

INNOVATIONS AND CONTROVERSIES: INTERROGATING EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

# Psychology in Education

## Critical Theory~Practice

Tim Corcoran (Ed.)



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## **Psychology in Education**

INNOVATIONS AND CONTROVERSIES: INTERROGATING  
EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

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# **Psychology in Education**

*Critical Theory~Practice*

*Edited by*

**Tim Corcoran**

*The Victoria Institute, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia*



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For my father Bill Corcoran – academic-practitioner.



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## FOREWORD

*“Sous les pavés, la plage.”*

[“Beneath the cobblestones, liberty (the beach).”]  
Graffiti of the Situationist International;  
prominent in Paris, May 1968.

A critical psychology of education – What is it? What does it assume? What might it become? Many things, of course, both large-scale and small. Let me begin with a few macro considerations.

Locking down childhood, giving education a certain form, is a polity’s best bid to fix the future. What does society want for children? That they can read and write and add up, first of all, surely ... Yes, we say: that’s crucial. But what of the bigger picture? Is ‘job-readiness’ be-all and end-all? Are there not more important things? Don’t we want our children to grow up as compassionate as possible, as playful, sceptical and inquisitive, – plus deeply motivated to strive for justice, and for freedom; to be valiant enemies of violence, inequity and oppression? Yes! we enthuse. So what kinds of schooling would produce such outcomes? And how might a more critical school psychology best serve as their catalyst? Hold on, though. Do I hear a remonstrance?

In school, as in church, we deal with the world that we wish existed, trying to inspire our descendants with ideals we ourselves have failed to live up to. We assume, for example, that there is no chance of making adults live together in desegregated neighbourhoods, so we try to impose this ideal on children by inventing elaborate school bussing plans.<sup>1</sup>

This is the voice of Chris Jencks and colleagues, still relevant from 1973. Their trail-blazing research on the sociology of inequality challenges any debate about education that assumes schooling has long-term effects, good or bad. Individual characteristics and family background, they found, have noticeably more influence over a child’s occupational fate than the specifics of curriculum – largely by influencing years endured at school. The kinds of children entering school – the input – predicts the output, with next to no lasting value-add in between. Which means that school reform cannot bring about important changes outside of school. Are things much changed after forty ensuing years? Either way, we do well to consider Jencks’ & Co’s conclusion: that we need to focus our attention more on making the best of what life is like *inside schools*. This is one place we can directly influence. So, if schools are where kids (and teachers) hang out for a large chunk of their lives, let’s make them enriching places to live ...<sup>2</sup> Were we successful, a bonus could be that more students would stay in school longer and so improve their occupational opportunities.

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Even this argument forks. We could step from here straight to the micro and inquire: how are we to make schools more life-enhancing? But that would be to duck a more fundamental question. Why have schools at all? Typically, the answers to both these questions play to Romantic sensibilities.

The macro question – why have schools at all? – is often answered by resurrecting the Dickensian spectre of child labour from Victorian Britain:

When my mother died I was very young  
And my father sold me while yet my tongue  
Could scarcely cry ‘weep! ‘weep! ‘weep! ‘weep!  
So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep.  
Etc.<sup>3</sup>

Viewed thus, schooling becomes a humane and enlightened antidote to the satanic child-munching industrial revolution (see Ch.8 below).

Analyses differ, however. Another history makes mass schooling arise from a moral panic about the ‘unruliness’ of children in the 1800s, who were increasingly gaining spending power through their industrial labour. Added to this was the threat of working children undercutting adult wages.<sup>4</sup> So, rather than being competent, knowledgeable and productive labourers in the new industrial society, Victorian children were recast as ignorant and therefore requiring moral (re)formation; helpless and innocent, therefore dependent on adults for protection. Suddenly there was a ubiquitous ‘need’ for schools.

This switch from child-as-productive-worker to a child-as-incompetent-innocent has a class dynamic which is now globalised, such that all children are assumed (by the West) to need ‘saving’ from child labour through schooling, even in countries where schools are of extremely low quality and where child labour adds significant economic value for families – plus giving purpose and status to children. Folding this analysis back into the West, we might ask whether schools are not just our own preferred way of keeping children ‘quiet’ – that is, off the streets and out of the labour force?<sup>5</sup> It is only a step from here to the idea that schools are primarily instruments of social control and surveillance, with allusions to Goffman’s concept of “total institutions,” Althusser on education as “ideological state apparatus,” and Foucault on the panopticon and governmentality.<sup>6</sup>

Looked at like this, a critical psychology of education would need to reconsider the push to ‘de-school’ society.<sup>7</sup> In the era of the world wide web, Ivan Illich’s now-old work shows a shocking prescience. His starting-point was the ineffectiveness of institutionalised education. Rather than a society that funnels children into single-purpose, localised, educational institutions, Illich argued we should create the ‘institutional inverse’ of funnels, namely: “educational *webs* which heighten the opportunity for each one to transform each moment of his living into one of learning, sharing, and caring.” The need was to engineer a computer-based (!), “peer-matching network” which would be free and universally available. It would provide all who want to learn, at any time in their lives, with access to

available resources and like-motivated peers and tutors. Correspondingly, it would: “empower all who want to share what they know to find those who want to learn it from them; and, finally, furnish all who want to present an issue to the public with the opportunity to make their challenge known.” In short, it would provide “a free world-class education for anyone anywhere.” This is the motto of the web-based, Youtube-enhanced, Khan Academy – founded in 2006, four years after Illich’s death.

Unfortunately for this particular practical initiative, the take-up of free, online educational courses is heavily skewed. The takers are predominantly well-educated themselves or they have access to educational resources in their background. It is hard to do an online course if you can’t read or get online. Likewise, it is unlikely that you will look to get education if you don’t have some close-at-hand role-models to inspire, encourage and support you.

Which brings us back to the micro perspective. We have schools. Mass schooling is obligatory across half the world. Indeed, if it were not, educational psychology would remain unborn. So too, in all likelihood, would be psychometrics; maybe even the whole profession:

We are all industrial psychologists: and our knowledge is moulded by our role in precisely the same ways as that of the psychologist whose contract describes him [or her] as such. What is regarded as a ‘problem’ is to be that which threatens the efficient working of the existing political system, rather than human unhappiness or disease *per se*. Adaptation of people to the social structure is to be our yardstick, not the adaptation of social structure to people: providing human beings who will act out their required roles efficiently and without making trouble.<sup>8</sup>

It is thus that the macro entangles and compromises the micro. Psychologists in education wrestle a contradiction. Witness the constant complaints from just-qualified school psychologists about the pressure to test-test-test with no time to enter into any child’s problems therapeutically. They, like all psychologists, are primarily servants of the State, paid to provide piecemeal remedies for the human problems created by social structure, in ways that defuse any threat of coordinated change.<sup>9</sup> Yet this runs against the grain, for they join up to make a real human difference to children and teachers in difficulty. It is this contradiction which hobbles us when we seek answers to Jencks’ argument: We can’t change the big picture, so let us find ways to make schooling itself the best possible experience.

Margaret Donaldson’s classic *Children’s Minds* – extolling the importance of emotion, ‘the warm blood in the veins,’ over cold Piagetian cognitivism – broached what I am calling this ‘micro’-problem of education. Donaldson opened the book with a description of Grade One children contentedly and playfully learning outdoors, in ‘a small open courtyard ... bright with flowers.’<sup>10</sup> She juxtaposed a grim picture of children at the other end of their school careers, news bulletins and research papers full of ‘recurring cries of educational woe: falling standards, illiterate and innumerate

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adolescents pouring forth from schools in their thousands, not fitted to earn a living in the kind of world they must enter, discontented, disillusioned, defeated before they have begun.<sup>11</sup> Echoes of Wordsworth:

Heaven lies about us in our infancy!  
Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
Upon the growing Boy ...<sup>12</sup>

The Romantic trope of school as prison-house, concreting over the paradise that childhood should be, still lies at the heart of psychology.<sup>13</sup> Neither does Goffman's concept of total institution nor Foucault's panopticon escape its gravitational pull.

Recognising all this, (how) can theory and practice combine to make the lives of our school-children and their teachers more enriching once immersed in the cauldron of peer-peer and teacher-pupil dynamics that make recess and class-time so challenging? In my own work, I have used Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal to spur changes to collective classroom practice.<sup>14</sup> In this, like much of the framing above, I have drawn on positions developed in the 1960s and 1970s. To what extent do the 20-teens pose different problems, requiring different solutions? Or do today's challenges – as I believe – have much the same shape and determinants that psychologists of schooling faced four and five decades ago? There is no better goad to examine these questions than the twelve comprehensive chapters Tim Corcoran has collected under the title *Psychology in Education: Critical Theory~Practice*. I commend them to you.

*Ben Bradley*  
*Charles Sturt University*  
*December 2013*

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> C. Jencks, M. Smith, H. Acland, M.J. Bane, D. Cohen, H. Gintis, B. Heyns & S. Michelson (1973). *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America*. London: Allen Lane. (p.260).
- <sup>2</sup> Twenty years ago, Ann Sanson and I made the same argument about day-care, of which the 'educational' effects wash out after a couple of years. So let's focus on improving the day-to-day experience of 0-5ers: Bradley, B.S. & Sanson, A.V. (1992). Promoting quality in infant day care via research: Conflicting lessons from "the day care controversy"? *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 17, 123-131.
- <sup>3</sup> W. Blake (1789). The Chimney Sweeper, from *Songs of Innocence*. Downloaded on 9<sup>th</sup> Dec. 2013, from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Chimney\\_Sweeper](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Chimney_Sweeper)
- <sup>4</sup> See H. Hendrick. (2003). *Child Welfare: Historical Dimensions, Contemporary Debate*. Bristol: Policy Press; E. Burman. (2008). *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology*. (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.). London: Routledge;
- <sup>5</sup> (Cf. out of sight and out of mind.) If this *is* their main purpose, they often fail at it even so! (See Chapter 5).
- <sup>6</sup> E. Goffman. (1961). *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books. L. Althusser (1971). Ideology and ildeological State Apparatuses.

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- In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books. M. Foucault (1977).  
*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- <sup>7</sup> I. Illich (1973). *Deschooling Society*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- <sup>8</sup> D. Ingleby (1974). The job psychologist's do. In N. Armistead (ed.), *Reconstructing Social Psychology*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books. (p.322). The epigraph to Ingleby's *plastique* is the epigram by Alexander Pope, engraved on the collar of King George II's dog: "I am his Highness' Dog at Kew/ Pray tell me Sir, whose Dog are you?"
- <sup>9</sup> Loc.cit
- <sup>10</sup> M. Donaldson (1978). *Children's Minds*. Glasgow: Fontana-Open Books. (p.11).
- <sup>11</sup> Donaldson (op.cit), p.12.
- <sup>12</sup> W. Wordsworth (1805). Ode: Intimations of immortality from recollections of early childhood. Lines 67-69. Downloaded on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2013 from: <http://www.bartleby.com/101/536.html>
- <sup>13</sup> "Sous les pavés, la plage." For more on the Romantic construction of psyche and childhood in behavioural science, see: B.S. Bradley (1989). *Visions of Infancy: A Critical Introduction to Child Psychology*. Cambridge: Polity Press; Bradley, BS (1991). Infancy as paradise. *Human Development*, 34: 35-54; Bradley, B.S. (2011). Darwin's Sublime: The Contest between Reason and Imagination in *On the Origin of Species*. *Journal of the History of Biology*, 44, 205-232.
- <sup>14</sup> P. Freire (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books. A. Boal (1974). *Theatre of the Oppressed*. New York: Urizen Books (1979).



## INTRODUCTION

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Such a little sign, but as is so often the case, the little signs can be the ones of greatest importance. It looks like a dash that has been out in the wind too long. Or perhaps, the whimsical grin of a cheeky rascal. This sign does have a formal name; it is called a tilde. Deployed in mathematics, a tilde denotes a relationship of equivalence between things. At this point, I should disclose that I am not the person you would go to with any surety when looking for advice regarding mathematics. Truth be told, in my undergraduate psychology degree I had to retake the statistics course because the first time around I received a Pass when a Credit grading or above was required to enter the Honours stream of the program – important for those interested in pursuing post-graduate study. As I complained to the Head of the School of Psychology about this prerequisite, he wisely counselled me that it was necessary to be conversant with statistics as numbers were a predominant language within the discipline of psychology. To paraphrase his rationale, he told me that however I saw my future in the field, as researcher and/or practitioner, multi-literacy was of critical importance to being an informed psychologist<sup>1</sup>.

I am drawn to the tilde for what it represents and hence my invocation of Rorty:

The purpose of inquiry is to achieve agreement among human beings about what to do, to bring about consensus on the ends to be achieved and the means to be used to achieve those ends. Inquiry that does not achieve coordination of behaviour is not inquiry but simply wordplay [...] There is no deep split between theory and practice, because on a pragmatist view all so-called ‘theory’ which is not wordplay is already practice (1999, p. xxv).

Within psychology (or any discipline for that matter), how might Rorty’s contention apply? As I envisioned a future as a psychologist, even in those days as an undergraduate bemoaning the relevance of statistics, I began to recognise an unyielding personal desire to examine the relationship between theory and practice.

I was taken aback by the fact that the majority of psychologists who taught me had no professional experience with the discipline beyond the lecture theatre. Whilst they seemed well intentioned, my self-imposed standards told me I had to leave the world of academia to practice as a psychologist, applying theory in an ‘inhabited’ world (Ingold, 2008). And so it was, having graduated (eventually achieving that Honours degree), I began work as a registered practitioner. My first role was as a psychologist at the adult prison situated on the outskirts of town. I admit, I did not foresee this particular opportunity coming. But given the common premise regarding rehabilitation being part of the justification for incarceration, I believed this a chance to potentially make a difference in the lives of people discerned to

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have transgressed the law. It was during my two years inside that I enrolled in a PhD. What was becoming increasingly manifest in my work with those imprisoned was interest in the ways these individuals were spoken about (e.g. in legislation; Corcoran, 2005) and how this might relate to how those imprisoned, in turn, spoke of themselves. Certainly, as a practitioner, I struggled with predominant psychological theories of criminality and the kinds of limitations these set around the personhood of the individual. These limitations, as far as I could see, demoralised opportunities for rehabilitation in many instances causing further concern regarding relationships between theory and practice.

For the next eight years I practiced as a school psychologist. It was not long into this engagement that I realised much of what I had experienced within the prison system could be transposed to educational settings. Therein, psychological theory often worked to maintain a status quo that, by effect, pushed those not seen as 'normal' to the margin. This issue was particularly contentious around notions of behaviour and discipline. As the region's District Psychologist this arrangement saw the majority of my caseload being populated by students schools no longer wanted. For varied reasons, these students were described in terms not of their own choosing, and often in terms that encouraged suspension or exclusion from the school community (Corcoran, 2003, 2007).

I believe the tilde represents something of monumental importance to my discipline and yet, for different reasons, psychologists (and those informed by psychology) often ignore relationships between theory and practice. How is this possible? At its most pervasive, we may be dealing with what Koch (1981) warned was humanity's need for 'antinomality'. This condition, he said, 'makes all of us vulnerable – in one degree or another – to the claims of simplistic, reductive, hypergeneral, or in any other ways ontology-distorting frames, so long as they have the appearance of systematicity' (p. 264). These are ontology-distorting frames for they diminish our capacity to pursue debate around questions of value or worth – questions central to relationships of equivalence. In other words, 'to presume the subject matter is to mystify the valuational basis of one's ontology' (Gergen, 1992, p. 24). Let us consider three examples from educational psychology.

As with other forms of inquiry, antinomality is present in educational psychology in attempts to separate or exclude politics from science. This has been well documented in studies exposing the limitations and discriminations involved with psychometric testing (Danziger, 1990) and the medicalisation of childhood (Rafalovich, 2013). In the case of the former, cultural and socioeconomic conditions, and their associations with prevailing politics, have been stressed as confounding variables for establishing validity and reliability in standardised assessment (Sumuda, 1998). And regarding the latter, compelling research calls our attention to an apparent correlation between mandates within education law and policy and rates of diagnosis (e.g. ADHD; see Fulton et al., 2009).

Aside from the too-often-ignored relationship education psychology has with politics, a second distortion comes about at the nexus between health and education.

This is a critical contemporary ontological challenge for I believe education has yet to adequately address the inclusion of health related concerns in its practices:

Health inclusive education goes beyond the appearance of curricular containing objectified health-related knowledge delivered by teachers to students. To participate in health inclusive education, school staff, students, families and learning communities must actively and purposively engage not only what it means individually and collectively to be healthy but also, and probably more pragmatically important, how becoming healthy (i.e. change) within these forms of life can be sustained (Corcoran, 2012, p. 1043).

Such discussion situates educational psychology within ongoing debates concerning the purposes directing our institutions. On one side of the conversation sits unified perspectives like the one promoted above. Another side claims that '(e)ducation needs to be saved from those who want to turn it into an all-purpose institution for solving the problems of society' (Furedi, 2009, p. 6). Whilst relationships existing between health and education should remain pragmatically focussed, one can only hope temptations to antinormality do not impede future practice.

The third and final example is drawn from challenges facing practitioners in the application of their trade. It may come as surprising to those outside the profession that many school psychologists are committed to engaging beyond the strictures of antinormality, actively pursuing unexpected ways of working. These might be termed unexpected for the predominant model of psychological practice, at least if the prevalence of clinical postgraduate programs are recognised, is a 'scientist-practitioner' model (Barlow, Hayes & Nelson, 1984). Within such programs practitioners are trained to work from an evidence-base (often positivist in orientation) and medical framework (seeking pathological cause). In variance to this, practitioners are increasingly seeking a combination of systemic (e.g. consultation, parent education) and individually centred practice as their preferred modus operandi. A recent study completed in Melbourne, Australia, involving 138 school psychologists, reported that a predominance of assessment-based over systemic-oriented tasks led to lower levels of job satisfaction (Bell & McKenzie, 2013). Might this circumstance speak to the 'valuational basis of one's ontology', particularly as it relates to the performance of school psychologists?

To enable educational psychologists' capacity to work in ways that (at least potentially) support their respective orientations (Shotter, 2012), but so too where reverence for people and communities is explicitly consequential, educational psychology must sustain and foster conversations. The present volume joins an ongoing conversation encouraging heterotopics<sup>2</sup> and the pursuit of divergent meaning. As cultural theorist Homi Bhabha suggests, difference should be acknowledged as 'signs of the emergence of community envisaged as a project – at once a vision and a construction – that takes you “beyond” yourself in order to return, in a spirit of revision and reconstruction, to the political conditions of

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the present' (2008, p. 334). Whilst differences of opinion are necessary to assist the revisioning of a discipline, perhaps one familiar chorus amongst the voices gathered here is the want to enable educational psychology to become something other than it presently is and its effects to be profounder than they have previously been. For if we are to take on-board Rorty's maxim that all theory is already practice then we must equivalently accept that the language of our practice is ultimately confirmed or denied by the practice of our language. To do otherwise, as he warned, is to engage in wordplay. And so, the following chapters enact the practice of a language, exceptional intonations contributing to the broader conversation that is educational psychology. Between the examples recognised above - politics and science, health and education, individual and systemic practice - exist certain values that ontologically sustain who educational psychologists can be within their forms of life as theorist~practitioners. I have been incredibly privileged to participate in this conversation and now I invite you to join in.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> For this I remain indebted to Professor Mike Innes.
- <sup>2</sup> In Chapter 3 I expand on the idea of heterotopics. Therein heterotopics are defined as 'a means to engaging process orientations to ontology'.

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LISE BIRD CLAIBORNE

## 1. THE POTENTIAL OF CRITICAL EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY BEYOND ITS MERITOCRATIC PAST

### INTRODUCTION

At the start of the millennium, I described possibilities for a critical educational psychology beyond those of the “bewildered traveller at the crossroads of Psychology and Education” in a field that “is in many ways one of the furthest from the critical project in psychology” (Bird, 1999, p.21). This chapter continues the conversation, asking how much influence there has been from Michel Foucault’s theoretical work on the discursive constructions of power relations. For example, his critique of the individual ‘subject’ (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn & Walkerdine, 1984) should have been instrumental in unsettling traditional educational psychology’s reliance on normative constructions about selves and their capacities and behaviours. Though there are signs of a turn towards more concern with social responsibility in the past few years, I still wonder how far the notion of the individual – defined by a body whose boundaries contain knowable abilities and qualities – has been unsettled from its position at the centre of educational psychology.

Though the field once clearly demarcated as educational psychology has changed greatly in the past 15 years, it still carries baggage from the hierarchies of race and class foundational in the work racist and classist work of Cyril Burt (e.g., 1937) in the UK and Herrnstein and Murray’s (1994) *The Bell Curve* in the US. In New Zealand, for example, many researchers who had once called themselves educational psychologists now actively avoid the term. In 2009 when I put forward a proposal at my university to create a grouping in critical educational psychology (CEP), I was surprised to get the most enthusiastic responses from those who wanted to reinstate ‘old school’ views regarding the ‘classic’ areas related to individual behaviour studied scientifically. At the same time, reactions from more critical colleagues were wary and uncertain. Four years later the idea seems to be generating new interest. One problem may be that the discourses underpinning the earlier meritocratic version of educational psychology are still in circulation, even though these constructions are no longer dominant, as I discuss further below.

Healthier shoots have irrupted recently from the older wood as new critiques from disability and inclusion studies have emerged. These involve some alternative perspectives on subjectivities related to competence, disability and inclusive education.<sup>1</sup> It is a particular conjunction of these that define my passion in the field and are the focus of this chapter: troubling the essentialist, nativist discourse of

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difference around personal ability that, I would argue, still operates with considerable influence. Before tackling that topic, though, I would like to acknowledge a few recent approaches that are helpful to the critical project in educational psychology: sociocultural theorising related to moves away from individual cognition, 'lay' theories about the self and debates about national assessment. The last raises larger issues about the basis for sorting and classifying individual learners living in very different economic circumstances.

#### RECENT MOVES HELPFUL FOR THE PROJECT OF CEP

##### *Distributed cognition*

With influence from sociocultural theorising, learning in and supported by groups has become more accepted, a development with much potential for deconstructing notions of education that rely on discourses of difference and notions of individualism. Earlier I had pointed to the ways that Gardner's (see Gardner, 2011) approach to multiple intelligences expanded notions of intellectual ability to encompass a more diverse set of skills and dispositions, while still holding on to certain nativist assumptions (see Bird, 1999). An encouraging successor to Gardner's work is British work on 'new kinds of smart' (Lucas & Claxton, 2010), which looks at learning and abilities in an interconnected way, set within wider questions about strategic planning, ethics and with recognition of the distributed nature of our learning and competence. There are also explicit connections to classroom practice.

There is also interesting movement that is grounded in sociocultural studies of distribution of work across students, particularly in the popular notion of "communities of learners" (see Lave & Wenger, 1991). Research on distributed cognition is now much more widely known, and has been applied to studies of the scaffolding of collaborative learning (e.g., Belland, 2011). Such work is based on a Vygotskian view of the learner more embedded in the local setting and historical context of education than would have been common in traditional psychological studies of learning of the 1970s. At the same time, this work continues to assume that learners are individual and separate, as can be seen in measures that compare the performance of individuals working alone versus in groups. The work thus relies on an epistemological assumption that the boundaries of individual selves can easily identified so that their outputs can be clearly attributed. This is a crucial assumption for national educational testing, of course.

##### *Critical work against national standards movements*

There is considerable public debate about the advent of an educational reform movement that proposes individual testing of students at every level against national (or international) 'standards' for a particular year-group in compulsory education. In New Zealand the RAINS (Research, Analysis and Insight on National Standards)

group, which works actively to provide research counter to the standards movement, draws on sociology of education critiques to question the “valuing of some students over others because of their ability to perform” and “damaging effects on students’ conceptions of themselves as learners (‘I’ll be a nothing’) (Reay & William, 1999)” (see Thrupp & Easter, 2012, p. 15). The standards movement differs from earlier ability-testing models in educational psychology in a focus on explicit standards supposedly achievable by anyone, rather than by some presumed ‘innate’ intelligence factor, as earlier proposed by Galton and then Burt. Critiques of this movement point to its tendency to reify hierarchical distinctions between affluent and poor areas, once again giving such distinctions legitimacy in the guise of pointing to weaknesses that can be corrected with greater effort on the part of school districts and teachers (e.g., Broadfoot & Pollard, 2000). Surely it could be helpful for students of CEP to be exposed to such wider social critiques. Another relevant source would be Rose’s (1990) critique of the ‘psy’ disciplines explicitly concerned with the larger governmental policy framework that supports practices of traditional educational psychology.

*Attributing success to personal ability or effort*

My own interest in alternative social constructions of notions of ‘ability’, whether academic or sporting (see Wright & Burrows, 2006) emerged long ago when I had the chance to visit the ‘labs’ of both Carol Dweck and John Nicholls on my first sabbatical in the 1980s. Nicholls and Dweck had worked together briefly on the tricky problem of attributions of performance to ability or effort. Nicholls (1978) was one of the first to suggest that girls might be more inclined to attribute their success at an academic task to the less reliable factor of their own efforts rather than to claim the success as a sign of their own stable, perhaps inherited capability. Boys seemed to have the reverse tendency: to claim success as due to their own inherent strengths; though subsequent research in the 1980s, which explored attribution patterns related to ethnicity and social class differences within genders, failed to support such strong generalisations. A description of the way this research is carried out may be helpful here (see also Bird, 1994).

*Interlude one: Trying out the ability/effort problem with students*

Incidents in my own university classrooms, spanning 20 years, continue to convince me that beliefs about the inheritance of something measurable related to academic ability, which perhaps coalesce around a discourse about brightness, cleverness or smartness, continue to produce particular subjectivities. In the first incident, I had asked senior undergraduate students<sup>2</sup> to carry out Nicholls’ (1978) experiment in which individual children are shown two pictures of individual boys working at desks on a mathematics problem, while the interviewer describes one boy as “working very hard” and the other as “not working very hard”, though both in the

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end receive the same mark for the problem. The interviewer would then ask, “which child was the smartest or cleverest?” The students reported that the interviews had gone pretty much as expected by the developmental stage research, with responses indicating an inverse relationship more likely with adolescents (i.e., ‘smart people don’t have to try as hard’), but the response of an indigenous 8-year-old boy led to much class discussion.

“Him [pointing to the child who had not tried hard and blushing] That’s not how it should be though!” (Tane)

I would like to think that Tane’s expressed sense of injustice showed evidence of the budding critical educational psychologist, skeptical about the rigid boundaries of ‘cleverness’ on offer in the study, but perhaps he was upset at what he perceived as the reality of the classroom that he must come to accept. I hope Tane’s teachers had the kind of critical education that would help him to continue to question critically the education he was receiving (see Vassallo, 2013).

#### *Lay theories about the self*

The attribution approach evolved over time as Carol Dweck, now at Stanford University, mobilised the psychological concept of ‘lay theories’ to critique dominant notions of regarding the stability or malleability of qualities such as ‘ability’ in views of students and teachers. This work has become very influential internationally in providing a basis for challenging nativist views that are consistent with meritocratic views of society based on the notion of a humankind distributed into a fixed hierarchy of worth based on bodily capacities. Dweck differentiates between “entity” and “incremental” lay theories about achievement. In the former,

...failure often signifies that abilities are permanently lacking in some way. Following failure, any self-regulation in which these individuals are engaged is thus likely to focus primarily on suppressing the importance of this failure or on coping as best they can with the negative emotional impact. (Molden & Dweck, 2006, p. 194)

This view of self-regulation is based on the idea of a self recognisable within the liberal humanist ontology of the Enlightenment, in which bodies are knowable through their agentic moves, inferred from spoken beliefs. A student who has a lay theory that is based on a strong entity component, then, might avoid any further study of physics after failing a single test, since preserving a positive view of the self essential for getting through the day means avoiding situations that could be damning of a personal belief in their competence in this area.

In Dweck’s work, there is a more adaptive lay theory less likely to lead to learned helplessness on the part of students who have experienced a setback. Rather than the view of an individual’s capability as a stable, globalised entity that signals a personal

deficit, the individual with a more adaptive incremental lay theory is viewed as composed of multiple, alterable characteristics. In this situation, any setback can be seen as requiring the mobilisation of any of the student's diverse skills, each of which is building incrementally through learning, in order to tackle the problem a new way.

[F]or incremental theorists, failure may signify that their abilities require improvement through further attention and effort. Following failure, any self-regulation in which these individuals are engaged is thus more likely to focus on determining how to bring about this improvement (Dweck cited in Molden & Dweck, 2006, p. 194)

Dweck's approach is congruent with Martin Covington's (2009) self-worth theory, which takes a somewhat wider view of contemporary educational practice as relying explicitly on individual notions of competence that are highly valued within the competitive, hierarchical classroom environment in which only a minority of students can be the A students. These approaches focus on implications for individual students, usually without pulling back the focus to consider a larger picture around assessment practices that could be viewed as working to maintain high efforts on the part of all students who are encouraged to believe that with enough determination anyone could be an A student. This lean towards an egalitarian discourse in education is in tension with older meritocratic discourses that focus on excellence as a quality to be expected in only a few (see Young's 1968, analysis).

The approach by Dweck rattles the cage of normative practice, though unfortunately without putting these practices into a wider political context. (It is interesting that the RAINS project on national assessment mentioned earlier referred to this work to provide evidence for harmful effects of mass testing.) I think Dweck's approach can be a useful starting point for CEP as an initial manoeuvre to disrupt essentialist assumptions about human bodies and knowable selves. Critical psychological work, however, has gone much further by grappling with challenges made by theorists who considered that our very selves and identities might be socially constructed within particular cultures at particular times in history (e.g., Shotter & Gergen, 1989). Work that significantly shaped my own thinking was Walkerdine's (1988) exploration of dominant discourses in education and beyond that offer positions for the assumed 'mastery' and rationality of the able student.

The work of Michel Foucault has provided tremendous challenges to psychology and education through his reworking of questions around dualisms of self and society towards exploration of subject-positions within discourses. Foucault (e.g., 1977) described technologies of control in disciplines such as education, through which 'truths' about subject-positions – 'the good student', 'the slow student' or 'the hopeless student' – are produced by discourses that both constitute and constrain their possibilities of expression in the bodies of particular students. Through power manifest in technologies such as the surveillance of norms, our educational testing regimes, rankings, groupings, hierarchies and invitations to

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speech or silence maintain the boundaries of the selves we are permitted to be. This is not simply a matter of theoretical interest, but one with crucial implications for educational practice. Rather than work within an expected reality in which individuals work towards changing lay theories popular in their communities, a critical educational psychologist might instead eschew pep talks about motivation and self worth, and attempt to deconstruct with students our normative social constructions of individual ability or capacity. This might be done by considering ways that success and achievement have altered according to discourses that both construct our taken-for-granted views of reality and, through pervasive and difficult to pinpoint mechanisms of power – via governmental policy and everyday social practice – offer only a select range of constitutive selves that function within them. Together students and teachers might undertake a collective exploration of learning and abilities relevant for the political project of a more inclusive society. Some concrete examples from my own experience may provide a helpful illustration.

*Interlude two: Tertiary students respond to notions of ability in educational psychology*

My second example from experience comes from an exercise in 2012 with undergraduate child development students who were asked to use a Likert scale to rate various statements from famous psychologists. In response to a paraphrase of Lewis Terman's view that "healthy, able-bodied, middle class children are more likely to be high achievers", almost half the 90 students agreed with a view that, for Terman (1925), was underpinned by a belief in eugenics. After brief discussion of eugenics, I asked students to consider whether some of these attitudes about eugenics still exist at some level in our society. Amongst the sceptical murmurings and negative head-shakes in the mostly anglo-european audience, I noted an indigenous man in the back row – face obscured by the raised hood of his jacket – who caught my eye to give me a nod 'yes'. Moments like that keep me tied to a topic that often seems rather outdated.

My third example from my own practice occurred six months later when I attended a lecture for trainee teachers taking a compulsory course on inclusive education. In a session on 'gifted and talented' students, the lecturer referred to a case study of a classroom containing "a gifted student with an IQ of over 200." I was sitting near the back of the lecture theatre in the cohort of these 60 students. I heard mutterings around me such as, "so what's the IQ of this group?" to which someone called (sub voce to the lecturer who continued to speak), "50!". The ribald nature of the responses around me seemed to me to provide little evidence in support of Covington's view that such students would be lacking in self worth due to their assessment (however ironic) of their "IQ"; at the same time I wondered if the students simply accepted the discursive construction around meritocracy for academic work and their place within it as teachers, while looking elsewhere for their 'self worth'. It is also worth

noting that the student who initially made the call-out was signalling a particular subjectivity for the group as having a capability much below the supposed mean for the population. While this move deconstructs the design of IQ tests for testing individuals, there could be very problematic features involved in an entire educational group of trainee teachers taking on a subjectivity that implies academic competence below the 'average', however humorously this might have been expressed. This may point to the students' acceptance of cliché'd views of teaching, which imply that the profession does not require as much competence as other fields. These experiences led me to research in which, with others, I explored whether such discourses still operate in society 'under the radar' of overt acknowledgement in everyday social practices.

Surely education has moved away from the view that ability is an essential capacity of a bounded individual body. Were he alive today, though, Foucault might warn us about our tendency to overplay the modern nature of our education system. Extrapolating from his work on this history of sexuality (Foucault, 1978), he might have been critical of the discursive framing of historical changes in educational practices as having moved from nativist 'repression' to the liberated celebration of diversity. He might wonder if we were perhaps congratulating ourselves too soon. In his theoretical view, the social rhetoric of any particular period means that certain voices will be heard and only certain recognisable 'truths' will be spoken, while other voices will be silenced or appear incomprehensible. Ideas about brightness in western cultures (and through their impact globally) seem to form part of social reality that it is in many ways still taken for granted.

In my years of inserting critically discursive concepts into the teaching of educational psychology, I have become more sanguine about our collective move away from an essentialist discourse around individual students and their knowable capacities. Though there may be new ways to challenge a humanist subjectivity of bounded bodies of knowable potential, in my daily administrative work, which often entails reading comments and references from international academics about prospective applicants, it seems that a discourse about fixed potential, often signalled in words such as "bright" or "able", persists within the intelligible vernacular of educational understanding around the world. Fortunately Foucault's (1980) analysis of power-shifts at the intersection of contradictory discourses points to possibilities for transforming our subjectivities and educational practices. While Foucault is crucial for a critical project in educational psychology, other theoretical strands are needed to take possibilities of transformation further.

#### NEW IDEAS ABOUT ABILITY FROM DISABILITY STUDIES

Some of the most exciting critiques in the area of abilities are in the burgeoning field of disability studies, particularly at its edges, with explorations of new forms of embodiment and subjectivities. Disability studies has taken off since Oliver's (1990, 1996) call for disability to be seen as constructed by the barriers societies create for

people outside normative body types, mobility, appearance and learning. Rather than a lack of ability, the lack was posited to be in the creativity of social structures that could support the diversity of bodies present in our societies. Research in the 1990s and early 2000s emphasised a contrast between the ‘medical model’ of concerns about disability as defined largely by disease or impairment of normal function and a ‘social model’ that emphasises socially created barriers for people with disabilities (or Disabled People, as an identity category). Gillian Fulcher’s (1989) influential policy work in the disability field drew explicitly on Foucault in charting disempowering discourses around charity and personal tragedy. An important political accomplishment of social model concerns was the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UN, 2006), outlining the entitlements for independence and quality of life for all people with disabilities. The social model and the Convention have formed the basis for much international policy, e.g., explicitly within New Zealand government policy regulations.

I experienced at first hand the importance of the social model and rights perspectives for social policy when another researcher, Sue Cornforth, and I were approached by my university’s disability support service to conduct collaborative research on how successfully “students with impairments”, a term used in a national policy document on inclusion of students with disabilities initiated by members of the secondary teachers union (Achieve, 2004), were included in our university. Findings of this research showed a contrast between perspectives of students with impairments and those of academics, high level administrative staff and students who did not have impairments who provided note-taking and other supports for students with impairments. Students with impairments clearly expressed a rights perspective with concerns about their lack of access to resources they considered essential (e.g., high level audio boosting in lectures or multiply presented visuals); in contrast staff and students concerned with support-work were more optimistic about current levels of inclusion, focusing more on the feel-good aspects of social inclusion (Claiborne, Cornforth, Gibson & Smith, 2011). Along with the rights perspective, the students with impairments’ views also fit with a social model focus on material conditions that could provide support or put up barriers for people with disabilities.

There are some theoretical difficulties for the social model, however. Many researchers in disability studies in Australia, New Zealand and the UK draw on critical theory in order to keep material conditions in the foreground (e.g., Sullivan, 1996). Much disability studies research rejects the ‘objective’ gaze of the researcher on the passive, abject subject, based on a clear divide between those who are able and those who are disabled, a dualism that has more recently been called into question as the social model is examined more closely. While recognising the importance of the material conditions for Disabled people who do not have access to funds to ensure quality of life (however they might define this), questions raised by poststructural theorising add additional dimensions important for critical educational psychology.

BEYOND ABILITY VERSUS DISABILITY: THE RADICAL EDGE OF  
EMBODIMENT AND SUBJECTIVITIES

There is new theoretical work with crucial implications for an analysis of discourses surrounding the student succeeding or struggling inside and outside the classroom with peers, family and community. Though still a controversial notion, the social model of disability has been critiqued for narrowness and oversimplification (see Shakespeare, 2006). Drawing on more Foucauldian notions in subject-positions created by discourses around disability allows more subtleties in examination of the many differences that separate or unite people.

Important critical work by disability theorists has challenged essentialised notions of bodies as knowable by their disabilities/abilities. The addition of feminist theory to disability concerns raised concerns about the notion of a stable Disabled identity (e.g., Corker and French, 1999). Added to this, Carol Thomas's (1999) critique of the essentialism of differences in the gendered or 'abled' or 'disabled' body started to unsettle simple notions offered by the social model that barriers to inclusion for excluded people could be easily identified and removed. Drawing on the work of Shildrick and Price (1996), she referred to "a new type of radicalism...involving the purposive disruption of the boundaries, the problematization of identity, the destabilization of binaries and fixities" (Thomas, 1999, p. 115).

Thomas helped to provide new lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) for work on embodiment beyond the dualisms of constructed difference. More recently, possibilities for deconstruction of essentialised boundaries has been taken up by Goodley and Roets (2008) in the field of developmental (also called intellectual or learning) disabilities, a field that is socially constructed quite differently to other forms of disability related to mobility impairment. As well as Foucault, they draw on the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to consider the rhizome as an alternative to hierarchical forms of difference and the notion of malleable and nomadic selves proposed by Braidotti (e.g., 1994). Goodley and Roets (2008) argue for "development of a cultural politics of 'impairment' and 'developmental disabilities' that draws upon a vocabulary applicable to the post-modern subject of the contemporary world: as uncertain, productive and moveable" (p. 250).

Other writers who expand theoretical constructions around embodiment include Wolbring (2008), who presents a critique of ableism, and Kumari Campbell (2008), who questions the able/disabled dualism and calls for an exploration of what it means to be human beyond current normative boundaries of the human. Both these writers consider ways that new biotechnologies construct possibilities for selves beyond previously accepted boundaries of normative embodiment. Nikolas Rose's work continues to be of great importance to the critical educational psychology project, for example in his critique of biomedicine (Rose, 2008) that continues to draw on Foucault as well as Deleuze and Guattari (1987).

Finally, crucial work for the critical project is found in Youdell's (e.g., 2006) work on subjectivities available for the normative successful or struggling 'secondary

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school student'. In intensive examinations of interview and classroom conversation with young people, Youdell uses Judith Butler's (1997) notion of the unintelligible to posit the subjectivities of "impossible" secondary school students (normatively sexed, classed, raced, abled) or (e.g., the tomboyish and competent "geeza-girl" difficult to classify) within contemporary discourses of education. Particularly helpful is her use of Judith Butler's extension of Foucault to consider positions that are not "intelligible" within recognisable discourses. She also uses Butler's reworking of the notion of performative speech to indicate ways that a particular subjectivity is expressed through normative constraints of classroom and peer group movement and speech.

These theoretical influences, taken together, provide fruitful possibilities for taking research in critical educational psychology further. In the research described below, collaborative discussion with critically leaning educational psychologists considered ways that we might reshape the boundaries of our own practice in an era in which norms are changing through biotechnological intervention.

*Exploring the future of educational psychology practice in an era of new biotechnological enhancements*

Because it is often very difficult to raise questions about ability or brightness in everyday life or with research participants, in the last few years I have come at the question from another angle, by asking educational psychologists to consider how they might deal with a child who had been enhanced by means of new biotechnologies. To imagine a student who has been given pharmaceuticals or other advanced biotechnology interventions to enhance cognitive processing is a way to deconstruct the notion of the individual as a knowable quantity in terms of abilities and capacities. Another reason for this project was to consider the potential impact of new biotechnologies with educators who had not had the chance to discuss such issues with others before, despite the likely importance of this change for the future. For example, in future there may be students who arrive at school with either obvious or hidden enhancements. Some alterations could be seen merely as extensions of the known that are now so familiar that they are seldom remarked upon, such as individual tutoring, smartphones and caffeine. The hyper-enhancements being developed today, however, have the potential to rattle dualisms that have been foundational for education, especially the notions of inherent or 'in-born' talent. The cyborg- or genetically-enhanced body is potentially an unintelligible subjectivity that might not easily fit within normative discourses around knowable individual differences considered (cf. Youdell, 2006). I wanted to see what impact the possibility of such new forms of malleability of our selves might have on current and future educational practices, as seen by critical educational psychologists.

