1989, p. 8).

So let us get something clear at the outset: we are *not* implying a position of ‘extreme relativism’ in which ‘anything goes’, nor do we attempt to reveal the ‘true nature’ of evidence-based practice (EBP). We also find it difficult to see where in the text such a reading might arise. Of course, there might be a self-fulfilling prophesy at work here. Once Griffiths has decided that deconstruction entails an extreme relativism in which anything can be said of anything, then he is perfectly justified in saying whatever he likes about our work, and thus to attribute that same extreme relativism to our writing.

What is *actually* claimed for this book (on the back cover where no one can miss it) is that ‘This innovative book strips the concept of evidence-based practice back to basics using deconstructive analysis, *so that readers can move towards a clearer understanding of it*’. Now, whereas Griffiths might (and does) take issue with the first three words (Is this a book? Is it innovative?), there is nothing to suggest that we are making any universal claims about evidence-based practice at all, let alone to reveal its true nature. Neither, as we said, are we claiming that ‘anything goes’, nor that everything is equally true, nor even that there is no truth. To say, as we do, that ‘there is no single, authoritative and correct deconstructive reading/writing of any particular text’, including ours, does not preclude there being ‘incorrect’ or downright ‘wrong’ readings. Derrida, as usual, phrases it much better:

Since the deconstructionist (which is to say, isn’t it, the skeptic-relativist-nihilist!) is supposed not to believe in truth, stability or the unity of meaning, in intention or ‘meaning to say’, how can he demand of us that we read *him* with pertinence, precision, rigor? How can he demand that his own text be interpreted correctly? How can he accuse anyone else of having misunderstood, simplified, deformed it, etc.? In other words, how can he discuss, and discuss the reading of what he writes? The answer is simple enough: this definition is *false* (that’s right: false, not true) and feeble; it supposes a bad (that’s right: bad, not good)

and feeble reading of numerous texts, first of all mine, which therefore must finally be read or reread. Then perhaps it will be understood that the value of truth (and all those values associated with it) is never contested or destroyed in my writings, but only reinscribed in more powerful, larger, more stratified contexts (Derrida, 1988, p. 146).

So where is our evidence (ha! ha!) for the charge that Griffiths simply ‘got it wrong’? And what would count as evidence in such cases? Let us start at the beginning:

...our aim in writing this book is to challenge the authority of the ‘is’, to initiate a critique of health and social care practice and theory that does not emanate from (and is therefore not bound by the rules of) the practice and theory that it seeks to criticise (Freshwater and Rolfe, 2004, p. 4).

Griffiths picks up on this statement as one of the main thrusts of his critique. He writes: ‘by denying the legitimacy of the ‘is’ this deconstruction leaves one in the uncomfortable position of either invalidating the endeavour... or feeling that pointing out facts (is) is not legitimate criticism’. In other words, how can an extreme relativist who is ‘denying the legitimacy of the “is”’ take her own position seriously, let alone expect it to be taken seriously by others? How can she even make positive assertions? And how can her critics make positive assertions against her? If ‘anything goes’, how, then, can anyone claim to have uncovered the ‘true nature’ of anything?

A good point, except that is not what we said. Griffiths is wrong (that’s right: wrong, not right) to say that we *denied* the *legitimacy* of the ‘is’. What we said, loud and clear on p. 4, was ‘our aim in writing this book is to *challenge* the *authority* of the “is” ...’. To challenge the authority of (say) the RCT is *not* to deny the legitimacy of the RCT. We are not *denying* its *legitimacy* as a form of evidence: We are not *denying* that it is a source of evidence, nor are we saying that it is *illegitimate* evidence; we are simply *challenging* its *authority* as the ‘gold standard’ of evidence, suggesting that we should not accept it at face value. To challenge and question is not to deny, at least not in our dictionary, although we can see why Griffiths might wish it to be otherwise. Not only does it implicate us with the broader project of denial (including holocaust denial), but to paraphrase Eaglestone: writers challenge evidence-based practice, no story; writers deny evidence-based practice, story.

