Critical Pedagogy and Cognition
An Introduction to a Postformal Educational Psychology
Critical Pedagogy and Cognition
EXPLORATIONS OF EDUCATIONAL PURPOSE

Volume 15

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Joe Kincheloe (1950–2008)

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In today’s dominant modes of pedagogy, questions about issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, colonialism, religion, and other social dynamics are rarely asked. Questions about the social spaces where pedagogy takes place – in schools, media, and corporate think tanks – are not raised. And they need to be.

The Explorations of Educational Purpose book series can help establish a renewed interest in such questions and their centrality in the larger study of education and the preparation of teachers and other educational professionals. The editors of this series feel that education matters and that the world is in need of a rethinking of education and educational purpose.

Coming from a critical pedagogical orientation, Explorations of Educational Purpose aims to have the study of education transcend the trivialization that often degrades it. Rather than be content with the frivolous, scholarly lax forms of teacher education and weak teaching prevailing in the world today, we should work towards education that truly takes the unattained potential of human beings as its starting point. The series will present studies of all dimensions of education and offer alternatives. The ultimate aim of the series is to create new possibilities for people around the world who suffer under the current design of socio-political and educational institutions.

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Critical Pedagogy and Cognition

An Introduction to a Postformal Educational Psychology

Springer
For Joe L. Kincheloe and his many, generous, critical, postformal gifts
This book, presented in an introductory, yet sophisticated and appropriately academic, format, simultaneously contributes to the fields of critical pedagogy and educational psychology in new and innovative ways by demonstrating how critical pedagogy, postformal psychology, and Enlightenment science, seemingly separate and distinct disciplines, are really part of the same larger, contextualized, complex whole from the inner most relatively developmentally fixed biological context of human faculties to the perpetually shifting, socially and politically constructed context of individual schema and human civilization. The text’s uniqueness stems from its bold attempt to connect the postformal critical constructivist/pedagogy work of Joe Kincheloe and others to Western science based on a shared, although previously misunderstood, critique and rejection of crude forms of social control, which the psychologists call behaviorism and Western scientists identify as mechanical philosophy. This book therefore argues that critical pedagogy, which includes, among others, anarchist, Marxist, feminist, Indigenous (globally conceived), Afro-Caribbean/American, and postmodern traditions, and critical/constructivist educational psychology have much to gain by engaging previously rejected work in critical solidarity—that is, without compromising one’s values or democratic commitments. Joe Kincheloe argued that this interdisciplinary approach allows the postformal researcher/activist/educator (i.e., the bricoleur) to listen to and engage subjugated knowledges and, in the process, become more critically democratic and complex. The goal of this book is therefore to contribute to this vision of developing a more transgressive and transformational educational psychology. Through these discussions and explorations the historical and philosophical development of the field of educational psychology is outlined for the novice, yet with enough unique insight to engage the seasoned scholar.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

Critical Pedagogy and Cognition: An Introduction to a Postformal Educational Psychology is an introductory textbook laying out a new paradigmatic approach to the study of cognition and the implications of this perspective for educational psychology. Educational psychology has traditionally addressed issues such as teaching, learning, motivation, cognitive development, personal, social, moral, and emotional development, learning abilities and learning problems, thinking processes, intelligence, classroom management, higher order thinking, assessment, lesson planning, self-esteem/self-concept, creativity, study skills, tests, and measurements. Over the last couple of decades profound changes have occurred in higher education and knowledge production that hold dramatic implications for educational psychology. While many psychological scholars involved with situated cognition, linguistics, socio-cognitive analysis, constructivism, enactivism, and integrated intelligence (i.e., Buddhist psychology), to name just a few, have challenged cognitive science and educational psychology’s conceptual landscape, other work is emerging that promises to exert similar effects on the field. This textbook proposes to study the traditional concerns in the field in light of these new (and old) ways of seeing. It will serve as a reconceptualized introduction to the field in the twenty-first century.