One possibility might be that a greater appreciation of diversity and hidden potential of our students will emerge in educational settings. How would we as educators respond to the 7-year-old struggling reader who, within a few months,

appears to be able to read literary texts well? Because such futuristic questions go beyond most everyday work conversations, they are also difficult to bring into a traditional interview or focus group. I wanted to explore new possibilities for focus groups with critical professionals in an attempt to open some new space for charting discursive moves away from long established assumptions and practices around students' predictable potential. The research considered the extent to which the possibility of enhanced bodies might challenge the disciplinary power of education to produce and enforce norms about the capacity and potential of individual students.

To explore some of the post-human possibilities that have emerged from the radical disability studies work mentioned above, I located educational psychologists and other education professionals who support students with learning/emotional difficulties to explore implications of new biotechnologies for future practice (see also Bird, 2006). Critical focus groups were conducted with five groups of three to four senior professionals each after purposive sampling in the educational psychology field, from community groups, former students and contacts suggested by colleagues who had been asked to recommend colleagues who "were known for expressing a critical interest in practice". It seemed to me that the critical educational psychologist in the field might be much better equipped to handle discussion of such possibilities, compared to an educational psychologist trained in the classic individualist notions of individual performance.

In order to raise complex questions quickly in a focus group setting, the research method itself was 'enhanced' by the use of constructed documentaries in order to present subtleties of biotechnological debates quickly to foster immediate critical engagement. Documentary films were constructed from a collage of examples of popular video and still images of biotechnological change, from both scientific documentary and fictional portrayal; the films acted as montage documentaries,<sup>3</sup> to foreground possible changes regarding future students with genetic and cyborg human enhancement. The montages, presented instead of oral questions at the start of focus group interviews, helped to give space for complex and immediate engagement with issues of enhancement relevant for future educational practice. Participants were able to consider their own future practice in a world in which their own students or clients – those with disabilities and/or emotional or personal difficulties – might be altered by bio/technological enhancements such as pharmaceutical or cyber-implants in an individual body that could greatly alter a student's future academic potential or behaviour (e.g., regarding a student with a 'learning disability' suddenly exhibiting 'gifted' performance). The goal was to open participants' discussion beyond the practicalities of everyday life about what it means to be human and how scientific changes ask new questions of our current educational practices.

I will focus here on one group of educational psychologists who discussed at some length media portrayals of new genetic 'breakthroughs'. In the excerpts below, Beverley seemed to find her knowledge as a psychologist compromised by discussions about gene-effects that ignore gene-environment interaction.

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Beverley: So when I, you know hear about things like sad and happy genes you think okay, so this person has got a predisposition, therefore are certain things that need to be in their environment or they need to know about themselves so that they know that, when this happens I need to pay particular attention or I need to do ya know those sorts of things.<sup>4</sup>

Beverley then expressed the concern that once people think that a genetic marker has clear links to a student's 'condition' there is a closing down of considering the interactions that might produce addiction or

Beverley: why bother? and so that, that really worries me as a psychologist. [coughs]

Janet: Is it the lack of balance, you know the lack of input?

Beverley: well it's the lack of explanation of interaction. That's what's missing.

In the subsequent discussion, Beverley seemed to struggle with the way to explain gene-environment interaction to clients such as parents.

The discussion later moved beyond traditional notions of interaction to more critical engagement with practice as Cathy, whose clients were very young children and their parents, mentioned that, "It's very common for parents to bring up their worries about future children." Rather than suggest any intervention (interestingly, the group sometimes used the term "interferences"), Cathy saw herself "in an information sharing role" rather than an advice-giving role. She was concerned that parents might not know the range of supports or technologies available.

Cathy: Maybe what's happening now is that the range of choices is increasing. And that's what we're experiencing, so I mean my parents' generation had no choice apart from, um you know dangerous abortion and natural family planning. [quiet laughter in group] And then in my generation the choice of amnio is now, now replaced by villi sampling, I think they call it, which is even better, earlier and much simpler and more efficient and then my daughter's, my kid's generation there's huge choice like, you know, is all, all the way from choosing the personality and the eye colour of your child all the way through to avoiding complaints, ha. So and, and the little voice in my head goes but across the population, are now [willing to report] it's really not, not, not, not safe. There is the sort of wider social need and also you know I want I also wonder about the sort of, the, the social issue of value and diversity, which is a really important value. And that whole kind of personal choice versus social decision-making and the fact that personal choices are made often for reasons that are socially constrained, like the fact that people have got very poor support for having different children, that part of their choices are actually in some way constrained by what's available by the values, the social values by economic support by a whole lot of things. And so maybe there's less, another way of taking away choice is not to offer those supports.

Beverley: Yeah, so that in fact what looks like a personal choice actually is you know very constrained, socially constrained choice you know dressed up as personal choice.

Clearly these psychologists took a critical view of the illusory nature of ‘choice’ for parents, given constraints around, for example, financial support for those raising a child who would require specific assistance beyond what the parent could provide.

Later the group made a connection between their current work with children who had experienced “medical accidents” with the likely increase in such support-work as riskier biogenetic procedures become more common. Cathy asked about what the group might do as professionals “when genetics don’t deliver.”

Cathy: it can create assumptions that genetics will take care of it, this kind of approach will take care of it you know? So that then, if things aren’t perfect, then what? What’s the next step? Because you were aiming for perfection and we know that it doesn’t answer everything.

Shortly after this Beverley asked a further question.

Beverley: I think I would feel a lot more comfortable about people making decisions about you know to genetically determine our characteristics in babies and things, if it was positioned within a society that really valued a wide range of diversity and things like that. But that’s not the context in which it’s happening. I think it’s quite a narrow sort of perception of what’s perfect or what’s okay or what’s not wrong. You know [it’s] not a good context to then be able to sort of select out difference.

Here the group shows its awareness of a wider socio-economic setting in which individual families may be making decisions about biotechnological enhancements for their children. A number of times this group questioned the lack of discussion in the wider community about which enhancements might be acceptable and which not, and about the impact of privileged access to certain enhancements on those families and children in the rest of the community who would never be able to afford them.

In terms of these professionals’ preparation for a world in which bodies might be malleable in unexpected ways, the findings were mixed. Participants made critical connections to their current practice. There was notable reflexivity, in the group of teachers given additional postgraduate training in disability and inclusion studies, in their acknowledgement of their part in ‘policing’ the norms of classrooms that make certain subject-positions (e.g., the ‘slow’ student or the ‘gifted’ student) available. Despite these forays into new possibilities, however, most discussion tended to remain on the individual student or family. Perhaps it is not surprising that much of the discussion, in all groups, stayed within an essentialist discourse about individual bodies. In some ways the word “enhancement” is itself problematic, since the word implies some core object that is being stretched or altered from its original shape. Perhaps our language is so bound by individualist notions that speaking another possibility is hard to hear.

#### FINAL THOUGHTS ON CEP BEYOND MERITOCRACY

At the start of this chapter I asked how much work in educational psychology has been influenced by the critical psychology project. There are a number of approaches that have emerged recently that bring a strong emphasis on social justice to educational psychology, as work on socio-cultural approaches, distributed cognition and lay theories suggest. The current book shows that this concern has gone further, with greater engagement with theoretical influences that question current normative structures in education, Foucault being the most prominent. This chapter has focused on the ways that new theorising around embodiment, subjectivities and power can contribute ideas to critical educational psychologists who practice in a world where the individual human is not as recognisable and stable as it once was, or where the goal of meritocracy could be left unproblematically on the agenda.

This chapter has focussed mainly on new possibilities for supporting the construction of student subjectivities beyond the individualised accounting of performance through normative practices such as testing and assessment. There is more to be done in collaboration between critical educational psychology researchers and practitioners as we consider the implications of changing governmental policy objectives and increasing financial constraint. Traditional educational psychology's reliance on normative constructions about selves and their capacities and behaviours has been thoroughly unsettled in the past two decades. It is time for greater acknowledgement of the place of critical educational psychology within the wider project of critical psychology.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The critical project in educational psychology must of course draw on the interlinked field of critical developmental psychology, but to draw out these links would be beyond the scope of this chapter.
- <sup>2</sup> Sara Acland and Teresa McGuire.
- <sup>3</sup> Claiborne (in preparation).
- <sup>4</sup> In the transcriptions presented here, repetitions of filler phrases ("ya know") were omitted; unclear words and non-verbal sounds are marked in square brackets.

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## THE POTENTIAL OF CRITICAL EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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ISAAC PRILLELTENSKY

## 2. EDUCATION AS TRANSFORMATION

### *Why and How*

#### INTRODUCTION

When academics, politicians, and advocates vie for your attention – and your vote – in educational reform, it is useful to have criteria to evaluate their proposals. The goal of this chapter is to introduce criteria for sound educational policies, programs, and practices. Equipped with criteria, we will evaluate towards the end of the chapter two contrasting educational paradigms, parts of which are present in many educational reform efforts around the globe. Towards the end of the chapter I will analyze the role of psychology in education as transformation.

To provide criteria for education reform, I will argue that education should be transformative. I will explain *why* it should be transformative, and *how* it should do so. To begin with, I will claim that education should be transformative because it must promote two fundamental human values: wellness and fairness. Both wellness and fairness are lifelong pursuits. We are neither born with them, nor do we ever achieve perfection. Education must be a force of change, to take us from formative stages of wellness and fairness, to higher ones.

To achieve wellness and fairness, education must seek to enlighten and transform two entities: individuals and systems. People and structures are inextricably linked, and education should help us discern the connections between the two, and harmonize them for the promotion of better quality of life and better societies.

There are multiple avenues for the transformation of individuals and systems to achieve wellness and fairness, but in this chapter I will concentrate on two essential ones: competence and engagement. Competence pertains to self-efficacy, mastery, and sense of control; whereas engagement refers to active participation, ownership, relevance, and meaning-making. In the overall context of educational change, wellness, fairness, individuals, systems, competence and engagement provide a template to begin assessing the merit of competing visions. Following an exploration of these six dimensions of education, I will compare and contrast two opposing paradigms of education. The first is called the DRAIN approach; an acronym that stands for *deficit-oriented, reactive, alienating, and individualistic* models. The second, the SPEC approach, stands for *strength-based, preventive, empowering, and community-based* approaches. As I will show, educational policies can be analyzed according to their philosophy on capacities (strengths or deficits), engagement

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(empowering or alienating), timing (reactive or proactive), and focus of intervention (individuals or communities). I will claim that the SPEC approach has a much better chance of promoting wellness and fairness, individual and systems transformation, as well as competencies and engagement (Prilleltensky, 2005) than existing models. At present, the dominance of the DRAIN model represents the interests of government and power elites invested in privatizing public education and deprecating the teaching profession (Ravitch, 2010). Power issues permeate the choice of DRAIN vs. SPEC models. The SPEC model represents an emancipatory approach, whereas the DRAIN approach represents a conservative approach (Prilleltensky, 2005). Let's explore the various claims in more detail.

### WHY SHOULD EDUCATION BE TRANSFORMATIVE?

Education is the process of actualizing human and social development through competency and engagement (Dewey, 1997). Human and social development can and have been defined in multiple ways, according to cultural, political, religious, and ethnic traditions, defying our ability to stipulate one set of common concerns. And yet, two values seem to pertain to multiple populations, across regional, generational, and cultural divides: wellness, or well-being; and fairness, or justice (Prilleltensky, 2012). Across the world, we can see countries striving to become healthier and fairer to improve the lot of their populations (Elster, 2004; Graham, 2009; Selin & Davis, 2012; Sen, 2009). It would appear that well-being and justice are universally if differently sought across the planet. While particular definitions of mental health may vary across the world, most countries are invested in fostering a version of it. Similarly, while definitions of justice can and do vary according to context, we see people all over the world fighting for a version of it. In my view, there is sufficient evidence that people want to live longer, healthier and happier lives, and that they wish to live in just societies (Elster, 2004; Sen, 2009). But justice and well-being are not independent of each other. On the contrary, they are inextricably linked (Prilleltensky, 2012). Due to their vast scope, wellness and fairness stand as two fundamental principles for the promotion of human and social development, and insofar as education is the process to get there, I very much advocate for the advancement of justice and well-being through education.

Before we proceed, I should make it clear that I will use wellness and well-being interchangeably. I will do the same with fairness and justice. In each section below I will provide a clear definition to make sure that both writer and reader understand each other.

#### *The Place of Wellness in Education*

Wellness is a positive state of affairs across diverse domains of life and ecological systems. Six domains of life have been found to form the core of wellness: interpersonal, community, occupational, physical, psychological, and economic

well-being (Prilleltensky, 2012; Rath & Harter, 2010). Together, these six domains form the acronym I COPPE (pronounced *I cope*). By defining wellness in this pluralistic way I stand apart from efforts to frame it simply in terms of physical well-being. There is so much more to thriving than just physical wellness. In my view, this is but one consideration in wellness.

Research demonstrates the synergistic effects of promoting well-being across the I COPPE domains (Buettner, 2010). Healthy and fair relationships provide psychological meaning in life, as does a meaningful occupation. Physical health and wellness, bolstered by adequate nutrition and exercise, improve mood and overall functioning. Helping individuals and communities alike contribute to a sense of purpose in life, which is essential for psychological thriving. Stable finances reduce stress and afford people opportunities to explore interests and communal pursuits (Buettner, 2010).

So far we have focused on the wellness of individuals, but wellness is an ecological construct that pertains also to extra-individual systems. We can talk about family wellness, organizational wellness, community wellness, and environmental wellness (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2006). Implied in these terms is an understanding that systems can be healthy or unhealthy, high performing or low performing, productive or unproductive. The well-being of these systems is not just intrinsically beneficial, but also instrumental in the advancement of the people affected by them (Fullan, 2008; Sisodia, Sheth, & Wolfe, 2007). For instance, we want to promote environmental health and wellness, not just for the sake of doing the right thing for the environment, but also because it affects humans in the planet. Similarly, we want to have high performing organizations, not just for the sake of making more money or providing a better service, but because organizational well-being enhances the wellness of people affected by it. In essence, individual and system well-being are related and interdependent. It is hard to imagine a high functioning school where teachers are always depressed or students are always stressed (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). By the same token, it is hard to imagine happy students in a tyrannical environment.

The wellness of organizations can be gauged by how well they are doing on three dimensions: How effective they are, how supportive they are, and how reflective they are (Crutchfield & McLeod Grant, 2008; Fullan, 2008; Scharmer, 2009). Effectiveness consists of clear roles, high performance, achievement of desirable outcomes, and effective communication. A climate of support is a second key characteristic of healthy environments and workplaces. In climates of support, workers are allowed to take risks and are rewarded for their initiatives. The focus is on strengths and not deficits. Finally, systems that operate well tend to be reflective. It is entirely possible to work in an effective and supportive place that rarely questions its practices, possibly perpetuating antiquated practices. Learning communities challenge convention, stretch its members, and revisit the vision and mission of the enterprise (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2009).

Effective schools are characterized by attention to evidence, efforts at capacity building, hiring of high quality teachers, and transparency in results (Hargreaves &

Shirley, 2009; Levin, 2008). Reflective schools are about mindful teaching and peer-learning. Supportive schools, in turn, are about inclusion of parents and community and authentic collaboration and partnerships. In my vocabulary, a good process is a good outcome, because it builds trust, collaboration, and social capital, which are treasured values for building a successful educational enterprise.

One ecological level above organizations is the level of communities. A useful way to evaluate community wellness is through social capital. Social capital is a measure of participation in social life, involvement in parent-teacher-student associations, civic affairs, politics, and volunteer activities. In the United States, states with more civic participation do better in terms of health, education, and crime (Block, 2008; Putnam, 2000). Some people say that folk in the south are friendlier than people in the north but that does not seem to be the case (Putnam, 2000). When you do live in a place with high social capital, however, as in Tower Hamlets in the Docklands area of London, educational improvements can occur at a rapid pace. Through concerted community development efforts, schools begun cooperating with communities and religious organizations to improve educational outcomes, and improve they did. Tower Hamlets went from being among the worst educational achievements in the UK to some of the best (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009).

As we can see, school, organizational, and community well-being support individual well-being. We cannot advance individual well-being through cognitive interventions alone. After we reach the ceiling effect of improving a child's learning through refined pedagogical strategies, we must engage systems to break the ceiling effect (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Levin, 2008).

The wellness of individuals and systems can be captured through perceptual and social indicators. Self-reports of life satisfaction are the prime vehicle to ascertain perceptual individual well-being; whereas longevity is an example of a social indicator (Diener, Helliwell, & Kahneman, 2010). At the systems level, perceptual appraisals of well-being can be obtained through reports of occupational climate. From a social indicator point of view, systems can be assessed using a variety of quantitative data, such as student scores on international tests or number of students who drop out of high school. Community well-being can be measured through social capital.

Having reviewed some key elements of wellness, we are now in a position to apply the construct to school environments and educational practices. With respect to the I COPPE domains of wellness, current educational practices, in many public schools, tend to focus on occupational well-being, preparing students for the world of work through math, reading, and writing, at the expense of other domains, such as physical, psychological and community well-being. Well-being tends to be defined in educational circles as preparation for a job, and not as readiness for citizenship (Postman, 1996; Ravitch, 2010). Flourishing is equally left to the vagaries of life.

With regard to the scope of wellness, we learned that individuals interact with systems in inextricable ways, leading us to the conclusion that education must strive to develop both. However, this is not the case. Educational practices embrace

what I call the *bio-psycho-without the social* approach. It is common knowledge in psychology that a comprehensive approach to mental health ought to adopt a holistic, *bio-psycho-social model*, acknowledging the interactions among the three domains of life. Yet, in education, many reformers adhere to the *bio-psycho-without the social model*. Great attention is paid to neurological development and cognitive science, but not so much to social circumstances surrounding the lives of children, teachers, or parents (Ravitch, 2010). The focus is on the micro-dynamics of cognitive processing, not the macro-dynamics of poverty (Duncan & Murnane, 2011; Kozol, 2012; Levin, Schwartz, & Gamoran, 2012; Payne, 2008); which leads us to the third implication of wellness for education.

As noted above, well-being can be conceptualized through objective and subjective lens. In education, there is bifurcated attention to either social indicators or perceptual assessment of progress, with little integration of the two. Policy makers seem to equate educational progress and well-being with increased scores on high stakes testing (Ravitch, 2010). This quantitative measure does much to neglect the stress and deterioration of individual well-being of students, teachers, and parents associated with high stakes testing. While obsessing with data and spreadsheets on student progress, many policy makers turn around and completely neglect very quantifiable elements of well-being, such as poverty. Arne Duncan, the US secretary of education, is fond of saying that poverty does not matter for educational outcomes (Duncan, 2010), thereby ignoring one of the most robust social science findings of all time: that socioeconomic status has a huge impact on educational outcomes (Duncan & Murnane, 2011; Levin, Schwartz & Gamoran, 2012). Poverty all of a sudden is just a state of mind that can be overcome by good teaching. For some students with a great deal of support, innate ability, and the right educational environment, yes, poverty can be overcome, but for the vast majority of poor children, who live in conditions of inequality, the future is not so bright. This leads me to consider fairness in education.

#### *The Place of Fairness in Education*

Although when people talk about social justice they talk primarily about distributive justice, there are other important types that we should keep in mind. Distributive, procedural, relational, retributive, and informational are different types of justice that appear widely in the literature. But in addition to these there are other types of justice that do not get as much attention: intrapersonal, developmental, and cultural. Let's define these elements of justice.

Distributive justice is about the fair allocation of resources, gains and pains (Miller, 1999; Sandel, 2009). Procedural justice, in turn, is about fair processes, in which people have a say in matters affecting their lives (Torblom & Vermunt, 2007). Relational is about granting people the respect they deserve in relationships. Retributive is about responsibility and paying for transgressions, and informational is about enabling people to know what is happening in their organizations and

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communities (Colquitt, 2001; Prilleltensky, 2012). Thus far we have defined well known types of justice. Now I would like to say a few words about three educationally relevant justice types. Intrapersonal justice pertains to lack of fairness towards oneself. Developmental injustice pertains to cases in which people are subjected to unfair treatment due to their developmental stages. Child abuse, elder abuse, and parentification of children are cases of developmental injustice. Cultural injustice takes place when minority groups are discriminated on the basis of their identity. In education, this is highly prevalent through stereotype threat (Good, Dweck, & Aronson, 2007). All these types of justice affect well-being and education in meaningful ways (for a lengthier explanation of diverse types of justice, please refer to Prilleltensky, 2012).

Given that most people identify fairness with distributive justice, I wish to expand on it. Distributive justice has been defined by Miller (1999) as

to each, his or her due

and by Sandel (2009) as

giving people what they deserve, giving each person his or her due.

This part is relatively uncontroversial. What is truly contentious is how to ascertain what is due a person. We can consider merit or need. These criteria are not mutually exclusive however. When we take context into account, the decision becomes clearer. In social conditions of inequality, we must accord preference to needs over merit and ability because people do not have the same opportunities to develop competencies and establish a record of achievements. Under conditions of equality, where the gap between classes is not pronounced, it is possible to favor merit and effort over needs to reward hard work and dedication. Indeed, in a context of plenty of opportunities for everyone, it is possible that ability and effort will be the preferred choice (Facione, Scherer, & Attig, 1978). Think of students applying for scholarships. It makes sense to reward students who have worked hard in their lives to attain high educational achievements, but only if we all start the race of life from the same place. If we don't start the race for educational achievements from the same place, rewarding people just on the basis of merit ignores inequalities, making the race, and the granting of scholarships on the basis of achievement, highly unfair. Students who attend private schools, who come from well-endowed families, with access to enrichment, computers, ballet lessons and the like, have an obvious advantage over students with fewer resources. In short, we better pay attention to the context before we render fairness judgments and grant scholarships and admission to colleges and universities.

There is no question that **some** countries, and **some** regions within countries, experience more distributive justice than others, and there is no question that **some** schools foster a great deal of procedural, relational, informational, and cultural justice; but if we look internationally at education, we must come to terms with the fact that there is a lack of distributive justice within **many** countries and regions

(Attewell & Newman, 2010). Let's take inequality for example. Even if inequalities were justified, which I don't believe they are; why should children pay the price of a social condition not of their own doing? There is compelling data to show that inequalities affect a range of educational and developmental outcomes. The UNICEF index of child well-being clearly demonstrates that countries with less inequality achieve higher developmental outcomes for children than countries with more inequality. Among OECD countries, the Nordic countries do best by children, with Canada, France and Italy in the middle of the pack, with the United States and the United Kingdom towards the bottom. Within the United States, school dropout is much higher in unequal states like Alabama and Louisiana than more egalitarian ones like Vermont and Wisconsin (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009).

Poverty is one of the most researched predictors of educational outcomes. The findings are conclusive that children from poor socioeconomic environments perform at much lower levels than children from higher socioeconomic status (Duncan & Murnane, 2011; Henig, Malone, & Reville, 2012). Inequality and poverty, then, affect children in ways that are incompatible with distributive justice. But in addition to poverty and inequality, power differentials in the educational system disturb also procedural, relational, informational, developmental, and cultural justice. The literature is replete with abuses of power by teachers, parents, administrators, and students (Payne, 2008). Bullying of children by children; teachers by teachers; students by teachers; teachers by parents; and so on and so forth illustrate the lack of several types of justice: relational, procedural, and developmental, to name a few. These phenomena diminish procedural, relational and developmental justice. Racial discrimination in schools, which is rampant in subtle and overt ways, undermines cultural justice. We must educate for justice, but we send our children to playgrounds of injustice.

#### HOW SHOULD EDUCATION TRANSFORM LIVES?

We have talked so far about why education should transform lives and systems. Let's talk now about *how* education transforms lives and systems. There are two main mechanisms: competence and engagement. Competence is about knowledge and skills and the resulting sense of self-efficacy, mastery, and control (Dewey, 1997; Rath & Harter, 2010; Tough, 2012; Tuckman & Monetti, 2011). Engagement is about active participation in learning and change processes (City, Elmore, & Lynch, 2012; Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2003; Tough, 2012).

##### *Competence*

In education, competence is being seriously compromised by a narrowing of the curriculum. In the United States, if you happen to attend a public school, which is the vast majority of the population, you will be obsessively taught reading, writing, and math at the expense of the arts, history, geography and the humanities. In some

schools, physical education has also been eliminated to make sure students can cram for the state-mandated exams. As a result, we develop children with tunnel vision who can read and multiply but cannot find a country on a map, speak a second language, or tell you what happened during the Second World War (Ravitch, 2010). The obsessive focus on the basics curtails future possibilities of our children. But, if you happen to attend a private school, chances are you will be exposed to a rich curriculum. Distributive justice plays tricks with children. If you can afford a private education, your competence will be enhanced, you will be admitted into an Ivy League College, and your path to success would be paved. But if you belong to the majority who attend public schools, forget about a second language, geography, or an Ivy League education.

We train students in public schools to be docile workers while we should be training them to be knowledgeable citizens and responsible leaders. Private schools most definitely offer a rich program of studies that develop talent in multiple ways; at least this is the case in the United States, where I happen to reside now. Other countries where I have lived, such as Canada and Australia, offer a more robust and comprehensive curriculum for the vast majority of students who attend public schools. Finland, for instance, does not test students on the basics the way England or the United States do (Sahlberg, 2011). It is hard to develop competencies across the board, in arts, humanities, geography, and history when students are focused just on the basics.

Fairness plays a definitive role in capacity building. Students exposed to rich and diverse materials, due to the privilege of living in Canada or Finland, or attending a private school somewhere else, will have a great advantage over students living in countries or regions with less distributive justice (Levin, Schwartz, & Gamoran, 2012; Ravitch, 2010; Sahlberg, 2011).

### *Engagement*

Engagement is no less important than competence. As a student, you must be an active participant in your education, and as a teacher, you must have a say in the curriculum you teach (City, Elmore, & Lynch, 2012; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Tough, 2012; Tuckman & Monetti, 2011). Engagement is about having voice and choice in your life, and perceiving the relevance of the curriculum or the work you do to your life and aspirations. Engagement is about deriving meaning from your occupation and daily activities. Engaged students do better at school and engaged workers derive more satisfaction from their employment (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2003; Rath & Harter, 2010; Tough, 2012). Education should be about finding your strengths, connecting the material to your life, and making sure you are an active participant in the course of your life. Education should be about nurturing passion for your pursuits (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

It is impossible to nurture engagement without an appropriate pedagogy. Emancipatory educational philosophies usually succeed because they connect the

material to the lives of students. But the call for engagement is not only about student well-being. Teachers must also experience engagement in their work. They must connect their work to a vision and mission of wellness and fairness. The high rates of dropouts in some countries (Orfield, 2006); together with the high rates of attrition and burn out of teachers tell us that neither population is sufficiently engaged (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Payne, 2008; Ravitch, 2010).

To promote engagement and competence in the I COPPE domains of well-being, my research team and I have been developing online games. The games are designed to promote well-being through active participation, interactive games, chat functions, and social networking. Our game is called *Wellness in Your Hands*, and users learn health promotion principles through their avatars. Our avatars, called Wellnuts, watch mini-dramas that last two minutes each. We created 36 mini-dramas in which real actors struggle with challenges in one of the six I COPPE domains of life. To make sure we engage our players fully, we addressed common concerns that pertain to most people. We endeavored to answer two key questions in each one of the I COPPE areas.

*Interpersonal well-being.*

- How to resolve conflict.
- How to foster positive relationships.

*Community well-being.*

- How to help individuals.
- How to build a better community.

*Occupational well-being.*

- How to be organized.
- How to use your strengths.

*Physical well-being.*

- How to improve nutrition.
- How to improve physical activity.

*Psychological well-being.*

- How to cope with stress.
- How to foster meaning and positive emotions in life.

*Economic well-being.*

- How to manage money.
- How to improve long term financial security.

After watching the mini-drama related to these questions, users can play a variety of games related to them. In addition to playing, users can also journal their experiences related to the six domains of life. Through a pilot with 90 adult participants,

consisting of students and staff working at the University of Miami, we learned that users found our virtual world quite engaging. Eighty nine percent of players said that they got something useful out of the games, 92% said that they enjoyed playing the games, 94% enjoyed the overall experience, 76% learned some specific techniques to improve their well-being, and 92% related well to the concepts covered in the game. This is but one example of how to increase competencies in holistic wellness through an engaging pedagogy that speaks to people’s struggles and pursuits.

EDUCATIONAL PARADIGMS

Educational, health, and social interventions can be analyzed according to four key dimensions: competency, engagement, time and focus (Prilleltensky, 2005). The combination of the first two creates the *affirmation* field, whereas the combination of the last two creates the *contextual* field. I will elaborate on these four dimensions and two fields, and apply this framework to education.

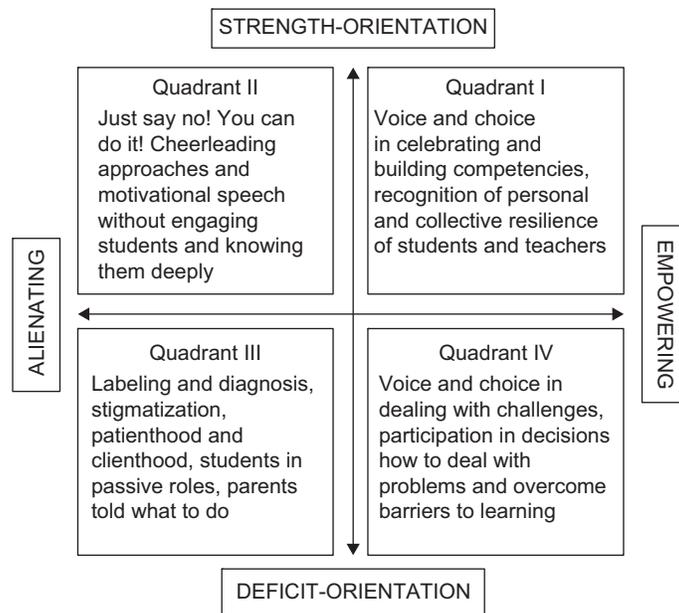


Figure 1. *Affirmation Field: Educational and Social Interventions at the Intersection of Engagement and Capacity Continua.*

In working with people, in health, education, or business, we can concentrate primarily on their strengths or weaknesses. Along a continuum of competence, professionals fall somewhere between focusing on people’s strengths or weaknesses. Educational interventions can therefore be classified as strength or deficit-oriented.

A deficit orientation lets diagnostic labels drive the educational approach, as opposed to identification of strengths and talents. Unfortunately, in mental health and special education, we have a history of labeling individuals with many untoward consequences, not the least of which is stigmatization and neglect of unique talents and resilience (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002). In contrast, a strength orientation focuses on people's ability to cope and thrive, sometimes under very challenging circumstances. The competency orientation of professionals makes a huge difference in how they treat children, students, patients, employees and citizens alike in a wide array of social encounters. The pursuit of patienthood and clienthood in the psychological and educational professions has dire consequences for students and patients alike, who often endure stigmatization and sticky labels for their entire lives.

The second axis of interest is engagement. Professionals engaging citizens, students, patients or employees in any kind of activity can choose to involve them deeply and meaningfully, or they can just tell them what to do and what is expected of them. On one end of the continuum we have empowering interventions, in which the people affected by the intervention have voice and choice, and on the other end we have alienating experiences, in which people feel detached and controlled. The way we engage people in any experiences affecting their lives will be crucial from a process and outcome point of view. From a process point of view, we know that dictatorial and alienating approaches lead to disaffection and withdrawal. From an outcome point of view, we know that alienating practices fail to achieve desired results because people are psychologically disengaged (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2006). Thus, teachers do not perform as well as they might, and students do not score as well as they could. Empowering educational interventions afford students, teachers and parents voice and choice in their learning and cooperative experiences; whereas alienating experiences keep the recipients of the intervention in a passive and acquiescent role (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Fullan, 2008; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009).

When we cross the competency and engagement continua, we create the *affirmation* field, as can be seen in [Figure 1](#). I call it *affirmation* because the confluence of empowering and strength orientations creates a sense of affirmation and support for the recipients of the intervention; be it educational or social. Participants in such programs feel appreciated, validated, and honored for what they have to contribute. Minimally, these interventions promote interpersonal justice in that students feel respected for what they can contribute to the educational enterprise. The same applies to teachers and parents. When they are validated for their contributions, they experience a surge in interpersonal justice. Additionally, the invitation to participate actively in the educational process enhances procedural justice, because everyone is involved and everyone has a chance to voice opinions. Lastly, participant involvement in creation and execution of educational plans improves organizational justice through transparency and sharing of information. These experiences of fairness elevate the overall level of wellness of students, teachers, parents, and everyone involved in the educational process.

Figure 1 depicts the type of interventions conceived by the intersection of competence and engagement. Quadrant I emphasizes voice and choice of students, celebration of achievements, resilience and competencies. Quadrant II is strength-oriented but alienating at the same time. This is best exemplified by invocations to do better and *just say no to drugs*. I call them *cheerleading approaches* because they seem to motivate students with calls for action, but show no appreciation for the complexity of their lives, or genuine interest in their psychological make-up. In the United States, former first lady Nancy Reagan was famous for telling students

Just say no to drugs;

which sounds wonderful, but ignores the complexities of students' lives. Many motivational speakers call on audiences to *get up and get on* with their lives. *You can do it*, they say, as if it were so simple. These seemingly empowering exhortations are empty promises of easy solutions. People invoking these quick solutions tend to alienate people because at the first sign of failure, people blame themselves.

Quadrant III reflects the confluence of deficit-orientations and alienating approaches. In many ways, this is the worst quadrant because it results in labeling, emphasis on stigmatization and the development of patienthood and clienthood. Students are in a passive role, and if they deviate from expectations, they are labeled by well-meaning school and educational psychologists. Quadrant IV is about interventions that strive to empower students in the face of serious challenges. These types of interventions acknowledge that students experience disabilities of all kinds, but instead of labeling and simply dispensing treatments, in this quadrant professionals focus on giving students with disabilities voice and choice, and a significant role in problem solving.

Although I have focused above on students, the model applies all the same to teachers. Educational reforms often ignore and alienate teachers, imposing on them new programs and accountability measures that are based totally on deficit orientations. Especially in the United States, there is a concerted effort to undermine the teaching profession and their unions (Ravitch, 2010). They are often portrayed as the culprits of national educational failures. As a professional body, teachers are often depicted in line with quadrant III: labeled as obstructionist at best or incompetent at worst. In direct opposition to many reform efforts in the United States, educational improvement strategies in Canada, Singapore, and Finland, build on the strengths of the teaching profession and aim to qualify teachers more, not less (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Levin, Schwartz, & Gamoran, 2012; Sahlberg, 2011). In the United States, reformers find themselves in the exquisite contradiction of wanting teachers to be more professional and opening the gates of teaching to people with no background in education whatsoever. This is the case with Teach for America and other avenues to teaching euphemistically called *alternative pathways*. On one hand reformers want *better* teachers but on the other hand they want to diminish the professional stature of the discipline by allowing into the classroom people with a 3 week summer training course. It is obvious that the best educational systems in the world demand more, not less qualification from teachers.

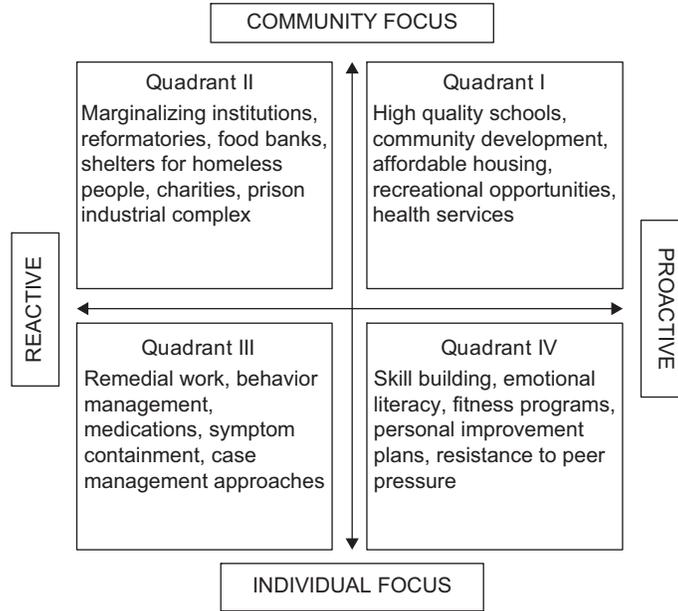


Figure 2. Contextual Field: Educational and Social Interventions at the Intersection of Temporal and Ecological Continua.

The second field of concern is the *contextual*. This field is created by the intersection of time and focus of intervention. The horizontal axis of Figure 2 pertains to timing of interventions: proactive or reactive educational and developmental interventions. The vertical axis, in turn, represents the focus of intervention: individuals or entire communities. Quadrant I in Figure 2 is about proactive, community-wide efforts, such as high quality schools, community development, affordable housing, and accessible recreational opportunities and health services. Longitudinal studies demonstrate the positive educational impact of preventive interventions in communities. For example, students from poor families who participate in high quality early education enrichment programs go on to achieve much better outcomes than student from similar backgrounds without the intervention. Among the better outcomes achieved: high school graduation, less criminal behavior, better employment record, university attendance, and better financial stability.

Quadrant II is the intersection of reactive and community-wide solutions, such as marginalizing institutions, reformatories, psychiatric institutions, food banks, shelters for homeless, and more prisons. These are all examples of reactive solutions to massive problems that could be prevented with the right type of prevention. This is a question of distributive justice par excellence because poor children who lack resources are much more likely to end up in prison. Through no fault of their

own, many children in unequal countries are deprived of opportunities to develop their potential. When poverty is compounded by racism, they experience not only distributive, but cultural injustice as well.

Quadrant III reflects the intersection of reactive and individualistic approaches, typical of remedial education, behavior management plans, medications, and case management. A great deal of attention is being paid to this quadrant in education and mental health; often at the expense of more investments in quadrant I. Proactive individual approaches are the realm of quadrant IV. Skill building, emotional literacy, fitness programs, and personal improvement plans are all examples of preventive actions at the personal level.

In a telling synthesis of research on preventive educational interventions at the community level, several programs were found to increase high school graduation. For every 100 students, the Perry Preschool program produced an extra 19 graduates; the Chicago Child Parent Center an extra 11 students, and Project star on class reduction contributed also another 11 students per 100. Longitudinal studies have matured now to the point where it is possible to calculate the return on investment of preventive educational interventions. In addition to helping more youth to have a better life, the monetary savings are considerable, with the Perry Preschool program in Ypsilanti Michigan leading the group with returns of up to \$17 for every dollar invested in the program (Belfield & Levin, 2007).

There is evidence that many school systems invest more in quadrants III than in quadrants I; both in *affirmation* and *contextual* fields (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Payne, 2008). This means that many educational policies and practices still focus on alienating and deficit-oriented approaches, and reactive individualistic models. There is also evidence that the best human and financial investment school systems can make is in strength-based engaging approaches, and in proactive community paradigms (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The short hand I created for the desirable paradigm is SPEC, which stands for *strengths, prevention, empowerment and community change*. The acronym for the opposing paradigm is DRAIN, which stands for *deficit-oriented, reactive, alienating and individualistic*.

In *The Fourth Way*, Hargreaves and Shirley (2010), two leading education researchers and policy analysts describe a number of exemplary educational reform efforts that are very much in line with the SPEC paradigm. At a national level, they describe the Finnish model of education in which students, teachers, and parents, are very much empowered and appreciated for their talents. As a country, they focus on proactive community wide reforms such as training for teaching the best college students, investing in capacity building of teachers, and making schools and education a priority for investment. The Finnish model has been described in detail by Pasi Sahlberg (2011) in *Finnish Lessons*, a widely acclaimed book that describes the strategies of this top educational performer.

At the school system level, Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) offer the Raising Achievement, Transforming Learning (RATL) network as an example of school improvement guided by empowering and strength based approaches. In this network

of schools, high performing institutions partner with others in collaborative ways that avoid the shame and blame game. The SPEC model was also successfully used in Ontario, Canada, in efforts to elevate the educational achievements of children in the Province. Similar to the RATL network, schools partnered in sharing resources and strategies and created learning networks that proved very effective in raising achievement. Teachers felt engaged and empowered, and the peer learning network built on the strengths of all the partners. A sense of vision and mission permeated the collective effort, and teachers were acting proactively together to solve a provincial problem. They felt part of a movement (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

At the community level, Mediratta, Shah, and McAlister (2009) describe a number of community organizing efforts for school improvement that follow the SPEC principles. Among them are Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition in New York City; Chicago ACORN; Oakland Community Organizations in California; Austin Interfaith in Texas; People Acting for Community Together (PACT) in Miami, Florida; and a few others. Some of these efforts are locally based, whereas others are part of national coalitions such as PICO National Network, Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), and Association of Communities Organized for Reform Now (ACORN). In all these cases, parents and students built on their strengths, felt empowered by the organizers, acted proactively and addressed community-wide problems. In all cases, the organizations achieved important goals such as better literacy, lower dropout rates, and more parental involvement in education.

In the United Kingdom, a similar community organizing effort took place in Tower Hamlets, in the Docklands area of London. Residents partnered with clerics and schools to improve the educational attainment of immigrant children, mostly from Bangladesh. After a few years of community organizing efforts, Tower Hamlets went from being one of the worse educational performers in the country to one of the best (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2010).

#### THE ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGY IN EDUCATION AS TRANSFORMATION

Education should be transformative to promote wellness and fairness, and it should do so through competence building and engagement. Our best hope in educational reform is to concentrate on strengths and engage students, teachers, and parents in empowering ways. For educational reforms to meet wellness and fairness criteria, they must be proactive, address multiple dimensions of well-being, work at various ecological levels, and pay attention to inequalities. The SPEC approach combines all these expectations in the *affirmative* and *contextual* fields. The DRAIN approach, in contrast, diminishes wellness, fairness, engagement, and people's self-efficacy by focusing on deficits. Psychologists involved in education as diagnosticians, therapists, consultants, and researchers, have inadvertently contributed to the perpetuation of the DRAIN approach. Critical psychology emerged in part in response to the individualistic, reactive, and deficit orientation that prevailed in many subfields of the discipline (Fox, Prilleltensky, & Austin, 2007; Prilleltensky &

Nelson, 2002), including clinical, educational, and school psychology. On a personal note, I used to work as a school psychologist in Canada in the late eighties. Our job was primarily to assess students with problems, refer them to special education, and provide therapy and consultation. When I raised with my superiors the possibility of doing more preventive and systemic work I was told that there was no time to do prevention because there were too many children in waiting lists to be evaluated. While the clinic I worked for was very supportive, it was not very reflective and as a result, not very effective. If we had invested more in prevention, we would have had fewer cases of children struggling behaviorally and emotionally.