Griffiths is also wrong on a second count. He writes: ‘In revealing (or attempting to reveal) evidence-based practice for what it “really” is, the tyranny of the “is” is truly revealed. There is no escaping from it—it IS how our language works’. Well, actually, no it ISN’T. The word ‘is’ is the third person singular, present tense, of

the verb ‘to be’, and the verb ‘to be’ has a number of meanings, only two of which concern us here. ‘Is’ means both ‘to exist’ and ‘to be equivalent to’ or ‘to signify’. When we question the authority of the ‘is’, we are challenging the equivalence of two nouns and not their existence. To challenge the *equivalence* of (say) the RCT with the gold standard for evidence is not to deny the *existence* of either the RCT or of evidence. Or, to take Griffiths’ example, the ‘is’ of ‘this is not a book’ has a completely different meaning from the ‘is’ of ‘there is (or was) no holocaust’. We may well be ‘in denial’ when we question the *equivalence* of our book with the generally accepted meaning of what a book might look like or function as, but it is a completely different type of denial from the historian who denies the *existence* of the holocaust. Derrida (1976), of course, recognised the duplicity of the word ‘is’ and sometimes put it ‘under erasure’ by writing ~~is~~, thereby acknowledging its necessity whilst alerting us to its slipperiness.

And so to the claim that we are intent on ‘revealing the true nature of evidence-based practice’? As far as we can make out, nowhere do we claim to reveal the true nature of *anything* (although Rolfe does, at one point, concede that EBP might have a hidden agenda). Our deconstructions are presented not as a final word on the true nature of EBP, but as exemplars, as examples for the reader to follow. As we explicitly write in one of our deconstructions:

This is, of course, merely one deconstructive reading among many, and as such it carries no authority over and above the paper it is attempting to critique, nor over any other deconstructive reading that *you or anyone else* might attempt. (Freshwater and Rolfe, 2004, p. 57, emphasis added).

We are not sure whether we can say it any clearer: this is *not* an attempt at revealing the true nature of evidence-based practice; it is rather *our unique and singular reading* that challenges and encourages the reader to write her own. It is also, importantly, not saying that all deconstructions are equally valid and that ‘anything goes’, only that our reading has no special authority, no divine right to be heard above the hubbub of competing readings, no intrinsic ‘gold standard’ status.

### 3. This is not a *BÖC*

**Book** *noun* **1** a set of written, printed, lined, or blank sheets bound together. **2** a long written or printed composition [Old English *bōc* beech tree] (New Penguin English Dictionary, 2001).

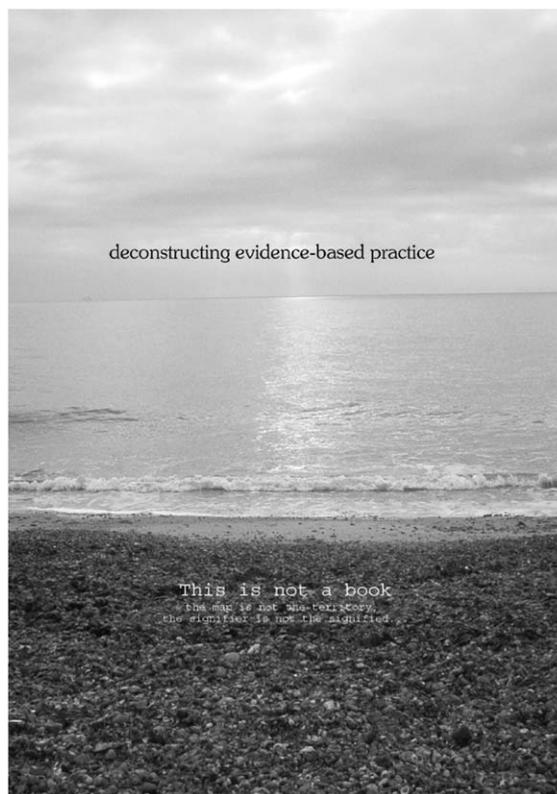
Where to begin? At the beginning, perhaps, with the frontispiece, between the cover and the text, neither one nor the other, which also provides Griffiths with an

opportunity to carry out his own deconstruction. In true Derridean fashion, he begins by focussing on a seemingly inconsequential remark, in the margins of our text:

The frontispiece of Freshwater and Rolfe’s ‘Deconstructing evidence-based practice’ declares ‘*this is not a book*’: a statement (presumably) designed to echo Magritte’s painting of a pipe ‘*The Betrayal of Images*’ which carries the caption ‘*this is not a pipe*’ (Griffiths, 2005).

Well, of course. But he continues by noting that whereas Magritte was right in pointing out that his picture of a pipe was not a pipe but a *picture* of a pipe, the relationship of the statement ‘this is not a book’ to...