In some ways the book will serve as an interdisciplinary study of the biological, social, and spiritual aspects of cognition and educational psychology. Before we continue we must note that the spiritual domain, from a scientific perspective, refers to the notion of free will, our most noble gift according to Galileo, which, for Newton, was evidence of action at a distance therefore disproving mechanical philosophy. However, Newton had no scientific explanation for free will, that is, the absurd notion of being animated by an independent (not divine), non-material, perhaps spiritual, entity. Three hundred years later science still cannot explain the idea of mind, free will, or the phenomenon of consciousness beyond the idea that it is just matter organized in such a way as to produce thought. Traditional psychology, through behaviorism, has attempted to solve the problem by denying the problem arguing that free will is an illusion because humans are designed like machines that only respond according to external conditioning. That is, humans, according to the behaviorists, are not designed to be free. However, this explanation is inadequate at
best, and dangerous at worst, because we know that humans suffer when our creative capacities are externally controlled as wage workers, for example, rendering the concept of extreme importance for teaching and learning.

Situated cognition and socio-cultural analysis in this context can be viewed as what happens when educational psychology, cognitive science, and notions of free will intersect with cultural anthropology, sociology, social theory, philosophy, psychoanalysis, literary studies, and critical pedagogy. *Critical Pedagogy and Cognition: An Introduction to a Postformal Educational Psychology* picks up on this intersection as it considers new ways of viewing and representing the field. As the study of learners, learning, thinking, and teaching, educational psychology has traditionally viewed these topics outside of psycho-social, spiritual, and cultural processes. In the traditional paradigm the field focused on the processes by which information, skills, values, and attitudes were transmitted from teachers to students mechanistically where the individual learner is not physically contextualized or endowed with an independent *free will* or spirit. Dedicated to both scholarly advances and practical applications, the book opens a conversation about these issues from unique and compelling perspectives. Dedicated to multiple ways of conceptualizing the field, I discuss and question the assumptions on which the existing field is grounded.

With these ideas in mind the book engages the various sub-disciplines that come under the umbrella of educational psychology: developmentalism, evolutionary biology, the nature of mind, child and adolescent psychology, learning theory, cognitive science, abnormal psychology, teaching and learning, motivation, intelligence and psychometrics, and social psychology. Some chapters will focus on knowledge production and research in these domains and accepted processes of interpretation and meaning making. Other sections of the book will analyze assumptions about the autonomous individual and nature of mind. Are the boundaries that the field has traditionally established to demarcate what is inside and what is outside of the mind in need of reconceptualization? Do students “take in” information from “outside” themselves in the learning process? Have artificial borders been constructed between self and other? Individual and community? Cognition and emotion?

An example of the type of disciplinary ferment addressed by the book involves the conversation over the social formation of the learner. In this context authors will explore the socio-cognitive assertion that social interaction is a fundamental aspect of the human self. In this conversation many contemporary psychoanalysts have maintained that the self is never complete, always in process of shaping and being shaped by the socio-cultural and symbolic realms. With these ideas in mind these psychoanalysts replace the term “self” with its implication of autonomy and unity with the term “subject” with its connotation of the self’s production by its interaction with the world around it. Thus, the argument is made that the development of mental functions must take into account a wide variety of factors including contextual analysis, the conscious and unconscious production of identity (subjectivity), the subtle dynamics of interpersonal interaction, and an individual’s or a group’s position in the cultural web of reality.
Such psychoanalytical speculation brings us back to the analysis of educational psychology’s assumptions about the concept of mind. Psychoanalytical analysis and Buddhist psychology, among other sub-disciplines, challenge the traditional notion that mind does not exist beyond the body. Buddhist psychologists even challenge the Western tendency to reduce the notion of mind to a single lifetime arguing that one’s spirit or free will develops over many lifetimes giving way to the possibility of a critical, complex, historically grounded psychology. When educational psychologists fail to challenge these traditional views of mind, scholars of Buddhist psychology, socio-cognitivists, and contemporary psychoanalysts (among others) assert that undesirable consequences result.