The proliferation of diagnostic categories and individualistic approaches, exacerbated by the lack of awareness with regards to power differentials conspired to create a DRAIN like approach in psychology. Students and parents did not fully participate in treatment plans formulated by school psychologists. Today, there is more awareness with regards to the need to involve parents and students, but preventive efforts still lag behind curative and reactive approaches (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002; Prilleltensky, Prilleltensky, & Voorhees, 2007).

Although psychology played a role in fostering an unhelpful approach in the past, it can perform a productive function in the future. To begin with, psychology can foster an awareness of the multiple domains of well-being. Hitherto, newer approaches to well-being, like positive psychology, have concentrated on psychological and spiritual well-being but have not paid sufficient attention to community, occupational, or economic well-being (Ehrenreich, 2009). While it is natural for positive psychology to attend to subjective well-being, it is risky to neglect other aspects of the equation, which, ironically, support psychological well-being. As noted earlier, in psychology, medicine, and education, the *bio-psycho-without the social* approach still prevails.

With regards to fairness, psychologists have explored perceptions of organizational (Colquitt, 2001), distributive and procedural justice (Tornblom & Vermunt, 2007), but have not played a major role in translating these studies into social action. We have an opportunity to show how lack of fairness leads to lack of wellness, and what can be done about it. Injustice is not a life sentence, and much can be done to combat it, at the intrapersonal, developmental, cultural, distributive, procedural, and retributive levels. In a recent book on the power of groups for educational and social change, Rosenberg (2012) shows that righteous indignation, or the awareness of injustice, can lead to the formation of consciousness raising groups that unite to combat racial, political, and economic injustice. As leaders in awareness raising, psychologists can surely play an active role in discerning how injustice affects our well-being, and how insight can lead to change. Unfortunately, psychology has sided with the status quo for far too long (Prilleltensky, 1994). Time has come to change course, embrace a multidimensional view of well-being, deal with various types of injustice, engage populations in community change, and focus on strengths. The question for us, psychologists engaged in education, is how to translate these insights into action.

Psychologists working alone in private practice or clinical work, doing individual and reactive work from an office are unlikely to challenge the status quo. As poignantly

illustrated in Tina Rosenberg's *Join the Club* (2012), educational, economic, spiritual, psychological and community change happens in groups. It is virtually impossible for lone rangers to change systems. Agents of change accomplish a great deal with they work in teams, engage everyone, practice relational, procedural, and distributive justice, and plan proactive interventions to change schools and communities. Indeed, as demonstrated above, community organizing for educational change works (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009). Psychologists can join such efforts or mount new ones. Group work impelled by a meaningful vision can be energizing and uplifting. The key is to find the most promising cause, committed allies, and an effective strategy. Psychologists can not only learn from such groups, but also contribute a great deal: team work, group dynamics, social cohesion and sense of community are some of the skills we have to offer SPEC initiatives. These groups can start pretty much anywhere: with neighbors, colleagues in a clinic, teachers in schools, parents in a church, or students in a counseling session. It is a different way of working – challenging – but very rewarding at the same time.

#### CONCLUSION

Education can transform lives. Education can help us thrive. Education can foster relationships and communities based on justice. For many children living in poverty and teachers working under tremendous stress the educational system is not delivering on its promise. Focusing on deficits, turning a blind eye to injustice, and using schools to produce docile workers are not recipes for wellness and fairness (Postman, 1996). Psychologists must join teachers, students, and parents to create fair environments, produce rich curricula, and engage students in knowledge production as opposed to information consumption. Fair schools start with relational, organizational, and procedural justice. Fair families start with developmental justice. Fair communities start with cultural justice, and fair nations start with distributive justice. They are all important. We have an opportunity to practice fairness every day, in every one of the environments we live in. With more fairness, we will see more wellness, in families, schools, and communities.

Educational reform must embrace wellness and fairness. They cannot be an afterthought. SPEC interventions are well on their way to foster the well-being of children, parents, and teachers through engaging, cooperative, and proactive approaches. We must object to DRAIN approaches that denigrate the dignity of children, teachers, parents, and entire communities, however subtly. They all have strengths. We ignore them at our own peril and the peril of future generations.

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TIM CORCORAN

### 3. HETEROTOPICS

#### *Learning as Second Nature*

Once the new way of thinking has been established, the old problems vanish; indeed they become hard to recapture. For they go with our way of expressing ourselves and, if we clothe ourselves in a new form of expression, the old problems are discarded along with the old garment (Wittgenstein, 1980, p. 48)

#### INTRODUCTION

It may seem an oxymoron – critical educational psychology. If that is how it presents to some inside the fence it is no wonder those viewing from a distance might be quick to judge. No doubt, psychology's contribution to educational practice has produced a burgeoning and dominant literature willing to measure (e.g. intelligence quotients), categorise (e.g. learning and/or behavioural difficulties) and pathologise (e.g. attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) students across learning contexts. Practices like these pervade relationships existing between psychology and education because they share in common certain views of people and the world in which they learn.

There is however increased acknowledgement that being of the world (Shotter, 2010a), today and tomorrow, urgently requires alternate ways of engaging psychology in education (cf. Bird, 1999). In particular, unprecedented global movements and exchanges are reconfiguring ways in which people involved in educational practice can and should be understood. Critical studies in education have for some time recognised and considered potential influences stemming from globalisation to education (Rizvi, 1985). The discipline of psychology has been slower off the mark (see e.g. Arnett, 2002) with critically informed approaches gaining presence in the literature (see Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007; Kinnvall & Lindén, 2010; Stenner et al., 2011; Valsiner, 2009). Given this circumstance it is not surprising that contributions from critical educational psychology to the topic are noticeably scarce. At the heart of the matter is that in engaging what globalisation might mean to education there is a subsequent and more engrossing invitation to re-examine theoretical conditions which enable and/or disable alternate understandings of psychosocial action such as learning.

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To accept the invitation in this chapter I begin by briefly considering ideas surrounding cosmopolitanism in education and how these have been subsequently applied to understanding the complex nature of personhood in learning practices. My discussion then turns to the idea that an ontology informed by process orientations to psychosocial action facilitates more useful perspectives for practitioners engaging with the commotion of contemporary life (Corcoran, 2007). I move to introduce the concept of heterotopics as a method for dialogic action taking place in third space (Bhabha, 2008; Rutherford, 1990). Herein opportunities present where critical educational psychology, and conceptualisations of the psychosocial engaging and moving beyond normative frameworks, can be considered, debated and envisioned. Not only is it seen to be crucial to education that process orientations are promoted, I argue that this recognition challenges practitioners (e.g. educational psychologists and teachers) and learners alike to make an ontological commitment, in person and in relationship, to the undertaking and their involvement in practice. The conclusion thus directs us to reorient our participation in education guided by psychological theory situated within an ontology of activity (Harré, 1995).

#### AT ONCE UNIVERSAL AND LOCAL

I only found out recently that I am/can be classified a global nomad (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008) or a third culture kid (Fail, Thompson & Walker, 2004). Membership status befalls me because I spent a significant period of my youth in a country other than the one shown on my passport. The story goes: when I was 3 years old my Dad, who was teaching high school English in Brisbane, moved our family to Edmonton, Canada where we then lived until returning to Australia just prior to my 10<sup>th</sup> birthday. The need for such a concept is suggested to be one response to the influence of globalisation in educational practice. At its most direct this is an indication of educational theorists eager to know how the complexities of personhood may be understood in contemporary societies. I won't digress further on my newly determined standing for the example alone serves its purpose here. Nonetheless, mention of this does segue to a brief engagement with cosmopolitanism and how this concept is being repositioned in educational research to envisage learning as an accomplishment of relational practice.

It is a mistake to infer that globalisation or cosmopolitanism are somehow new to experience in the human condition. For centuries people have interacted with those from beyond their own culture or territory and such contact has brought ongoing challenges to maintaining the status quo of the familiar and the known. What is astonishing today however is the pace at which global connections are made, the relative insignificance of physical distance and the possibilities that derive from transnational encounters. This is particularly evident in contemporary educational practices like the internationalisation of higher education (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

Also peculiar to recent practices in education are efforts made to label and explain human behaviour within the social milieu. Being labelled a global nomad for example seems far less insidious than some of the more pathologically oriented psychological disorders currently in vogue (e.g. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). Mention of pervasive, often a-contextual practice like measurement of psychological constructs (e.g. intelligence) or diagnostics invites questions regarding the applicability of certain knowledges of peoples across cultures and historical periods. For the purposes of the present discussion I am interested in briefly considering the relevance and/or appropriateness of cosmopolitanism to education as applied to developments in learning theory and the implicit knowledges of personhood created therein.

Popkewitz (2007) suggests that cosmopolitanism should be engaged as an historical narrative that attempts to story universal humanity. In terms of globalisation this statement could be inferred to intimate a certain a-contextuality to knowledges concerning personhood. To the contrary, he suggests that '(t)he universalism of the cosmopolitan self is continually local and is a particular narrative about belonging' (p. 66). In reference to educational practice, the story has changed with the duress of time and today is intimately linked to socio-political ends. Extending Foucault's (1972) idea of governmentality, Popkewitz contends that modern schooling achieves two central purposes. He states: 'The double qualities of cosmopolitan "reason" inscribe not only a universalism/particularism and the joining of change and stability. Its principles of reflection and participation inscribe a continuum of values about who "fits" and who does not fit the notions of reason and the "reasonable individual"' (p. 67). Of course, since their inception the bulk of work undertaken in the psy disciplines (psychiatry and psychology) has lead the way in prescribing what is considered normal (or reasonable) concerning universal understandings of human nature and thus colluded in localised exclusionary practices (Rose, 1999). This point is particularly salient to a range of educational practices, learning, assessment and the sardonically conceptualised notion of behaviour management or modification to name a few (Kohn, 1993).

As noted, a primary theme raised in engaging cosmopolitanism in contemporary educational practice is an attention to 'a continuum of values' evident in psychosocial action. Those concerned with education are directly invited to explicate what values might be germane to enabling learning in schools and educational contexts. Succinctly put, Rizvi (2009, p. 264) suggests that cosmopolitan learning 'represents an aspiration that seeks to develop a different perspective on knowing and interacting with others within the changing context of the cultural exchanges produced by global flows and networks'. Because of the pace and diffuse nature of our present day interactions, cosmopolitanism cannot be engaged via antiquated and monologic top-down notions of disciplinary practice, be that educational and/or psychological, nor via ignorance of the values which underpin relational processes. In practice we are invited to acknowledge learning as taking place in contexts where immeasurable tensions abound and such struggles are often a matter of authority (or authorship) in

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meaning making. The storying of what it means for learning to be a certain person in today's world calls for, in Appadurai's words, 'a new role for imagination in social life' (1996, p. 11).

#### FOUCAULT'S HETEROTOPIA

*hetero*: the other of two, other, different (Onions, p. 958).

*topic*: a kind or class of considerations suitable to the purpose of rhetorician or disputant (Onions, p. 2328).

At its most unambiguous heterotopia may be considered to be a space wherein 'other considerations' (i.e. heterotopics) are possible. Foucault considered heterotopia to be a space 'both utterly real...and utterly unreal' (1998, p. 179). As well as this he suggested it to be a process involving 'a kind of contestation, both mythical and real, of the space in which we live' (p. 179). There are, to clarify, two aspects of Foucault's concept requiring direct attention. The first is that as a space in which sensibility may be sought (e.g. around understanding personhood), heterotopics can simultaneously be both real and imaginary, both ideal and imperfect, both conceptual and concrete. From this perspective a heterotopic method, as applied by psychologists, teachers or learners, is one that enables options or alternatives to understanding reality providing authentically situated accounts for what is considered real at any given time. Of course, in an epistemic sense, what is considered unreal will usually be something that is inconsistent or difficult to fit with our present understanding. By design then heterotopics, if used in our engagements with another, cannot set out to establish absolute certainty or essential truths because they are unable to furnish monologic outcomes. Heterotopics are a means to engaging process orientations to ontology.

The point regarding the construction of reality via heterotopic methods is particularly important for ontological and epistemological contests appear as relationships are enacted and re-enacted. And so, another point of emphasis is that the logic driving heterotopic methods is inclusive of possibility, engaged historically and dialogically. Methods are simultaneously tools engaged with, and in, processes of meaning making. This point brings the second aspect of Foucault's concept to bear. Not only are our methods sites of knowledge production but they are also processes through which meaning is developed or sought. Knowledges concerning personhood may always be dialogic and unfinished but not, it should be emphasised, shallow or inauthentic processes. The potential criticism that Foucault may be fence-sitting with the concept of heterotopia misses this point entirely. We all occupy various positions, temporally, morally, socially and spatially, in the living of our lives. Because an understanding of personhood is not couched in finite or essentialist terms does not imply a position has not been occupied.

It is here practitioners may realise how important an explicit ontological commitment is to being involved in educational practice. Over a decade ago, Packer and Goicoechea (2000, p. 234) put it this way:

...learning – gaining knowledge or understanding – is an integral part of broader ontological changes that stem from participation in community. A community of practice transforms nature into culture; it posits circumscribed practices for its members, possible ways of being human, possible ways to grasp the world – apprehended first with the body, then with tools and symbols – through participation in social practices and in relationship with other people. Knowing is this grasping that is at the same time a way of participating and of relating.

Appadurai's earlier petition resonates here. So too Wittgenstein's (1953, no.19) simple yet insightful testament: 'And to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life'. If education helps to transform nature into culture, what kinds of psychology might renew contemporary practice?

#### BETWEEN FIRST AND SECOND NATURE

Discursive psychology (DP) is an area where I believe critical theoretical contributions can be made in educational psychology, particularly in relation to (re)imagining and understanding human being. DP is most commonly aligned with applied social psychology and has a defined history traceable to the mid-1980s (e.g. Harré [1983] or Potter & Wetherell [1987]). Fuller descriptions of this developing theoretical field than can be offered here are readily available (Edwards, 1997; Harré & Gillett, 1994; McKinley and McVittie, 2008). For the purpose of the present discussion a few of DP's central tenants will now be highlighted to imagine their applicability to learning theory.

Common amongst deliberations in DP is a fundamental reorientation to understanding social life. In an effort to delineate such movement, previously I have described the ontological work done in psychological theory as belonging to first or second nature views of personhood (Corcoran, 2009) and within DP specifically, how its own theory is related to philosophical traditions (Corcoran, 2010). First nature orientations are those which most psychologists and laypersons would be accustomed. Historically views such as these have been informed by objective and realist accounts of psychosocial action seeking to generate universal laws concerning behaviour and innate properties existing in human being (Bandura, 1986 or Erikson, 1950). In the context of education, as informed by prevailing psychological theory, the concept of intelligence is regarded as *something* that each of us possess. More often than not it is considered to be a quantifiable measure of our ability to think and perform in areas like mathematics, language comprehension, spatial awareness, etc. For an extended discussion of the historical advance of the concept I recommend Danziger's (1997) elucidatory text, *Naming the Mind*. Therein Danziger outlines a series of sociocultural developments which contributed to the formalisation of psychological theory and practice in the area. One example directs attention to the

United States government and its requirement to categorise thousands of American soldiers during and post the First World War. Psychologists, as Danziger notes, were complicit and willing to be involved in this work:

Their sense of identity as scientists and their existence as a specific community of experts depended upon two articles of faith: that they were engaged in the investigation of real natural objects and that they possessed the appropriate technical means for generating knowledge about these objects. For early twentieth-century American army and school psychologists the most important natural object was “intelligence” and IQ tests formed the appropriate technology (p.80).

More recently, psychologists have broadened the concept to incorporate a range of intelligences as in the work of Gardner (1983) and Goleman (2007). Such movement has enabled the profession to go beyond cognitively focused underpinnings of testing for intelligence quotients or I.Q. scores (e.g. Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children) to developing measures which purport to assess the notion of emotional intelligence (e.g. Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test).

An understanding of intelligence informed by critical psychology questions a number of implicit assumptions contributing to the trustworthiness of the concept. At the heart of such apprehension are two decisive differences stemming from the kind of philosophy informing first and second nature theorising. As already mentioned, approaches based in realism and objectivism provide the philosophical lifeblood circulating in first nature accounts of personhood. A representational view of language use, inherent in such accounts, suggests an uncomplicated relationship between a word and its meaning. What this stance potentially means for psychological discourse is that concepts like intelligence are mobilised within social practice as legitimate actualities describing entities or properties to be found within the embodied being of the individual. Put simply in this case, we all possess in our psychological makeup an attribute known as intelligence. Is confirmation or disconfirmation of this really at issue? The concern being highlighted here is unequivocally pragmatic and cannot be answered with a simple binary yes/no response to the question. Granted, as social agents, to achieve tasks in a coordinated and meaningful way, we require a means by which to communicate one to another. As such, the issue of whether such a thing as intelligence exists is not as immediately important as the function of the term in people’s lives. Discomfort thus becomes alarm when we attend to the ways in which words like intelligence are used in social practice, the apparent scale of that practice and the potential ramifications that arise from their presence in our discourse.

In the context of the present discussion, the concept of intelligence has been criticised for promoting westernised views of personhood (Sternberg, 2004). In this sense, Euro-American psychological knowledges have effectively colonised the planet without due attention or respect to cultural variability. Given that intelligence measures are premised on knowledges pertaining to representative populations, it is fair to ask exactly who or what population is being represented by such measures?

Extending this idea further we might also ask whose individual and collective interests are being represented by the practice taking place? Cole (1993, p.53) elucidates:

We can recognise the school as an institutionalised setting designed to provide children with massive practice in activities that are useful and valued in our society. IQ tests sample school activities, and therefore, indirectly, valued social activities, in our culture. In so far as tests are really used to ensure that all children master the required skills, such tests would have to be considered extremely useful. However, in so far as such tests act as screening devices giving access to some people and not others, without any commitment to insuring that all achieve the level of proficiency required for full participation in the adult life and access to the resources available to adults in our society, their initial purpose has been subverted and must be re-examined.

In an effort to examine taken for granted practices discursive psychologists, as might be presumed, are critically oriented to understanding human being via the ways in which language is used in daily practice. If we accept that there is an intimate relationship between language and its capacity to create what we understand to be true of human being, it can then be suggested that the way in which we mobilise psychological discourse has significant impact on the lives of all people, and this includes a concept like intelligence.

Returning to the philosophical differences apparent between first and second nature accounts, instead of assuming an uncomplicated representational view of language use i.e. that the word intelligence uncomplicatedly represents such an attribute, critical attention is drawn to the constitutive nature of language as a means of both informing and forming how we come to understand people and the practices they/we engage in. Not only is the representational view of language disputed in DP but so too is psychology's dominant account of cognitivism (Potter, 2000). Instead of accepting the presence of cognitive schema or scaffolds as existing in the mind of the individual, DP looks to engage cognitive discourse for the work it performs in facilitating social action. Subsequently, instead of presuming and locating psychological action such as remembering (Edwards & Potter, 1995) or decision making (Carbaugh, 1995) as traceable to individualised mental substances, the action of account giving, reporting or constructing becomes the focus on inquiry. As Harré (2002, p.151) suggests: 'We have learned to see [mental phenomena] not as attributes of a mental substance. They are nothing but aspects of the flow of joint action in accordance with local norms of correctness and propriety. Those relevant to cognitive psychology are properties of discourse'.

DP radically changes psychological contributions to learning theorisation and educational practice most explicitly via its positions on language use and cognitivism. But before moving to consider several potential examples of heterotopics, one more crucial point must be raised regarding theoretical approaches involving DP. Recently I have advocated for an ontologically informed account of DP (Corcoran, 2009,

2010, 2012). This position is very much formed by an acceptance of the principles supporting social constructionism (Gergen, 1999; Shotter, 1993) and an approach to pragmatics indebted to the work of Rorty (1980, 1999). Without venturing into an extended discussion on either I believe Rorty sums my feelings on the matter when he says: 'Nature is whatever is so routine and familiar and manageable that we trust our own language implicitly' (1980, p.352). As a psychologist and social researcher, I believe the significance of this statement is vital to acknowledging how it is that I am situated in this life, as participant-observer, in the construction of human being. As I understand the statement it primarily challenges me to critically reflect upon my ongoing relationship with language and it is reassuring for me for this to be considered in a context of trust and not (primarily) truth. Whilst what I come to accept as true is concomitantly something I also trust, I cannot escape the insight that implicit trust or articles of faith (see Danziger's earlier statement) are vital to establishing the conditions for knowing something to be true.

Is there a language that can be trusted implicitly? Perhaps there is, for example, for those for whom spirituality is a central part of life. Maybe the language of love is another. But still, in this regard, is truth not a matter of trust? In our imagining of life in the twenty-first century, whatever our beliefs or wherever we apportion implicit trust, we are actively conceiving of ourselves and what contributes to our very being. Crucially, such a situation does not infer amorality to our forms of life. The earlier referenced discussion concerning cosmopolitanism highlights the idea that within the local and the global there exists a 'continuum of values' which is always present in psychosocial action. 'It is therefore tempting', Taylor suggests,

to think that our modern notions of moral order lack altogether an ontic component. But this would be a mistake. There is an important difference, but it lies in the fact that this component is now *a feature about us humans*, rather than one touching God or the cosmos, and not in the supposed absence altogether of an ontic dimension (2004, p.10-11; my emphasis).

Whilst some might deduce the utilisation of mechanistic description (i.e. a language of components potentially favouring first nature accounts of personhood), here I read Taylor as emphatically acknowledging the ontological presence of a moral order in psychosocial action. Rather than imagining this as part of who we are this becomes an aspect of what we do. It is, in Harré's (1995) terms, part of what constitutes an ontology of activities in/to which we belong. To repeat Popkewitz's observation, '(t)he universalism of the cosmopolitan self is continually local and is a particular narrative about belonging' (2007, p. 66). And herein lies a fundamental challenge to work undertaken by educational psychologists and educators more generally: How do we remain within and connected to narratives of belonging?

This, I maintain, occurs authentically via the kinds of ontological commitment we make in our engagements with others and in formal learning contexts this involves a myriad of people including students, teachers, parents and colleagues. How practitioners position themselves within these relationships is determined by

an explicit acknowledgement of affordance (Gibson, 1986) given to joint action. In Gibson's terms, '(t)o perceive the world is to coperceive oneself. The awareness of the world and of one's complementary relations to the world are not separable' (p. 127). Given first nature psychologies are motivated to produce accounts of separability (as infinitesimal as synapses firing neurons), commitment to a different kind of ontological understanding is required. Also necessary are ways in which to reconceptualise learning contexts such that second nature psychologies would be enabled to meaningfully operate. At this juncture I want to present three potential possibilities for consideration.

#### HETEROTOPICS AND LEARNING

As has been discussed so far, second nature psychologies employ process orientations to issues of ontology (Bickhard, 2012; Stenner, 2007). Shotter adeptly summarises as follows:

To adopt a process orientation is, we might say, to adopt a worldview – a way of looking out at and acting within the world around us – in which instead of substances (stuff) we see processes; instead of already existing things we see things in the making; instead of a succession of instant configurations of matter we see a unitary, holistic, continuous flow of events, we see becoming rather than merely being (2010a, p. 71).

What is uniquely implicated and unavoidable in reorienting practice to process orientations, as I have already suggested, is an ontological commitment. Such a commitment acknowledges that we are always-already related to people within practice (Bradley, 2005). In psychology this means breaking free from the compulsion to measure and categorise i.e. to essentialise and reduce personhood to substances and elements. It means looking for ways in which practice can contribute to enabling processes, not impeding their movement. Whilst working as a school psychologist I found the dominance of first nature psychologies often an impediment to assisting students in becoming who they preferred to be or, at the very least, an obstacle to resisting the ways in which they were being represented (Corcoran, 2003, 2007). Students who were referred to me (always with their consent) were already surrounded by discourses of deficit and descriptions that posited the source of the perceived problem within the psychology of their personhood. As a health-education professional working alongside young people I struggled to operate within and against dominant practices constantly having to reposition myself so as to stay committed to second nature ways of understanding. The application of heterotopics to learning resonates with a number of recent discussions in the field and it to a selection of these that I now turn.

In a wonderfully erudite article, Burbules (2008) outlines what he coins 'tacit teaching'. Indebted to the philosophy of Wittgenstein, such practice is designed to keep processes of inquiry active by the way in which questions and responses

(a term I find preferable to answers as these may be inferred to complete the process) are engaged. Tacit teaching, he suggests, can be at least potentially always present in learning contexts as engagement of this kind takes place within both intentional and unintentional forms of instruction. It is a form of engagement which is not dedicated to demonstrating proofs so much as investigating possibilities. In this way, tacit teaching and learning is heterotopic and very much requires, as I have been emphasising here, an explicit ontological commitment to learning processes. For example, as teachers, the kinds of possibilities for understanding what students are able to do often exist as tacit knowledge within our normatively skewed forms of life. As discussed above, the kinds of knowledge first nature psychologists pursue often direct teachers to focus on internalised deficiencies known to cause and explain what students are not able to do thus discouraging possibility; they do not imagine new forms in ways that are open to becoming and not just being. The idea of tacit teaching and learning then is one that encouragingly applies to a variety of learning practices, teacher education for instance.

The aim of maintaining dialogue in learning processes is also supported in Englund's (2006, 2011) work on deliberative communication. Coming from the field of citizenship education and drawing considerably on the pragmatics of Dewey, Englund argues for the displacement of traditional didactic forms of teaching and learning. In their place he sees psychosocial action in school communities as contributing to a contemporary politics of cosmopolitanism wherein democracy is enacted as a purposeful way of being. Much like the earlier cited work of Popkewitz (2007), Englund recognises an explicit moral dimension to learning as differing cultures encounter one another in educational institutions. Deliberative communication is said to consist of five aspects: i) time and space is given for differing views to be articulated; ii) participants actively listen with tolerance and respect for another; iii) attention to differences, temporary agreements and/or consensus are targeted; iv) dominant knowledges are open to examination as are traditional views and customs; and v) teachers need not control or be present in the process (Englund, 2011). In its attention to relationship and process deliberative communication can also be marked as heterotopic.

The necessity for the presence of critical psychology in education studies is evidenced in the remnants of first nature discourses which persist in imaginative approaches like Burbules' and Englund's. A brief example from each will suffice. In outlining his position, Burbles (2008) adds: '...there is a corresponding element to tacit teaching, which might be called tacit learning: precisely what was learned, how and when it was learned, may be uncertain even to the knower who has *internalised* the rule and can follow it in the appropriate way' (p. 672; my emphasis). As people who write and describe the lives of others, researchers and practitioners must attend to the languages they employ as they actively create the world before them with their words. By invoking processes of internalisation we enter the world of first nature psychology. Burbules could have used the word 'adopted' which would not have set up the dominant individualised psychological model of an internalised and externalised world. Englund too relies on discursive resources evidenced in first nature

psychologies. He says a new agenda for institutional practice involves ‘...a gradual shift in the inner work of schools towards a communicative rationality, a rationality not tied to the subject-object relationship of a cognising and monologically acting individual, but to an intersubjective relationship between communication individuals’ (2011, p. 240). I will let a similar complaint to the one just made regarding internal/external dichotomising pass as it is not clear here whether Englund is referring to actions taking place within classrooms or craniums. However, what does take my interest is the attempted rationalisation of relational activity. Whilst not as explicit as the Burbules example, there remains an issue with appeals to rationality, as a supposedly superior means to knowing, within discussion concerning psychosocial action (cf. Burman, 1992; Gergen, 1992). In heterotopic accounts, competing discourses challenge for the right to be heard and accepted as meaningful, they are not predetermined.

A final example comes from work dedicated to explicating what an understanding of third space might mean for education (Gutiérrez, 2008; Kostogriz, 2002). Influenced by political theory and semiotics, third space conceptualisations attempt to address potentials for learning when cultures engage in cosmopolitan modalities. These can manifest in a range of social structures and actions (e.g. teaching in a classroom) where tensions exist between the universal and the local or between dominant and marginalised meaning. To enable meaningful learning to go on, certain commitments need to be made in relation to engaging another and how meaning may be derived from relational activity. As Kostogriz (2006, p. 182) suggests:

...the aim is to construct a comprehensive notion of cultural space as a complex polysystem, or network of activity systems, in which differences coexist within the imagined boundaries of the official culture...[thus providing for an]... exploration of diverse cultural-semiotic activities and their role in learning and psychological development.

In a specific example of third space application, Gutiérrez (2008) describes work taking place at the University of California (Los Angeles) Migrant Student Leadership Institute. In engaging with students from nondominant communities, prevailing academic literacy practices are scrutinised and replaced with activities which resonate with the student’s sociohistorical lives. In direct refutation of first nature psychological practices, the ethos of the Institute purposively eschews individualised notions of linguistic or academic deficit. Instead, learning processes aim to develop collective understandings for how language, literacy and learning practices appear sociohistorically and the relationship of these to socioeconomic and sociopolitical conditions impacting on the lives of the students.

#### ORIENTING TO THIRDNESS

To this point I have outlined an argument for creating greater affordance in educational theory and practice to second nature psychologies. Employing an ontology of activities to understanding practices like tacit teaching, deliberative

communication and third space pedagogy provides educationalists with a useful, and I would suggest, highly appropriate alternative to reificatory first nature accounts of personhood. A central concern in this discussion has been not only to critique historically dominant accounts of psychosocial action and their subsequent ways of constructing personhood but to also provide alternate ways to go on. In deference to this pragmatic principle, process orientations assist those engaged in practice to maintain a focus on the prospective nature of learning, education and personhood. In this final section I continue to explore the imperative of an ontological commitment to practice as a means to ‘overcoming our orientational difficulties’ (Shotter, 2010b, p. 75).

How, as practitioners, we orient ourselves to our work will determine the kinds of understanding or knowledge we bring to practice. We can engage in practices of reductionism or separability (as described above) as much as we can acknowledge our situatedness within other more integrated forms of life. Either way, practice lives on in the discourse we employ and this point was one well known to Bakhtin:

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become *an active participant* in social dialogue. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it – it does not approach the object from the sidelines (1981, p. 267-268; my emphasis).

Of particular interest here is the contention that words seemingly have a life of their own i.e. they can be engaged as ‘living utterances’. Could this mean that words owe a responsibility to psychosocial action in a way similar to that we bestow upon people? To explore this point we now turn to the concept of thirdness.

Given the dominance of first nature accounts it should come as no surprise that in this instance educational practice is dominated by reductionist and essentialist orientations. But here I want to move beyond what might be taken to be implicit intrapsychological process to address the point that through our employment of certain discursive repertoires we (personally and relationally) actively contribute to the continued presence of thirdness. And it is in our attentiveness to the responsibility each of us has, in adopting or resisting certain discourse, that we demonstrate the kind of ontological commitment we hold to one another and to our communities.

In some ways it is easier to think of thirdness as context or merely the background to what is of more importance to the majority of psychologists, the inner machinations or the ‘engine room’ if you like, of psychosocial action (cf. Kelly, 1955). Of course, if the source or cause of joint action is to be traced to the individual and their inferred cognitive-behavioural make up there is no requirement to regard, in a heterotopic sense, other considerations. But by disregarding our own contributions to thirdness, and importantly thirdness as an active participant within our forms of life, we continue to retrace our steps along the path of dominant discourse. If, following

Wittgenstein, our charge as researchers and practitioners involves us being able to find our way around the forms of life we share with others, prior to stepping off the beaten track, we somehow need to prepare ourselves for the journey. This, I see, is the distinction Shotter makes regarding being of the world as an always-already related participant in our ways of being. As he suggests, such preparation involves ‘changes in our embodied ways of being *of* the world rather than merely *in* it, changes in our language entwined practices to do with how we go out to meet our surroundings with the right kind of anticipatory responses’ (2010b, p. 84, emphases in original). This means, I believe, orienting ourselves to thirdness, not simply as background or landscape through which we travel but as a fellow traveller, always beside us in our life’s mission. How we then relate to thirdness is an example of the kind of anticipatory response presently absent from educational and psychological practice.

Orienting ourselves to thirdness helps us to account for the ways in which normativities present as natural or given to the world. This acknowledgement emphasises my point regarding the need for process orientations to ontology. Whilst this might not circumvent normative accounts of personhood it creates discursive space for cultural, historical and political specificity. If we accept Popkewitz’s visioning of cosmopolitanism and the potential influence for perpetual dialogue between universal and localised psychosocial action then we must attend to two important issues regarding the presence and function of narrative as a discursive resource. The first has to do with how we engage narratives of belonging. In much the same way that process orientations are about becoming and not just being, our relationally bound process oriented narratives should focus on activities which contribute to the sense of *belonging*. For example, an explicit ontological commitment by psychologists (and educationalists) to practice in certain ways is a sign of active participation in creating and sustaining preferred forms of life. This requires us, as Shotter suggested, to overcome our orientational difficulties, to orient ourselves to thirdness and critically revision our relationship to practice. If psychologists were happy to merely *belong* there would not be a critical psychology of any kind to speak of.

This focus on movement brings forth my second consideration. As we move within and across social practices occupying different positions along the way, we reorient our ways of attending to the world. The importance of engagement with difference or diversity is crucial to the production of alternate narratives, specifically as these apply to belonging and the emergence of community. Supporting this idea Bhabha (2008, p. 334) says that social differences ‘are signs of the emergence of community envisaged as a project – at once a vision and a construction – that takes you “beyond” yourself in order to return, in a spirit of revision and reconstruction, to the political conditions of the present’. This is a salient point to acknowledge for in moving ‘beyond’ narratives of the present we address and potentially recreate what contributes to the normative. Finally, echoing the terms of cosmopolitanism, Bhabha suggests that in reorienting ourselves in this way we ‘reinscribe our human,

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historic commonality; to touch the future on its hither side. In that sense, then, the intervening space “beyond”, becomes a space of intervention in the here and now’ (ibid). And this is the kind of heterotopic space all practitioners must occupy.

#### CONCLUSION

...one thing that “Nature” may be said to utter is that there are conditions of educational efficiency, and that till we have learned what these conditions are and have learned to make our practices accord with them, the noblest and most ideal of our aims are doomed to suffer (Dewey, 1916/1997, p. 115).

If what I have been arguing for in this chapter seems acceptable then there is a counter intuitive acknowledgement which must be made once again. Under the auspices of second nature psychologies, learning and knowledging practices which engage heterotopics are continuously constructing and reconstructing meaning and thus are never within our power to finalise. This principle counters the prevailing conditions for professional practice in education and psychology which aim to provide, in an authorial or narrative sense, the final word. This distinction helps us to frame the very kinds of conditions Dewey speaks of above. Such circumstance does not condemn practitioners to eternal suffering or flaccid uncertainty; rather it is by way of such commitment that we are enabled to go on. Process orientations keep us in the game – the language game that is about belonging in/to our many forms of life. Whilst there are many purposes to contemporary education one of the most vital must be to enable, in Bhabha’s terms, movement to ‘the beyond’ or movement of our narratives to a new story or next chapter. To acknowledge that learning is an unfinishable task suggests there is always more to understanding, always another meaning to be grasped. As Dewey intimates, our practices must respond in a truly dialogic sense with nature, all the time resonant with how we orient ourselves to living within the commotion of an existing world. This is but one way a critically informed psychology enables educational practice to go on.

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#### **4. NEO-FOUCAULTIAN APPROACHES TO CRITICAL INQUIRY IN THE PSYCHOLOGY OF EDUCATION**

Education is, first and foremost, the education of persons. While debate persists over whether or not animals teach, what they are is not changed by their learning. By contrast, persons can be transformed by education in ways that change the kinds of persons they are. Education is concerned with people making, or “making up people,” to use Ian Hacking’s (2002) phrase. Schooling is never an impartial instrument in human development. Societies require people who can do certain things and education prepares people who will do these things. Nor does development follow a naturally uniform course. Children are understood and administered according to varying institutional purposes and practices, and come to understand themselves and act in institutionally prescribed ways.

Following Foucault, Hacking and Nikolas Rose have demonstrated how features and kinds of personhood are formed within structures and practices of institutions, most notably, those of psychology and other social sciences, psychiatry and related domains of clinical medicine, what Rose (1998, 1999) refers to as the “psy” disciplines. A striking implication of their work is that failing to take into account the constitutive influence of historical, sociocultural institutions has led to fixing features of persons to human nature rather than to characteristics of the institutions within which we become persons.

In this paper, I examine how the work of Hacking and Rose could inform critical inquiry in the psychology of education. I begin by describing and illustrating Hacking’s and Rose’s approaches. I then examine a divergence between them. The difference is marked by their responses to the question of human agency, a difference that also divides the final phase of Foucault’s oeuvre from earlier work. I conclude with a discussion of the significance of these approaches for a critically informed psychology of education.

##### IAN HACKING: MAKING UP PEOPLE

According to Hacking, we experience ourselves as persons only because we do so under certain descriptions. Personhood consists in taking up and acting in terms of the descriptions made available to us. When persons become aware of how they are described and classified within their groups, societies, and cultures, they experience themselves in particular ways as a result of these classifications, and form and alter

the kinds of persons they are. Consequently, Hacking posits that new languages of description and classification can bring about new kinds of persons. However, individuals also can react to the ways in which they are classified and change those systems of classification, in turn, creating further possibilities and descriptions for personhood. Hacking (1995a) calls this interaction between systems of classification and those classified, “the looping effect.”

Through a wide array of examples (e.g., adolescence, autism, child abuse, fugue, homosexuality, multiple personality disorder, suicide, and teen-age pregnancy), Hacking illustrates how new classifications of people, especially those promoted by the human sciences, are implicated in supporting the actions and experiences characteristic of the individuals classified and, in so doing, help reify the classification.<sup>1</sup> Such classifications not only can be seen to expand possibilities for human action and experience, and create new kinds of personhood, but also, come in and out of fashion. According to Hacking (2002), “making up people” does not take a universal form. We are constituted as persons at a particular place and time, in which an historically distinctive constellation of conditions and materials form a space of possibility, “an ecological niche” (Hacking, 1998, p. 82), conducive to the emergence of a certain kind of person.

Conducting “historical ontologies,” Hacking (2002) traces how kinds of personhood are constituted in specific local, historical ways. Because “each category has its own story” (Hacking, 2002, p. 111), inquiry demands attention to the particularities of its historical emergence, the development of specific problems and issues, and the concepts and practices generated in attempting to address them. Hacking has special interest in “transient mental illness” (1998, p. 1) and the kinds of persons formed by psychiatric diagnosis. Transient mental illnesses appear suddenly, are recognized as a disorder afflicting numbers of people, are sustained for some time, but then disappear. They flourish when the diagnosis resonates both with those afflicted and those who have assumed authority in identifying, explaining, and treating the disorder.

In his study of fugue (*Mad Travellers*, 1998), a disorder characterized by compulsive traveling and amnesia that arose in France in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hacking introduces an investigative frame for historical ontology that draws on the metaphor of vectors. Four vectors point as “different kinds of phenomena acting in different ways, but whose resultant may be a possible niche in which a mental illness may thrive” (Hacking, 1998, p. 81). One vector is “medical taxonomy.” The illness must fit into the current system of diagnostic classification. For example, it was disputed whether fugue was a manifestation of hysteria or of epilepsy, the major mental pathologies of the era. A second vector is “observability.” The disorder needs to be noticed and labeled as problematic by professionals and recognized by the public. A third vector, “cultural polarity,” situates the condition between two cultural phenomena: one that garners approval or admiration; the other, fear and condemnation. For example, fugue was positioned between romantic tourism and criminal vagrancy. A fourth vector, “release,” concerns ways in which the condition provides relief or escape from suffering or discomfort,

unavailable through other means elsewhere in the culture. Hacking describes how fugue provided escape for men of a particular class who felt oppressed and trapped by their circumstances.

Neufeld and Foy (2006) have applied Hacking's approach to shed light on the dramatic rise in prevalence of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and wide acceptance of it as an explanation of children's behavioral and educational difficulties. Neufeld and Foy begin with medical taxonomy, from the first descriptions of those William James referred to as possessed of "explosive will" and "mercurial temperaments" (James, 1890, pp. 537-538). They follow the emergence of the concept of brain-injured child syndrome and the developing assumption of an organic cause of ADHD. They reveal how ADHD was easily incorporated into already well accepted notions of disability as lodged within individuals and neurological impairment as a source of psychological dysfunction. Drawing parallels with learning disabilities and other less severe psychopathologies, Neufeld and Foy show that there was a well established space of possibility in which ADHD could become an object of expert knowledge and intervention.

In detailing the rise of its observability, Neufeld and Foy discuss the addition of Attention Deficit Disorder to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of The American Psychiatric Association*. However, ADHD not only has garnered an exponential increase of interest in scholarly and professional quarters, but also, in the popular media and general public. As a recognizable problem, ADHD has been blamed for "low academic achievement, poor school performance, grade retention, school suspensions, expulsions, poor peer and family relations, anxiety and depression, aggression, conduct problems and delinquency, early substance experimentation and abuse, driving accidents and speeding violations, as well as difficulties in social relationships, marriage and employment" (Neufeld & Foy, p. 456). From big business for pharmaceutical companies to the subject of award winning children's novels and popular television shows, to its frequency in common parlance, ADHD has achieved an enormous public presence.