To what? To what is the statement actually referring? Is it, as in Magritte’s painting, referring to the picture (in this case, of the sky/sea/sand) on which it is printed? Or perhaps to the title ‘*Deconstructing Evidence-Based Practice*’ printed above it? Or to the text ‘the map is not the territory, the signifier is not the signified...’ printed below it? Or, as Griffiths assumes, to the physical object of the book itself. Griffiths turns to our statement ‘the signifier is not the signified’ to support his assumption, claiming that it echoes Korzybski’s assertion that ‘the word is not the thing’. Thus, he continues, ‘the statement [this is not a book] refers to an object consisting of text printed on pages made of a material that appears to be paper’.



It might be worth restating our earlier point: whereas all deconstructive readings have a right to be heard, not all such readings are *right*. In particular, they are not right if they originate from first principles that are not right. And in this case, Griffiths' first principle is *wrong*. The statement 'the signifier is not the signified' is not, as Griffiths seems to believe, an 'adapted version' of Korzybski's phrase 'the word is not the thing'. Griffiths is making the fundamental error of mis-taking the *signified* for the *sign* (Saussure, 1959). The *signified*, as any first year student of semiotics would have informed him, is not the object but the *concept* of the object. (Korzybski, whose project of 'General Semantics' was an attempt to eradicate such misuse of words, and who also warned against confusing different meanings of the word 'is', would by now surely be spinning in his grave.) When we wrote 'this is not a book', we were not challenging the reader's belief that she was holding in her hand 'an object consisting of text printed on pages...' as Griffiths eloquently puts it, but rather her *mental concept* of what the word 'book' might mean. It was an epistemological challenge rather than an ontological one.

So, in what ways might *Deconstructing evidence-based practice* challenge the normally accepted *concept*, the dictionary definition, of the word 'book'? Firstly, it attempts to undo (to subvert) the traditional *form* of the book; or rather, to act as an exemplar of a *different concept* of what a book might look like. Deleuze and Guattari describe two types of book. The root-book is the book in its classical form. The image of the root-book is the tree (perhaps, as the etymologists tell us, the *bōc*, the beech tree): 'a tap root, with its pivotal spine and surrounding leaves' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 5); that is, a central core, rooted in the earth, in the world, supporting an ordered array of branches and leaves. The second type of book is the rhizomatic book, whose image is the tuber, the fascicular root, the rhizome. Whereas the tree-like root-book is linear and hierarchical in nature, the tuberous rhizomatic book is a decentred, subterranean network in which all points are connected to all others. Whereas the structure of the root-book is *A then B then C, then D*, the structure of the rhizomatic book is *F and D and J and X and...*, without beginning or end. Clearly, a rhizomatic book will look different from a root-book; we might argue that a *true* rhizomatic book will not look like a book at all, or at least, that it might resist being *read* as a book.

Secondly, *Deconstructing evidence-based practice* attempts to challenge the traditional function of the book:

We will never ask what a book means, as signifier or signified; we will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it functions with.... A book itself is a little machine... (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 4).

A book itself is a little machine; we know a book not by its cover, but by what it *does*. For Deleuze and Guattari, machines are assemblages that regulate flow; a book regulates the flow of words, of sentences, of ideas; a book stops and starts the flow, it dissects and orders it into parts, into chapters: the book machine plugs into other machines, including other books. Books are not defined by a hard cover or by a certain number of pages; a book regulates the flow of energy; it stimulates and stems the flow of thoughts and idea. A *root-book* imposes a *certain kind* of order on the flow; it directs the flow of energy from root to branch, from branch to root, along a certain predetermined route. A root/route book has a beginning, a middle, and an ending, in that order. A *rhizomatic book* imposes a different order, an order without top or bottom, without beginning or end: 'contrary to a deeply rooted belief, the [rhizomatic] book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world...' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 11), that is, it enters into a *partnership* with the world.

The classical book form is an attempt to convey meaning, facts, knowledge. Eaglestone's *'Postmodernism and holocaust denial'* is a classical root-book. Root/route books are more or less faithful tracings of the world onto the page, and are judged according to the accuracy of those tracings. However, 'the rhizome is altogether different, a *map and not a tracing*' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 12, their emphasis). Furthermore, a different kind of book demands a different kind of writing: 'writing [that] has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, pp. 4–5). Our writing has nothing to do with signifying; we are not claiming that deconstruction is..., but neither are we saying that deconstruction is not.... Our self-appointed task is to *challenge* such statements of identity, of signification, and thereby to *open up a space* in which the reader can decide for herself what is and what is not.