From this perspective, intelligence, memory, and thinking are not merely the possessions of individuals—they are always social and historical processes. Viewed in this context psychometrics, for example, is opened to new questions; for example, just what is being measured on an I.Q. or a standardized test? Some scholars from the socio-cognitivist paradigm would argue that the examinations measure more of the student’s cultural familiarity with the discourse of Western schooling and linguistic socialization and less some objective notion of innate intelligence. In this context—as well as with most other aspects of the book—questions of power are brought into the conceptual mix. This is why critical pedagogy is so central to the conceptualization of the work. Whose interests are served by particular answers to the preceding questions and to the way educational psychology is configured in general? This critical pedagogical concern with justice and power permeates all aspects of the book.

In this critical context debate has emerged in the field concerning the social structuring of the self. While more traditional psychometricians, for example, argue that it is impossible to measure such a process, socio-cognitivists argue that problems result when the social dimension is ignored. Such problems, they continue, affect most directly those in less powerful, marginalized social positions. Outside such contextualization individuals from dominant cultural backgrounds are unable to understand that the behaviors of socio-economic subordinates may reflect the structural pressures under which they operate. Thus, a political dimension is added to the conversation within educational psychology. More traditional educational psychologists often believe that socio-economic success is the result of individual merit and intelligence hierarchies and bell curves represent the natural dispersion of biological cognitive aptitude. Socio-cognitivists disagree, arguing that such individualized belief structures serve to hide the benefits bestowed by dominant group membership.

Thus, an important discussion emerges in educational psychology around the following question: Is the individual the object of study in the field or must individuals always be analyzed in a larger social context? Also, rejecting the false science of invented intelligence hierarchies, how can biological knowledge inform and advance this socio-cognitive work for social justice? Socio-cognitivists and many cultural educational psychologists refer to the individual orientation of many in the field as “concealment by individualization.” They use this phrase to mean that the effects of race, class, and gender discrimination are hidden by reducing cognitive and educational study to the individual level. In this context such educational psychologists
challenge the universal hierarchies about human development that emerge from what they refer to as “decontextualized studies.” In response to the socio-cognitivists mainstream educational psychologists argue that to achieve empirical validity the mind must be studied in laboratory settings where it can be viewed in detailed specificity. In this context it can be conceptualized as the “software program” that is best understood in social isolation. Such isolation, mainstream psychologists contend, avoids the messiness of the social values and political agendas researchers concerned with contextualization inevitably bring to studies of cognition, teaching, learning, and development.

These conversations and debates construct the conceptual core of *Critical Pedagogy and Cognition: An Introduction to a Postformal Educational Psychology*. In addition to delineating the various concerns and subfields of educational psychology, descriptions of these intra-disciplinary debates will run throughout the various chapters. Such material will produce a detailed description and interpretation of the field as it stands in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Subsequent chapters will indicate how paradigms collide and the ways such collisions shape how teachers, policymakers, school leaders, and the public view education. From the perspective of many in the “critical new paradigm” of educational psychology, the empirical decontextualization processes tend to *psychologize* the field. In this new paradigmatic analysis psychologists blunder when they study cognition, teaching, learning, motivation, human development, identity formation, etc., as only psychological processes—not as psychological and sociological, political, economic, cultural, linguistic, and other processes as well. Jean Piaget, they argue for example, decontextualized his study of children, often removing questions of cultural context from his observations and analyses. Did non-European cultures, they ask, develop in the same way? What about in other historical periods? Socio-cognitivists and cultural psychologists ask: What does it say about not only Piaget, but also educational/developmental psychology in general, that such questions were not asked?

Thus, the fascinating debate rages in the domain of educational psychology. *Critical Pedagogy and Cognition: An Introduction to a Postformal Educational Psychology* is an important book at this historical juncture because the issues it addresses matter so deeply. The topics it explores rest at the basis of how we define ourselves and the world around us. Within these concerns rest the future of education. Because of its centrality to these issues readers interested in educational psychology as well as pedagogy, teacher education, history, philosophy, anthropology, cultural studies, sociology, and other areas will find the text germane to their needs. The book will introduce readers to a complex set of ideas around issues of critical pedagogy, cognition, and educational psychology. Thus, it will be written in an accessible style with definitions of unfamiliar terms provided for the novice reader.

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Part I

Psychological and Critical Foundations