In demarcating its cultural polarity, Neufeld and Foy describe how ADHD is linked, on one hand, to the celebration of excess in North America and rapid stimulation characteristic of contemporary forms of entertainment; while, on the other hand, it is feared as symptomatic of moral decline, evinced by the problems previously mentioned. Neufeld and Foy assert that this positioning of ADHD between vice and virtue contributed to its success as a classification because it became "a palatable way to disorder others and to be disordered oneself" (p. 459). Behaviors and characteristics seen as problematic in school children are, at the same time, extolled when exhibited by the celebrities we admire and seek to emulate. ADHD has it both ways.

According to Neufeld and Foy, ADHD admits three types of release. First, the classification furnishes those with ADHD an understanding of why they are experiencing difficulties in their lives, an understanding previously unavailable in the absence of the diagnostic category. Second, diagnosis absolves teachers and parents from any responsibility for causing or abetting the condition. Third, release is accomplished by

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the suppression of behaviors associated with ADHD through psychopharmacological treatment and, to lesser extent, behavioral or cognitive intervention.

There are other institutional structures and practices that have contributed to the ascendance of ADHD. For instance, Neufeld and Foy identify the trend toward inclusion of special needs students in regular classrooms that has resulted in greater prevalence of behavior problems, but without a corresponding augmentation of support to address them. There also is the restriction of corporal punishment and adoption of more humane, but also more complex and time consuming approaches to disciplining students. In addition, there are increased demands on teachers and schools to boost achievement, meliorate student conduct, and be more efficient, prompted by the shift to high stakes accountability and administration. These conditions result in drawing greater attention to problematic behavior and to ADHD as the explanation for it. Neufeld and Foy conclude,

ADHD is thriving in North America today, at least in part, in response to a complex and historically situated interaction of factors (vectors) that together create a space, a niche, in the social world within which a particular kind of explanation and treatment for specific kinds of troubling behaviors exhibited by children can and does thrive. (p. 465)

Their analysis shows clearly that the status of ADHD as a disorder; ways in which it presently is understood; belief that it demands treatment; kinds of interventions deemed appropriate; and the participation of parents, teachers, other professionals, and students in sustaining its status, require a highly particular set of institutional arrangements, situated within a broader constellation of specific social, cultural, moral, ethical, economic, political, and technological conditions. Their account reveals the dangers of ahistoricism. It is easy to imagine how under different conditions ADHD might never have surfaced as a disorder, let alone escalate to epidemic proportions.

While sidestepping the question of the reality of ADHD, Neufeld and Foy do caution that their analysis refutes simplistic biological or sociocultural reductionism. What also can be said is that while it might be conceded that there always have been individuals who fit the description of ADHD (i.e., it is a real way of being), it has come to matter at this particular point and place in time, and its designation as a “disorder” is bound inextricably to this context. The ascendance of ADHD cannot be comprehended adequately by studying population statistics, pharmaceutical prescription rates, the manipulation of variables in experimental settings, or other approaches that strip the phenomenon of its historical context of emergence. Thirty years ago, adult ADHD might have been considered an oxymoron (P. Neufeld, personal communication, September 14, 2010). Today it is accepted as a discrete condition that claims a certain kind of person.

#### ROSE: THE PSY HYPOTHESIS

Rose (1996, 1998, 1999), like Hacking, uses history to demonstrate that we have an orientation to ourselves peculiar to our place and time. For those of modern western

societies, it is a self who exists as a discrete entity delimited by its body; possessed of uniquely individual experiences, beliefs, desires, and potentialities; and autonomous and self-governing. However, not only does human autonomy vary with the ways in which we understand ourselves. It does so in lockstep with institutions that justify their regulation of conduct on this very self-understanding. As Rose illustrates, “law, with its notions of responsibility and intent; morality, with its valorization of authenticity and its emotivism; politics, with its emphasis on individual rights, individual choices and individual freedoms” (1996, p. 103).

It is within this context that the psy disciplines have arisen as important instruments of institutional control by creating and administering classifications of human difference: normal, disordered, educable, employable, admissible, legally responsible, capable of leadership, and so forth. Rose detects the ways in which the psy disciplines have shaped the self-understanding characteristic of persons in western societies through an array of knowledge and expertise, exercise of institutional authority, and practical technologies. According to Rose, the psy disciplines have been complicit in making our self-understanding an object on which others can act. Moreover, Rose champions the Foucaultian insight that the technologies through which are controlled by others, can be turned toward ourselves and, thus, become means of self-control. The psy disciplines have been instrumental in making us intelligible to ourselves. In turn, this intelligibility enables individuals to govern themselves which results in effective and efficient forms of social control.

Rose (1999) thus argues that the psy disciplines are strongly implicated in constructing the kind of “governable subjects” (p. vii) required of modern liberal democracies. The psy disciplines are far from neutral politically. They provide a complex of techniques for the exercise of political and personal control that conforms with western liberal notions of individual freedom and autonomy. For instance, the sorts of technologies designed by psychologists for measuring public opinion, highly dependent on invention of the technology of the representative sample, gave rise to a conception of the “opinionated person” living in an “opinionated society” (Osborne & Rose, 1999). But then, people came to fit the demands of the research. They learned to be the kind of person who has opinions and expresses them freely. Key to Rose’s thesis is that the success of the psy disciplines’ role in this enterprise has not been built on the imposition of arbitrary authority. Rather, the psy disciplines have succeeded by widely unquestioned acceptance of both experts and the lay public that disciplinary and professional psychology is founded scientifically on the real nature of human persons as psychological subjects. Importantly, Rose also refuses the idea of a monolithic state apparatus molding persons through coercion and constraint. As Rose (1999) explains:

These technologies for the government of the soul operate not through the crushing of subjectivity in the interests of control and profit, but by seeking to align political, social, and institutional goals with individual pleasures and desires, and with the happiness and fulfillment of self. (p. 261)

By way of illustration, Martin (2004) has taken up Rose's psy hypothesis to interpret the kinds of persons and selves promoted by research and theorizing in educational psychology. Martin asserts that over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, educational psychologists came to espouse scientific and humanistic conceptions of personhood that abstract and sever persons from the traditions and practices within which they originate and develop. Educational psychology is focused on the individual. It advocates individual enhancement and empowerment based on a conception of persons as ordered and oriented instrumentally toward expressing themselves and achieving their own ends. Education, by contrast, entails broader purposes; that is, preparing citizens, such as those who can participate effectively in the diverse and disputed moral and political arenas of modern democracies. The mission of education is to support human development in ways that are consistent with, or advance, civic virtue and the collective good. Martin claims that the result is that educational psychologists deliver theoretical and practical models of self-enhancement and self-management that are inadequate to the aims of deliberative democracies and democratic education.

According to Martin (2004), since the 1960s two particular conceptions of selfhood have dominated theory and research in educational psychology. One is a "scientific self" that metacognitively makes itself and its actions objects of reflective awareness. The scientific self is assembled of hierarchically ordered components, and functions optimally as a rational decision maker who processes information efficiently. This is the self of self-concept and self-regulation in educational psychology. It operates autonomously and strategically, equipped with executive mechanisms that conduct the processing and manufacture of its descriptions, strategies, self-appraisals, and evaluations, all of which are assumed to be susceptible to the quantitative measurement and analyses of educational psychologists.

Martin (2004) acknowledges that this conception has been criticized by some in the field as insufficiently attentive to sociocultural contexts of development. Nonetheless, he notes, the response to such criticism most often has been simply to add additional variables that try to capture characteristics of the immediate social interactions of individual learners and teachers. Broader historical, sociocultural, moral, and political considerations are ignored, as are the ways in which they might be necessary to the constitution of persons and selves. The scientific self is self-contained and in charge of its own development. As Martin describes, "The central concern is for an individual actor capable of simultaneous action and reflection on this action, much like a stereotypic scientist in close scrutiny and judgment of experimental phenomena of interest" (pp. 193-194).

A second conception of selfhood employed in educational psychology is derived from the humanistic and romantic traditions. This is a self defined by its uniqueness and possession of a trove of private emotions, experiences, and identifications. As implicated in theories of self-esteem and self-worth, the "humanistic self" of educational psychology is a sensitive and reactive integral entity steered by an inherent propensity to seek its own development through self-expression. This conception of the self often is brought to bear by educational psychologists in consideration of the

socioemotional needs and deficiencies of learners, as well as matters of ethnic, racial and socioeconomic diversity. However, Martin (2004) observes, what is missing from such considerations are the ways in which the conceptions and self-esteem building recommendations of educational psychologists may in fact be contributing to the persistence of concerns they have been designed to ameliorate.

Martin (2004) declares that despite their differences, scientific and humanistic selves are both forms of what Cushman (1990) calls “the empty self.” The empty self is so termed because it experiences an absence that comes of being disconnected from a history of traditions of understanding and being that once provided an orientation to living as a person. Without the kind of meaningful communal involvements that engender strong moral, ethical, political and, perhaps, spiritual ties, the empty self is oriented narrowly toward itself and its own development. The social and cultural world becomes simply a place where one can be recognized and affirmed. Cushman adds that the empty self is idealized as masterful, replete with interior resources for self-management and capable of acquiring and exploiting what it needs or wants. However, lacking a strong sense of their historical and sociocultural origins, and suffering an absence of personal meaning, individuals are prone to compensate with acquisitiveness and consumption.

Martin (2004) alleges that the scientific and humanistic selves of educational psychology reflect persons who are empty. Persons, as conceived by educational psychologists, pursue academic tasks and social experiences by attending to their humanistically coined needs and potentials, and, like scientists, plan, monitor, and act strategically in the service of goals and interests. As Martin describes, however, ultimately the self of educational psychology is “the empty self disciplining itself to follow a series of tried and tested, relatively generic steps that somehow will finesse gaps in relevant knowledge and contextual variations to culminate in the accomplishment of life goals, both small and large” (p. 200).

With little understanding of the traditions by which they are oriented, however, such persons are unprepared for democratic participation. Martin (2004) contends that educational psychology does not support the kind of personhood demanded by genuine deliberative democracies. Endorsing Gutmann’s (1990) perspective on democratic education, Martin elaborates the kind of person capable of critical political participation and authentic engagement in deliberative democracies. This is a conception of personhood that is tied to a diversity of existing and emergent sociocultural traditions and practices, yet is capable of agentively seeking creative possibilities for more just and equitable forms of personal and communal life. These are persons who understand that individual freedom must be balanced with civic virtue, and who have acquired the knowledge and ethical commitments required to debate and decide democratically how that balance is achieved.

Martin (2004) deciphers that educational psychologists have mistaken characteristics of scientific and humanistic selves for those of the responsible citizen. From the perspective dominant in contemporary educational psychology, all that seems required for a life with others are the appropriate psychological attitudes

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and strategies—a strong sense of one’s own worth and executive processes of self-management. The result, Martin (2004) claims, is that educational psychologists glorify the autonomous, self-governing individual at the expense of the socioculturally immersed, intersubjectively constituted, committed citizen. Martin (2004) resolves that what is needed are conceptions of selfhood and personhood informed by greater consideration of the traditions of sociocultural concern and practice that shape and orient our interactions with ourselves and others. In this regard, more recently Martin (2007) has been buoyed by some educational psychologists’ efforts in theorizing a “communal self.” In concert with the theories of Vygotsky, Dewey, and Mead:

This communal self is always embedded in a co-constitutive self-other, self-societal dialectic. It is a self that is cut from the fabric of those sociocultural conventions and ways of life into which we are born as biophysical human beings, and come to exist and understand ourselves as particular kinds of persons. (p. 83)

However, Martin’s (2007) optimism is tempered by the observation that many attempts to develop more socioculturally oriented approaches still fall short. Often they treat classrooms as collections of individuals and presume the priority of individual cognitive activity over socioculturally contextualized interactivity.

#### FOUCAULT, HACKING, ROSE, AND AGENCY

The work described herein owes no small debt to Michel Foucault. Foucault was intellectual heir to a French tradition of critical history and philosophy of science. His intellectual legacy consists of a compelling collection of case studies and insights gleaned from tracing the “history of the present” (Foucault, 1977, p. 31) — how certain things came to matter in modernity, especially subjectivity. In wielding history to confront philosophical issues, Foucault’s “archeological” investigations reveal seismic historical shifts in the epistemologies by which knowledge is produced in science, philosophy, literature, and art. In subsequent “genealogical” studies, Foucault looked at how knowledge becomes connected to institutional power, exercised through the managerial and bureaucratic languages and practices of social and cultural institutions. Foucault held that the effect of these techniques was not simply to control people, but also to produce particular forms of subjectivity. Foucault identified techniques of objectification, classification, and normalization to which persons are subjected and formed as subjects. In works such as *The Birth of the Clinic* and *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault showed how modern institutions, such as the clinic and the prison, gained authority on the basis of claims to knowledge that distinguished deviance from normality. His work demonstrates how forms of institutional control supply the means by which individuals control themselves; the technologies employed initially for governing and controlling groups becoming instantiated in the individual.

According to Foucault, a complex of institutions conducts the ways we manage and understand ourselves and shapes our selfhood in a manner that perpetuates their authority. In this regard, Foucault recognized the significance of the human sciences in producing the selfhood characteristic of modernity. He drew attention to the way technologies created in the human sciences supplanted earlier techniques—diaries, letters, and confessions—as the means by which modern persons make themselves intelligible to themselves and evaluate and regulate their conduct. In so doing, Foucault ignited critical studies of subjectivity and the role of the human sciences in its construction.

Foucault interpreted human subjectivity as form rather than substance. In analyzing the historical conditions of its emergence, he sought to reveal how the modern self was neither universal nor given, but rather, a relatively recent configuration rendered in relations of knowledge and power. In his earlier work, Foucault argued that if the subject is produced by particular practices then it cannot have the sovereign autonomy and causal agency it is touted to possess in modern western societies. The subject is an effect of institutional functions. But while Foucault continued to reject the autonomous and disengaged subject of the Enlightenment, toward the end of his life, it appears he attempted to reconcile agency as a kind of self-formation capable of, albeit limited, critique and resistance (Gordon, 1995; McCarthy, 1990; Sawicki, 1991). Foucault conceded,

perhaps I've insisted too much on the technology of domination and power. I am more and more interested in the interaction between oneself and others and in the technologies of individual domination, the history of how an individual acts upon himself, in the technology of self. (1988, p. 19)

Despite the limitations on our actions placed by living within institutional structures and various “technologies of the self,” Foucault believed in human freedom. As he described his project, “I shall thus characterize the philosophical ethos appropriate to the critical ontology of ourselves as a historico-practical test of the limits we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings” (1984, p. 47). Foucault saw freedom as manifest in the practice of making choices and the value of his work in assisting people to choose in ways that would resist and overcome oppressive systems and practices of power.

Hacking and Rose have adopted Foucault’s insight that self-formation occurs within institutional orders and practices. They also follow Foucault in making the psy disciplines the target of their inquiries. Hacking and Rose embrace Foucault’s empirical approach to critical historical ontology. The study of archival texts and other historical evidence is empirical research. And, like Foucault, they eschew a theory of the essential person. The forms personhood take vary depending on the historical and socioculturally specific purposes and practices that organize our ways of being.

However, Hacking and Rose part company on the issue of agency. Rose sides with the earlier Foucault, insisting that agency is wholly unnecessary to explaining personhood. The source of human choice, action, and experience is not the

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autonomous actor. Rather, Rose explains, it is persons' "constant movement across different practices that subjectify them in different ways" (1998, p. 35). This stream of activity does not require agents born with the impulse to realize their autonomy. As Rose states:

It needs no account of the inherent forces within each human being that love liberty, seek to enhance their own powers or capacities, or strive for emancipation, that are prior to and in conflict with the dreams of civilization and discipline. (1998, p. 35)

Rose denies any capacity for agency beyond that produced as an institutional effect. In order for individuals to live as autonomous agents, certain capacities for thought and action need to be developed. However, these capacities only are acquired through an elaborate course of development in which they are cultivated purposefully to fit sanctioned forms of expression. Rose is adamant: "Our own 'agency' then is the result of the ontology we have folded in to ourselves in the course of our history and our practices" (1998, p. 189). For Rose, agency provides no psychological capital whatsoever.

For all the desires, intelligences, motivations, passions, creativities, will-to-self realization, and the like folded into us by our psychotechnologies, our own agency is no less artificial, no less fabricated, no less unnatural—and hence no less real, effective, confused, technical, machine-dependent—that the problematic agency of the robots, replicants, and monstrous symbioses that Donna Haraway uses to think of our existence ... (1998, p. 189)

For Hacking, persons are constituted by their descriptions and classifications. However, in contrast to Rose, Hacking defends that persons also are agents capable of exercising some degree of self-determination with respect to their choices and actions. Like the later Foucault, Hacking is unwilling to surrender the concept of human agency. The descriptions and classifications circulating in a society make some forms of personhood possible while preventing others. It may be the case, Hacking admits, that we are highly constrained by our sociocultural and biological constitution. Many of our choices may be imposed on us. Hacking advises, however, "The important thing is not to be overwhelmed by a sense of determinism" (2004, p. 286). Acknowledging his existentialism, Hacking contends that whatever of our personhood is determined by constraints of which we are unaware or powerless to change, at least some of what we are and become consists in the choices that we can make. As Hacking describes,

We push our lives through a thicket in which the stern trunks of determinism are entangled in the twisting vines of chance. Still, you can choose what you do, under the circumstances. The choices that you make, situated in the thicket, are what formed you and continue to form you. Responsibility is in part taking responsibility for that being that you become, as consequence of choosing. (2004, p. 282)

The preconditions of the looping effect are not only that we are responsive to the descriptions others have of us, but also, that what we are is partially constituted by our own particular interpretations and understandings of ourselves. Because human psychological beings are agents who, at least some of the time, are self-aware and reflective, their courses of action and ways of being are affected not only by the classifications of their societies and cultures, but also by their own conceptions of, and reactions to, such classifications (Sugarman, 2009). Thus, for example, the experience of being victimized by racial discrimination is not simply a social construction but is constituted partially by one's own interpretation and understanding of the significance of being the victim of such malice. In order to experience racial discrimination requires immersion in, and appropriation of, socioculturally available descriptions that lend intentionality and intelligibility to actions and experiences. However, much also depends on the inevitably unique experiential and ontological history of the particular person—an ontological history in which choice figures largely.

Furthermore, the interpretations and reactions of classified individuals often result in changes to systems of classification. People may rebel against the scientific, political, economic, medical, legal, educational, or religious institutions that classify them. Changes in human rights laws, policies, and practices, for example, have been realized as a direct consequence of the activities of multicultural and antiracism advocacy groups. Individuals are capable, at least potentially, of taking matters into their own hands. The self-determining properties of persons owe to their agency: "the deliberative, reflective activity of a human being in framing, choosing, and executing his or her actions in a way that is not fully determined by factors and conditions other than his or her own authentic understanding and reasoning" (Martin, Sugarman, & Thompson, 2003, p. 82).<sup>2</sup>

Despite the great value in Rose's approach, the kind of sociocultural determinism Rose insinuates is difficult to defend. The forms and meanings conveyed by sociocultural orders and practices are not fixed and static. They change over history. The ongoing change evinced in individual and collective life would not be possible if sociocultural structures and practices were fully determinate of human action and experience. In order for sociocultural structures and practices to change, they must be at least partially open-ended in ways that permit individuals to develop new descriptions, classifications, and possibilities for action and experience that can contribute to social and cultural transformation. While sociocultural structures and practices enable individuals to develop psychological capacities to transform these very structures and practices, the provision of such possibility is not determination (Martin, Sugarman, & Thompson). Of course, our conceptions of agency vary in degree and type, are influenced by specific cultural conceptions, and are always open to revision and change. However, persons are able to interact with, and resist, those classifications and practices devised to describe, study, and control them precisely because they have agentic capability.

THE NEED FOR CRITICAL APPROACHES TO EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

The pervasive influence of psychology in educational institutions originated with its provision of techniques to organize, simplify, rationalize, impose, and administer individual differences and other phenomena of educational significance (Danziger, 1990). However, in light of the work I have described, the disciplinary and professional practices of educational psychologists are not ontologically innocent. They contribute to creating a niche or space of possibility in which aspects and kinds of persons can appear as objects of concern, achieve ontological stability, and become targets of psychological intervention. By interpreting persons as isolated individuals, evoking various performances from them, measuring these performances, subjecting them to quantitative comparisons and evaluations, and ordering them in systems of classification, educational psychologists have rendered stable and transparent features and kinds of persons that might have remained undetected or, perhaps in some cases, nonexistent. The consequence is that schools have become environments infused with psychological language, psychological entities, and psychological authority. Students' conduct, characteristics, and proficiencies are comprehended in psychological terms. Dysfunctions and deviations are set against scientifically derived standards of normality and made troubling yet intelligible to both those afflicted and others charged with their administration. With a rapidly expanding system of diagnostic classification, a host of children's behavioral and educational maladies are readily identified, from pathological shyness (i.e., social anxiety disorder) to a pathological penchant for confrontation (i.e., oppositional defiance disorder), from disorders of speaking and listening (e.g., apraxia and auditory processing disorder) to disorders of reading and writing (e.g., dyslexia and dysgraphia).

In a similar manner, educational psychologists promulgate self-regulation, self-concept, self-esteem, self-efficacy, among myriad other attributes that implicitly advance particular conceptions of personhood. These technologies of self, not only are objects of study and instructional intervention, but also, are taken-up by individuals to recognize, examine, and evaluate their personal experiences, beliefs, feelings, memories, goals, and conduct. Further, this scrutiny occurs in relation to idealized conceptions of psychological persons. In North American educational institutions, such persons are psychologically autonomous, independent learners with unique potentialities, aspirations, and goals, and the moral responsibility to pursue and realize them by effect of their own means. It may be the case, as Martin (2004) suggests, that the selves such characteristics articulate are those of scientific and humanistic empty selves.

However, rarely do educational psychologists inquire critically as to their complicity in recreating the phenomena they seek to study and administer or conceptions of personhood presumed in their theorizing and research. Perhaps the most significant reason for this is a neglect of history. [Despite the multitude of graduate programs in educational psychology in North America, courses offered on the discipline's history are scarce.] The prevailing belief is that the objects of psychological research in

education are ahistorical. Learning, motivation, intelligence, creativity, giftedness, disability, the self and its array of attributes, teaching, instructional design, and so forth are identified, represented, and classified in ways believed to correspond to timeless divisions in human nature and true knowledge. Thus, the history of educational psychology, on those rare occasions when it is told, becomes a logical and inevitable unfolding of scientific progress in the discovery of natural objects that are the foundation for psychological investigations (e.g., Zimmerman & Schunk, 2003). Psychologists in the past were describing the same kinds of things we do today, only less precisely. However, not only are the divisions by which educational and psychological phenomena classified, historically contingent, so too are the phenomena themselves. The objects of investigation are, as Hacking (2006) describes, “moving targets.” They change as the culture changes. They change with the descriptions used to interpret ourselves as persons which, over the past century, increasingly are products of the psy disciplines.

The work I have discussed offers a needed corrective to the presentism of educational psychology. As Hacking, Rose, and others (e.g., Cushman, 1990; Danziger, 2003) have argued variously, the present should not be taken as ontologically definitive (as it is in most contemporary educational psychology). Rather, the psychology of the present is a point on a trajectory without a foreseeable terminus that has arrived with an ontologically constitutive history; ergo Foucault’s (1977) turn of phrase, “a history of the present.” A critical question for Foucault was, “in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent and the product of arbitrary constraints” (1984, p. 45). This problem is highly salient for educational psychology. If the phenomena of interest are not fixed by nature, but rather, assembled with the instruments of historical and sociocultural institutions, educational psychology will need to broaden its focus. Critical ontological inquiry, as described herein, would seem well suited to the task of demonstrating the historical and sociocultural contingency in our present ways of understanding and organizing educational psychology. By expanding the parameters of disciplinary inquiry to include a critical focus, there is opportunity for alternative accounts that could challenge in productive ways those that are dominant, creating new possibilities for psychological description, understanding, and being.

#### THE PSYCHOLOGY OF EDUCATING PERSONS

Theories of education are tied inevitably to conceptions of personhood and civic responsibility. This should come as no surprise given that education is a distinctively human activity aimed at preparing the young for entry into adult society. Consequently, psychological theories of education are required to say something about what persons are and in what way psychological theory contributes to that for which they are being prepared. In concluding, I sketch cursory responses to these issues.

The conceptions of personhood currently dominant in educational psychology (e.g., scientific and humanistic) are aligned with those of classic liberalism. In classic liberalism, persons are rational agents capable of shaping themselves and expressing their freedom through exercise of will and acts of reflection. These capacities issue from persons as fully autonomous entities who exist prior to and separate from the linguistic, social, and cultural practices in which they choose to participate. Fundamental to classic liberal doctrine is the ontological claim that the person is not constituted by any of the particular identifications, ends, or attachments he or she chooses, but rather, by the fundamental capacity to make choices. Thus, the liberal person is an independent agent capable of self-legislation. Societies and cultures are aggregates of individuals competitively or cooperatively pursuing their self-determined ends. The structure and function of liberal institutions founded on the classic view issues from the nature of persons so understood. Education in support of classic liberalism attempts to prepare individuals to author their own lives and does so in a way that privileges self-determined interests over civic responsibility. The expressive humanism endorsed by contemporary educational psychology is easily melded to the conception of the autonomous liberal individual given the Romantic strand deeply woven into modernity (cf. Taylor, 1989).

However, if persons not only are agentive, but also, historical and sociocultural beings in the strong constitutive sense, then the classic liberal conception of personhood no longer is tenable. Critical and historical ontology shows that persons are not constituted essentially from within, but relationally from without. Their understanding of themselves, their capacities for reflection and choice, their identities, their values, and their purposes are historically and socioculturally conditioned in every respect. The particularities of time and place are neither simply additional independent variables nor error variance, but rather, are features of the human condition in which much of our “nature” resides. From this perspective, education becomes vitally important as the means by which individuals are initiated into the historical, sociocultural orientations to being and understanding requisite for reflective personhood.

Further, as Martin (2004) suggests, ontologically informed proposals for emancipatory forms of democratic education would seem to require a conception of persons who originate within sociocultural traditions and practices, yet are capable of agentively exploring possibilities for enriching personal and collective life. Deliberative democracy is shared, concerted action. However, as noted political philosopher, Hannah Arendt (1958) pointed out, democracy also requires articulated and sustained diversity.

One approach to the psychology of education that accommodates these considerations has been proposed by Martin, Sugarman, and Hickinbottom (2003). In their view, critical self-understanding and reflective personhood of the kinds demanded by deliberative democracies are built through an acquired appreciation of the historical and sociocultural traditions and practices by which personhood is achieved. In understanding that we are formed within traditions and practices, but not fully determined by them, we can begin to grasp how others may be constituted

similarly, but within differing historical and sociocultural circumstances. With knowledge of how historical and sociocultural contingencies shape our beliefs, emotions, biases, choices, and actions, the assumptive background to our lives is cast in relief and can be put to personal and collective scrutiny. Similarly, with such knowledge we are more likely to engage openly and consider seriously differing conceptions and practices of personhood.

The kind of engagement Martin, Sugarman, and Hickinbottom envision requires critically discerning one's own sociocultural background while being receptive to the possibilities presented by those of others. In this way, there can be ongoing dialogical exchange in the shared effort to expand the horizon of intelligibility within which to understand and respond to individual and collective concerns. A genuinely open, critical examination and exchange of perspectives also appears to demand a set of communicative virtues: civility, recognition, equality, perseverance in understanding, and open-mindedness. These virtues are more likely to be valued by those who have come to understand the significance of the commitments and concerns that define one's life, while understanding that the commitments and concerns of others, while perhaps wildly divergent, may be no less significant for them. As Martin, Sugarman and Hickinbottom assert,

these considerations are precisely the conditions required for sustained attempts to understand and cooperate with others who also may be striving to uncover better and more equitable possibilities for living together across different social and cultural backgrounds and ways of life. (p. 19)

In this light, there are two primary educational objectives that educational psychology might serve in helping to prepare the kinds of persons capable of participation in deliberative democracies. The first is assisting learners to acquire a thorough appreciation of the historical and sociocultural origins of self-understanding and reflective agency. The second is developing the dispositions needed to engage critically and respectfully, alternative conceptions and practices of personhood. These dispositions would include a view of such exchange as an opportunity for enhancing personal and collective development and for supporting democratic forms of deliberation.

There obviously is much that remains to be worked out with respect to the various ways in which a critical psychology of education might be pursued and the education of persons thus conceived and theorized. However, my hope is that educational psychologists might be stimulated and encouraged to take up the challenge of broadening their disciplinary perspectives to include critical forms of inquiry.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> For specific sources see Hacking (1995a) for adolescence, child abuse, suicide, and teenage pregnancy; (1995b) for multiple personality disorder; (1998) for fugue; and (2006) for autism and homosexuality.
- <sup>2</sup> See Martin, Sugarman, and Thompson (2003) for elaboration and defense of this conception of human agency.

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## 5. SCHOOL SUCKS! DECONSTRUCTING TAYLORIST OBSESSIONS

Every day I come out of there I feel ripped off. I'm getting the shit kicked out of me and I'm helpless to stop it. A good day's work is being tired but not exhausted. (Morgan, 1989, p. 55)

### INTRODUCTION

In the early twentieth century American workplace, Frederick Taylor was the icon of industrial efficiency. Taylor's time and motion studies were used to regulate worker's regimens and to constitute success in the new modernist science of mechanizing workers to maximize productivity. Taylor's creation, Scientific Management (Taylor, 1947), had a profoundly dehumanizing effect upon the workplace (Morgan, 1989). In his most cited study of the movement of pig iron, Taylorist applications generated a four fold increase in the amount of labor produced by one man. Essentially, this was accomplished by exploiting workers under the guise of increasing productivity to raise wages. As Taylor (1947) himself observed after a particularly manipulative conversation with an uneducated, immigrant worker:

This seems to be rather rough talk. And indeed it would be if applied to an educated mechanic, or even an intelligent laborer. With a man of the mentally sluggish type as Schmidt it is appropriate and not unkind, since it is effective in fixing his attention on the high wages which he wants and away from what, if it were called to his attention, he would probably consider impossibly hard work.... (p. 46).

The effect of Taylor's scientific management was to reinforce the modernist thinking that all problems could be solved with a rational, logical, and empirically based algorithm. Exploitation of workers was fair if it increased the profitability of the corporation. In the words of one worker discussing General Motors' use of this management style: "When the company gets a bug up its ass to improve quality, they come down on you for every little mistake" (Aronowitz, 1974, p. 28).

Traditional educational psychology has followed Taylor's work with an obsession for modernist thinking and scientific rationalism: quantifiable conceptualizations of normative outcomes through an educational process governed by controls and

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assessments. *School Sucks! Deconstructing Taylorist Obsessions* examines the deleterious result of the over-use of the Taylorist and colonialist dominations in the operations of schools. This chapter defends the potential of a critical educational psychology to liberate minds for the creative enterprise of living in a truly democratic society.

#### SEARCHING FOR AN ANSWER

If critical educational psychology had a face: what would it look like? The beard of Paulo Freire; the eyes of Lev Vygotsky; the mouth of Karl Marx; the brow of Shirley Steinberg; the moustache of Peter McLaren; the chin of Audre Lorde? Critical educational psychology is the artistic and philosophically infused amalgam of consciousness created by individuals who have raged against the ubiquitous tyranny of the measures of central tendency, standardized minds, and woeful allegiance to conformity masked as a scientific rationality. Critical pedagogy, the pedagogy of hope and the progenitor of critical educational psychology, is the struggle to expose traditionally situated public and non-secular schools as the agent of society responsible for perpetuating cultural reproduction and maintaining a “race-, class-, and gender-divided society” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 23).

My connection to critical pedagogy is visceral and precedes my introduction to *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970). As I continue my work as a professor of education, I try to always remember that my professional purpose is tied to my life experience; my *perezhivanie*. *Perezhivanie* was Vygotsky’s (1994) term to describe our subjective experience of seeing and being engaged in our own lives. Knowing that experience is subjective and personal shapes my perspective of critical pedagogy by creating a catharsis with my students’ struggles to overcome the damage done to their creativity by years of oppression from No Child Left Behind’s dogmatic and authoritarian assessment-driven schooling.

Although I was too young to articulate that I was in fact oppressed by my early school experience, I now understand that this is the lesson of hegemony. Your oppressors are not going to volunteer that your vapid schooling is a training ground for conformity. And if you want a different experience, you must change it for yourself! The oppressor, whomever that may be, wants you to stay right where you are. Question not! Hegemony depends upon the surrender of the flummoxed and weak to the overpowering force of authority, be they police, politician, or schoolmaster. I have always resisted. Following Foucault, “At every moment, step by step, one must confront what one is thinking and saying with what one is doing, with what one is” (Miller, 1994, p. 9).

When I was a young child, my family was very poor. My father was a veteran of World War II, and I was born the late 1940’s baby boom. Although my parents were employed, their income was marginal. We lived in a two-room apartment

on the third floor of a decrepit tenement building (read: fire trap). One room was our family's bedroom, and the other room was everything else except the toilet. At night, the building's owner would turn off the heat, and when we awoke for my parent's work and my school, the apartment was just slightly warmer than the exterior's cold New Hampshire winter air. The morning routine began by getting dressed while standing on a chair. My father said, 'heat rises,' and I was convinced that it was actually warmer 17 inches up off the floor. The next diversion from the cold was the ritual removal of a dead rat from our cupboard. Trapped by a large wire mouse-trap, the deceased rat would exit through the toilet. Following that frightening and unappetizing prelude, I would eat breakfast and head off to school.

School for me was tediously boring and an excruciatingly painful experience. The regimens of endlessly copying cursive letters, lining up, and waiting for the bell to ring to release for recess or home killed countless hours. As the hours added up to years, and the years, a decade, my father's occupation greatly improved, and life at home changed. But school remained the same. Now in the tenth grade, the result of school's process left me bored, lethargic, and depressed. Every morning while attending Manchester Central High School, I would enter a classroom, put my head down on the desk, and doze off to sleep or lapse into some trance-like daydream. Generally, my teachers ignored me. My absence of participation gleaned D's and F's, and I was a 'discipline problem' accruing detentions and suspensions on a regular basis. In the vernacular of the time, I was bored shitless.

This absence of activity was not a threat to my teachers, but my active rebellions were. Years of disciplining and punishments had the stultifying effect of depressing my mind, body, and spirit. McNicol Gardine (2005) describes this well:

Such bodily docility is quite familiar to educators. We can reflect upon the extent to which we require immobility from even the youngest students in schools, where their bodies become merely vehicles required to transport their heads to school, and their bodies become in our command – eyes on me, sit up straight, stay put, gym class is later, no talking, touching, squirming, and so on. We can reflect, too, on how deep seated is our presumed understanding of bodily “troubles”: fidgeting, not staying seated, annoying others, making noise, are all judged “misbehavior” and, once released for a well-monitored time on the playground, pent-up bodily energies easily become overly aggressive. (p. 41)

At the end of my second year in the public high school, a new school opened in Manchester, N.H. The Derryfield School was a private, day school, and it promised “excellence in education.” Being that my father's economic situation was much improved, I was retained in tenth grade and began my education anew at the Derryfield School. Although Derryfield was no center for critical pedagogy, the faculty was caring, intelligent, and dared to take risks for the benefit of their students.

And I was a big risk. I smoked pot and consumed beer like it was oxygen. Frequently I'd be arrested for garden variety misdemeanours: shoplifting, firing guns within the city limits, creating disturbances. There was a lot to turn around.

While a student at Derryfield, I met Peter Ordway, a teacher who shared my love of risk and adventure. Although it would be dishonest to say that the relationship began to flourish at first sight, by the time we had both been ejected from the school's community, we had developed a special bond. I soon discovered Peter's keen capacity for creating chaos. Peter's proclivities were centered around a profound pleasure in pursuing play. While many of his contemporaries, Harvard and assorted Ivy League grads, focused on industrious endeavours, Peter was more likely to be found on his tennis court or sipping a gin and tonic on the family's historic saltbox breezeway. Peter loved a buzz, and I thoroughly shared his passion for pleasure. In addition to all of his playful qualities, Peter was a sedulous reader. Peter was intellectually curious, and he was constantly immersed in some sort of physical or intellectual challenge: building boats, learning to climb, or traveling to exotic places.

In my early twenties, Peter introduced me to an adventure school called Outward Bound. Outward Bound is an international, experiential learning organization based upon the philosophy that one's reach exceeds their grasp. Founded by Kurt Hahn in the early 1950's, Outward Bound's motto is "To serve to strive, and not to yield." I was ready for a challenge, and on Peter's recommendation, I attended a 26 day mountaineering school in Colorado.

Following that, I attended the University of New Hampshire and studied philosophy of education with Professor Dwight Webb. Dwight introduced me to *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970), and he infused me with a sense of hope for change in education. The 1970's were a wonderful time for challenging the modernist thinking that persisted in institutions like schools, government, and even marriage. During the inchoate period of my adult development, I was sanguine about the possibilities for change; remaking the schools I have formerly found so stultifying. In Dwight I had found another mentor in my quest to make learning engaging and meaningful. Both Peter and Dwight loved the maverick in me. Together the three of us forged a friendship that brought us innumerable joys.

The experience of many of today's youth and their educational ordeal is often no less debilitating than my first ten years of public schooling. Fortunately, I was able to escape factory-styled, Taylorist public schools because of a class change within my family. We went from being a poor, 'working class' family to middle class (and then back to working class again after my father's bankruptcy at the end of high school). The short respite from poverty meant that my parents had enough money for their son to attend a decent school. The relationships, stimulation, and learning created an awakening in me.

My relationships with Peter and Dwight have continued for several decades (Peter died in 2001) and they helped to bring me to the place I am today: a senescent professor, creatively maladjusted (Kohl, 1994), and challenging the standardization and sterilization of learning. For the past 40 years, I have been in and out of the

experience of raging against the quotidian forces of education. Some years, I admit, I did little to resist. School culture can be a powerful agent of cultural reproduction. One rebel and forty institutionalized teachers does not equate to rethinking schools or reclaiming youth. For my own survival, I admit to taking the easy way out and hitting the exits as soon as my opportunities presented themselves. I learned early on that the culture of the school depends upon the intelligence and passion of the principal. After my first failed encounters with indolent and uninspired leaders, I was able to meet and work for some polymath principals: Al Rocci, Gene Hawley, and Jeff Eben.

For the strength to battle back against the massive beasts of conformity during the last 15 years, I thank Dwight Webb, Peter McLaren, and Karen Carey. These courageous individuals provide me with the hope that my resistance to conformity and cultural reproduction can abide and that we will win the fight to provide a critical educational psychology in our schools. Since the turn of the century, I have been teaching teachers to challenge the Taylorist assumptions of No Child Left Behind and the vapid practices of scripted instruction. My mentors remind me of the exigencies for raging against the force of politics designed to dumb down our students (Gatto, 2002).

Unfortunately, for far too many, the battle with school has already been lost. The school to prison pipeline is real, and the alienation of many youth is palpable. Especially in poor and urban areas, schools are in disastrous condition. Cities like Camden, N.J. are in economic and social free fall, and within poor communities many of the schools are sites of violence and chaos. Taylorist solutions such as adopting common core state standards are not going to fix the problems of education in our most needy schools and communities. Rather, I suggest we listen to the disenfranchised and join them in their revolution to change the disequilibrium of rich and poor. When we hear students exclaim, "School sucks!" we need to respond with positive solutions, not punitive denials.

The reductive, adolescent critique, "School sucks!" is the truth. But to hear this ubiquitous claim is the bane of every teacher's existence. A bold refutation of our existence, essence, and teacher identity, the words can cut at our very core. Like the lyrics of *The Wall*, those students who do not resist and fight back or drop out become indolent bricks in the wall. Roger Water's song, *The Wall*, so succinctly captured people's rage that the album became the third all-time largest selling hit ever released. Water's words, "we don't need no education, we don't need no thought control" (1979) clearly articulated a generation's frustration with schooling's depersonalization; hence, "you're just another brick in the wall."

After bringing the revolution of experiential learning to my consciousness, and believing that I could be the harbinger of all the good education can deliver, I had become a teacher. Yet, young and untested, I had not experienced the monster of public education as a member of the other side. I quickly learned that my pedagogy of experiential learning and liberation was not going to gain adoption by my new colleagues. My senior colleagues called me naïve; administrators resisted my attempts to leave the building on learning walks or other experiential education

ventures. My hopes and idealized dreams about education and schools I imagined were shattered when I heard this scorn, 'school sucks,' from my students. What happened?

Had I become a part of all that I had despised? Sadly, few of us can deny that these words challenge our teacher identity and leave us to ask ourselves: how valid are these critiques? We wonder: what are our students really saying? What does 'sucks' mean for them? In today's schools, teacher self-efficacy can be both constructed and shattered within the same day. Period to period and hour to hour, we face a seas of hope, possibility, despair, and apathy. Maintaining our sense of direction and staying on course are ever-present challenges. Every day we need to reinvent ourselves, and each day is different from the last. One of the great values of the job, its diversity of experience, is also one of the biggest challenges. Our energy gets drained with each class.

The best teachers know that teaching is a protagonist's performance, and the show is totally dependent upon our active presence. We think that we are the captains of our classrooms, and although most of the leadership must come from within ourselves, the education machine is ever churning out new challenges to thwart our creativity. As we work to support islands of hope and schools of possibility, forces of repression continue to press for more testing, greater security, and zero tolerance for free expression.

Despite our cries for a critical pedagogy, still school sucks. Not for everyone, but for far too many. With dropout rates reaching the high 60-70%'s in the most challenged communities (Spring, 2008), we cannot ignore that for vast numbers of our students in the land of K-12's public schools, the disconnection between their lives and the realities of schooling make 'school sucks' the truth. They say this by being late, sleeping in class, ignoring our lectures, retreating to the bathroom, disregarding our invitations to participate, skipping class or school, failing to perform even the simplest tasks, and finally, by leaving.