#### 4. This is not nothing

For a very long time, the question of the *yes* has mobilised or traversed everything that I have been trying to think, write, teach or read (Derrida, 1991, p. 592).

The question of the *yes*, the question of significance: Griffiths begins with the words 'This is not a book review'. He is quite right: it is not a book review; or at least, it is not a review of the book we have written, although it might be a review of the book he (mis)read. In the course of his not-a-book-review, Griffiths uses the word 'not' a further 88 times. By the end, we are in little doubt what (according to Griffiths) evidence-based practice is *not*, what deconstruction is *not*, what history

is *not*, what words are *not*, and in particular, what our book is *not*. Perhaps ironically, Griffiths concludes that we are in denial in a similar way that certain historians are in denial of the holocaust (or, at least, that postmodern philosophy nurtures and encourages such denial), and that we are nihilists, pulling down the edifice of evidence-based practice but offering nothing in its place. He would, I suspect, have us replace the epigraph ‘this is not a book...’ with ‘this book is not...’.

Interestingly, Griffiths makes no comment whatsoever on the sub-title of our book: ‘*Everything and nothing*’, and the quotations which accompany it, even though this perhaps gives a better clue to the thinking behind our writing. He concludes his not-a-review by pointing out that our book says nothing, that it de(con)structs evidence-based practice but offers nothing in its place. In response to Griffiths’ assertion that our book offers nothing, we argue rather that it in fact offers ‘nothing’; that, to paraphrase John Cage, we have ‘nothing’ to say and we’re saying it. Griffiths, of course, mistakes ‘nothing’ for nothing. That is, he mistakenly assigns the ‘is’ in ‘this *is* not a book’ as the ‘is’ of existence, when it was presented as the ‘is’ of equivalence or significance. In attributing to us a position of existential denial, Griffiths has missed the point that sometimes a pregnant, empty space, a ‘nothing’, is also a ‘something’. (Or, as the old joke has it: if nothing works faster than Anadin, take nothing.) If our book says ‘nothing’, it is to leave space for the reader to write her own ‘something’. In saying ‘nothing’, we are also, with Derrida, saying ‘yes’, or rather: ‘I say the *yes* and not the word “yes”, for there can be a *yes* without the word...’ (Derrida, 1991, p. 590).

## 5. This is not radical

**Radical** *adj* affecting or involving the basic nature or composition of something [from Latin *radic-*, *radix* root] (New Penguin English Dictionary, 2001).

So where to begin? In the middle, perhaps. Griffiths writes: ‘The issues raised are not radical or unique and do not necessarily require a deconstruction... to make the points that are made’. They are certainly not unique: what is? Barthes tells us that *all* text is:

woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages (and what language is not?) antecedent or contemporary, which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony. The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try to find the ‘sources’, the ‘influences’ of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet

already read: they are quotations without inverted commas (Barthes, 1977, pp. 159–160).

Let us forget about any aspirations to uniqueness, then. All texts, all books, all *ideas* are a series of quotations without inverted commas.

Neither are the ideas in *Deconstructing evidence-based practice* radical: they are not, in etymological terms, concerned with roots or origins; they are not (despite what Griffiths might believe) concerned with the basic nature of anything; they are not presented in a *root book*; they have nothing to do with signifying. Let us remember, the signifier is not the signified, the word is not the concept.

Griffiths appears to think that the aim of our book is to reveal some *hidden facts* about evidence-based practice; to expose its roots, one of which is the ‘fact’ that the hierarchy of evidence is a *hidden* hierarchy. This revelation, he observes, is hardly radical, and he goes on to suggest that the hierarchy of evidence is hidden in the same way that his 3-year-old son is hidden when he is wriggling under the duvet with his legs protruding. Thus, when we wrote about the ‘hidden agenda’ of evidence-based practice as promoting a strict hierarchy of evidence, Griffiths claims that we were stating the obvious, acting like the father of a 3-year old, pretending not to see the wriggling lump in the duvet and feigning surprise when it finally reveals itself.