Many students consciously decide they will not learn from us and school is not for them. To borrow from Paul Simon, students have 'fifty ways' to escape the classroom. Herb Kohl (1994) called this phenomenon "refusal to learn." He took this concept from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's "creative maladjustment." The system is wrong; therefore, I will adjust to protect myself from a bad situation. Too many teachers compromise the intelligence, creativity, and enthusiasm of their students with pedagogies of standardization and impersonalization. Following No Child Left Behind, standardization becomes 'best practice' and deviation from this capitulation to the test puts the teacher at risk for firing or other administrative rebuke. In this hostile learning environment, the exigencies of teacher survival trump any student-centered, creative, or meaning-making activities. Just feed students the facts.

New? No, this negative assessment of school is not a new phenomenon. Many notable geniuses gave school thumbs down and left for their own, personalized reasons. For example, Nobel Prize winner Rabindranath Tagore (Literature: 1913)

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wrote that [School], “forcibly snatches children away from a world full of mystery of God’s own handiwork, full of the suggestiveness of personality.” ([learninfreedom.org/Nobel\\_hates\\_school.html](http://learninfreedom.org/Nobel_hates_school.html)). He goes on to state that schools depersonalize the individual child and instead attempt to assimilate children into one preconceived identity. Albert Einstein also saw the ways in which schooling attempts to strangle “the holy curiosity of inquiry; for this delicate little plant, aside from stimulation, stands mainly in need of freedom; without this it goes to wreck and ruin without fail” ([learninfreedom.org/Nobel\\_hates\\_school.html](http://learninfreedom.org/Nobel_hates_school.html)).

And finally, Literature laureate (1925) George Bernard Shaw compares schooling to the dehumanization of prisons. He states that:

...there is, on the whole, nothing on earth intended for innocent people so horrible as school. To begin with, it is a prison. But it is in some respects more cruel than a prison. In a prison, for instance, you are not forced to read books written by the wardens, and beaten and otherwise tormented if you cannot remember their utterly unmemorable contents. In prison you are not forced to sit listening to the turnkeys discoursing without charm or interest on subjects that they don’t understand and don’t care about, and are therefore incapable of making you understand or care about. ([learninfreedom.org/Nobel\\_hates\\_school.html](http://learninfreedom.org/Nobel_hates_school.html)).

Of course the various quotes from Nobel winners were crafted in the early-mid 1900s and skeptics may say “Well, it is different today!” Unfortunately that is not the case. In speaking of their contempt for school, one middle level student made the following statement,

I hate school. I don’t mean it’s a pain in the ass. I don’t mean it’s annoying. I mean that if you told me today that if I drove a red-hot nail through my hand and in exchange for that I could have my degree and wouldn’t have to go to class anymore, in two seconds that nail would be through my hand. I’m not joking. I’m not being hyperbolic, either. Week in and week out of having to drag myself to an experience I loathe so deeply and so passionately has been one of the biggest psychic drains on me of the last two and a half years. ([school-survival.net/articles/school/Man\\_I\\_Hate\\_School.php](http://school-survival.net/articles/school/Man_I_Hate_School.php)).

As schoolteachers have been stripped of their creativity and autonomy through draconian policies of standardization and zero tolerance, it is not surprising that some children are equating today’s classroom with the institutions such as prison or of slavery. A Frederick Douglass inspired analysis of this parallel by thirteen year old Jada Williams was recently reported by Liz Dwyer (2012):

In a bold comparative analysis of *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Jada Williams, a 13-year old eighth grader at School #3 in Rochester, New York, asserted that in her experience, today’s education system is a modern-day version of slavery. According to the Fredrick Douglass Foundation

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of New York, the schools' teachers and administrators were so offended by Williams' essay that they began a campaign of harassment—kicking her out of class and trying to suspend her—that ultimately forced her parents to withdraw her from the school. In her essay, which was written for a contest, Williams reflected on what Douglass heard his slave master, Mr. Auld, telling his wife after catching her teaching Douglass how to read. “If you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there will be no keeping him,” Auld says. “It will forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master.”

Williams wrote that overcrowded, poorly managed classrooms prevent real learning from happening and thus produces the same results as Mr. Auld's outright ban. She wrote that her white teachers—the vast majority of Rochester students are black and Hispanic, but very few teachers of colour—are in a “position of power to dictate what I can, cannot, and will learn, only desiring that I may get bored because of the inconsistency and the mismanagement of the classroom.” (p. 4)

According to psychologist Sarah Fitz-Claridge students who experience this complete and unabashed hatred of school should not feel alone. Instead they need to know that their feelings are valid and that although others experience similar reactions:

they don't feel entitled to say so, and many can't bear to think about it so they hardly even know how they feel. You are not mad—you don't have a Deep Psychological Problem; and you are not bad for wanting to live your life the way you choose, doing what you think right—that is what everyone should be doing. You are not the problem: coercion is the problem. Being forced to go to school is the problem. ([school-survival.net/articles/school/Who\\_wouldn\\_t\\_be\\_school\\_phobic.php](http://school-survival.net/articles/school/Who_wouldn_t_be_school_phobic.php))

As powerful as this critique can be, these words too often face thick walls of denial. The defences of the school machine can be unyielding. The dissenter's voices are discounted as singular, rude, uninformed, and inaccurate. When students are constructed as the “trouble” and they leave or are forced out of the door, what's left to be done? Are the administrators truly happy to see these failures go away and leave the ranks of our schools? Do our teachers and administrators just shrug off our teenagers' rejection of school as reductive, adolescent assessments? Do educators simply fall victim to the immaturity inherent within the adolescent's argument that ‘school sucks’, and respond as did Nick Nolte in the movie *Teachers*: “Yeah, but what we got (meaning the students) sucks!” Is our only defence denial or a repression of the truth behind this all too common slur of the disaffected? Or could it be true? Should we take this seriously?

We believe our students, both the brightest and the disaffected, are telling their truth when they say ‘school sucks.’ Students are honestly reporting on their reality

and their feelings; the alienation and the pain they experience within their schools and the twenty-first century, business-centered educational system. Clearly, the consequences of these student's conclusions are having a disastrous affect upon their school outcomes, their family's lives, and the communities they inhabit.

In an earlier writing, *Urban Dropouts: Why Persist?* (Hilton & Goodman, 2010), my colleague, Adriel Hilton, and I elaborated on the dropout toll in one community: Bridgeport, CT, U.S.A. This city has experienced dropout rates exceeding 50% in its public high schools! For every entering freshman class of 1,000 students, graduation numbers rarely exceed 400. Despite interventions proposed by several prominent educational consultants, Bridgeport's culturally mismatched educational praxis still fails to dramatically change the course of its dropout dilemma.

This phenomenon of gross failure is not unusual; it is ubiquitous within historically subordinated and marginalized groups (Beachum & McCray, 2011). The effects are wide-spread and schools are seemingly complicit in the promotion of failure that this process has been given the metaphor: the school to prison pipeline (Elias, 2013)! According to Marilyn Elias in her excellent report on policies and practices that favor incarceration over education:

The school to prison pipeline starts (or is best avoided) in the classroom. When combined with zero-tolerance policies, a teacher's decision to refer students for punishment can mean they are pushed out of the classroom – and much more likely to be introduced into the criminal justice system. (p. 39)

Beachum and McCray (2011) further articulate these issues of alienation attending school failure in their brilliant critique of school and culture: *Cultural Collision and Collusion: Reflections on Hip-hop, Culture, Values and Schools*. In districts rife with poverty, crime, drug use, and gangs, it is too easy to lay the blame on the victims of this breakdown: the children. "The situation in far too many schools is one of despair, poverty, isolation, and distress" (Obiakar & Beachum, 2005, p. 20). When the teachers and administrators give up and abdicate their agency over the attendant issues of the distressed community, the collapse of the school can be hope's demise. "When the school culture is characterized by value disagreement, lack of communication, and little collegiality among teachers and students, many students view themselves as incapable, incompetent, and worthless" (Beachum & McCray, 2011, p. 38).

Of course, there are very successful districts, too. The Clovis Unified School District in Clovis, CA touts multiple Blue Ribbon Schools and numerous scholastic and athletic accolades attributing to its stellar reputation. But with NCLB and other state and national bell curve assessments, schooling has become a zero sum game and with every winner, 'someone has to fail' (Labaree, 2010). For every Clovis, there is a Newark, a Bridgeport, and a Compton to balance the equation. My point: there are too many losers. Since writing *Alternatives in Education* (Goodman, 1999), 2,000,000 more students have left public school for home schooling. This triples the number from 1999 to include a total of 3,000,000 students removed

from public education's ranks. Parents and students who can choose are voting with their feet and walking away from the public schools. The less fortunate, those without parental support to create a home school, have no choice; they are simply out.

Whatever the choices, I am weary of test-driven, bureaucratic, policy-polluted, and violence-wracked public schools. Traditional educational psychologists have played a large role in convincing school policy makers that bringing the 'science' of learning to the classroom logically aligns with the Taylorist and business-orientated culture of American capitalism. America wants to be Number 1, and this status is accorded to those who follow the behavioural goals and performance objectives of direct instruction. Sheepishly adhering to the specifications of the learning experts, in this case the scientific rationalists, our own educational psychologists, teachers can expect total efficiency within their classrooms and maximum test scores from their students. The metrics of this formula for curing our schools' ills are simply logical and scientific: buy the empirically proven program and pass the test.

Of this commoditized vision of traditional educational psychology, the critical educational psychologists take umbrage. Learning must be engaging, meaning-making, and exciting. Shy of this, school is all of the bad things our non-learning, school haters have reported. As I have expressed in an earlier publication (Brock & Goodman, 2013), for far too many, 'school sucks' is an understatement!

As organizational behaviour and leadership models have changed the enlightened workplace (for example Google's transformed offices) from a Taylorist, time and motion science to a more humanistic and egalitarian art of working together, so schools must change from factory-modelled, credit-banking warehouses of control to spaces of life long liberation and joyful learning. Learning liberation is best achieved through a critical educational psychology. Critical educational psychology combines the best of critical pedagogy's revolutionary multiculturalism (McLaren, 1997) as well as the critical contributions of many of this volume's writers; for example, Jeff Sugarman (2010), Anna Stetsenko (2002), Stephen Vassallo (2013), and Athanasios Marvakis (1996). This critical educational psychology (C.E.P.) calls for Vygotsky-infused, socially conscious, and artful connections to student's families, their communities, and one's self. Learning needs to be empowering, personal, and meaning-making for all of the participants in the educational endeavour. If we, as teachers and administrators, can break free from the chains of old schooling habitus and move forward, the liberation of our students will not be far behind.

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CHRISTOPHER BOYLE

## 6. 'WHAT'S THE *SCORE*' WITH SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

*Do we carry on regardless or is there any added value?*

### INTRODUCTION

The science of psychology has many varied divisions and strands under which the noble profession is viewed through diverse lenses. Generally, people seem to have an interest in psychology and seek opinions from the psychologist on various topics from philately to pilates. Boyle and Lauchlan (2009) make reference to a journalist who when struggling for a decent quote or angle for a story would usually contact a psychologist as "...not only couldn't you make it up, you get better stuff than if you made it up" (p. 78). This author is able to recall various instances where, on being asked 'what do you do?' and stating 'I am a psychologist', the wide and varied responses are always interesting and usually range from believing you are a fortune teller to being an expert in telepathy. The chapter author recalls a memorable exchange when depositing money at a local bank. The teller decides that he wants to know my employment status and on being informed that 'I am a psychologist' he looks straight at me and says with a straight face 'do you not get sick of being able to read people's thoughts?' Probably! It was just as well the teller could not read my thoughts, as he was not a qualified psychologist, at that moment. The lesson is that it is probably better to say that you work in insurance – it limits the conversation somewhat! The public are interested in psychology – there is a certain *je ne sais quoi* or intrigue regarding the subject of psychology and maybe by extension to the psychologist. With this comes a certain reputation and expectancy in that practising psychologists are expected to produce some sort of result, or some sort of end product, that is actually meaningful and with a commensurate level of skill so that not just anyone off the street could do it. The main focus of this chapter, and indeed this book, is to consider the unique contribution of psychology as it is applied in educational settings. Are we skilled psychologists or are we psychologists with skills in some areas that are not necessarily psychological? This chapter considers the issue of 'value added' or more specifically whether utilising the services of an educational psychologist adds value to the client so that s/he is in a position to positively move forward based on that intervention. Whether or not this is indeed the case in school psychology is queried in this chapter.

### WHAT IS SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY?

The profession of educational psychology<sup>1</sup> is widely regarded as coming into being in 1913 with the appointment of Cyril Burt as the educational psychologist for the London County Council. He was an expert on assessment and went on to become the first British psychologist to be knighted in 1946 (Hearnshaw, 1979). It can be reasonably argued that the onset of professional psychology stemmed from an educational strand and the need for cognitive testing so that students could be placed in alternative schooling. This was the case with the early work in the French education system of Alfred Binet. This work began to pervade into other areas of the population and much work was done towards the end of the First World War with the testing of US soldiers' cognitive abilities (Danziger, 1990). So, this was school psychology, with the focus on scoring and the rarified world of psychometric testing. A domain of psychology, only understood by those initiated in the world of individual differences and identified through various modes of child testing using standardised instruments.

Over many years, the role of the school psychologist has moved beyond testing to involve different areas of psychology. There are several examples of the role of the school psychologist being involved in different types of psychology (e.g. Toland & Carrigan, 2011; Boyle, 2007a, 2007b) and this will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. The International School Psychology Association has conducted several studies into various aspects of school psychology, including types of psychological work employed and the demographic makeup of the profession in many different countries (e.g. Jimerson, Skokut, Cardenas, Malone, & Stewart, 2008a; Jimmerson et al., 2008b; Jimerson, Stewart, Skokut, Cardenas, & Malone, 2009a; Jimerson, Annan, Skokut, & Renshaw, 2009b; Jimerson, Alghorani, Darweish, & Abdelaziz, 2010). These studies found that the role was extremely mixed across many countries where it was a recognised profession whilst in some countries, for example Italy; the profession of school or educational psychology did not clearly exist. Notwithstanding the difficulties inherent in attempting to define the role of the school psychologist, Jimerson, Oakland & Farrell (2007, p. 1) put forward their perspective as to the most appropriate definition of the role of the school psychologist,

...one that collectively provides individual assessment of children who may display cognitive, emotional, social or behavioural difficulties; develops and implements primary and secondary intervention programmes; consults with teachers, parents and other relevant professionals; engages in programme development and evaluation; conducts research and helps prepare and supervise others.

Similar to other branches of psychology, those in school psychology are in the fortunate position of being able to study psychology twice, once at undergraduate and then at the more specialised postgraduate level. The notion of the school psychology role can vary on many factors but in the public sector *doing* psychology

can be regarded as being difficult mainly because there are conflicting demands on the school psychologist's time. Boyle and Lauchlan (2009) highlight the struggles of the job with the 'drag' away from psychology into administration, perennial difficulties with the difference in expectations of teachers and schools, which can lead to a comfort in practice. This is suggesting that it is easier to do psychometrics than say that of dynamic assessment (DA) which Lauchlan (2012) suggests is to do with the extra effort required for DA, as opposed to the lower level skills required to carry out a cognitive assessment. The suggestion here is that the practice of psychometric testing becomes less challenging after a time as once the psychologist has mastered the skill, this chapter author would argue that the level of practitioner difficulty plateaus. The practice of DA is constantly changing and challenging, as the psychologist has to advance the student's knowledge through forms of mediation. In short, DA is difficult to master therefore the psychologist is constantly having to adapt his/her practice to improve the ability of each individual child.

#### *The State of Psychometrics*

The added value of the school psychologist is not always clear depending on the particular method used. From a historical perspective an influential UK publication by Gillham (1978) entitled *Reconstructing Educational Psychology* was challenging to many practitioners for many years. Gillham's premise was that the work of the psychologist was too limited, too basic, and that the notion of there being psychological skills applied was moot. It was suggested that "...few psychologists give an intelligence test without a sense of unease, without a note of apology (or defensiveness) as if engaging in some shameful act...it is mainly due to an increasing awareness amongst psychologists of the conceptual and practical limitations of traditional tests" (Gillham, 1978, p. 82). This was a controversial statement as it was revolutionary and was written at a time where casework and more specifically psychometrics really were the mainstay of educational psychology, certainly in the UK. At around the same time Nixon (1976) was considering the role of the educational psychologist in Australia but the focus was very different. Nixon was more concerned with making better use of psychometrics and states one of the main roles of the psychologist is to "assess and place" (p. 65).

School psychology may have its origins in testing and the inevitably special school placements but there has been an evolution with various levels of innovation evident in contemporary practice (e.g. Burnham, 2013; King & Kellock, 2002; Toland & Carrigan, 2011). However, in Australia the picture could still be regarded as bleak, with much practice still heavily focused towards the testing regime. Bell and McKenzie (2013) report a recent study on the role of school psychologists in the city of Melbourne, Australia, and highlight "...the current climate within which psychologists work and the particular emphasis which is placed on the use of psychometric assessments, not only in determining eligibility for funding but in general practice" (p. 70). It seems that school psychologists work in institutions

guided by policy, which is effectively created by politicians and bureaucrats who believe they represent public opinion. Therefore, psychologists do not practise in a social vacuum but are influenced by the determinants of their environment. The researchers also indicate that more of an understanding is required in the community as to what exactly the role of the educational psychologist can be. The use of psychometrics is more based on the idea of finding out the weaknesses of those tested i.e. what are they not good at. This forms the basis of a model of deficit, which is not absolutely helpful in considering a balanced approach to support in schools or in the community. As it stands, if the emphasis on the job is continually focused on psychometric assessment, then following on from this the training at university will also focus on this deficit model. Therefore, when new psychologists complete their post-graduate training program they are, in fact, limited in what their understanding of the role should be. This can become cyclical in nature, as is shown in [Figure 1](#), in that the role is poorly defined from various angles and the service user dictates the major emphasis on what the role of the psychologist should be. As a result of this, the psychologist loses the ability to offer certain services available as reasonable psychological practice e.g. counselling or systemic interventions. This can then lead to the notion of the school psychology service being limited either theoretically or practically.

In summary, [Figure 1](#) depicts the situation where the role of the school psychologist is ill defined and as a result the organisation, which has requested the psychological input (service user) for a particular reason, has undue influence over what the psychologist *should* do, irrespective of what the psychologist *can* do. This, thus, results in a seemingly limited professional role. In many cases this is highlighted in the psychologist being heavily involved in providing a 'score', which dictates whether funding and/or specialist placement should be provided, which means the role of the school psychologist has not really changed since the original position description in 1913 which may have applied to the world's first educational psychologist, Cyril Burt. One hundred years or so further on, this is not a compliment to the contemporary profession of educational psychology. Farrell (2010) suggests that one of the major difficulties with advancing the profession is to do with the persistence of applying psychometric testing in order to provide scores to facilitate the funding of students in mainstream classes. He suggests that in many countries this may be to do with the history of the profession and the work of Binet (mentioned earlier in the chapter), which has meant that the shackles of testing have been difficult to discard. Many other branches of psychology have been created and have evolved with contemporary practices. It is disappointing that educational psychology practice in many cases is restricted to the most basic of measurements, that of the cognitive assessment. As Bell and McKenzie (2013) state, there is a gap between what the psychologists are expected to do compared to what the psychologist can do based on training. Continuing Farrell's (2010) discussion it can be suggested that it may be that the profession of educational psychology has not educated the people who use the service about what can be done. If the service user is not understanding of the benefits of various levels

of psychological intervention then there cannot be complaints about the persistent requests for cognitive assessments. It is up to the educational psychologist in his/her local domain and to the profession in the wider setting to provide a framework of psychological practice where the service user e.g. the school, the local authority, become more able to understand that the cognitive assessment is just but one product of the shop of educational psychology interventions.

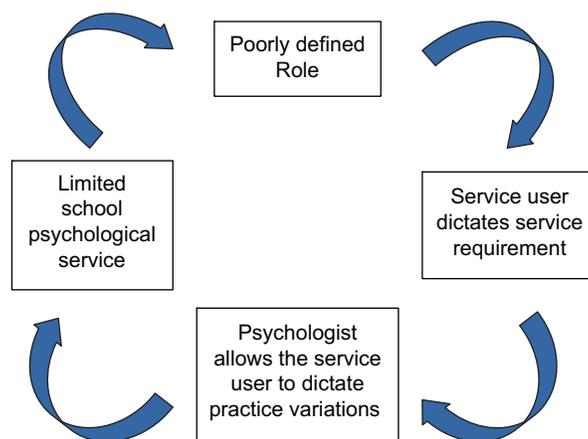


Figure 1. The Negative Influence of Service Users' View of educational psychology.

If both practising and aspiring school psychologists were to consider the question of why they have entered this particular profession they might suggest that it is about making life better for the children, adolescents and adults that they work with. By wanting to make a contribution to their well-being and their education this can be achieved. However, why is this contribution often reduced to being psychometricians who give labels, diagnoses, with no 'real' psychological intervention? Where does the psychology exist in this method? Jimerson et al. (2006) suggests that the profession has over-invested in psychometrics as the main stay of the school psychology role and this is certainly the case in local education authorities "...where systems dictate the necessity of specific kinds of information..." (Topping and Lauchlan, 2013, p. 75). It is presumed these authors are implying that the 'information' required is that of IQ scores or the softer term of cognitive ability assessment scores. Is this what educational psychologists are trained for? There has to be a clear psychological edge if the profession and the job it entails is to be regarded as meaningful. The question to ask under these circumstances should be around how much training is *really* required to be an educational psychologist if the vast majority of the role is taken up by administrative tasks and cognitive assessment. Norwich (2013) suggests that this type of question needs to be answered, as in many cases the high level of psychological training to become a psychologist is not evident in work undertaken.

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*Case for Casework*

Criticism of cognitive testing should not imply a criticism of individual casework (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009) of which there are many examples of direct and effective psychotherapeutic interventions e.g. solution focused brief therapy, motivational interviewing, CBT (Boyle, 2007b). If not done appropriately, working on a casework basis can be limiting, if not limited, however it can inform practice and provide the psychologist with opportunities to understand what to do on a wider scale systematic intervention e.g. behavioural management for the whole school. This would be a more effective intervention than testing all students referred for behavioural difficulties, in say, one class per contra to undertaking an intervention which takes into consideration environmental factors such as teacher competence and school ethos. This point is made by Boyle and Lauchlan (2009, p. 75) who state that “as the behaviour of the child is dependent upon his/her interaction with the environment there must be a limit as to what can be achieved at the level of the child on its own.” It follows that with psychological assessment no one method is appropriate or necessarily effective on its own but collectively the potential for a positive intervention is significantly enhanced. Neither the school nor the individual person exists in isolation. Both cannot be looked at exclusively but they interact and affect each other thus narrow assessment techniques are a poor way to demonstrate skills in educational psychology approaches and knowledge.

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY IN THE MARKETPLACE

As a professional group, school psychologists, similar to any other group primarily based on public sector employment, are dependent on what their employer requests them to do. This can be the case whether the line manager is a psychologist or not. For example, the demands for a ‘score’ in order to place a student in specialist provisions can be ethically problematic if a wider assessment is not carried out. The argument is more complex than this, however. Considering that a market driven economy exists, irrespective of whether this is at the macro or micro economic levels, it is not as straightforward to suggest that we, as educational psychologists, do not do certain tasks or interventions, as there is not enough psychology involved. Even though Boyle and Lauchlan (2009, p. 79) suggest “if a profession becomes perfunctory in nature then, by definition, that profession is in danger of becoming obsolete and ultimately redundant”, it would not be advisable to ignore market forces. In this case the driving force is the person or organisation that requests the service. It is possible that if services are not being provided when requested then the school or local education authority will consider looking at alternative providers e.g. clinical or counselling psychologists in order to gain the service they require, which to continue the present scenario would be that of cognitive scores for the purposes of funding or categorisation. Educational psychology is not a cheap service and as there is a squeeze on public

sector spending in Australia and many other countries around the world the clear service value of utilising the school psychology profession must be tangibly beneficial otherwise educational psychologists may find themselves no longer required (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2013).

Notwithstanding the previous discussion regarding the role of the manager or *service user* as described in Figure 1, the individual psychologist has much influence over what particular practice they would desire to employ, irrespective of any instructions from further up the food chain. This is an important point in that the psychologists are responsible to the ideas of their profession and in the case of educational psychology helping clients gain from their educational and social environment is paramount. The work of USA political scientist Michael Lipsky in 1980 (updated in 2010) suggested that there is a street-level bureaucracy in play with regards to many frontline workers (e.g. teachers, police, benefit officers, amongst others). They have the *de facto* opportunity to decide on the strength of policy implementation from a higher source e.g. manager, local authority edict, state law, and national law, amongst others. In this chapter Lipsky's argument can be extended to the role of the school psychologist in assessment and recommendation and where the importance of particular scores comes into effect. In the State of Victoria in Australia the archaic use of cognitive scores is still widely used for both the purposes of funding extra school support and specialist school placement. The difference between a score of 70 and 69, with the latter being less than two standard deviations from the mean, can result in no funds being awarded if a student has a score of 70 or above. However, how much of this process will include involvement from the ground level staff (school psychologists) who are the *de facto* implementers of the rules of policies governing allocation of funding or placements. Policy makers can forget that there is a street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 1980, 2010) and if psychologists at the ground level, who in effect, have to implement the policy are not in agreement with the philosophy underpinning the procedures, then the chances of effective operation are naturally diminished.

### *Street Level Psychology*

Transferring Lipsky's sociological approach to that of the direct work of school psychologists in the public education system, it is clear that at an individual level a psychologist may decide that for the sake of a point on an IQ scale that it might be fairer to a student and by extension the school (as it will be they who receive the extra funding) to ensure that the student achieves a lower score than may be the strict interpretation. So, in essence the psychologist is acting as Lipsky suggested in that working from a social justice perspective and maintaining professional ethics can be incongruous. Furthermore, despite government regulations staff at the ground level are choosing to implement them in a particular way, which would, in many cases, benefit those who need access to the funding i.e. schools and the students

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themselves. It is unlikely that this would have been what Boyle and Lauchlan (2009) envisaged when they stated “as a profession educational psychologists must be able to influence and contribute to the educational progress of young people using the discipline of psychology in a positive and effective way. If not, then the profession will become obsolete” (p.79).

The pseudo circumvention of higher-level policies indicates the nature of the profession that can, in many circumstances, be over psychometricised and drawn into a system that only values that type of work from a school psychologist. Thus, inherently not seeing the further psychological skills that many practitioners would be able to demonstrate if the opportunity was available is an inevitable result of a narrow focus on the perceived usefulness of the psychologists’ role in the system. The theme of this section is about consideration of the market place and the area of consideration is ensuring that the psychologist is able to demonstrate usefulness in what the customer or employer requires. If educational psychologists, en masse, were to alter their role from the heavy psychometric focus to that of a more systemic approach then there is the constant danger that questions may be raised by the service user about effectiveness of the required service. This would be irrespective of whether it would be an over-reliance on psychometrics or moving towards a more systemic approach. In this period of fiscal austerity and “as special educational procedures are reorganised to reduce costs in the current economic climate, educational psychologists may pay a high price for this over-investment” (Lauchlan & Topping, 2013, p. 75).

#### LABELLING AND CATEGORISATION

Psychologists working in educational settings are heavily involved in the categorisation and labelling of many students who are deemed to potentially require extra support. The school psychologist therefore has two main roles: that of an identifier of particular need through a labelling system and also, perhaps more related to psychological input, that of being able to inform school, student, teacher, strengths and deficits in a person’s profile. However, this can be used positively to inform the necessary people about particular learning styles, which might be useful and relevant to the student. Rayner (2013) also advocates for the importance of learning styles and puts forward the perspective that educational psychologists should be promoting an understanding of the client’s individual learning styles as a method of positively promoting their abilities.

Blum and Bakken (2010) suggest that an overly rigid focus on the deficit model will not recognise the strengths and successes of that particular person. The labelling of students within the school system may lead to negativity and a focus on what they cannot do i.e. a focus on a within-child deficit model (Blum and Bakken 2010). Cognitive testing invariably produces a magnetised draw to the negative portion of the student’s capability and may lead to the attention from educators being on what the student is not able to do per contra to the individual strengths of that person. As

was mentioned earlier in this chapter the continuing basis of educational psychology practice being that of providing scores in order for the allocation of resources is inherently flawed and knowledge of this is not new (c.f. Klassan, Neufield & Monro, 2005, for a discussion on this issue). For long periods of time there have been many questions raised about cognitive testing in schools generally (c.f. the discussion by Gillam, 1978, earlier in this chapter) and how much benefit can actually be brought from this method. Resnick (1979) suggested that '...IQ tests ... are likely to be functionally necessary in schools as long as the present form of special education for the mentally handicapped remains with us – or until we are prepared to spend substantially more...' (p. 252). Both the Gillam and Resnick studies respectively are from the UK and the USA, however it is not complementary that in 2014 we are working within a system which has been flagged as flawed over 35 years ago. The idea of categorisation and thus labelling is an anathema to what school psychologists should be attempting to do in invoking natural justice for clients and following an ethical code, which promotes the client as a potential vulnerable person who should be supported and assisted through an appropriate psychological intervention. As mentioned before, there is an incongruity between the code of professional ethics and the notion of social justice.

As with many nuances of practice and particular opinions as to whether an approach is ethical or based on the principles of social justice but in any case it would not be appropriate to take a stance on an issue due to personal belief if it caused maleficence to a client or other person to whom the psychologist is working in their best interests. This point is succinctly made by Boyle and Lauchlan (2013) in that "it would be senseless not to label a child to make a sociological point if that meant that there could be no access to services for the person and family that required it" (p. 216).

The question of how important a name or to be more specific 'a label' is to the recipient or by extension to the producer of the label can vary depending on many circumstances. Boyle and Lauchlan (2007) report a 2004 UK High Court Case where a former school student took legal action against their local education authority because they had not specifically identified that the student had dyslexic type difficulties. More precisely, the issue was that the school had not labelled the student as being dyslexic. Despite not using that particular label the school had put in place many supportive strategies, which were regarded by all parties as being highly effective, in order to ameliorate the student's reading difficulties. The Court found in favour of the education authority and the school, as the notion of the dyslexia label was irrelevant, as "the school had put in place an appropriate level of intervention in order to support the student" (Boyle, 2013, p. 217). The point from a school psychology perspective is that the labelling of students is not always necessary and the argument that psychometrics are required to fend off legal challenge is usually benign. It could be argued that it is only put forward by those who want to perpetuate the myth of school psychologists *having* to do these types of tests, when the reality of the situation may be somewhat different.

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### *Positive Outlook*

The within-child deficit model that was, and in many places still is, used by school psychologists in assessing and intervening in educational issues is regarded as being a fairly blunt instrument and is thus outdated. More school psychology practitioners are considering more innovative approaches to their work such as from the positive psychology paradigm based on much of the work by authors such as Seligman (2007). This type of approach allows the school psychologist to offer more direct psychology, which was termed 'Overt Psychological Practice' by Boyle (2013, p. 34) and examples of this are contained in cognitive behavioural approaches to success and failure in learning (Toland & Boyle, 2008), building resilience in schools (Toland and Carrigan, 2011), and using dynamic assessment for identifying students with learning needs (Lauchlan, 2012). 'Overt psychological practice' can be seen by service users and thus the credit can be applied to the school psychologist as opposed to another provider. By focusing on these types of interventions it can be argued that direct improvements can be attributed to the work of the school psychologist. It is not clear whether this type of recognition could be applied when using a deficit model of the child as the focus on positivist interactionalist models cannot be as clearly linked.

### CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed the sometimes dichotomous relationship between what it is expected that school psychologist can do and what they actually can do. The length of time to become a qualified school psychologist in many countries rivals that of becoming a medical doctor yet much of the work of the psychologist is restricted to categorisation based on a 'score' supplied by the psychologist. Notwithstanding the flawed nature of cognitive testing, school psychologists have to be aware of the difficulties of withdrawing services that clients expect them to do i.e. psychometrics. Doing this too quickly may result in school psychology losing this position to other branches of psychology, which would not alleviate the issue of poor outcomes from cognitive testing. School psychologists are highly skilled and this talent should be put to good use in offering various levels of applied psychology that incorporates strengths-based approaches such as the client empowering aspects of positive psychology. Returning to the question in the title, the 'score' could definitely be better as there are so many robust psychological interventions that could be enhancing the profession but it is a pity that so many choose psychometrics over innovation.

### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> The terms 'school' and 'educational' psychology will be used interchangeably throughout this chapter.

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## **7. CHALLENGES EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS FACE WORKING WITH VULNERABLE CHILDREN IN AFRICA**

*Integration of theory and practice*

### INTRODUCTION

Sub-Saharan Africa is the world's second fastest growing region after Asia with a GDP of 5.8% for 2012. However, it is still the world's poorest region and it has the largest proportion of vulnerable children in the world (Sewpaul & Matthias, 2013). The definition of what makes a child vulnerable is complex and focuses on three core areas of concern: *material problems*, including access to money, food, clothing, shelter, health care and education; *emotional problems*, including insufficient caring, love, support, space-to-grieve and containment-of-emotions; and *social problems*, including a lack of supportive peer groups, role models to follow or guidance in difficult situations, and risk-factors in the immediate environment (Skinner & Davids, 2006, p. 2). There are multiple vulnerabilities that children can be exposed to from their early years, including HIV/AIDS and other illnesses; disability; poverty; limited access to services; physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect; being children of divorced and single parents; child-headed households; violence; and substance-abuse within communities (Skinner & Davids, 2006). As such, educational psychologists practicing within a Sub-Saharan African context have their work cut out for them simply by attending to the multiple vulnerabilities children face on a daily basis. This chapter explores the role of educational psychologists within an African context, and the challenges they face in relation to theory and practice.

#### *Educational psychology in an African context*

The term used to refer to educational psychologists, as well as their role, vary within and between countries, but their psychological orientation to educational services is the common denominator in all countries where they are prevalent (Cook, Jimerson & Begeny, 2010; Jimmerson, Stewart, Skokut, Cardenas & Malone, 2009). Depending on the country, they may be referred to as school psychologists, school counsellors, or educational psychological specialists. However, the term educational psychologist is

used throughout this chapter to refer to professionals licensed to provide educational and psychological support to schools. Generally, they provide services that support learners to succeed academically, socially and emotionally (Cook, Jimerson & Begeny, 2010) through consultations with educators, parents, professionals and other community members, involved in the educational and psychological empowerment of learners. They collaborate with a variety of stakeholders to provide a safe and nurturing learning environment in order to improve the quality of life of all children. According to Cook, Jimerson & Begeny (2010, p. 439) they are knowledgeable about different “perspectives on student learning and social development (e.g. theories of human learning and behaviour change) and provide useful skills (e.g. assessment protocols and remedial interventions) that are used to prevent, reverse or lessen the severity of problems students present.”

The number of educational psychologists and the role they play are critical concerns in Sub-Saharan Africa. Jimmerson, Stewart, Skokut, Cardenas & Malone, (2009) found that in many Sub-Saharan African countries where there were significantly more school-aged children than there were educational psychologists, the proportion of which was the lowest in the world. For example, in South Africa there were 1,178 educational psychologists servicing more than 10 million school-age children, 18 for 624,820 school-age children in Namibia, 12 for 502,884 in Botswana, 500 for more than 44 million in Nigeria, 10 for more than 4 million in Zambia, 18 for more than 11 million in Uganda, 15 for more than 11 million in Kenya and 3 for more than 13 million school-age children in Tanzania. This presents a rather bleak picture of educational psychological services in most parts of Africa often resulting in people who have limited training in psychology providing such services. The focus then is on addressing the needs of the masses rather than the quality of the services itself. It is believed that in this way at least some of the needs of some of the people are met rather than none of the needs of people being met. The matter is becoming more complicated, since in some African countries the requirement for educational psychologists to have a minimum master’s qualification and a license to practice has been legislated.

There are a number of reasons why the training and appointment of educational psychologists in different countries are not taken seriously. Some of these reasons are related to the following: socioeconomic development (Oakland, 2003; Siaroff, 2000); cultural modernity (Alexander & Welzel, 2007); historical legacy (Hicks, 1999; Peters & Pierre, 2005); and institutional design (Ingelhart & Norris, 2003; McDonagh, 2002). With regard to socioeconomic development the stronger the economy of a country, the more resources are likely to be available for educational psychological services. Cultural modernity refers to the changing values in a country, for example, respect for human rights, equity and inclusive practices, which propagate equal services and opportunities for all people. Historical legacy alludes to the fact that educational psychological services are more likely to be prevalent in countries that have a legacy of social welfarism and left party control (Cook, Jimerson & Begeny, 2010). Institutional design is based on the premise that

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educational psychological services are more likely to be prevalent in countries that have strong democracies. If all of the above reasons hold true, most of the time, then one may argue that the situation of educational psychologists in Africa is bound to remain bleak for decades to come. Most African countries have impoverished economies, people experience gross violation of human rights, there are inadequate social welfare systems and autocratic governments that claim to be democratic predominate. Against this backdrop the challenges that educational psychologists face in terms of theory and practice are discussed.

## THEORETICAL CHALLENGES

A theory is an organized set of ideas and tenets that are formulated to explain a particular phenomenon (Nsamenang, 2005). In the context of this chapter theoretical underpinnings of the role of educational psychologists in supporting vulnerable children in Africa are considered. Usually theory informs practice, but within an African context it may be a reverse situation where practice informs what theories should be utilized in conceptualizing and actualizing the role of educational psychologists. For many of these psychologists daily practice is often challenged by problems and social ills that they may not have adequately been trained to manage. On-the-job training is generally essential for helping psychologists cope. For example, finding ways of feeding children, or treating them for HIV/AIDS related sicknesses, may be what they have to deal with before they can consider more effective ways of teaching them. As such, what they have to do (practice) is probably more important than theoretical permutations if there is no direct link between the two. In fact one can go back to the argument of the philosopher, Rorty (1979 & 1991), that all theory is actually practice based on the language in which it is conveyed. Nevertheless, theories play an important role in comprehending human thoughts and behavior. This is very significant to the role educational psychologists' play within an African context, especially in their work with vulnerable children. A critical (re)positioning of western and Eurocentric theoretical formulations is needed within an African context. This is aptly captured by Lanyasunya and Lesolayia (2001) who emphasize the point that theories must be relevant to cultural heritage. This point was emphasized in the early writings of the cultural theorist, Bhabha (2004) who argued that histories and cultures consistently intrude on the present necessitating a transformation on the understanding of cross-cultural relations. Nsamenang (2005, 2004b) was more direct when he argued that rigid alignment to Eurocentrism would leave the African Continent theoretically impotent. He maintains that "importing from western psychological theories and models should not compromise scientific independence and self-reliance in Africa," since the western social reality is more often than not oblivious of the harsh realities of life in Africa (Nsamenang, 2005, p.276). Bearing these theoretical criticisms in mind I will now proceed to examine some popular theories commonly accepted by psychologists worldwide. It is not my intention to delve into the details of the

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theories that follow, but more so to illustrate the critical elements of contestations between western and African ideologies that educational psychologists should take cognisance of.

#### *Maslow's hierarchy of needs*

Maslow focused on what motivates people (1943; 1954). He believed that people are motivated to achieve certain needs, which he presented in hierarchical levels within a pyramid. He identified five stages ranging from basic needs to self-actualization needs. In the first stage people strive to meet their basic needs which include air, food, water, shelter, sleep, warmth and sex. The second stage involves safety needs (protection, security, order, and law). The third stage is social needs (belongingness and love- work group, family, affection, relationships). The fourth stage refers to esteem needs (self-esteem, achievement, mastery, independence, status). The fifth stage brings in self-actualization needs (realizing personal potential, self-fulfilment, and seeking personal growth). Maslow (1970) later expanded the five stages to eight, including cognitive (knowledge meaning), aesthetic (search for beauty, balance and form), and transcendence needs (helping others to self-actualization). Hence, over the years he shifted his focus from what was wrong with people to what was fundamentally right. His theory is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, his findings lack empirical authenticity and is based on the subjective experiences of eighteen individuals (McLeod, 2007). Secondly, his sample was limited to educated white males so it cannot be generalized to females and people from lower social classes. Thirdly, he assumes that lower level needs must be met first before people move on to higher level needs. This may not necessarily be true for most cultures in which poverty is rife. In Africa there are, arguably, many people who have achieved self-actualization even though they lived in poverty and hardship. Also there are many others who are still capable of higher order needs, such as love and belongingness, even though they live in poverty (McLeod, 2007). Maslow's theory may also suggest that the many orphans and vulnerable children in Africa may experience psychopathological behaviour, but research has shown that many of them display resilient behaviours (Lethale, 2008).

#### *Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development*

Erik Erikson (1963) viewed human life span as comprising of a series of developmental phases, each with a major developmental task. The ability to deal with crises in each of these phases would determine how healthy or unhealthy a person will become. In the first phase: Basic trust versus mistrust (birth to 1 year) the infant learns to trust the mother to be fed and comforted when she or he is in distress. In an African context children are often vulnerable from

birth. For example, as a result of poverty some mothers leave their babies with caregivers so that they could go back to work. Increasingly, some mothers die during childbirth as a result of poor health facilities, lack of qualified doctors, and AIDS related sicknesses. A strict application of Erikson's theory would mean that there are many unhealthy children in Africa. The same will remain true for the remaining phases of development until adolescence. However, Erikson's theory is strongly questionable within an African context, since it does not take into consideration the impact of prolonged structural oppression, cultural transitions, violence, inadequate education, health and family life (Pillay & Nesengani, 2006). Furthermore, Erikson's theory insinuates that vulnerable children may be psychologically damaged. Even though this is expected in most situations it is also contradictory, since it does not necessarily explain how many of these children have been resilient enough to survive against all odds (Dawes & Donald, 1994; Lethale, 2008; Swartz & Levett, 1989). Another shortcoming of Erikson's theory is his omission of cultural dynamics in the different stages of psychosocial development. For example, African cultures may have different ways of viewing crises in comparison to western cultures.