An amusing analogy, but not a particularly apposite one. If he reads again *Deconstruction 2* in our book, he will see that our argument is that the hierarchy of evidence is certainly hidden, but in the way that a tree is hidden in a forest. It is in full view, it is seen by all, and yet somehow it is ignored, somehow we cannot see the wood for the trees. When researchers wish to promote the findings from the latest RCT, they point to the hierarchy of evidence, there in full view in the middle of the forest. But when critics attempt to question the status or the validity of the hierarchy, it suddenly blends in with the forest and becomes invisible. For example, Rolfe recently submitted a paper critiquing the rigid hierarchy of evidence to a leading British nursing journal. Despite good reviews, it was rejected because, according to the editor, he was attacking an old-fashioned concept of EBP; no one, he was informed, still subscribes to such a simplistic hierarchical view of evidence. Hierarchies of evidence are still regularly published in the journals (e.g. Evans, 2003); Griffiths still upholds and supports their use; and yet when we point to one, we find ourselves pointing only at the wood and not at the tree.

These hierarchies almost always place findings from RCTs and systematic reviews at the top, and knowledge from experience at the bottom, arguing that evidence from higher up is more relevant, important, valid, or whatever. However, when faced with the objection from

practitioners that this might result in a ‘cookbook’ approach to practice, David Sackett, whose definition of EBP is probably the most widely cited in the UK, reassures us that:

External clinical evidence [from research] can inform, but can never replace, individual clinical expertise, and it is this expertise that decides whether the external evidence applies to the individual patient at all and, if so, how it should be integrated into a clinical decision (Sackett et al., 1996, p. 72).

So that is clear, then. The clinical experience that informs the expert practitioner is at the bottom of the hierarchy except when the practitioner uses this clinical experience and expertise to decide that it is at the top. The hierarchy of evidence is ‘hidden’ like a toddler playing under a duvet until the critic points out its shortcomings or a practitioner is faced with applying it, and then, like the toddler at bedtime, it is nowhere to be seen.

## 6. This is not the end

For there *must* not be a last word—that’s what I’d like to say finally (Derrida, 1992, p. 197).

And so we come to perhaps Griffiths’ most damning criticism of all: ‘The nature of hierarchy of evidence offered by evidence-based practice is not seriously challenged, or at least no alternative is offered’. Or, put another way, our book deconstructs the traditional concept of evidence-based practice (although not ‘seriously’, in either sense of the word) but suggests nothing in its place. Practitioners are therefore left floundering, and ‘in rejecting the certainties promised by evidence-based practice a refuge for sloppy thinking, laziness and poor practice might be created’.

We have already addressed this criticism from the perspective of the ‘nothing’. Now let us be a little more pragmatic, a little less philosophical. The first and most obvious point to make is that, to the best of our knowledge, hardly any advocates of evidence-based practice still consider that it promises ‘certainties’ of any kind when applied to practice. As we have seen, Sackett even calls into question the certainty of the RCT at the top of the hierarchy of evidence. We might argue, then, that it is these advocates of EBP who have rejected the certainties, and who are therefore advocating sloppy thinking, laziness and poor practice. But of course, the entire hypothesis is itself flawed; we have certainly never before come across the argument that the rejection of, or refusal to accept, uncertainty promotes clear thinking and good practice, and it is perhaps those few who still cling to the promise of certainty that are the sloppy, lazy thinkers and poor practitioners. As Lyotard (1988)

pointed out, it is the modernists who cling to the illusion of certainty, and the postmodernists who reject it ‘to save the honour of thinking’ (p. xii).

The second and more important point lies in Griffiths’ assertion that no alternative to evidence-based practice and the RCT is offered. One answer might be that none was promised; that the book was, by its own admission, a book about deconstruction that used evidence-based practice as one example of how it might be done: ‘a book about deconstruction, but shot through with the weft of evidence-based practice’ (Freshwater and Rolfe, 2004, p. 19). But here is another answer: no alternative is offered because none is needed. The assumption underpinning Griffiths’ objection is that deconstruction entails a *destruction* of the text, and of what the text refers to. However, as Spivak (1974) tells us, to deconstruct is ‘to dismantle in order to reconstitute what is always already inscribed’ (p. lxxvii). Deconstruction entails a *close reading* of a text, opening it out by exposing all the contradictions in meaning *always already there* that the author has tried to suppress in the name of coherence, or which she did not realise were there in the first place. Deconstruction therefore does not destroy, or even reject, but leaves us with a broader, fuller understanding of evidence-based practice in all of its conflictual and contradictory glory.