#### *Kohlberg's theory of moral development*

Kohlberg (1969, 1981) proposed a model of moral development comprising three levels, each consisting of two stages. Level one is pre-conventional morality made up of two stages, namely; obedience and punishment, and individualism and exchange. In the first stage children obey rules to avoid punishment and in the second stage individuals obey rules to serve their own interests. Level two involves conventional morality. Here the focus is on living up to social expectations and roles, and maintaining the social order (law and order). The last level focuses on post-conventional morality. The two stages here highlight social contracts, individual rights and universal principles. Kohlberg's theory has undoubtedly made a major contribution in terms of understanding moral development, however, it has been criticized for the following reasons: there is a difference between knowing what people ought to do and what they actually do; it overemphasizes the concept of justice in making moral choices; and lastly its underlying philosophy is based on western individualistic cultures that emphasize personal rights (Boyes & Walker, 1988; Sullivan, 1977). The latter is obviously problematic in an African context where collectivist cultures emphasize society and community. Furthermore, with the escalating numbers of orphans and vulnerable children in Africa there are often no significant adults in their homes to take care of the young let alone teach them morals and values. So does this mean that there is no hope of the young acquiring morals and values? Are there no other ways of children developing morals in the absence of parents and significant caregivers? These are some of the concerns that need to be addressed within an African context.

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### *Critical Theory*

An understanding and application of critical theory within an African context is essential, since its major focus is on identifying beliefs and practices that “limit human freedom, justice, and democracy in order to enable people and communities to change their lives” (Seedat, Duncan & Lazarus, 2001, p. 144). Neuman (1997) viewed critical theory as a critical process of uncovering real structures in society that contributed to material oppression of people. The central tenets of critical theory are the empowerment of people so that they could take control of their lives; challenge ideologies that maintain the status quo; and enable people to take action that would liberate them from all systemic forms of oppression. Educational psychologists adopting a critical theory stance focus on the empowerment of vulnerable children by recognising and challenging oppressive structures and systems in society that marginalise children resulting in them becoming vulnerable.

### *Bio- ecological systems theory*

Educational psychologists adopting Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological systems model (1979) view vulnerable children from different, but interrelated and interdependent, levels that cohere with other subsystems. Vulnerable children experiencing change in one system, for example the family, would inevitably experience change in other levels of the system or sub-systems (Berns, 2007; Landsberg & Nel, 2005). As such, these children do not grow in a vacuum, but in multiple settings of sub-systems in which they interact such as parents, schools and communities. These children both influence, and are influenced by, their environments (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 1997). Hence, children growing up in deprived environments would experience a ripple effect of deprivation in all other sub-systems; for example, parental unemployment affects what happens in the home as well as the ability of parents to provide the needs of their school-going children.

### *Social Ontogenesis theory*

Building on Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, social ontogenesis views human development as being determined by a combination of ecology and social systems (Ngaujah, 2003). Children adopt social norms and cognitions from their own cultural environments. Social ontogenesis theory gives attention to the setting in which a child grows. Nsamenang (2005; 2010) identified three interconnected periods that depicts the African human cycle, namely; a social, ancestral and spiritual selfhood. In each of these periods there are specific developmental tasks that humans are exposed to, based on their cultural realities, for example, in the social stage of infancy pre-social priming is important and the developmental task within an African context is to prepare infants to tolerate multiple caregivers. Mainstream psychology neglects ancestral and spiritual selfhoods, which are the essential tenets of an African worldview.

#### CHALLENGES EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS FACE

All of the theories discussed above clearly articulate the discrepancy between what is relevant in western and African societies. These theories were only chosen as examples to illustrate such discrepancies and the same could be true of numerous other theoretical perspectives. Hence, the point I emphasize is that western and Eurocentric theories should be interpreted with caution in an African context. In fact Africa should have its own emergence of theoretical perspectives relevant to its own context, such as the social ontogenesis theory discussed above. Theory should always be relevant to practice as indicated in what follows next

#### CHALLENGES FACING PRACTICE

Most schools in Sub-Saharan Africa are characterised by the extremities of poverty, lack of equal and universal education, gender inequalities, and the gross marginalisation of children. Inevitably, one would expect that children exposed to such difficulties will be vulnerable to childhood psychological and learning problems. As such, it is not surprising that educational psychologists in Africa are confronted with several unique challenges emanating from diverse learner populations characterised by varied social, psychological, political, economic, historical and cultural experiences (Pillay, 2012). Research by du Preez and Roos (2008) has shown that educational psychologists are often challenged by a high prevalence of social problems that are often carried over to schools by learners from diverse backgrounds. Some of these social problems are related, but not limited, to crime, violence, substance abuse, different forms of child abuse and neglect, teenage pregnancies, different forms of oppression and discrimination, divorced and single parent families, orphans, and child-headed households largely manifested through the scourge of HIV/AIDS. Combating these social challenges requires educational psychologists to have a thorough understanding of indigenous knowledge systems, that is, they should have an understanding of local knowledge unique to the cultures or society they are working with. Indigenous knowledge is developed and adapted as it passes down different generations in continuously changing environments (Kunnie & Goduka, 2006). However, the problem faced by most, if not all, educational psychologists in most parts of Africa is that their training mainly comprised of western ideologies, which are often not sufficient in an African context (Olivier, 1992; Osborne & Collision, 1998; Seedat, Duncan, & Lazarus, 2001; Walsh, Howard, & Buckley, 1999). It is imperative that their training should take strong cognisance of indigenous knowledge, which has great social value often influenced by changing times, experiences, socio-economic dynamics, politics, and other knowledge systems (Nakashima, Prott, & Bridgewater, 2000). Hence, educational psychologists could contribute to local empowerment and development by finding local solutions to a variety of social problems (Diale & Fritz, 2007). However, if their training did not include indigenous knowledge systems then a major challenge would be to reskill them accordingly (Nugent & Jones, 2005; Pillay, 2003, 2005, 2012; Van Niekerk & Prins, 2001).

At the risk of not throwing the baby out with the bath water, one would argue that whilst there are several useful aspects of western models of training educational psychologists, it may be more problematic in an African context for several reasons. Firstly, for economic reasons psychological services are actually a 'luxury' that most poor people cannot afford (Pillay & Lockhat, 2001). Secondly, African societies are plagued with many social problems – some of which were identified earlier –which lead to a situation where there are “too many people with psychological problems and a limited number of people who could help” (Pretorius-Heuchert & Ahmed, 2001, p.23). The situation in schools is often worse with one educational psychologist servicing a cluster of schools with hundreds of learners. In fact, as mentioned earlier, most schools do not have educational psychologists in the poorer African countries. Last, but not least, psychological services within an African context are increasingly expressing the need for primary prevention of psychological problems and contextually relevant community-based services (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000; Van Niekerk & Prins, 2001). All of the above appear to contradict the western mode of providing psychological services on a one-to-one basis.

Like all other continents in the world Sub-Saharan Africa has to respond to changing social, political, economic, and psychological issues facing children, families, schools, and communities (Baker, 2000; Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; Herr, 2001; Paisley & McMahon, 2001). This poses a challenge to educational psychologists who have to extend their services beyond academic support and career development of learners to a broader focus on personal and social concerns if they are to make a positive difference in the lives of children (Fitch & Marshall 2004; Nastasi, 2000). However, several authors have noted that successful interventions in the personal and social lives of children are significantly depended on the involvement of multiple stakeholders within the school context (Fall & VanZandt, 1997; Gibson, Swartz, & Sandonbergh, 2002; Hargreaves, 1994; Hayes, Paisley, Phelps, Pearson, & Salter, 1997; Mearns, 2003; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002).

In a study conducted by Pillay (2012) in South Africa it was found that educational psychologists could only play a meaningful role in schools if they received support from a variety of stakeholders both within and outside of the school. Numerous studies have indicated that the needs of learners are better met if there is effective internal collaboration amongst teachers, learners, school management teams, school governing bodies and parents (Evans, Lunt, Weddel, & Dyson, 1999; Fitch & Marshall, 2004; Hopkins, Ainscow, & West, 1996; McLaughlin, Clark, & Chisholm, 1996; Metcalf, 1995; Parsons & Kahn, 1984; Wasielewski, 2004). External collaborations with education district offices, outside agencies, NGOs and other organizations were essential to address the various barriers to learning and psycho-social problems that learners experienced. Pillay (2012), however, found that external collaboration was often negatively impacted by: inadequate support from the education district offices, which often complained about the lack of human,

financial and material resources; the high cost of private practitioners and agencies that provided support for learners and schools; and poor involvement of parents in their children's schooling.

Educational psychologists working in Africa have to take different cultural, racial and ethnic contexts into account in their daily interaction with schools. For example, in South Africa alone there are four different racial groups with a great variety of ethnic divisions both within and across these racial groups. Such diversity often presents both challenges and opportunities for educational psychologists (Baker, 2000; Benedetto & Olisky, 2001; D' Andrea & Daniels, 2001; Murphy, DeEsch, & Strein, 1998; Wardle, 1992; Winn & Priest, 1993). They would have the opportunity to become flexible enough to work with the richness that a variety of cultures bring into the educational and psychological realm. However, this could become a problem if they are not adequately trained to make a shift from their traditional roles (Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2004; Van Niekerk & Prins, 2001). Increasingly, educational psychologists working in African contexts are expected to be culturally competent and culturally responsive to a significantly large variety of needs of diverse learners (Lee, 2001). The diversity of learners is reflected in race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, (dis)abilities (Carpenter, King-Sears, & Keys, 1998), sexual orientation (Cooley, 1998; Lipkin, 1999), behaviour styles, values, and beliefs (Lee, 2001).

Another challenge experienced by educational psychologists is the increasing reliance on technology, especially computers and internet facilities (Baker & Gerler, 2001). In many parts of Africa people do not have access to electricity let alone computers and internet facilities. For example, black students studying educational psychology in many African universities have to rely on the computers that are only accessible in the computer laboratories of those institutions. For those tertiary institutions, schools and families that do have electricity the financial implications for improved technology is simply unbearable (Owen & Weikel, 1999; Sampson & Bloom, 2001).

Finally, a major challenge that educational psychologists in Africa face is the escalating, multiple roles they have to play (Pillay, 2012). More often than not they have to engage in roles that they have not been trained to deal with. For example, they have to do the work of social workers when they deal with cases of rape and sexual abuse or when they have to assist orphans to acquire social grants to support them financially. They have to be knowledgeable about nutrition and health issues when they try to organise meals for starving learners or look at environmental health hazards that further increases the vulnerability of children. They have to adopt legal roles when the rights of children are violated. Sometimes they have to adopt the roles of safety and security personnel when they have to work towards creating safe and secure environments for children. In most parts of Africa there is a fragmentation of government services resulting in poor and inefficient service delivery. This is why educational psychologists have to engage in all of the multiple roles that have been mentioned (see diagram below).

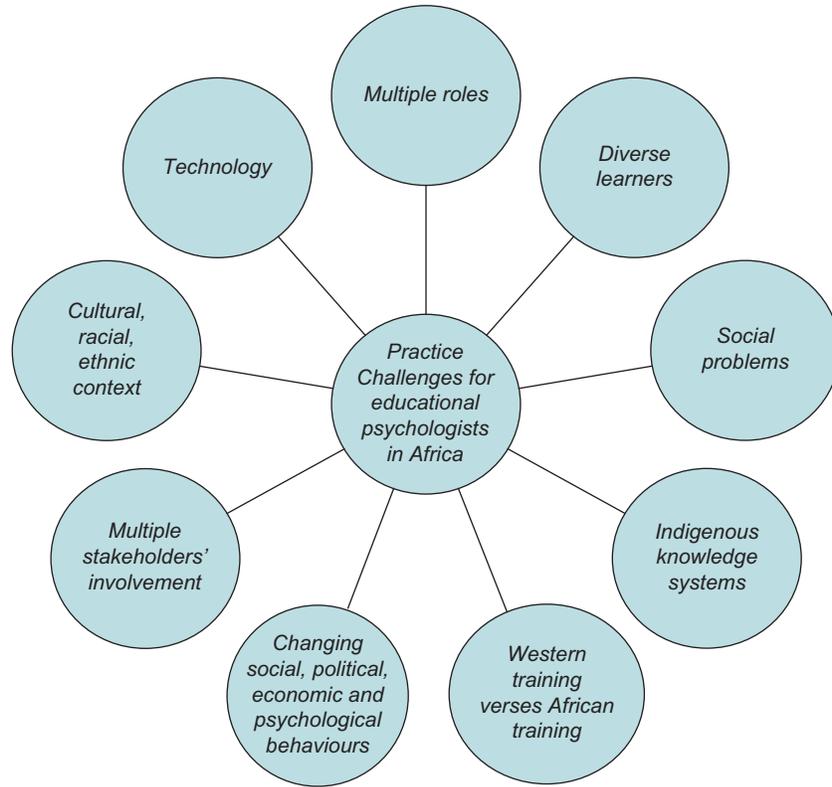


Figure 1. Diagram illustrating practice challenges of educational psychologists practicing in Africa.

#### INTEGRATION OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

A major challenge for educational psychologists working in an African context is finding ways of integrating theory with practice. As discussed earlier there has been much reliance on western and Eurocentric theories in the training of educational psychologists, which often have little or no relevance in an African context. Much focus has been placed on *applying* theory to practice. However, my view is that *integration* of theory and practice is needed. Integration inhibits one from seeing theory as something separate or different from practice. In this way, theory is in our practice and practice is in the theory we use. The traditional point of departure in psychology was that one examined human behaviour and then tried to place such behaviour within specific theoretical perspectives that are in existence postulating a 'one size fits all' view of human nature. Integration for me moves beyond this, it actually forces us to explore behaviour within specific social, cultural, economic and

political contexts by juxtaposing theory and practice. It encourages and creates room for individual and collective experiences unique to situations and contexts, hereby endorsing an African approach that postulates 'different strokes for different folks'.

Thus far this chapter has identified several challenges or I may even go so far as to refer to the topic of this chapter as being controversies experienced by educational psychologists in Africa. But now I move to some innovative ideas of integrating theory and practice that would hopefully interrogate educational change. I advocate the belief that both psychology and education should be related to the construct of social justice (Shriberg, Wynne, Briggs, Bartucci, & Lombardo, 2011). With regard to the plight of vulnerable children in Africa, in particular, social justice could be conceptualized as an overarching framework that ensures that they are treated with respect and dignity, protecting their rights and providing them with equal opportunities to develop and function optimally in society (see diagram below). As such the practice of educational psychologists should be directed to supporting children to achieve their full learning and personal potential through accessing opportunities offered in society (Shriberg, Wynne, Briggs, Bartucci, & Lombardo, 2011). Educational psychologists are in a powerful position to act as agents of social justice by virtue of their expertise, knowledge, skills, and access to children and other school stakeholders. Becoming agents of social justice- not all of them are at the same level due to disparity in training and past discriminatory practices- demands that practice adopts a more critical view of educational psychology that has traditionally focused on assessing, labelling and pathologizing children. The impetus should be on creating equal opportunities for all children to learn and develop in a society that provides opportunities for children irrespective of race, class, creed, gender, ability or disability.

Practice from a social justice framework places certain requirements on educational psychologists. The first one being the need to critically view different theoretical perspectives from a social justice framework - like some of those that were discussed earlier. The second requirement would be to integrate theory and practice in such a way that it becomes 'second nature' to educational psychologists. I concur with Corcoran (2009) who describes 'second nature' as the ability of psychologists to practice a duty of care as a straightforward daily occurrence. The third would be to think and act in a manner that transcends boundaries across the different disciplines of psychology. This would mean integrating core elements from different psychological disciplines, such as community, social, cross-cultural, and critical psychology that propagate a social justice framework. For example, a community psychology perspective would emphasise the empowerment and psychological well-being of vulnerable children within communities (Pillay, 2008). A critical psychology perspective would place social issues high on the agenda of psychology as a whole (Parker, 2007). Within the context of vulnerable children it would examine how systemic oppressive structures and power relations in society maintain the status quo of such children. In emphasizing the need for educational psychologists to conceptualize their roles beyond the boundaries of other disciplines in psychology I propose an argument

for the psychology *of* education to be (re)positioned as psychology *in* education. The latter is actually the focus of this book and many of the chapters that have been included in it. This clearly authenticates a local (in terms of Africa) as well as a global repositioning of psychology which is quite conspicuous in the community of scholars that have contributed to the publication of this book. However, if psychology is all about studying human behaviour and human relationships then from an African context I would like to extend it to *servicing humanity*. So my argument is that serving humanity- an essential aspect of psychology in Africa - should be an integral part of education. However, I also want to bring in the notion of education *in* psychology arguing that educational psychologists should be instrumental in educating students across the board to serve humanity.

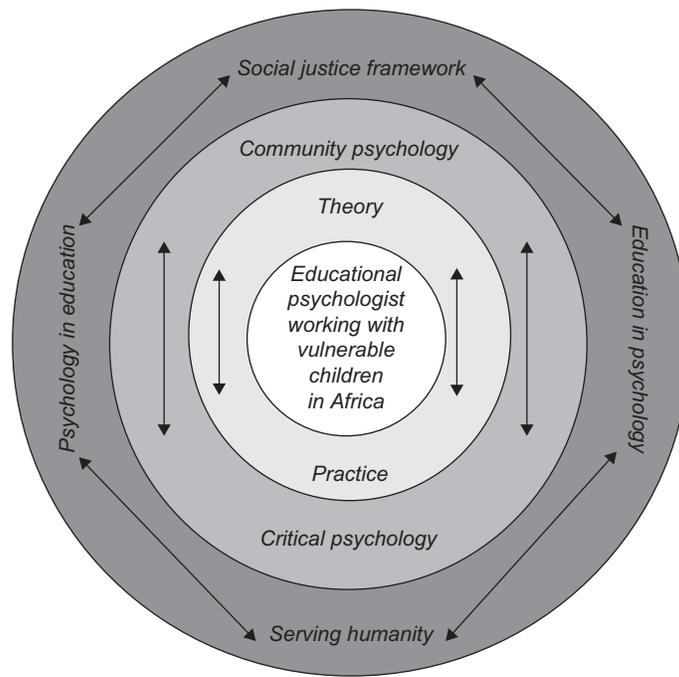


Figure 2. Diagram illustrating the implications for theory and practice for educational psychologists practicing in Africa.

## CONCLUSIONS

This chapter explored the role of educational psychologists working within an African context critically, especially with vulnerable children. Firstly, it does this by discussing the views of educational psychology in western, Eurocentric and African contexts. Secondly, it emphasises the point that western and Eurocentric

theories, albeit useful, may not necessarily be relevant within an African context. Several western psychological theories are discussed with the intention of articulating their discrepancies within an African context. I advocate a bio-ecological systems theoretical approach within an African context suggesting that educational psychologists must work together with local communities as part of an ecosystem to improve the lives of vulnerable children. Thirdly, the challenges facing educational psychologists practicing within an African context are highlighted. The chapter concludes with an argument for the integration of theory and practice by educational psychologists embedded within a social justice framework that strives to serve humanity. A social justice framework creates opportunities for educational psychologists working within an African context to be more innovative in their practices and paves the way for an interrogation of educational and psychological changes that are needed in their engagement with vulnerable children.

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#### CHALLENGES EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS FACE

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## **8. TOWARDS A CRITICAL RELATIONAL EDUCATIONAL (SCHOOL) PSYCHOLOGY**

*Clinical encounters*

### INTRODUCTION

‘You make [the work of the educational psychologist] seem like working for the Gestapo...’

Educational psychology in the UK has a relatively small academic base and is a term which often refers to what in the US would be known as school psychology. I want to muddy the waters in this chapter by proposing an educational (school) psychology practice which is both relational in its foundations and more theoretically transparent i.e. critical in the way that it subjects to analysis direct work with young people, their families and their teachers.

Young people have usually been brought to the attention of the practitioner educational psychologist on account of some kind of individual disability, disorder or other kind of ‘deficit’. In an academic context, however, whether as researcher, teacher or trainer, there has been a greater freedom to locate and explore issues of social justice and ethical practice which arise in the moments of relation, in what I will refer here to as the ‘clinical encounters’ (Katz and Alegria, 2009).

In this chapter theoretical resources are explored which could usefully provide a foundation for a professional practice which seeks primarily to be ethically sensitive, theoretically more demanding (i.e. critical) and thus ultimately, more scientific. Resources (philosophical, psychodynamic, relational) are selected in order critically to expose two particular concerns: understandings of the distinctly human, social relations constructed in direct work but firstly, the epistemological foundations of the discipline.

The critical approaches noted here, of course, do not suddenly appear on the page for in many cases they have long histories. However, during the last decade or so in our critical educational psychology group at the University of Sheffield we have sought to change the emphasis, even character of our discipline. We continue to challenge an obsession with the identification and distribution of narrowly-conceived and scientifically questionable psychopathologies and instead seek to develop a critical educational psychology through analysis of the relations we share with the recipients of our practice. We aim to find ways, on the one hand, of resisting those contextual and ideological practices which reify deficit and thus restrict human potential and on the other, of acknowledging the complexity and scientific importance of social and cultural variability.

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Some reflections on past experience are followed by a brief review of practice as defined by 'deficit'. Alternatives for practice are then organized around consideration of three constructs - 'mental space', 'relational space' and 'relational being'.

#### PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE – OF HOPE AND DOUBT

The words recalled at the start of the chapter were those of a University tutor. She was in no way intending to be disrespectful to those who were tortured and murdered in a previous generation (indeed her own family had suffered). She was though responding to work I had submitted over twenty years ago during my own initial professional training in which I had subjected some experiences as a trainee educational psychologist to Foucaultian analyses of power relations (developed several years later utilizing Lacanian-informed discourse analysis; Billington, 1995).

I had entered training like many others with hope and the best of intentions, of course, wanting to do something worthwhile, by helping young people who were encountering problems in their lives. Today still, new trainees continue to enter our programmes at Sheffield with such hope, passion and a desire to make useful contributions to society as part of their life's work while as staff we continue to seek ways of honouring and supporting those aspirations. What some of us have encountered in professional training, however, have been assaults on our hope and commitment, which I recall now as the sometimes brutal exchanges witnessed as a trainee, two of which I recount now in brief.

As trainees we had been required to undertake some initial observations of senior practitioners working with young people. While the intention had presumably been to provide opportunities for the novitiates to witness exemplary performances of psychometric testing, it had been neither the consummate skill of the expert nor the compelling intellectual force of the concepts underpinning the tests which demanded attention. Rather it was the anxiety of the young subjects which burned into memory, for on two separate occasions I was unfortunate to see children of primary school age reduced to quiet tears during testing. While this may have been sheer bad luck, of course, and not at all representative, I had found both experiences deeply unsettling for why had the children been so affected? Was it because they were unusually fragile in some way? The psychologists in question had not been unfriendly and I had merely sat in the corner, if awkwardly, attempting nervously to smile away any potential anxieties, whether those of the children or indeed my own.

To recall another occasion, the tutor became impatient as I struggled to articulate objections to working with a young boy in front of the group of fellow trainees. It seemed simple enough for we were each to prepare a behavioral task analysis and then to conduct its implementation with a young person. The child, again of primary school age, was seated at a table surrounded by a group of about ten trainees and our tutor. I can no longer remember the actual task we were supposed to implement but what I do remember is the child's (presumed) acquiescence. For he could see but gave few signs that he could; he had no language but seemed unable or unwilling to

communicate intentionally in any form; indeed, perhaps thankfully, the boy seemed almost completely unaware of our presence in the room. I watched the others in the group and became more and more ill-at-ease for how would we know whether the boy wanted to work with us? How would we know whether he was objecting? How could he say 'no'?

The diagnosis would have been 'PMLD' – Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties – and no doubt the boy's parents will have been desperate for their young son to engage with the world, perhaps even just to acknowledge their existence. The professional dilemma was thus real enough: how might we encourage this particular young boy to engage and to learn? The personal dilemmas were also real as my desire to prove my competence, firstly to perform a task analysis and secondly to implement a behavior modification programme clashed with the wish to engage ethically. I would like to think that trainees nowadays are better prepared for such situations; but the underlying dilemma must continue to trouble whenever we are asked to do something which we regard as 'wrong', morally but perhaps scientifically too.

To act in accordance with those practices which fall within a disciplinary boundary of 'educational psychology' may result in a significant impact on the lives of other people and indeed on our own lives too. Perhaps I should have walked away and quit the programme since not only was I troubled by the lack of attention to the ethical issues raised during the exchanges (neither the tutor nor some of the trainees could see the problem) but I was also concerned about a knowledge base which seemed oblivious to the complex relational factors involved i.e. intra- and inter-personal, environmental, not to mention political or ideological. Hence the doubt. However, while educational psychologists are expected to work with many diverse groups of young people who are identified in one way or another as possessing 'difficulties' or 'disabilities', there is always the tantalising prospect that there might just be ways of intervening which would not necessarily compound any distress, indeed might contribute more positively, and which could be founded on more humane, perhaps even more scientific principles. That is the hope.

Support was more forthcoming from Foucault, whose analyses, immersed as they were in a longer sweep of history, revealed how many professional practices could be explained in terms of the processes of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1967, 1977). More hopefully, perhaps, other forms of meticulous analysis or passionate scholarship suggested that it might yet be possible legitimately to intervene (Dewey, 1916; MacIntyre, 1981; Freire, 1972; Newman and Holzman, 1993; Nelson and Prilleltensky, eds., 2005). What was clear, though, was that any authentic direct engagement with young people as an educational psychologist would entail struggle, for while complex analyses and dilemmas were frequently ignored by the training curricula at the time, they were to present on a daily basis at every turn (Billig et al. 1988).

In those first days and weeks as a trainee it had quickly become clear that professional discourse in educational psychology was embedded in accounts of deficit and that those accounts were constructed in power relationships with other

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potential accounts which could potentially have damaging consequences for the lives of the young people (see also White and Epston, 1990). I thus became troubled by the ethics of practice, not only in respect of the potential complexities of individual interaction and dialogue but also by the shaky conceptual foundations of a discipline which seemed intent, not on remedial or emancipatory action, but on constructing deficits in ever more ingenious configurations – as psychopathologies – as part of a web of social exclusion. These were important first steps along the path to criticality.

#### PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE AND THE SCIENCE OF DEFICIT

The British Psychological Society has just marked a centenary of educational psychology (Arnold and Hardy, eds., 2013). However, psychology's earliest roots in philosophy go back much further to (amongst many others) Rousseau, Descartes and beyond to Plato and Aristotle.

Edward Thorndike was the first person to be designated 'educational psychologist' in the United States (1904), Cyril Burt was the first person actually to be employed as an 'educational psychologist' in the UK (1913), while in France what we now recognize as educational psychology could be discerned prior to that in the works of Binet and Simon (1905). Each of these figures invoked positivist principles and ways of doing 'educational psychology' which contributed to the mechanics of governmentality and they did this by certain simple technical (as opposed to scientific) devices - measurement, rank and the category (Foucault, 1977, Billington, 2000). In the ontogenesis of modern educational psychology, therefore, the principles and practices utilized to study the human world came to be based more often on techniques which had been honed in respect of the physical or natural worlds. The more complex scientific and philosophical explorations of William James (1890) and Dilthey ([1883] 1989) which had informed debates in the late 19<sup>th</sup>. century were largely to be ignored for much of the 20<sup>th</sup>. century in favour of utilitarian, biological and reductionist arguments. The practice of educational psychology became locked into the machinery of state and for many years (and perhaps irredeemably) was taken close to eugenicist arguments (Chitty, 2008).

The roots of education too take us back through history and philosophy, eventually to Plato and Aristotle but more recently, following the introduction of mass schooling, Robert Owen's *New View of Society* (1815) remains a landmark educational text. Owen's works espouse principles and values which speak to us today, exposing as he did the conditions in which many children were living in the UK at that time. Accounts of Parliamentary debates at Westminster during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup>. century make for disturbing reading, providing glimpses of social conditions which unfortunately bear striking resemblance to contemporary child labour abuses across the world. For children as young as eight or even six years were then found to have been working 'from thirteen to sixteen hours out of the four and twenty' (Hansard, 1<sup>st</sup>. March 1832); children were being 'literally worked to death' (7<sup>th</sup>. June 1832). The drive for mass schooling in the UK can thus be seen firstly, as a humane antidote

to the horrors of the urbanized landscape in which children were being ‘regarded as machines of no value’ (7<sup>th</sup>. June, 1832) and secondly, as a way of ensuring industrial competitiveness (Gillard, 2011).

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup>. century psychology was constructed as a vast industry built upon discourses, not of difference, but of deficit, despite notable opposition (for example, from James and Dewey through to Bruner and Martin-Baro). Technologies of measurement became so virulent that it made it almost impossible to conceptualize any other kind of educational psychology, for example, which might lie beyond the acts of ordering and categorization. However, those prevailing professional accounts in which I had been immersed during professional training, for example, of assessments by measurement (of behavior modification, learning difficulties or other psychopathologies), while no doubt well-intentioned, have since become even more problematic, perhaps even unacceptable in terms of changing social mores – for example, whenever professionals or agencies conspire to silence the ‘voice’ of young people (Unicef, 1989). Arguably, those partisan professional accounts are becoming increasingly vulnerable to scientific challenge.

On entering the profession I had not wanted to contribute to processes in which young people’s difficulties were subject only or indeed primarily to discourses of deficit but I certainly did not want to do this on the basis of what increasingly has seemed be a very imperfect knowledge base. The science of autism or indeed any other kind of psychopathology has long since seemed far from complete and ill-served by a purely positivist endeavour and yet the tendency in professional training and practice has continued to prioritize:

- norms of individualized behaviors as opposed to human experience
- the acquisition of literacy as opposed to an understanding of the value of literature or narrative
- abnormality and deficit as opposed to potential development or growth.

During the last few decades more sophisticated theoretical frameworks have emerged which, implicitly or explicitly question the limited scientific basis upon which existing practices are based (Hollway, 1989, Holzkamp, 1992, Tolman, 1994, Harré, 2004, Fox, Prilleltensky and Austin, 2009), not least through critiques informed by economic, political or social considerations. There have thus been opportunities for educational psychologists to step outside the discipline to strengthen and re-invigorate the scientific basis of our work and it has seemed unethical simply to accept the reduced hope of a practice which limits itself to narrow understandings of learning, behavior and forms of psychopathology (critiques of which are informed by, for example, Bradley, 1989; Martin-Baro, 1994; Parker, Georgaca, Harper, McLaughlin and Stowell-Smith, 1995; Morss, 1996; Bird, 1999; Holzman and Morss, 2000; Parker, 2005; Burman, 2008; Willig and Stainton-Rogers, eds., 2008; Mercieca, 2011).

It is not the intention simplistically to reject positivist human science, however, since it generates extant discourse. However, research and practice are conducted in human, that is, social settings which host a myriad of variables which are rarely easy

to control and, ‘the rationality of science breaks down as it approaches the personal experience of human being...’ (Adams and Miller, 2008, p. 380). Even if it were possible to acknowledge the sheer quantity of variables in practice situations, there is a danger of overlooking the importance of an inter-connectivity which occurs between people as well as between those people and the (cultural) objects within their environment. Not least positivist methods get into difficulty in finding ways of examining the totality of a situation or the essential quality of any living thing: ‘Probably a crab would be filled with a sense of personal outrage if it could bear us to class it without ado or apology as a crustacean and thus dispose of it. “I am no such thing”, it would say; “I am MYSELF, MYSELF alone”.’ (James, [1902] 1982, p.9).

Henri Bergson occupied some common ground (and shared a mutual respect) with William James in a scepticism that a purely positivist science could answer the questions in which they were both interested i.e. relating to the nature of a peculiarly human life. Bergson was interested in the kinds of human inquiry which were less amenable to measurement and was critical of attempts to apply such techniques in situations for which it was clearly ill-equipped: ‘Physics, whose particular function it is to calculate the external cause of our internal states, takes the least possible interest in those states themselves...’ (Bergson, [1913] 2001, p. 70).

There have since been other critiques of that paradox which is inherent in the very measuring of human lives (Kuhn, 1962; Szasz, 1974; Packer, 2011) but Bergson pinpointed the fundamental error of misapplying positivist principles: ‘the moment was inevitably bound to come at which science, familiarized with this confusion between quantity and quality, between sensation and stimulus, should seek to measure one as it measures the other...’ (ibid, p.71). Bergson thus questioned whether it was possible to measure anything meaningful about human lives. Indeed, he believed that all we can ever do is to measure the distance or space between objects or events and in the process thus completely fail to engage with the experiential phenomena of the human lives which exist in the spaces, in between the points of measurement. To Bergson, our consciousness is inextricably in-relation-to the existential presence of others and is thus beyond simple measurement.

As a practitioner educational (or school) psychologist, by the time I became involved with a young person, he or she had invariably become fixed into relational positions from which there were few obvious means of escape or legitimate resistance. However, rather than accepting the negative discourses (for example, of disabilities, in learning, behavior, or of more specific psychopathologies such as ASD, ADHD) it has seemed important to re-consider and critique their application, not only on ideological grounds, but on account of a belief in a potentially transformative scientific and ethical practice (Newman and Holzman, 1993; Nelson and Prilleltensky, eds., 2005; Goodley and Lawthom, 2006; Rose, 2006). In order to develop this account of a critical educational psychology, however, there is a need to switch the focus of a gaze which usually falls principally on the objects of our practice – the young people - to a focus on the interstices of practice – in the relations which exist between the psychologists, the young people and their social and cultural context.

## TOWARDS A CRITICAL RELATIONAL EDUCATIONAL (SCHOOL) PSYCHOLOGY

Political, economic or sociological arguments could be explored here, or perhaps structural, organizational or ecological analyses. Instead, the focus for the remainder of the chapter will be on articulating ways of thinking about the relational possibilities enveloping the psychologist and the young people. Theorizations will be considered which could allow professionals to engage young people in a more ethical and scientific exchange and which offer analytical purchase on what might be regarded as the 'clinical encounter' (Katz and Alegria, 2009). The intention is to address the following critical questions and open up (relational) spaces for practice and research in our discipline by asking again:

How do we speak of children?  
How do we speak with children?  
How do we write of children?  
How do we listen to children?...  
How do we listen to ourselves (when working with children?)  
(Billington, 2006, p.8).

## OF MENTAL SPACE

Assessment practices demand professional opinions concerning aspects of a young person which will be selected from (and in relation-to), other ideas about the young person. However, opinions provided by a psychologist are expected to move beyond the obvious, and to provide a distinctive account, most usually regarding behavior, ability to learn or some other issue of concern to adult carers or teachers. Assessments are justified on the basis that they enable services to meet the 'needs' of the young person and that they will create and preserve a linguistically and conceptually privileged enclosure of knowledge which will accord with certain principles of 'governmentality' (Foucault, 1979).

Educational psychologists training in the UK are exposed to curricula which utilize particular preferred epistemological frameworks i.e. which tend to prioritize cognitivist or behaviorist approaches. However, these paradigms have invariably seemed inadequate when attempting to address those questions above and I searched for more analytically penetrating theorizations i.e. ethical, scientific, socio-political. In particular, I looked for analytical resources in respect of the relationships involved, for example, between myself as psychologist and the young person, the urgent need for which had been prompted by witnessing the 'distress' during the training episodes above. This search took me in several directions – to critical psychology but in respect of accounts of the individual, also to psychoanalysis and subsequently to neuroscience.

For much of the 20<sup>th</sup>. century psychoanalysis was to provide a home for those (relatively few) psychologists who wanted to challenge the Cartesian primacy of cognition and who wished instead systematically to explore our emotional lives. It seemed legitimate during professional training, prompted by those examples given at the beginning of the chapter, not only to consider the emotional life of the young

person with whom I was working but to consider also whether their emotional lives were wholly separate from their behavior or learning. The scientific bases of such connectivity had been barely acknowledged in training let alone explored. In search of theoretical understandings I stumbled upon the vivid metaphorical mental maps created by Wilfred Bion - of the processes of alpha-function, alpha and beta-elements, of K and minus K (1962). These ideas still provide one of only a few coherent psychological frameworks for conceptualising the inter-connective potentials between what have otherwise too often been the conceptually discrete worlds of cognition and emotion. While Bion is also remembered for having made available the notions of 'container' and 'contained' (which have become popular analogies deployed by practitioners in respect of our emotional lives; Bion, 1970), it is his further conceptualizations of mental space in this later work which are germane to the argument here.

British object-relations analysts developed theorizations of experience from their practice, of the relations between patient and analyst, in particular, focusing on the emotional components of their interactions. However, underpinning Bion's concept of the individual was a particular approach to an internalized mental space: 'The mental realization of space is therefore felt as an immensity so great that it cannot be represented even by astronomical space because it cannot be represented at all... mental space is...vast compared with any realization of three-dimensional space...' (Bion, 1970, p.12).

To Bion, our mental processes were simultaneously both sensory and emotional, and would thus challenge the reductionist schism between human cognition and emotion frequently reified by 20<sup>th</sup>. century psychology, 'geometrical concepts of lines, points and space [are] derived originally not from a realization of three dimensional space but from the realizations of the emotional life...' (Bion, 1970, p.10).

It is possible to see connections with the work of philosophers such as Bergson or later phenomenologists in consideration of our 'inner lives' but had they been alive today it is conceivable that both Bergson and Bion may well have utilized the kinds of technologies being developed now to investigate the brain and human nervous system. Contemporary neuroscience is expanding its activities and potentials and the technology clearly exists now to provide a window even into the minute inner biological workings of the brain (for example, Le Doux, 1998, Linden, 2007, Zeki. 2010).

Psychoanalysis and more recently, neuroscientific studies, each recognized 'the scientific neglect of emotion in the 20<sup>th</sup>. century' (Damasio, 2000, p.39) and that 'cognitive science is really a science of only part of the mind...it leaves emotion out. And minds without emotion are not really minds at all...' (LeDoux, 1998, p.25). Antonio Damasio makes a number of helpful distinctions, however, for example, between brain and processes of mind, between emotion and the emergence of feeling. In order to assist in his scientific quest he acknowledges a debt to early psychologists such as William James (Damasio, 2011) and challenges too the Cartesian primacy of thinking upon which research and practice in the human

sciences has often been constructed. Significantly, however, Damasio also accepts that neuroscience is powerless to access the nature of lived experience, ‘there is an abyss between knowledge and experience which cannot be bridged scientifically’ (Damasio, 2000, p.308).

Instead he reflects on the temporality and spatiality of mind: ‘the distinctive feature of brains...is to create maps...maps are constructed when we interact with objects...the human brain maps...all the relationships that objects and actions assume in time and space...’ (Damasio, 2011, pp. 63 and 64). He is insistent that the map-making processes of mind are not merely cognitive, narrowly conceived, since ‘map-making brains have the power of literally introducing the body as content into the mind process...’ (ibid, p.89). Damasio traces the origins of the very particular forms of investigation adopted in the human sciences back to Descartes and thus challenges the self-imposed limitations of investigations which are predicated on a schism between mind and body (see also Ryle, 1949; Billig, 2008). In so doing he acknowledges his debt to Spinoza, the philosopher who, three centuries previously had also re-affirmed their very indissolubility (Damasio, 2004). Damasio claims that his research supports the case that, ‘when the brain maps the world external to the body it does so thanks to the mediation of the body...the defining aspect of our emotional feelings is the conscious readout of our body states as modified by emotions...’ (Damasio, 2011, pp.39 and 56).

Other neuroscientists have been helpfully cautious regarding the legitimate claims of their science, for example, the neurobiologist Steven Rose writes ‘developments occurring within neuroscience cannot be seen as isolated from the socio-economic context in which they are being developed and in which searches for genetic or pharmacological fixes to individual problems dominate...’ (Rose, 2006, p.5). Raymond Tallis, another eminent neuroscientist observed, ‘...neuroscience lets us down. Somehow, bursts of electricity in the wetware of the brain don’t seem adequate to the exquisitely structured mind that I, and you, have...’ (Tallis, 2008, p.158).

Notwithstanding such helpful insider critiques, however, Damasio’s articulations of the links between mind and body are in similar vein to Bion’s analogies of mental processes which are intrinsically imbued with sensorily-informed emotionality and which are in turn processed as human feelings, ‘...how perceptual maps are *felt* and *experienced* – is not only central to the understanding of the conscious mind, it is integral to that understanding...’ (Damasio, 2011, p. 101).

#### RELATIONAL SPACE

Object-relations analysts, in particular, built sophisticated theoretical frameworks as a means of making sense of inter-subjective processes, building on initially Freudian concepts such as transference, counter-transference, projection. In particular, in his (1971) concepts of ‘transitional objects’ and ‘transitional phenomena’ Winnicott invited us to gaze not only on the infant but on the infant’s active participation in their first relationships, in particular, in their relationships with their mother.

Winnicott's vision of the infant world was inherently dynamic and relational and encouraged evocative accounts of the relationships between infants and mothers, for example, as sites for reverie in which play develops and allows safe (intrinsically social) exploration of their mutual social worlds. The concepts of transitional phenomena and transitional objects became part of Winnicott's representation of exchanges between infants and their carers, which emphasized the importance of external objects as a means of engaging in shared attention and activity. His work provided explanations not only in respect of communication, learning and development but, importantly, suggested ways in which infants engage with a social world and in the process absorb culture.

While Winnicott did not go so far as to subscribe to the Vygotskian account of the direction of child development (i.e. as being 'outside-in') he understood the inherently interactive nature of all human functioning, the constant processing and internalization of sensory stimuli and the importance of exerting some control over those processes. His notion of the 'transitional object' provided a theoretical means of understanding how infants engage with such stimuli (including people as objects) and, in particular, how they then come to negotiate themselves and others in an intrinsically social world. 'Transitional objects' and 'phenomena' have much to offer outside the clinic, for example, in terms of the conceptual possibilities they offer the practitioner in respect of more general situations relating to the interpersonal, the dyad or group.

Those early training experiences made a lasting impression in terms of my sensitivities to the nature of the interactions between myself (as psychologist) and young people during practice and I had grave misgivings about using any technological devices such as intelligence tests. However, while abhorrent in the opportunities they afford for the exercise of power based on a scientifically dubious concept, in other respects, such tests have proved to be excellent transitional objects, providing opportunities for shared attention in a manner which produces evidence of an inherently relational nature. For some young people are reluctant to engage or answer direct questions about school or family and employing cognitive tests as 'transitional objects' has appeared at times to free them from the more direct gaze of the psychologist (if not 'government'). In concentrating on the specific demands of verbal reasoning tests, for example, the young person can be spared the discomfort of probing, unmediated interaction with a relative stranger and instead we can begin to focus our energies on a separate object in the space between us. Relationships can unfold during and in between the various questions and the developing relational field can invite more sophisticated consideration of experience: 'we experience life in the area of transitional phenomena, in the exciting interweave of subjectivity and objective observation, and in an area that is intermediate between the inner reality of the individual and the shared reality of the world that is external to individuals' (Winnicott, 1971, p.75).

During professional practice, through a utilization of Winnicott's understanding of transitional space, it has become possible to conceptualise a meeting with a young person as holding a series of opportunities, for example, for opening up 'potential

space'. The professional invariably has access to a greater array of discursive options but the young person can begin to trust that they can exercise some control over the limits of their own engagement and emotional commitment. The use of intelligence tests is, of course, problematic, but rather than prioritizing any 'results' following testing, for example, Winnicott's ideas show how as practitioners we can observe a fundamental ethical responsibility to the young person; for example, by protecting them from failure in the moment or other potentially negative consequences of the engagement such as through our subsequent representations. Winnicott's ideas concerning 'relational space' help to conceptualize the ways in which the young person enters the space and the ways in which they are offered the power to vacate it. This can most effectively be achieved by conceptualizing work in terms of a relationship as we process ideas about the young person 'in-relation-to' a whole set of other ideas we have about ourselves and of the social and cultural factors which together construct the nature of that relationship.

The inherently dynamic nature of Winnicott's theorizations expose practitioner and client to relational possibilities, encompassing understandings of a psychology which cannot be conceptualized outside human relations. In considering again those earlier exchanges as trainee, Winnicott could have provided ways of understanding the inter-connectivity between the (emotional) lives of the participants (for example, the distress of the young people) and the transitional spaces they shared with the practitioners (e.g. as oppressors).

'RELATIONAL BEING' (GERGEN, 2008)

The science of relationships has yet to be established (Bion, 1970, p.53).

In its challenge to the Enlightenment view of the person (as a 'rational unitary subject', Hollway, 1989) the potentially radical nature of psychoanalysis provided at times frightening analyses of an unknown, barely restrained and potentially explosive emotionality. Psychoanalysis in turn was itself challenged by increasingly complex understandings of the ways in which the world (social, cultural, political, economic) operated on the individual as 'cultural experiences... [which] provide the continuity that transcends personal existence' (Winnicott, 1971, p.118).

Critical psychology has intervened, in particular, in its analyses of issues which testify to the importance of language, knowledge and power, informing as to the ways in which individuals and our understandings of the world, are socially constructed. However, while critical psychological approaches have made an impact on scholarship, it has been far too easy for practitioners to reject the often linguistically and theoretically dense epistemological frameworks as either irrelevant or remote from the knowledge or experience of individual clients. Whenever faced by the power of critical psychology's critique of our 'acts of government,' practitioners have too easily been allowed to retreat to a 'so what?' position whenever the weight of the critical discourse has threatened

the destruction of their expertise. The critical psychologist, of course, is needed to challenge existing theory but instead of holding it safe only in the silo of the academy I argue that it is precisely in the materiality of the exchanges between, for example, individual educational psychologists and their clients, that critical theory becomes absolutely vital.

Ken Gergen assembled a huge array of collaborators in constructing his challenge to what he termed 'bounded being' (Gergen, 2009). Drawing on Vygotsky's challenge to the 'dominant view of isolated minds' (p.xviii), he envisaged a 'process of relational flow' (p.46) informed by Bakhtinian linguistic analyses and which connected to the Deweyan tradition that 'the cultivated mind was essentially a social mind' (p.242). Gergen re-constructed the arguments in such a way that the theorizations became accessible and relevant to practitioners not only across mental health but across education too, sharing with Dewey and Bruner perhaps the belief that 'the primary aim of education is to enhance the potentials for participating in relational processes...that can ultimately contribute to the continuing and expanding flow of relationships within the world more broadly' (p.243).

Gergen too critiques the legacy of a Cartesian model of scientific practice, for example, in its implications for how we relate to one another as individuals (i.e. as hermetically-sealed) but also in respect of the assumptions the model makes regarding simplistic, linear understandings of cause and effect. Instead, he constructs a hypothesis which encourages challenges to that notion of 'bounded being' in all conceivable situations and makes his arguments relevant to forms of professional practice.

A model of relationally embodied action is suggested (ibid, p.138) in which 'knowledge emerges from the process of co-action' (p.xxviii). This understanding of a mutuality of engagement challenges the ability of those positivist methods traditionally employed by the physical sciences to say anything meaningful whatsoever about our psychological selves, 'biology tells us nothing about what psychological states, if any, are related to psychological activity.' (p.116). This is a very similar position taken by Bergson who also concluded that the very nature of the language of positivist approaches made little sense in respect of human experience. To Gergen, our experiences and indeed our emotions too are intrinsically human (i.e. as 'relational performances', ibid. p. 102) and as such are impervious to positivist approaches. His insistence on the fundamental nature of human relational approaches is also to be found in his notion of 'therapy as relational recovery' (pp. 270–309) while he also proposes an education whose aims should be revisited 'in a relational key' (pp. 240–269).

Gergen entices us from a Cartesian model of the person as 'bounded being' towards a model of the person which he conceptualizes by the term, 'multi-being' (p. 134) and in which our potentials are not considered as primarily 'biological but social' (p.139). The terrain being mapped in Gergen's work is that of social engagement in which all our everyday ideas, feelings and actions are constructed not in isolation but always in-relation-to worlds of others. As such, his model demands that as practitioners (or indeed as researchers) we consider the impact of our own presence within any

dyad or professional setting and consider our role in reifying or constructing the discourse. For example, the implications of Gergen's work are that when working with young people, their families or teachers, we will not only be in engaging in the dyad. We will be active participants in constructing, sharing or encouraging the discourses, whether they relate to matters of individual responsibility or to the social or psychological, whether to the political or indeed the abnormal or whether they are inculcated by discourses of deficit. Gergen's suggestion that all 'disorder' is created socially within our cultural situatedness but, importantly, created in ways which he describes as 'crippling' (p. 278), sheds considerable analytical light on the discomfort I had felt in those early trainee experiences.

Such ideas have profound implications for the work of the practitioner educational (school) psychologist for they allow us to base our work with young people, not on the discourses of abnormality or deficit but on the principles of relations, which offers a very different kind of knowledge but also practice. Gergen's social constructionist ideas would have encouraged us as trainees all those years ago to conceptualize a very different way of working with the young people i.e. as being intrinsically relational and dynamic.

#### SOME CONCLUSIONS

Evidence from psychoanalysis (Bion) and neuroscience (Damasio) suggests that the ways in which we learn and develop cannot be severed either from our emotions or from our social and environmental situatedness. Conclusions to be drawn from the other critical resources drawn upon in this chapter suggest that should we fail to take full account of those complex variables, we are likely to commit a grave error which, at root, undermines our discipline's scientific credibility. In direct work with young people, their families and teachers, we need to remain sensitive to those multiple variables which are unique to human being and which are present in the moments of relations – the 'clinical encounters'. These events do not occur only inside a clinic, of course, but in all the interactions and relations of our direct work.

Winnicott and Gergen provide important analyses concerning the complexity of our human relations and also important theoretical models upon which our relations with young people might potentially be constructed. Practitioners are thus invited to think about the kinds of encounters they might envisage, Winnicott proposing the transformative possibilities for both client and practitioner in the 'potential spaces', while Gergen similarly compelling us to acknowledge that all those characteristics and behaviors which might present as innately individual will, in fact, have emerged out of a myriad of dynamic relations.

Looking back again at the first example from professional training, the distress of the two young people would have seriously impaired their functioning and it is thus possible to conclude that any claim to accuracy in the 'results' from psychometric testing concerning their intellectual ability would be tenuous in the extreme, given the context of their relatedness in the situation.

In respect of the other boy, the implication of theorizations borrowed from Bion and Damasio is that while he undoubtedly presented with some kind of learning disability he may nevertheless have possessed learning and social functioning potentials. However, few situations could be envisaged as being less conducive to engaging with those potentials. As trainees we had been encouraged to develop modes of working which placed as central the specific psychopathology and only occasionally, the relations which we would share with young people. This would always allow us to miss an opportunity for developing further opportunities for learning, the consequences of which are both ethical and scientific.

The critical, relational educational psychologist looks to scrutinize existing explanations and encourage alternative theoretical accounts out of a renewed determination to act in accordance with an ethical but also scientific position. In the examples cited above, any focus on mere behavior or cognition, narrowly conceived, had seemed disconnected with those young people as personhoods (Martin, 2007; Sugarman, 2009). As a consequence I have argued that the theoretical resources upon which professionals have been expected to base our work with young people and their families have been at best, incomplete and at worst, impoverished.

It is the actual relations between practitioners (as well as researchers) and young people which provide a site for the development of a critical and ethical practice, in the name of educational psychology. It is the inter-subjectivities and situated relations between the educational psychologist and young persons which offer a site for scientific inquiry and opportunities for educational psychology to conduct its own search for the 'science of relationships' inside the 'clinical encounters'. Minds as processes are beyond measurement and I have argued that in direct work with young people, their families and teachers we need to be committed to *qualities*, which are beyond any particular psychopathology, and thus remain committed to understanding the relations. Critical relational educational psychologists in 'clinical encounters' should aspire to be ethical, emancipatory *and* scientific in human spaces which are intrinsically relational.

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ATHANASIOS MARVAKIS & IOANNA PETRITSI

## 9. SOLIDARITY, NOT ADJUSTMENT

*Activism learning as (self-)transformation*

“La solidaridad es la ternura de los pueblos”<sup>1</sup>

Che Guevara or Pablo Neruda

### INSTEAD OF AN INTRODUCTION: OUR BACKGROUND

Grounded on the German tradition of Critical Psychology, we have been engaged for years in youth research/work and internationalist activism (Foitzik & Marvakis, 1997). This particular background implies that all the theoretical and practical interventions we are participating in – conceived as “transformative/educative practices” – do not refer to some formalised social practices of education – e.g. to some more or less traditional schooling context. This is fitting with Gottfried Mergner’s (1999) notion of social learning processes, not as ‘technicalities’ in formalized schooling, but as integral part of an eventually self-organized process of political learning. In such a context “education” – conceived as transformative interventions – refers more to what is dubbed in German as “politische Bildung” (civic learning/education). Furthermore, “Bildung” – as an ongoing social learning process - includes also practices of “self-education” (or self-transformation) by/in activism.

Practices, like for example writing, are in this context moments/kinds of critical self-reflection, which is itself part of the political self-education (or self-transformation) of the participating subjects. Guiding questions for such an “educative self-clarification” and “self-transformation” could be: How are we “talking” and “acting” politically? Which (political) aims are we claiming and which aims are we serving with our particular talking and acting? How far do our conceptual means/tools fit to our political “declarations”? How far are we subverting our own claims with our theoretical praxis and practice?

The argument here is that we are participating in (re)producing power-relations as they are, thus finally participating also in our domination, not by purpose or because of some individual “needs” to dominate or being dominated. Such a way of understanding/interpreting our own social practice or other social phenomena - by dubbing them with ‘psychological terminology’ - make (some of) us potentially “feel good” (or feel better). However, it does not add a bit of clarification to our social practice, on the contrary it contributes to its disguise.

The (re)production of power-relations we are involved in has a lot to do with the social practices we are participating in (consciously or not, purposefully or not is a quite different issue/question). And the ways we are understanding and talking about our social world, as articulated in the discourses we are participating in, are not innocent, neither arbitrary, but very significant social practices for both: for understanding and changing our social world, but also for (re)producing power-relations dominating us. Our discursive practices are very efficient tools, for overcoming the “social learning barriers” (“soziale Lerngrenzen” - Mergner, 1999), but also for keeping us confined within the existing social barriers. For this, it is very important for our social learning – as civic education/learning, politische Bildung, etc. – to reflect constantly on the particular perspectives and restrictions engulfed in and transported with the concepts we are using – as being theoretical/linguistic tools for understanding and changing our world.

This ongoing reflective practice is itself necessarily a social, a democratic and also an educative/transformational process. We can catch such a “self-transformative” process with the concept of “social self-understanding” (coined by Klaus Holzkamp - within the tradition of German Critical Psychology). In the context of a (political) self-education (German: politische Bildung) it is to have, to develop a ‘peer discourse’ *with* others (peers) and less a report *about* others (e.g. as clients), offering reflections, clarifications and hints for our common social self-understanding. Thus, the chapter too aims to be useful exactly in such a context, in such a social practice and is less to be understood as some kind of reflection “about others” or some “instruction” for others.

#### COMPLICIT CONFINEMENT OF LEARNING IN DOMINANT THEORY AND PRACTICE

In our attempts to be human, to appropriate, cultivate, develop, expand our human powers and potentialities grounded in our triple heritage<sup>2</sup>, we are participating in re/producing and changing the capacities in them. The necessary dialectics herein, is to conceive and to encounter our learning in all its multiplicity and continuity: as a means, as a way and as an outcome of our overall activities, practices, actions. Learning practices are not only “unfolding” the subject’s potentialities but simultaneously also develop these potentials and produce and create new potentials. Learning refers to those particular practices with which in changing the world we are (also) changing the active subject. Learning practices are those particular social practices, which can also modify the functional basis of the psychical (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 156f., p. 277f.). *Learning* is thus intervening on the subjective *and* the “objective” presuppositions, the preconditions of these practices.

Learning is a subjectively grounded activity of the individual in his/her attempt to get to know the world and to intervene in it. The “knowing” is being realized by subjects through participation in social practices. Under this perspective learning is a moment of the integrative social process of transformation/education. The “doing of

learning” is a side of a transformative relation, the “contents” of this doing (training, transporting and transforming) are not only “objects”, but also relations and subjects: it is transforming also the epistemology (the politics) of the subjects towards the learning *praxis*, together with its learning *contents* and with the learning *subjects* themselves (ontology). An implicit confinement of the “doing of learning” to the appropriation, interiorisation of some “authoritative knowledge” allows for subjects only the “training” of a submissive, subordinating relation, or “employee relation”, if not a “faithful”, religious (“hailing”) relation towards learning and knowledge – whether it refers to sacred writings or highly rational and critical textbooks; independently of the intentions of the teaching or learning subjects!

We cannot reconstruct any social practices outside of social and societal interconnections and relations, so we also can not conceive the particular learning practices without adequate reference to such comprehensive processes and conditions in which they are embedded. Learning practices are concomitantly moments in a *learning regime*. This agrees with Anthony Giddens (1984) notion that action is an ongoing, steady *stream of action* (*Handlungsstrom*) and not some kind of processed meat ready to be sliced and analysed piece-by-piece. This implies that we have to approach learning as being a particular stream within the stream of action, which is itself within the wider stream of re/producing and changing our societies (and our lives within it). “I am learning” signifies, implies my participation in, my contribution to a *learning regime* from/in a particular and dynamic social position. My individual learning activities affect, modify, and transform the learning regime and my position in it! Thus, individual learning activities are transformative activities in different directions, with different recipients.

My own learning practices are always moments in a learning regime, i.e. moments in my participation in such a learning regime. On this basis, the practices of “my learning” cannot be conceived as something linear, mechanical or cumulative, but are necessary moments in/of a dialectical conflict. That is acts in a social battlefield. “I am learning” presupposes then that “I am encountering”, “I am dealing with contradictions” inherent in this battlefield and that the “outcome” of “my learning” can usually be only a “compromise”.<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, if I want to understand *my* learning practices, I need also an appropriate understanding of the learning regime (including an adequate theory about society), its components, participants, its organization and development, etc. To state this differently, the understanding of my own learning practices is embedded in a more comprehensive conception of a learning regime, which in turn, is embedded in some understanding/theorizing of society. Talking – and researching - about learning as a mere individual “issue” is thus always concomitantly a politically interesting abstraction of the complexity I am dealing with *by/in my* learning and the compromises I am usually making *in/with my* learning.

Learning as/in participation means participating and contributing in a concrete, that is, historical, social, technological, *learning regime*. In the context of such a regime the individuals are identifying subjectively the issues for their own learning.

The learning regime has necessarily intersections with – or is even included in – broader “schooling regimes” or “schooling complexes”, as the more comprehensive context of organized transformative practices in our societies, the *schooling regime* being itself a concrete attempt to give a practicable solution to the fundamental contradiction between *learning* and *power*. The issue at stake in this fundamental contradiction is, on the one – the learning - side, the productivity, creativity of subjects as moment of our human hypostasis, and how to re/organise the societal relations, how to create new social forms of life and which ones, so that this productivity can be actualized, cultivated and developed (Castoriadis, 1997)<sup>4</sup>. The other side, the side of power, includes the attempts to control the subjects’ productivity, creativity, in order not to endanger the already existent social forms, the dominant social order. “Control” can refer to the “channeling”, suppression or even nullification of the productive (subjective, social) potentials, based on the logic: “better destruction than revolution”.

Our learning is the outcome of our participation and contribution in a certain set of *social practices* within given social structures across numerous domains of social life. What we called a *learning regime* is the overall dynamic process that interweaves individual and social practices with social structures and values. Therefore, “learning” – as a product and prerequisite of such regime – constitutes an unequally distributed social good.

The dominant (Fordist) *learning regime* in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is part of the structuring of the life course in differentiated (though historically variable) ‘stages’ or ‘phases’, each one of which allocates qualitatively and quantitatively different resources and constraints. It proposes a serial organisation of life-course in biographical sequences with distinctive practices: first learning/acquiring then working/applying. In our historical Now we are living in a transitional period, usually characterised only “negatively” as *post-fordist*, where a new – a neo-liberal - learning regime is emerging, which is questioning exactly the Fordist *seriality* as it is expressed for example in the organizational principle: “first learning, than working”. Against the “seriality”, now a more and more “parallel” social organisation of learning/working is proposed/imposed. But the societal demands *for* life-long learning are being addressed, demanded without any necessary social backing-up for/during the learning practices – as it has been in the Fordist regime via the support of the learning Youth by the working Adults (the parents of the youngsters). Thus, learning is now existing or offered less as a life-long *opportunity* and is much more of a burden on everyone as a *life sentence*. The new freedom *for* life-long learning is coming down the street as new coercion, as life-long competition even between formerly non-competitive social groups (e.g. adults/parents vs. youth/children). In the new emerging learning regime, it seems that everyone has to learn and to work simultaneously and life-long – if he/she is not from affluent background.

As mentioned before, human learning is participating in social practices as complex and contested entities, and there are two *methods* for this: incidental, “osmotic” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964) learning (“Mitlernen”, Holzkamp, 1993)

and intended learning, as particular form of action, as “learning labour” (Rubinstein, 1946/2000). The concrete outcome of and the prerequisites for my *doing learning* is being realised through appropriation of social meanings (gesellschaftliche Bedeutungen) as these are situated and distributed in a variety of societally produced tools: mental tools (e.g. concepts), social tools (e.g. relations), “objective” tools (e.g. external objects, things, artifacts) guiding – not determining – our action. Learning means in such a perspective the participation in the action possibilities which are, so to say, situated and distributed in these tools. The reference point for these tools, and therefore also for my action, is the societal reality with its ambiguous, conflictual, and contradictory character which cannot but find its way, and be articulated also in the social meanings.

However, such a conflictuality in reality and consequently also in the social meanings seem not to be taken as necessary in organized educative practices *and* dominant theorizing of learning. Conflicts and contradictions have been replaced by some neutral, technical “unambiguity” (Eindeutigkeit) in the semantics of social meanings, probably for reasons of making understanding/learning easier. Social meanings seem to be constructed analogous with operating guidelines for technical equipment and not with social conflictual fields. This perspective allows for only faithful appropriation following the semantic differentiations of technical operating guidelines and leaves no space for any conflictual “deviation”. But such theoretical easiness is probably either a chimera of social scientists or a politically interested camouflage of powerful practices making social meaning look “unambiguous” and thus delegitimizing whatever “problems” with or resistance to any easy subordination to the authoritative social meanings as merely technical operating guidelines. However, are social meanings really just as “unambiguous,” as seemingly facile as the operating of my espresso machine?

The potential misunderstanding behind such a chimera or interested camouflage is, however, less grounded in some cognitive incapacities or errors and relies more on our own (e.g. as educators’ or social scientists’) social practices and the blind reflection of their seemingly unambiguous “offers” to conceptualize and practice learning. The chimera or the camouflage seems rational, logical to us from a self-misunderstanding about one of our own concessions in our praxis as educators and/or social scientists. It is our compromise in accepting *our* subordination under the “unambiguity” of our own employer, who expects knowledge *about* subjects and the control of their behaviour and not knowledge *for these* subjects! And this self-misunderstanding helps us educators, social scientists to stay far away (at least in our minds) from the conflictual, contradictory social battlefield – as long as our social position itself in this battlefield is not being questioned. This self-misunderstanding is emerging also because/if we, as educators and/or social scientists, take the dominant learning theories formulated potentially by ourselves as hard cash for social reality. In these theories learning is conceptualized without any autonomy of the learning subjects, just because these theories are theorizing the learning practices only from the perspective of the ruling institutions – speaking thus only about the one half of

learning – the “controllable” half.<sup>5</sup> Our self-misunderstanding<sup>6</sup> can thus be conceived as falling into the trap we (educators, social scientists) have set methodologically for our objects-subjects. It is, thus, a classic example for a theoretical shortcoming out of a pre-decided methodological shortcoming.

We have to be cautious of not confining social meanings to knowledge retrieved in/for some school test, constricting the world we need to get-to-know into a very narrow social practice. The tools in which the social meanings are situated and distributed and which we are using for learning are products of societal labour, and thus, cannot be but ambiguous, conflictual, even contradictory (just to name a few examples: knife, gender, alienation, equality, friendship, cell-phone, ...). *Situated* and *distributed* do not refer just to a semantic space but actually constitute social battlefields (with their differentiations) and thus, also particular standpoints articulated in specific perspectives on interpretations of such social meaning. We can use here as an example for this conflictual social polyvalence a short note from Marx' Paris Manuscript about the social meaning of *alienation*:<sup>7</sup>

First it has to be noted that everything which appears in the worker as an *activity of alienation, of estrangement*, appears in the non-worker as a *state of alienation, of estrangement*.

Secondly, that the worker's *real, practical behaviour*<sup>8</sup> in production and to the product (as emotional state) appears in the non-worker - facing him - as a *theoretical* behaviour.

*Thirdly*, the non-worker does everything against the worker which the worker does against himself; but he does not do against himself what he does against the worker. (Marx, final paragraph of the 1<sup>st</sup> Fragment with title: “Estranged Labour”)

As the young Marx points out, the social meaning of “alienation” is considered to be a *state*, or *condition*, when in actuality this is only the perspective of the “non-worker”, i.e. of “capital”! Contrary to this dominant view, he suggests the perspective of approaching alienation as process and as activity, which would actually be the perspective of the worker. Methodologically speaking, social meanings are not just terms that name different things; they also articulate particular social and epistemological standpoints, including also the “awareness” of the subject about his/her particular position in society. From this starting point, *alienation* is not at all a term indicating a psychological (individual) phenomenon or mechanism, *alienation* is not a psychological concept (psychic state, condition, like “individual distress”, etc. ...),<sup>9</sup> it is primarily to be understood as a relation(ship) and as a social practice. Alienation is a social phenomenon and has to be understood as such.

It is exactly this ambiguity, this conflictual or contradictory character of social meanings (like *alienation*) which opens a plurality of conflicting possibilities for subjects' learning. If social meanings could really be restricted to some unambiguous “technicalities” ready to be just memorized then there would not be any need for

empirical research regarding what real subjects are doing in their social reality; “things” would be much easier, since deductable from a thick description of social reality and waiting ready just to be “instructed” to the subjects. Learning would here be a mere technical process of inducing and performing, which is, however, far away from our societal reality *and* our human potentialities! Here learning is always the learning *of* and *through* contradictions, it is learning amidst of socially contested meanings. The contradictions in social reality are visible also in our doing of learning, our learning practices, and they appear to us subjects not as alleged *semantic gaps* waiting to be filled, like a glass of water, or a bank account.

Learning – as participation in the action possibilities situated and distributed in social meanings – thus cannot be conceived as reduced to some *interiorization* of a semantic variety in these meanings; it requires from the subjects to encounter the conflicts, contradictions, battles, standpoints included in them. The emergence of *subjective sense* is here a productive and transformative process, not reducible at all to the interiorisation of external – supposedly neutral and technical - information! The emergence of subjective sense relies on a practice we could call “subjective semiosis” (J. Brockmeier, 1988). Encountering contradictions in my learning (practices) necessarily includes compromises from me; potentially it also demands removing, eroding of learning-sediments, some real un-learning, but demands also creative, innovative solutions.

#### LEARNING BEYOND THE SCHOOLING MODE - THE AUTONOMY OF LEARNING

The complicity between theorizing education/learning in formal educative practices and the dominant societal order derives from educative theory’s blind acceptance to deliver *tech-knowledge* (learning and teaching theories) only on the *How*, on the procedures of learning, in order to maintain the educative process as it is with its double success (teaching *and* excluding). This tech-knowledge is finally a mere lubricant of the educational machine, as well as all of concessions (where the individual as unit of analysis is only one of these) - without questioning the dominant arrangements of these educative practices (e.g. teaching as an interpersonal procedure *in* a classroom).

Through such (theoretical/practical) devices, the whole dialectic between practice and theory is reduced to a simple, though legitimizing, sequence or string of succession: first practice, then theory – or vice versa. This “principle of simplification” with its popularity not only in educational settings is relying on and promoting a technocratic self(mis)understanding of the social sciences to be social engineers and neutral servants of the dominant status quo. As social engineers we are allegedly neutral and – hopefully - efficient problem solvers.<sup>10</sup> This confinement of action to its procedural aspects (the *How*) is a consequence *and* a precondition for the standpoint of a neutral and technocratic servant of power.

This very popular self(mis)understanding of our discipline(s) of being neutral and technocratic is quite useful in avoiding to see that we are also part of the problem

we have (or claim) to solve, not only part of its solution. However, if we don't want to serve blindly to such "pedagogy of assimilation", if we want to break up with such complicity and want to contribute to "pedagogy of dissent" (or resistance; C. T. Mohanty, 2003), we have to rethink both sides: educative *practices* and theorizing learning, we have to restore the dialectical unit of practice/theory.

A quite obvious moment to start our reflection and to reclaim the *autonomy of learning* would be, for example, to remind ourselves that every action is comprised not only of some procedural aspects (about the *how* to execute, to accomplish, to carry out the action), but is constituted also of moments concerning the *What* and the *Why*, the content, the intentions of the action. Reclaiming the autonomy of learning for the developing subject thus means reclaiming not only control over participation in the *process*, the "how of learning", as it is claimed, for example, by modern theories talking about self-regulated learning. The autonomy of learning also consists of participation in identifying its relevant content - the *What* of the action - and the social and subjective meaning of it (the *Why* of action/learning).

### *Social Movement Learning*

The above self-misunderstanding as it is articulated in reducing action/learning to some of its operative aspects, and in accepting interiorisation of a semantic variety as the core/only method for learning is easily questioned if we take into consideration also learning/transformational practices beyond the schooling mode. The social practice we will talk about is activist praxis in social movements. To be more precise we will have to talk about the *learning dimensions* in/of social movements (which could be named "social activism learning").<sup>11</sup> The learning dimensions herein are focusing on people's lives and the (social) struggles for improving their lives and for gaining control over the conditions of their lives, including resistance against domination and ruling relations (Foley, 1999).

Learning in such a conception is self-understandingly part of collective changing social conditions and relations, not as static entities (identities), but as dynamic relatedness. These changes are not (only) a particular educational scope or aim, but are also an *epistemological effect* of the practice/learning in social movements. "My learning" helps me to change my positioning in the web of complex and contested social practices. My standpoint in these practices is being changed with the help of my learning/practice. My learning happens, is made possible in collective changing of our relationship toward *knowledge* and social reality and thus towards our understanding of this knowledge and reality, with all its content, questions and subjects involved.

In traditional settings it is decided in advance and "somewhere else" who is to teach and who is to learn – and what. It is set in advance who is to change and who is to facilitate or enforce this changing and its direction. In contrast to this, in social activism learning – as in all learning dimensions as participation in social practices – "things" are simultaneously much easier and much more complicated. Learning

as part and as participation in activism are particular dimensions in/of these social practices and not some *neutral application* of educational techniques, and the very process of learning includes all the aspects/moments being ostracized in dominant learning practice/theory (“schooling mode”). Learning— as content and as process - is in such a context not something to be imposed or enforced from “above” or from “outside” upon certain subjects. Learning is not a technical process of instruction with fixed subject positions.

The “what is the problem” (or the “issue”), “why” and for “who it is so problematic” is an integrative part/moment of the ongoing stream of action, of the genuine learning process and not some “technical”, operational detail or characteristic. Identifying the problematic, the hindrances in/for my ongoing action which I - or we - want to overcome with our learning, is itself a decisive moment of this action – though “often not recognized as learning” (Foley, 1999, p. 66).

Taking in consideration the dominant learning conceptions, practices and experiences of subjects (through the schooling mode, “academism”, “from above”) it becomes probably understandable that what is named as “subjective identifying of the learning dimensions/aspects” is easy to be said and not just difficult to be done. Moreover, it has properly to be *conquered*: Contra the dominant consciousness and self-understanding, the learning subjects have to liberate space and legitimation for its articulation!

Learning in such a comprehensive conception is not merely a clear, unambiguous technical instrument ready to be applied in order to overcome a hindrance in my action, to solve a problem. The perception, the sense and awareness of what is problematic in my, and for my, action is a constitutive moment of my learning process – if we don’t want to confine learning on its operative aspects but want to include them as an aspect of the *learning problematic* which we have to overcome through further action/learning.

The difficulty of identifying and recognizing relevant learning dimensions in our action becomes even bigger if we don’t want to confine our learning to *ad hoc* or to “practical” issues in our ongoing stream of action. And this is so, less because of some increased complexity and more because of the contested, conflictual or even contradictory social field delineated by the questions about *Who* and *Why* has to learn – and *Who* does not!

*Learning* (as a particular action, practice) encompasses distinct practices of the learning *subject*, before and beyond this learning is being a caused effect of the (un/successful) didactic practices of the educator. This implies that learning is a *social relation* – with distinct accountable subject positions – and not a fixed technical or mechanical procedure with causes and effects. Learning is thus not just a detour, a circumvent (“Lernschleife” – Holzkamp, 1993) by which I can overcome some hindrances in my actual action. Furthermore, my learning requires (potentially) the reconfiguration of the action as a whole *and simultaneously* contributes to this reconfiguration of the stream of action and hence, of the social practice. Accordingly, *learning* is not *only* retroacting upon the ongoing action by facilitating

its continuation (quasi as a neutral applied technique, a tool, which otherwise does not touch this action). Moreover, it is probably co-determining from anew what the “whole of action” actually is, and by this it also co-determines who the learning subject(s) actually are or have to be. Thus, (activism) learning constitutes potentially the learning subject from anew. To put it in one sentence: Learning in/of social movements produces different knowledge, needs and poses different questions, requires and makes possible different subjects and subjectivities, and looks and has to find different solutions (Cox & Flesher Fominaya, 2009).

#### LEARNING (IN) SOLIDARITY

Activist learning is a privileged field for reflecting about all those issues which in dominant educational practices/arrangements are not allowed even to exist and thus cannot become at all issues of theorizing and intervention. As we have seen, in dominant educational practices there is no space at all for questions about the What and the Why of my doing/learning. It is thus impossible for these things to become questions for *my learning* – let alone the possibility of reflecting about *teaching* all these issues!

The *claiming* and *restoring* of the *autonomy of learning* will be discussed with reference to practices supporting the Refugee Shelter in the city of Thessaloniki. This Shelter exists as one of the few structures hosting refugee families in Greece and it is the only one in the city - run by a NGO with state support since 2000. In early 2010, the responsible Greek Ministry of Health stopped the funding of the shelter, and the previous administrators (the proven to be corrupt NGO) left. About 80 refugees, families with young children, were in danger of being left out in the streets. In this situation, local groups, mostly the “Anti-racism Initiative”, with voluntary work and material support also from hundreds of citizens and social organizations, including the mobilization and self-organization of the Shelter’s own residents, decided to resist the closing of the Shelter. Not only the management was taken over, but also new structural moments for the self-organization of the Shelter were implemented (like regularly house-plenary meetings), without stopping demanding responsibility from the State! Amidst adversary policies the Shelter became a practical model of social solidarity – and thus also a “thorn” in several bureaucratic eyes. Refugees and asylum seekers are not just mere objects of “refugee administration” (and “social policy”) but made their presence felt in space, managing their own home and establishing links in the neighborhood and with other organizations as they actively participated in activities all over the city.

Since then this singular self-organized Refugee Shelter (probably not only in Greece) is fighting with/against all odds to stay open!<sup>12</sup> And there are a lot of groups and persons with the particular “interest” of waiting for the solidarity “flow” to weaken enough, so that the too many traumatic problems and experiences the refugees are carrying with them, produce suitable situations and conflicts, where e.g. local fascist groups manage to mobilize “enraged neighbors” against the Shelter.

Taking up a suggestion of the Germany philosopher Wolfgang Fritz Haug we would like to characterize these practices methodologically as “real-experimental”

initiatives (German: Real-Experiment) based on the underpinnings of solidarity movements and aiming at a collective solidary socialization (“solidar-kulturellen Vergesellschaftung” - W. Fritz Haug, 1991). Such activist initiatives consist necessarily and always of two moves:

- transformative interventions *and*
- (self-)education, i.e. self-transformation or *learning*.

*Learning* solidarity presupposes and enhances the *doing* (application, organization) of solidarity. The *process* of learning solidarity presupposes and enhances the *content* of solidarity; and vice versa. Participation in this real-experiment in solidarity-socialization influences all of the participants, of course, differently depending on their social position, their subjectivities, and their evident and latent needs. The few examples to follow are *from the perspective* of the “locals” (volunteers, including refugees who have lived longer in town participating in the solidarity practices with their particular resources – language skills, crafts, etc.) and refer to *their* potential *learning challenges* (as we called them), i.e. the learning dimensions from the perspective of their own participation in these social practices. The very starting point of this initiative made necessary a great deal of social practices with their implied learning challenges for the involved participants and was not an activity, a “move” to follow after a cool and thorough means-ends analysis coming to the result that the endeavor is “manageable” with the already existing “means” (knowledge, capacities, resources) of the group - on the contrary! The very starting point of this initiative itself included a great deal of learning not yet foreseen at the moment of the beginning.

As we can reconstruct from the correspondence of the supporting group-participants one of the very first big action/learning challenges after the decision to “keep the Shelter open” was the collective organization of the myriad of actions needed – on the basis of the existing resources (including knowledge, political positions, and so on) and necessities. Characteristic questions to be found in the correspondence are though simple concomitantly very complicated:

- What are we doing now? Probably we should build groups. But which ones are to be the most important?<sup>13</sup>
- How can we “demarcate” self-organization in an institution like this Shelter?<sup>14</sup>

It is not possible here even to refer to all the identified action problems as learning problematic, so we will just pick a few further examples for subjective challenges from the (mostly electronic) correspondence between the volunteers, in order only to sketch a little bit the variety of the field. And it is important to stress here that every single one of the easy listed examples hides, engulfs itself a myriad of challenges and prompts for the involved subjects:

- Accompanying refugees in their necessary contacts with authorities (police, urban administration, ministries, lawyers)<sup>15</sup>
- Giving interviews to television, radio broadcasts, newspapers and journals

- Attending the meetings of the municipality council advocating for things needed for the Shelter<sup>16</sup>
- Demanding and mediating for the rights of refugees in the public services domain (e.g. hospitals)<sup>17</sup>
- How to write letters to companies, factories, schools, authorities etc. asking for jobs opportunities for the refugees, material support for the shelter, enrollment in school for children, and so on.
- How to deal collectively with difficult issues, loaded with shame and feelings of guilt, like for example curing lice or scabies
- How to re-connect the electricity – or to intervene with the Public Electric Company in order to avoid the cutting off services – because the bill is not paid?

As broad as the learning challenges are, the same exists for the potential “learning outcomes” for the volunteers, for example:

- New knowledge
- Subjective development (e.g. in gender issues) – herein also identity formation
- Relationship skills
- Citizenship learning (e.g. competent and confident acting in town hall meetings)
- Getting to know the society and the inter-connectedness

To conclude: For the volunteers the “problematic” aspects in/for their action are normally not recognized, not identified as potential “learning dimensions” in/for their solidarity action – actually it is very difficult to “switch” and to see them as “opportunities for learning”. The learning dimensions “appear” usually to the subjects:

- as actual action hindrances,
- as questions without (immediate) answers,
- as conflicts, contradictions
- as questions about what is right/wrong,
- as questions about what is important, what is not,
- as questions about who are our comrades and who are our “enemies”
- what is needed (for/from me): knowledge, faculties, abilities
- what are the impediments or disruptions and why?

Thus questions like “what is the (learning) problematic for me/us” have multiple faces and need a lot of effort – contra the experiences and the self-understanding – to get a subjective awareness of the action problems as learning challenges and dimensions. Actually it demands potentially also removing, eroding of learning-sediments, some real un-learning of the dominant social learning barriers (G. Mergner, 1999), but demands also creative, innovative solutions.

We have to consider a variety of potential difficulties making it hard for the involved subjects to identify learning dimensions in their action problems. Three examples for such difficulties in identifying learning challenges could be:

- There is an “objective” difficulty in the stressing every-day activities to do some extra effort in order to identify “problematic issues”. This is even more difficult with the claim to deal with it in a democratic way demanding extra efforts of coordination and agreement.
- The dominant self-understanding about our own action as (technical, moral) “application” and not also as “participation” and as “self-change” adds to the difficulties of seeing learning challenges in our action.
- *Learning* is – probably because of the dominance of the schooling mode – also loaded with a “smack” (aftertaste) of insufficiency, of an individual “deficit” needing “correction”. This aftertaste does not help me at all in identifying learning challenges for my action, on the contrary it is burdening more efforts to overcome the hindering self-understanding.

In reconstructing such difficulties it is important to see the explanations one can record in analyzing “empirical material” as an integrated whole, to think of them together. This is a minimum step to avoid the acute danger of imposing some “diagnostic expertise” (German: Gutachten) upon subjects – and identifying (again) some individual “insufficiency” and “deficit” to be corrected by educators.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> “Solidarity is the tenderness of the people”
- <sup>2</sup> The *natural history*, the *phylogeny* of learning, the *history* and *historicity of our societies*, the *learning history of the concrete subject*.
- <sup>3</sup> The lack, the missing reference on contradictions and compromises in the learning arrangements, in the learning regime “appears”, articulates in conventional, though dominant learning theories as inter-personal conflicts or motivational problems of individual pupils (or individual teachers). In such conventional and dominant conceptualizations without contradictions the teacher-subject is burdened to act as a behavioral manager and/or conflict manager (tamer, motivator of the pupils).
- <sup>4</sup> “Schöpfung neuer Formen des gesellschaftlichen Lebens” (Castoriadis GIS 1997, 96 – zum jungen Marx)
- <sup>5</sup> This reflects also the “double face” of social sciences in our societies: simultaneously controlling *and* helping subjects.
- <sup>6</sup> Self-misunderstanding of being is the lubricant of the Power-Machine.
- <sup>7</sup> “Zunächst ist zu bemerken, daß alles, was bei dem Arbeiter als *Tätigkeit der Entäußerung, der Entfremdung*, bei dem Nichtarbeiter als *Zustand der Entäußerung, der Entfremdung*, erscheint. Zweitens, daß das *wirkliche, praktische Verhalten* des Arbeiters in der Produktion und zum Produkt (als Gemütszustand) bei dem ihm gegenüberstehenden Nichtarbeiter als *theoretisches Verhalten* erscheint. *Drittens*. Der Nichtarbeiter tut alles gegen den Arbeiter, was der Arbeiter gegen sich selbst tut, aber er tut nicht gegen sich selbst, was er gegen den Arbeiter tut. Betrachten wir näher diese drei Verhältnisse.” (MEW EB, 522)
- <sup>8</sup> And not “attitude” - as in the “common” English translation!
- <sup>9</sup> As it is the dominant view of critical, Marxist social scientists during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- <sup>10</sup> Beyond of the obvious political/ethical critique for not giving subjects the opportunity to participate in determining the content of their learning, we also see that in such arrangements subjects are forced to learn under a confining regime, which hinders them to apply (meaning: to use and to develop), all of our human potentials by confining our action only to some aspects of it.
- <sup>11</sup> Activist Learning, Learning & Struggle, Emancipatory Learning, Radical Adult Education, Critical Social Learning (see e.g. R. Guin, 2009).