So what alternative to evidence-based practice do we offer? Why, evidence-based practice, of course. The aim of our book is not to destroy EBP in order to replace it with something different, but to open up the concept to scrutiny and questioning, to supplement it with alternative readings. But more than this, it offers an exemplar and a few rules of thumb by which practitioners might create *their own* alternative, expanded understandings. Rather than suppressing thinking, deconstruction encourages it. As we said at the very beginning of the book:

Our explicit intention has been to write an academic book. That is not to say, a book divorced from practice; on the contrary, we have tried to write a book that will encourage you to think deeply about practice and perhaps change the way you practice as a result of those thoughts (Freshwater and Rolfe, 2004, p. 3).

Not, as Griffiths suggests, a book that tells you what to do, or even one that offers you an alternative to what you are doing; not a book to encourage lazy and sloppy thinking and poor practice, but a book to help you to think about what you currently do, why you currently do it, and which encourages you to come up with your *own* thoughts about how you might think and act differently. In short, a book which offers ‘*nothing*’, that is, which offers a space in which ‘*everything*’ is possible.

## 7. Further reading (this is not a postscript)

Griffiths freely admits that he has read neither Derrida nor any of the other authors that we cite, but nevertheless feels that he has a reasonable grasp of texts that ‘present complexities that often defeat those who study them extensively and full time’. He continues with a strange twist of logic: ‘if such expertise is required to engage in the debate at all, the debate is of necessity restricted to a narrow and self-appointed elite’. So let us not bother, then. After all, why let the fact that we have not read a single word of the philosophers that we are discussing stop us from having an opinion. After all, isn’t that the postmodern way? In fact, Griffiths’ opinion appears to be that there are two postmodernisms, the first represented by Eaglestone and Lyotard (the voice of rigour and reasonableness), and the second by Derrida, Rolfe and Freshwater (the voice of unreason and lazy thinking). He cites Eaglestone citing Lyotard, at the same time explaining why it is unnecessary to return to original texts (they are, as we have seen, too complex, dense and obscure) to show how Lyotard is a moderate, reasonable, if complex writer whereas Derrida is an obscure, difficult relativist; that Lyotard accepts the holocaust while Derrida encourages his readers to deny it (or at least to doubt it, along with everything else). Unfortunately, Griffiths is wrong, as even the most cursory reading of Lyotard and Derrida will show.

It is certainly true that Lyotard (1992) regarded the holocaust as the pivotal moment in the turn from modernism to postmodernism, citing ‘Auschwitz’ as the ‘paradigmatic name’ for the ultimate, inevitable, nihilistic conclusion of modernism (that’s right, modernism, not postmodernism), which he disparagingly referred to as ‘capitalist technoscience’. In fact, as a self-proclaimed supporter of modernist science, Griffiths might have been wise to have read Lyotard’s earlier critique of science, particularly ‘*The Postmodern Condition*’ (Lyotard, 1984) before citing Eaglestone citing Lyotard. Furthermore, Lyotard does not stand in opposition to Derrida and to us as Griffiths implies. We suggest that he reads Derrida’s writing on apartheid, on the fall of the Soviet Union, on French imperialism in Algeria, on globalisation, and of course, on history, and then tell us that Derrida advocates quietism and encourages holocaust denial. In fact, Derrida was himself a Jew who suffered discrimination as a schoolboy at the hands of the Nazis. He might also read Lyotard’s writing on ‘parology’ (Lyotard, 1984), which he will discover to be very similar to Derrida’s notion of deconstruction.

If there are two postmodernisms (and of course most postmodernists would argue that there are never just two of *anything*), they are not the two that Griffiths would have us believe. Rather, on one side would be

Derrida and Lyotard, other ‘complex, dense and [sometimes] obscure’ writers and those of us who have at least attempted to engage with their texts, and on the other would be those who rely on second- and third-hand accounts and who have never read a word by any of the writers they are critiquing. As Lyotard (1988) might have put it, on one side, the genre of the academy, ‘to save the honour of thinking’; on the other, the genre of journalism, ‘for the sake of political hegemony’, that is, to preserve the status quo (or even, to turn Griffiths’ riposte back on himself, to ‘save us from thinking’). Of course, the former group would consist, in Griffiths’ words, of ‘a narrow and self-appointed elite’. But the point is that it is *self*-appointed and membership is open to anyone who can be bothered to pick up a book and read it.

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