- <sup>12</sup> Trying to realize the central slogans from the house-plenary: “solidarity, hospitality, openly accessible” («ανοιχτός, αλληλέγγυος και φιλόξενος»)
- <sup>13</sup> Ομάδα υποστήριξης σε θέματα υγείας και πρόνοιας, Ομάδα νομικής υποστήριξης, Ομάδα για τη συντήρηση του κτιρίου, Ομάδα για την αναζήτηση προμηθειών και πόρων, ομάδα παιδότοπου, Ομάδα εθελοντών εκπαιδευτικών «Εκτός Τάξης», Ομάδα δημοσιοποίησης, Ομάδα στήριξης στην αναζήτηση δουλειάς και στην οργάνωση εγχειρημάτων κοινωνικής οικονομίας.
- <sup>14</sup> The notes in Greek:
- Τι κάνουμε τώρα; Μάλλον πρέπει να φτιάξουμε ομάδες. Σε ποιες δίνουμε περισσότερη βαρύτητα;
  - Πώς ορίζουμε την αυτοδιαχείριση σε μια δομή τέτοιου τύπου;
  - Πρέπει να υπάρξει στον ξενώνα μια συνέλευση που θα λειτουργεί ως μέσο λήψης αποφάσεων για τα λειτουργικά ζητήματά του. Ποιος συμμετέχει σε αυτή τη συνέλευση; Οι ένοικοι, άτομα από την αντιρατσιστική (ομάδα υποστήριξης ξενώνα) και όσος κόσμος επιθυμεί να εμπλακεί. Πώς ενημερώνουμε τον κόσμο για το ζήτημα του ξενώνα και τις ανάγκες των οικογενειών; Με τη δημοσιοποίηση της κατάστασης (δελτία τύπου, ανακοινώσεις). Τι ζητάμε από τον κόσμο; Υλική υποστήριξη και συμμετοχή στις διαδικασίες του ξενώνα. Λύνουν τα παραπάνω το ζήτημα του ξενώνα ως δομή; Όχι. Τι άλλο πρέπει να κάνουμε; Να πιέσουμε δήμο και υπουργείο υγείας για μόνιμη λύση με δημόσια χρηματοδότηση και κοινωνικό έλεγχο. Πώς; Ποιος;
  - Πώς θα γίνει κατανοητό στους ενοίκους το ποιο είμαστε, γιατί επεμβαίνουμε, ποια είναι τα προβλήματα από δω και πέρα, τι είναι η διαχειριστική συνέλευση και ποιος ο ρόλος της, ποιες οι υποχρεώσεις και ποια τα δικαιώματα του καθενός, τι μπορεί η αντιρατσιστική και οι λοιπές οργανώσεις να κάνουν για τον ξενώνα. Στην αρχή πολλοί από μας θεωρούσαμε το κομμάτι αυτό πολύ εύκολο. Πιστεύαμε ότι οι ένοικοι θα αντιλαμβάνονταν άμεσα την κατάσταση και θα ήταν επίσης άμεσα συνεργάσιμοι. Δεν ήταν καθόλου απλό όμως το να συνειδητοποιήσουν τα παραπάνω και να μπουν στη διαδικασία να συμμετέχουν στις διαδικασίες που όριζε η συνέλευσή τους. Ψάχναμε διαρκώς τρόπο να τους εμπλέξουμε πιο ουσιαστικά στις διαδικασίες στήριξης του εγχειρήματος.
- <sup>15</sup> «Πώς θα πάω πχ εγώ να μιλήσω στο δικηγορικό σύλλογο να μιλήσω για το ζήτημα;»  
«Θα πάω σε εκπροσώπους φορέων ντυμένη όπως ντύνομαι στην καθημερινότητά μου και θα δείξω με την παρουσία μου το ποιος είμαι και γιατί κάνω αυτό που κάνω.»
- <sup>16</sup> “Μάθαμε τα δικαιώματά μας ως πολίτες.”  
“Μπορώ να ζητήσω να μιλήσω στο δημοτικό συμβούλιο και μπορώ να καλέσω δημοτικούς συμβούλους στο στέκι μεταναστών και να τους παραθέσω τα προβλήματα που αντιμετωπίζω, να προτείνω λύση, να ακούσω κτλ.”
- <sup>17</sup> «Δεν ήξερα τι μπορούσα να απαιτώ από τους γιατρούς ενός δημόσιου νοσοκομείου για τους αιτούντες άσυλο. Στην πορεία έμαθα ότι είναι νομικά κατοχυρωμένη η δωρεάν ιατρική περίθαλψη».

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## **10. THE ENTANGLEMENT OF THINKING AND LEARNING SKILLS IN NEOLIBERAL DISCOURSE**

*Self, Self-Regulated Learning, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Competencies*

### INTRODUCTION

Critical psychologists suggest that there is a crisis of selfhood in which people's lives are organized around material consumption, radical individualism, and self-betterment at the expense of civic responsibility and the recognition of the social mediation of self (Cushman, 1990; Gergen, 2009; Martin, 2004; Martin & McLellan, 2013). As schools are sites for the production of selves, this crisis can be both exacerbated and mitigated by pedagogical structures, curricula, and policy (Martin & McLellan, 2013; Sugarman, in volume). Shaping schooling to focus on thinking and learning skills may seem like a reasonable approach to address this problem. Such skills have been a hallmark of advocates who support civic engagement, humanization, and democratic processes (Dewey, 1916/2004; Lipman, 2003; Shor, 1992). Commitments to cultivate teaching and learning skills are an attractive approach that can satisfy a humanistic vision of schooling. However, a major concern is that thinking and learning skills have come to define essential features of neoliberal subjectivity, which is implicated in shaping selfhood that is radically individualistic, amenable to corporate interests, productive, efficient, and economically useful (Apple, 2006; Briscoe, 2012; Lakes & Carter, 2011; Martin, 2004; Matusov, 2011).

The task of neoliberals is to inscribe a brand of self that engages in constant and intense evaluation of desires, thoughts, behaviors, strengths, and weaknesses for the purpose of acting strategically (i.e. efficiently and productively) to increase personal value and outcompete others (Rose, 1998). This neoliberal self is individualized, disciplined, self-interested, and responsabilized. This self is fit for 21<sup>st</sup> century economic and educational environments, which can be construed as rapidly shifting, competitive, and replete with choices. In these environments, good workers/students are good thinkers and learners. They are self-regulated, adaptable, innovative, creative, flexible, and good problem solvers. Such individuals are believed to be necessary for economic growth, global competition, efficiency, productivity, and innovation. From this line of reasoning, the commitment to cultivate thinking and

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learning skills endorses and validates the neoliberal (trans)formation of selfhood. A major concern is that the neoliberal self fails to explicitly encourage social justice as a life principle because it contradicts market forces.

The purpose of this analysis is not to invite a wholesale rejection of thinking and learning skills, nor is it to endorse the habituation of behaviors and the enactment of rote procedures, which are emphasized in Taylorist and Fordist models of schooling; these goals constitute a false dichotomy. Furthermore, features of thinking and learning, such as flexibility, discipline, and persistence, are not necessarily and inherently a problem. However, such skills are dangerously aligned with a neoliberal goal to inscribe a particular kind of selfhood. As neoliberalism contributes to the crisis in selfhood, there needs to be considerable work exploring how curricula and pedagogy designed to teach thinking and learning skills are neoliberal. Concomitantly, there needs to be an exploration of how thinking and learning skills might be untangled to favor a commitment to schooling that contributes to the production of selfhood that is justifiably democratic, civically virtuous, and humanizing. To untangle the discourse of these skills from neoliberalism may not necessarily require the conceptualization of a different set of skills or a shift from the ends toward which these skills are directed. A starting point can be the examination of self that underpins thinking and learning skills. Critical psychological theorizing of the self can support this goal.

#### THINKING AND LEARNING SKILLS

An analysis of the ideological and philosophical underpinnings of thinking and learning skills requires a consideration of what it means to learn and think. For centuries, philosophers and psychologists have wrestled, and continue to wrestle, with these questions. There are countless books exploring the nature of thinking and learning, how they develop, and what they should look like. A comprehensive look at this context is far beyond the scope of this paper. When followed by the term “skills,” the notions of thinking and learning are no less certain. Lipman (1985) describes thinking and learning skills as “nothing less than an inventory of the intellectual powers of mankind” (p. 83). This broad conceptualization makes sense because thinking and learning are arguably the *sine qua non* of being human. However, when the notion of skills is associated with thinking and learning, there is a connotation of mastery, control, and discipline in the production and application of intellectual powers. What is arguably a human vocation becomes something to be cultivated and developed in specific ways.

My argument is not about whether thinking and learning skills are natural. Although one’s view of the ontology of these skills can affect pedagogy, the end is the same. If through a Deweyian commitment to shape natural thinking proclivities or a Montessorian approach to limit the constraints of environmental circumstances, the pedagogical aim may remain to ensure that students are displaying what is recognized and measured as thinking and learning skills. Although the notion of “cultivate” can have the connotation of forming something that is absent, I use this

term to signify the idea that there are specific and predetermined ways of thinking and learning that are the focus of pedagogical decision making, which must be associated with measureable student outcomes and gains over time.

In contemporary educational discourse, the terms “thinking skills” and “learning skills” are often used to encapsulate specific cognitive qualities, dispositions, and competencies. These may include, but are not limited to, critical thinking, scientific thinking, problem solving, creativity, reflection, metacognition, and self-regulation. These skills are different, some of which reflect contradictory relationships, making it difficult to unify curricula around cultivating all of them. There are also controversies surrounding specific skills. For example, critical thinking is different from critical consciousness. Exploring this distinction, Burbules and Berk (2009) highlight the ways in which thinking and learning skills that share similar terminology can vary significantly in both form and content. Critical consciousness includes but extends beyond the epistemic validation of truth claims to include a commitment to mitigate unjust social orders (Freire, 1987). Problem solving is different from the notion of “problem posing,” which involves a dialogic approach to the production of problems to be solved along with a commitment to a socially just outcome (Freire, 1970/2000). Given the extensive list of thinking and learning skills, along with the complexities that surround them, it is helpful to anchor the analysis in one particular skill.

This analysis is anchored in the contemporary discourse on self-regulated learning (SRL). SRL is a self-steering process that targets one’s own thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, as well as features of the environment in order to modulate learning goals (Boekaerts & Cascallar, 2006; Zimmerman, 2002). Although justifiably more of a learning skill than a thinking skill, SRL involves skilful thinking and arguably underpins other skills, such as critical thinking and problem solving. SRL is associated with dispositions and processes, such as adaptation, planning, executing plans, reflection, personal evaluations, and self-monitoring, which educationalists suggest are important for empowering students to take control of their lives and succeed in the 21st century (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2004; Mishra, Fahnoe, Henriksen & the Deep-Play Research Group, 2013; Järvelä, 2011). Like other thinking skills, SRL is associated with democratic participation (Yowell & Smylie, 1999) and humanization (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2004).

The discourse on SRL parallels the broad discourse on thinking and learning skills and can serve as a starting point for critique. The analysis would look different if the focus was on critical thinking, for example. However, there are points of critical concern with SRL that can be generalized to the broad discourse on thinking and learning skills. Furthermore, this analysis reflects a starting point for a conversation about the role of thinking and learning skills in contemporary educational reform, especially in the context of a spreading neoliberal agenda. Furthermore, with a growing interest in SRL and an acceptance of its importance for school success, the potential value for this analysis is significant. Although anchored in SRL, it is necessary to continue this work in relation to other skills in order to encourage the integration of such analyses in the field.

NEOLIBERALISM: A STORY FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

A key premise in this analysis is that thinking and learning skills are entangled in neoliberal values for selfhood. Although some controversy surrounds the definition of neoliberalism, it can be understood as an economic logic, government rationality, and ideology that are based on the idea that the best way to ensure prosperity and well-being for individuals is to organize all interactions to function in terms of free-market principles (Harvey, 2007). To this end, proponents of neoliberalism strive to remove obstacles to innovation and entrepreneurialism by maximizing choice, increasing competition, and rewarding productivity and efficiency. The purpose of these commitments is to support economic prosperity, improve global competition, drive innovation, and increase efficiency. Maximizing efficiency and productivity of workers on all levels of economic strata is an essential feature of neoliberalism (Agostinone-Wilson, 2006; Harvey, 2007; Hursh, 2000). This commitment is profit-driven (i.e. yielding productive workers), rather than driven by the production of better democratic processes (i.e. liberally educated citizens) (Apple, 2006; Hursh, 2000; Matusov, 2011; Schmidt, 2000).

Schools continue to be transformed to reflect neoliberal values, purposes, and commitments (Apple, 2006; Boyles, 2005; Johnson, 2013; Saltman, 2006). One product of this transformation is the deep entanglement between schooling and the economy. From neoliberal logic, the purpose of schooling is to promote the accumulation of human capital. One way to achieve this aim is through the scientific management of people and processes. Most notably associated with this aim is Frederick Taylor (1914), who believed efficiency and productivity were achieved by breaking tasks down into simple parts for which technical knowledge was required. This approach is not unlike Fordism, which is distinguished from Taylorism only with the emphasis on psychological interventions for the purposes of maximizing efficiency and discipline for assembly line production (Harvey, 1990). Given the expansion of manufacturing during the early 20th century, Taylorism and Fordism shaped the purpose of schooling to center on the accumulation of human capital to perform standardized, rote, and simplified procedures. These models are associated with pedagogical commitments to maximize instructional time, teach trivial facts, transmit knowledge rapidly, encourage rote procedures, and cultivate obedience to social hierarchies. As Goodman (in volume) argues, these models not only reproduce inequalities, but are also responsible for student resistance and dissatisfaction with schooling.

Although the contemporary occupational landscape is different from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, commitments to Taylorism and Fordism persist (Goodman, in volume). Such persistence is problematic especially given class-related differentiated curricula (Anyon, 1981; Bernstein, 1971; Gorlewski, 2011; Journell, 2011). Researchers observe that schools teach middle-class children the knowledge and skills to manage, while teaching working-class children to be workers. Specifically, middle-class children are taught to be creative problem-solvers, critical thinkers, and producers of knowledge; whereas, working-class children are taught to follow instructions,

consume information, and perform tasks without questioning. This schooling structure supports a social efficiency model of schooling and is reproductive of a hierarchy. These lessons for working-class children are considered to be obsolete for the 21st century (Gee, 2004; Gorlewski, 2011). Teaching thinking and learning skills to all individuals may appear to level the playing field. Although there are several reasons to doubt the efficacy of this reform movement, the focus here is how the current occupational landscape is arguably changing that render thinking and learning skills the new technical knowledge for efficient production.

### *Occupational Conditions*

The 21st century is often referred to as rapidly changing, unpredictable, and continually in flux. In this context, some suggest that few occupations require individuals to perform repetitive tasks and apply technical knowledge (Bialostok & Kamberelis, 2012; Ellis & Folley, 2010; Gee, 2004; Gorlewski, 2011; Walkerdine, 2003). Rather, individuals on all levels of the occupational structure are required to problem solve, adapt, create, self-direct, work with others, and innovate in order to support functioning in a multi-faceted and shifting social and economic matrix. Bialostok and Kamberelis (2012) point out that these new expectations stand in stark contrast to Taylorist and Fordist models of employment that emphasize “reliability, standardization, repetition, mass production and consumption, and firm-based loyalty” (p. 419). Today, businesses require employees at every level to develop strategies and skills requisite for responding to rapidly changing markets (Bansel, 2007; Gee, 2004; Gorlewski, 2011). Therefore, failure to cultivate thinking and learning skills may hinder individuals’ ability to perform the required functions. Gorlewski (2011) rightfully suggests that failure to cultivate thinking and learning skills may relegate individuals to employment with low wages, instability, and minimal benefits.

Aside from the nature of work, there are other conditions of the occupational landscape that justify the importance of thinking and learning skills. As a result of unpredictable and rapid economic changes, researchers argue that it is common today for people to switch careers 5–7 times in their lives, making it necessary to develop thinking skills for lifelong learning (Bansel, 2007; Walkerdine, 2003). Furthermore, Trilling and Fadel (2009) argue that individuals are increasingly confronted with the expectation to manage time, people, projects, and resources. The thinking and learning skills that are required to meet these demands, Trilling and Fadel contend, are needed to compete globally, paradoxically alongside a need for global cooperation to solve environmental and economic problems.

Access to technology is also a 21<sup>st</sup> century condition that validates the need for thinking and learning skills. With increased access to technology and information, such skills are considered more important than memorizing, reciting, and habitually acting. Individuals must learn to interpret information in order to evaluate its usefulness for application. In addition, Trilling and Fadel (2009) contend that individuals are and will continue to be confronted with a world that is shrinking

because of technological connectedness and transportability. Therefore, individuals need to integrate diverse perspectives and remain flexible when communicating and collaborating with other people from diverse cultures.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is constructed in a particular way: global, competitive, unpredictable, technology-rich, and replete with ill-defined problems. The essential question with which educators and policy makers wrestle is: what enables individuals to fix, navigate, and compete in this context? Of course, one response is thinking and learning skills. However, which skills are necessary? Once that is decided, there is the question of how to cultivate them. With the deepened neoliberal entanglement between schooling and the economy, the question of what kinds of people are needed for this depiction of the modern world is always accompanied by questions of how to shape classrooms to cultivate these kinds of people. There is an emerging framework in the United States that encapsulates the kinds of skills that students must demonstrate. It is appropriately termed 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies (21CC). The kinds of thinking and learning included in this framework are strikingly similar to SRL.

#### *21<sup>st</sup> Century Competencies and Self-Regulated Learning*

As a result of the conditions and demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Trilling and Fadel (2009), like many others, argue that schooling must be designed to support the development of thinking and learning skills. Järvelä (2011), a prominent self-regulated learning (SRL) researcher, states:

As we progress into the 21<sup>st</sup> century the importance of *learning competence* is growing. At school and in their free time students are surrounded by competing demands for their attention. In their working life adults experience increasingly strong *pressure to innovate* and *solve problems*. What, then, enables us to meet these demands? Both students at school and adults at work have to *make appropriate choices, prioritise and plan their work and lives strategically*. They need to focus and *adapt their behaviours and actions to fit each situation's demands*. (p. 297; emphases added)

The idea is that contemporary schooling must equip individuals with flexible and adaptive lifelong thinking and learning skills so they can make good choices, solve problems, adapt, strategize, and meet shifting contextual demands. Järvelä's depiction of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is common. However, what is significant about her quotation is that she uses this representation of the modern world to argue for the importance of students' SRL. Like other educational psychologists (Dweck, 2009; Mishra, Fahnoe, Henriksen & the Deep-Play Research Group, 2013; Zimmerman, 2002;), Järvelä views SRL as a form of engagement that can support success within the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The discourse of SRL is aligned with various frameworks for 21CC. In these frameworks, the key notion is "competency." According to an OECD (2005) report, a competency is "...more than just knowledge and skills. It involves the ability to meet

complex demands, by drawing on and mobilizing psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context” (p. 4). The notion of “competency” here mirrors definitions of adaptability and flexibility, which is common to all frameworks. Other competencies include an ability to execute, manage others, critically interpret information, solve problems, create, and innovate. These competencies align closely with SRL (Wolters, 2010).

In conducting an analysis of the conceptual commonalities between 21CC and SRL, Wolters (2010) contends that emphases on self-direction, plan execution, adaptation, and interpersonal management bridge these discourses. Frameworks for 21CC emphasize the need for individuals to work independently to set their own goals and self-direct their activities, which are defining features of SRL. Some researchers use the notion of proactivity to capture this feature of SRL (e.g., Cleary & Zimmerman, 2004; McInerney, 2011). Proactivity is associated with setting and seeking challenging tasks in order to improve skill and performance. Reactivity, which is strangely opposed to proactivity in the SRL literature, also plays a role in self-direction. Self-regulating learners treat feedback as valuable pieces of information that can prompt personal changes. The belief is that individuals must take action that is independent of external cues (e.g., teacher prompts) and consequences (e.g., bad grades); yet, they must remain attuned to external messages for information about the effectiveness of their regulatory processes and strategies.

Another point of overlap between 21CC and SRL relates to the emphasis on adaptability. In 21CC frameworks, being adaptable means working effectively within shifting environments by being attuned to external demands, incorporating feedback, understanding diverse views, adjusting goals, altering strategies, and being inventive. Researchers tend to agree that effective and productive self-regulated learners do not adopt a habit or a routine set of skills or strategies, but rather respond to new learning challenges in productive ways by strategically changing tasks, task perceptions, goals, plans, beliefs, and strategies. Wolters (2010) contends that self-regulating learners maintain an active and ongoing awareness of task demands, the effectiveness of learning strategies, and their progress toward task completion. From this awareness, they adapt thoughts and behaviors to fit each the demands of each situation.

Models of 21CC stress the importance of communication and interpersonal management. This competency means that individuals must be able to work with others to achieve both common and individual goals. In order to work with others, individuals must be able to interpret messages communicated by others and, in turn, effectively articulate their own perspectives. Working with others is a feature of effective self-regulated learners. Wolters (2010) writes:

Because they [self-regulated learners] are motivated and effective at managing their environment, self-regulated learners are able to work with others in the academic context in a way that will aid them in the achievement of their personal learning goals. To the extent that it will serve to further these learning goals, SRL would include effective collaboration with others. (p. 9)

Interpersonal management can also be tied to help-seeking, which is an important skill for SRL. Effective self-regulated learners evaluate the limitations of their knowledge and skill and strategically evaluate how others can be instrumental in the pursuit of personal and shared learning goals.

The overall pedagogical goal for SRL and 21CC is to support the development of certain skills so that individuals can adapt and make adjustments to meet challenges when seeking solutions and advancing skill level. Individuals must learn to self-assess the effectiveness of strategies and redirect efforts, if necessary, to achieve a goal or obtain a solution to a problem. The modern economy is believed to require such skills. Individuals must be flexible, strategic, problem solvers who are self-aware and self-regulating. They must be persistent when committing to achieving an academic goal and striving for self-improvement.

#### *Modern Classrooms for the Modern World*

Schooling that is based on preparation for the modern world is labeled “21<sup>st</sup> century education” (Jerald, 2009). Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is designed to mirror the conditions of the economy so that individuals can develop and transfer a specific set of thinking and learning skills. Given the purported problem-oriented nature of work, the requirement for collaboration, shifting circumstances, and unpredictability of market conditions, 21<sup>st</sup> century schooling is problem-based and focused on developing cognitive and conative skills (Jerald, 2009; Marzano & Heflebower, 2012). In 21<sup>st</sup> century classrooms teachers are “facilitators” (Marzano & Heflebower, 2012). This role of the teacher aligns with the philosophy of learner-centered pedagogy. In these classrooms, students are ostensibly given choice, control, and opportunities for personalized learning so that they evaluate themselves in ways that support strategic pursuits and adjustments of “personal” learning goals. To achieve this goal, Marzano and Heflebower (2012) suggest that teachers must work with students to produce inner dialogues that enhance attention, persistence, and goal attainment. Self-scales and self-assessments are important instruments for this type of schooling.

The representation of 21<sup>st</sup> century classrooms mirror classroom structures that are believed to facilitate SRL. Granting students autonomy in project-based learning situations is important for SRL. Paris and Paris (2001) suggest that such classrooms encourage mastery, collaboration, and self-evaluations, which are key processes and commitments for SRL. In addition, SRL researchers tend to agree that opportunities for choice and control are features of classrooms that invite and support the development of SRL (e.g., Cleary & Zimmerman, 2004; Housand & Reis, 2008; Paris & Paris, 2001; Perry et al., 2002). Housand and Reis (2008) argue that classrooms that support SRL are characterized by choices, complex tasks, volitional control (e.g., time and independence for task engagement), metacognitive prompting (e.g., weekly reflections), explicit strategy instruction (e.g., modeling and direct instruction), student participation in assessment, and the inclusion of materials that

allow students to reflect and track their progress (e.g., reading logs). The rhetorical emphases on projects, autonomy, choice, personalized learning, and self-evaluations are organized around a commitment to cultivate thinking and learning skills for 21<sup>st</sup> century economic contexts.

Shaping curricula and pedagogy to foster thinking and learning skills seems appealing. This aim provides a firm point of resistance to Taylorist and Fordist models of schooling that emphasize the habituation of technical procedures and the silencing of questions that probe for meaning and value of those procedures. Teaching individuals to think and learn can be reasonably distinguished from cultivating technical skills that enable individuals to follow orders and efficiently perform repetitive tasks. In the discourses of SRL and 21CC, the goal is arguably not to transmit a static form of technical knowledge and skills, but to shape individuals into those who can make plans, execute plans, be adaptive, communicate with others, critically interpret information, solve problems, take risks, and be creative. Questioning the focus on thinking and learning skills may seem counterintuitive. Likewise, questioning the production of schooling environments that ostensibly optimize choice, personal control, and opportunities for problem solving and critical thinking may seem absurd, anti-democratic, and dehumanizing.

Although an appealing educational focus, shaping curricula and pedagogy to cultivate thinking and learning skills aligns with a neoliberal agenda to transform subjectivity in ways that legitimizes neoliberal relations. Thinking and learning skills can be considered the new technical knowledge that enables individuals to perform neoliberal subjectivity and validate neoliberal structural arrangements. There is a danger that endorsing these skills can be associated with the goal to inscribe self-managing and responsabilized people who can adapt to shifting situational demands in order to support personal gain, corporate sustainability, efficiency, and productivity. The good thinker and learner is purportedly the good worker for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thought about this way, thinking and learning skills are not unequivocally empowering and aligned with democratic purposes of schooling, nor do they endorse a kind of personhood that is organized around civic virtue and justice.

#### SELFHOOD: THE BELLY OF THE BEAST

The main premise in this analysis is that thinking and learning skills have come to define key features of the neoliberal subject. It is imperative for neoliberals to inscribe this subjectivity because, as Apple (2006) argues, neoliberalism can work only if individuals are constituted in neoliberal ways: neoliberalism requires neoliberal subjectivity, which will be discussed here as a type of self and self-relationship that is organized around market logic. Thinking and learning skills can be associated with this logic. In this case, SRL and 21CC align closely with features and conditions of neoliberal subjectivity. This association is a problem because of the values and assumptions that underpin neoliberal subjectivity. The neoliberal subject is a highly individualized, responsabilized self who is committed to the

investigation and investment of self that is intended to increase personal value. This self is scientific (Martin, 2007), expressive (Martin, 2007), and empty (Cushman, 1990)—types of self that compete with civic responsibility and humanization.

### *Neoliberal Selfhood*

Neoliberal subjectivity can be described as a particular kind of self. This selfhood is referred to as the entrepreneurial self (Rose, 1998), enterprising self (Martin & McLellan, 2013), managerial self (Fitzsimons, 2011), and *homo economicus* (Foucault, 2008). Although each of these terms has slightly different connotations, they refer to an organizing principle of self, which is to maximize autonomy and freedom of choice in the pursuit of happiness, success, and personal fulfillment as rationalized in terms of economic purposes and competition (Hilgers, 2013; Rose, 1998). The term “neoliberal self” is used to refer to this principle. Specific features of the neoliberal self include the: (1) formulation of self as human capital; (2) treatment of life as a project to be efficiently and productively managed; (3) constant drive for improvement; (4) pursuit of happiness, success, and personal fulfillment; (5) consumption of material and immaterial products for personal goal attainment; (6) value for the maximization of choice; and (7) instrumental use of others to achieve goals.

A key feature of the neoliberal self is the reformulation of being as human capital. Becker (1993) defines human capital as the knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions that enable individuals to perform economic functions that raise their personal value. Fitzsimons (2011) argues that human capital theory is the most prominent economic theory of Western education, first appearing in the 1960s when the link between education and economic growth was crystallized. Governmental goals linked to human capital theory include improving the flexibility of labor, the overall competitiveness of the economy, and strengthening of international linkages. The treatment of people as capital revolves around the development of workforce skills that enhance the flexibility of the labor market that makes structural adjustments to economic changes readily possible.

From a neoliberal perspective, individuals are construed as human capital and education is viewed as a key source of its development, acquisition, and accumulation (Apple, 2006; Becker, 1975; Fitzsimons, 2011; Peters, 2001; Read, 2009; Rose, 1998). In neoliberal contexts, the accumulation of human capital is self-regulated and is driven by a commitment to render one suitable for the market (Hilgers, 2013). Individuals are responsible for making choices to consume experiences and credentials that mark them as having marketable and valuable capital. Thinking and learning skills, such as those reflected in the discourses of SRL and 21CC, are themselves a form of human capital and also support the continued self-regulation of human capital acquisition. This relationship is apparent by considering the resemblances between SRL, 21CC, and the neoliberal self.

Like 21CC and SRL, a fundamental feature of neoliberal selfhood is self-direction. The model neoliberal citizen uses all resources and information to: (1) set goals; (2)

operate with as little oversight as possible; (3) respond to environmental changes; (4) commit actions to a purpose; and (5) strive for improvement (Clarke, 2005; Davies & Bansel, 2007). Those who are successful in neoliberal contexts make appropriate choices for which goals to pursue, plans for actions, strategies to use, personal adjustments, and how much to persist. Self-direction is a fundamental element to the logic of accountability and individual responsibility—two fundamental tenets of neoliberal discourse. Flexibility and adaptability are also key features of neoliberal selfhood that overlap with 21CC and SRL. As environments rapidly shift, being competitive and functional requires that individuals continuously change to meet new demands. Walkerdine (2003) describes this process as involving “self-invention” (p. 240). To engage in that “self-invention,” the neoliberal self remains in constant evaluation and judgment of self in all its minute particulars. These evaluations and judgments provide the necessary information about the self to make adjustments to thoughts, actions, goals, and strategies that are efficiently and productively responsive to changing situational demands. The neoliberal self is intensely attuned to the environment and its demands, and it must have the wherewithal to mobilize personal resources to respond appropriately to those demands. The neoliberal self sees adaptability and flexibility as a normal process rather than a problem.

Interpersonal management is another unifying point between neoliberal selfhood, SRL, and 21CC. Interpersonal management has to do with dialogue and mutual engagement in the achievement of a particular goal. Although seemingly positive, in neoliberal contexts there is a danger that such management can encourage individuals to strategically form relationships that serve a personal aim. The neoliberal self sees social connections and life activities as worthwhile to the extent that they are instrumentally tied to the goal of enhancing personal value and advancing a personal agenda. In this regard, other people are instruments for personal gain, competing with possibilities for solidarity and the pursuit of a social good. Although neoliberalism can be said to encourage social relationships, the connections people make serve narrow economic and personal interests. With increased competition for employment, individuals must form networks in order to be competitive. Individuals must be strategic about where they are and how they can form relationships with those who can improve their chances of gaining access to certain social and economic positions. Cultivating interpersonal management in instrumental terms can invite an intense self-interest and attention to how others can be used to serve personal needs, regardless of how the help might affect the help-giver, others in the context, or the reproduction of problematic social structures.

Aside from the conceptual alignment, SRL and 21CC are instrumentally tied to neoliberal selfhood. Consider risk-taking for example. In shifting environments, individuals may not always know what to do or have the technical skills to perform certain functions. Therefore, they must take risks. Thinking and learning skills can be viewed as essential for managing risks by evaluating which risks are worthwhile, contemplating adjustments, altering plans of action that optimize the outcomes of risk, and modulating negative consequences. Such risk management can be made possible through the self-evaluative techniques and quality of adaptations that are

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made possible via SRL. Although risk-taking, self-regulation, goal-setting, social interactions, flexibility, and responsibility all seem like attractive thinking and learning skills, it is difficult to ignore the neoliberal undertones to this discourse.

*The Good Learner and Thinker as the Good Worker/Student*

Although neoliberals do not have sole jurisdiction over thinking and learning skills, these skills are nonetheless deeply embedded in neoliberal values of self (Martin & McLellan, 2013). The good thinker and learner has become the correlate of the good worker and student. The good thinker and learner embodies and performs SRL and 21CC, which can be viewed as instantiations of neoliberal selfhood. The discourse of equal opportunity legitimizes efforts to cultivate thinking and learning skills in schooling.

Depictions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are neoliberal. Therefore, it is reasonable to view the performance and embodiment of neoliberal selfhood as a source of economic empowerment. Thinking and learning skills can be associated with efforts to promote fair competition for employment and economic justice. As representations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century continue to look neoliberal, the need to inscribe neoliberal selfhood intensifies. Neoliberal structural arrangements validate the importance of neoliberal subjectivity. Thinking about the reverse relationship, the inscription of neoliberal subjectivity validates the importance of constructing the world in neoliberal ways. The more successful at inscribing neoliberal subjectivity, the more reasonable it may seem to construct the world to map onto this organizing principle of self so that one does not feel oppressed by structural arrangements.

Some might suggest that neoliberal rhetoric calling for the development of thinking and learning skills does not align with what primarily goes on in schools, nor does it align with what corporate executives, managers, and even teachers really want from individuals. That is, proponents of neoliberalism may not really want good learners and thinkers, but those who can follow orders and perform actions without questioning the purpose of tasks or the operation of power within a context. Or perhaps, corporate executives want people to be able to think and learn insofar as such skills are directed at a common interest—as defined by a corporate agenda and which is typically void of ethical concerns—that is shared by workers. This alignment would be a remarkable achievement given the competing interests of the owners of production and those who sell their labor. Inscribing SRL may help to achieve this alignment by providing individuals with the cognitive tools for self-governance within an institutional hierarchy (Vassallo, 2011). Thinking and learning skills can be associated with a particular form of discipline that is harnessed to support the kind of economic instrumentalism that favors the owners of production by enabling individuals to change themselves in accordance with institutional mandates and shifting economic circumstances. That which counts as thinking and learning skills can enable individuals to follow orders without direct and external oversight (Vassallo, 2011).

The potential contradiction in neoliberal discourse reifies the distinction between “actual” thinking and learning from engaging habitually in ways that conform to institutional mandates. However, in neoliberal discourse, the cultivation of thinking and learning is conformity to institutional mandates; thinking and learning skills constitute a new form of technical knowledge acquisition. Vassallo (2013) makes this point by suggesting that institutionalizing SRL invites homogeneity in the form of self and self-relationship that aligns with market logic. Individuals must be disciplined to an organizing principle rather than provided a script with specific steps for engagement. Hilgers (2013) also makes this point:

Bodies are the objects and targets of a power that disciplines them in order to maximise production. On the one hand, technologies of subjection aspire to regulate populations for optimal productivity; and on the other hand, agents subject themselves to and embody technologies of subjectivity that incline them to optimise their individual choices and to perceive the world through the principle of competition. Individuals develop a subjectivity, an ‘ethics of individual accountability that [is] deemed commensurable with neoliberal norms.’ (p. 83)

Although the rhetoric is about liberating the self, the neoliberal imperative is to harness and discipline self-regulatory capabilities so that individuals can organize themselves around free market logic. For this kind of discipline, individuals have to depend on teachers, counselors, and parents to form thinking and learning skills that enable them to self-regulate their choices that maximize personal value (Vassallo, 2013).

#### *Disciplining Individualism*

The neoliberal disciplining of self involves a commitment to inscribe individualism in order to produce a collection of self-governing individuals (Peters, 2001). As Apple (2006) writes, this commitment “involves radically changing how we think of ourselves...” (p. 23). Explaining, he writes, “...the educational task...is to change people’s understanding of themselves as members of collective groups. Instead, to support a market economy we need to encourage everyone to think of themselves as individuals who always act in ways that maximize their own interests.” (p. 23). As Davies and Bansel (2007) contend, in neoliberal contexts schools are continuously configured to produce highly individualized, responsabilized subjects. By “responsibilized,” the authors mean that individuals are construed as accountable for their own success and failures by virtue of their choices. As Martin and McLellan (2013) illustrate, 21<sup>st</sup> century classrooms are specifically structured to produce responsabilized individuals by committing to the study of self, as if it reflected static, isolated, controllable, and knowable features of persons.

The neoliberal commitment to individualism is reflected in the commitment to study and know the self, which in the SRL literature is a key for strategic self-management. Individuals must become scientists and investigate themselves by

recording and analyzing personal data, using certain techniques to change thought patterns or surroundings, and examining the data to see whether the change they desire has occurred. They must understand their strengths and weaknesses through the use of psychological tools and institutional discourse. Self-knowledge involves understanding environmental contingencies, and in so doing, being able to exert counter-control over environmental influences. The accumulation of such knowledge is made possible by tools for calculation and documentation, such as journals (e.g., Du Bois & Staley, 1997), graphs (e.g., Kitsantis & Zimmerman, 2006), logs (e.g., Zimmerman, Bonner & Kovach, 1996), and computer technology (e.g., Azevedo, Johnson, Chauncey & Graesser, 2011; Wang, Peng, Cheng, Zhou & Liu, 2011). These mechanisms are needed to support the continuous evaluation of self in order to figure out how to build on “strengths” and mitigate the affects of “weaknesses.” Self-knowledge is used to inform action for reforming and maximizing the self as it pertains to a “personal” goal, one that likely must be institutionally validated and valued.

This kind of individualism does not necessarily reflect autonomy and empowerment. The neoliberal self is not an autonomous chooser who operates independently from external mandates. Rather than liberating personal freedoms by inscribing responsible self-managers, neoliberalism actually produces limitations on the possibilities for selfhood by requiring individuals to discipline themselves in relation to free-market logic. The notion of self-management may invite the assumption that there is an absence of any external or social constraints; neoliberal conceptions of subjectivity create an illusion of autonomy. However, managing oneself to be adaptable, flexible, innovative, and a good problem solver is exactly the disciplinary goal of human capital theory (Fitzsimons, 2011). The application of human capital theory in practice converts the self into a kind of capital that can be invested, and it equates the self with productivity and adaptability. Through the perpetual struggle to fulfill self-potential, the individual is shaped by and harnessed to the economy in such a way as to maximize productivity. The neoliberal self not only defines autonomy in free market terms, it also fails to explicitly encourage social justice as a life principle because it contradicts market forces.

#### CRITICAL PSYCHOLOGY AND SELFHOOD

The neoliberal self is not an inevitable feature of persons. Rather, it is a self that is constituted in relation to particular times and places, such as in contemporary schooling that values neoliberal subjectivity (see Sugarman, in volume; Martin & McLellan, 2013). From a critical psychological perspective, the self is not *a priori*, static, and universal. Rather, the self is historically situated, constituted, emergent, and bounded. This treatment of self is not solely about content, but also form. It is not just characteristics of self that are historically constituted, but also what counts as self. The notion of “self” is a cultural and philosophical construction; it represents a particular kind of understanding (Martin & Sugarman, 2001). From this line of thinking, the ways in which we understand persons is mutable, shifting, contested,

and historically situated. However, in neoliberal discourse there are specific values for self and particular structural arrangements that validate, inscribe, and reward this self.

The neoliberal self is underpinned by certain notions of the self, which include bounded, empty, scientific, and expressive. The scientific self is componential, executive, rational, knowable, controllable, internal, and ahistorical. The scientific self compliments neoliberalism as it construes the self in individualistic, rational, and manageable terms, which are features of the self that are necessary for the pursuit of self-enhancement. Self-knowledge enables self-management, which is necessary for functioning within contexts that are characterized by choice, competition, and imperatives for continued personal improvement. As reflected in the discourse of 21CC and SRL, thinking and learning in relation to this self is defined by the embodiment of this scientific orientation to the self.

The expressive self shares a number of overlapping qualities with the scientific self. One major difference is the kind of individualism associated with expression. The expressive self is underpinned by a liberal commitment to encourage individuals to know, understand, explore, and express their unique personal features. The expressive self is less about scientific management in which technical procedures are enacted to shape the self in predetermined ways, and more about identifying unique features of the self and creating space for those features to develop and flourish. The expressive self can be associated with a neoliberal commitment to cultivate creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurialism. The assumption is that individuals have unique strengths that must serve as the driving force for new ideas. Knowing strengths and interests can enable individuals to pursue a path that best matches their characteristics. Both the scientific and expressive selves are committed to self-study, self-enhancement, and self-management. Although within educational psychology these selves are not construed in terms of economic value, these selves have clear connections to neoliberalism.

The expressive and scientific selves are related to what Gergen (2009) refers to as a bounded self, which is so termed because of the assumptions about psychological interiority. The bounded self is characterized by an understanding that selfhood is within the physical boundaries of the body. This self, as is true for the previous two discussed, is underpinned by problematic assumptions about the separation between self and world. Physical bodies are treated as housing psychological states, emotions, and thinking.

Notions of the scientific, expressive, and bounded selves contribute to what Cushman (1990) refers to as an empty self, which is so termed because it lacks connections with community, traditions, and meaning outside of consumption. Like the previous selves discussed, the empty self is masterful, bounded, and interested in self-betterment. Cushman situates the emergence and ubiquity of the empty self in the post-World War II era with the rise of the middle-class. During this time, individuals are shaped into those who can self-regulate their efforts to momentarily satisfy desires of consumption. Cushman describes the empty self as seeking “the

experience of being continually filled up by consuming goods, calories, experiences, politicians, romantic partners, and empathic therapists in an attempt to combat the growing alienation and fragmentation of its era” (p. 600). The neoliberal self is illustrative of the empty self. The concern is that thinking and learning skills can be easily entangled in efforts to shape individuals into scientific, bounded, expressive, and empty selves.

In order to untangle thinking and learning skills from neoliberalism, it may seem straightforward to avoid organizing the self around market principles of individualism, efficiency, consumption, self-betterment, and productivity. However, the focus on thinking and learning skills absent the explicit connection to the economy does not adequately resist neoliberalism. Rhetorically divorcing thinking and learning skills from neoliberal values does not mean that such skills will not serve a neoliberal function. Even if one focuses on cultivating thinking and learning skills independent of economic instrumentalism, these skills are featured in neoliberal selfhood and necessary for neoliberal arrangements. Therefore, good thinkers can be considered “ready-made” for a 21<sup>st</sup> century market. Pedagogy and curricula that support the cultivation of thinking and learning skills may ultimately support neoliberalism.

One way to untangle thinking and learning skills from neoliberalism is to value and validate different conceptions of persons, ones that are not scientific, expressive, empty, and bounded. Critical psychologists offer ways of constructing the self that vary from the individualism, isolationism, internalism, and emptiness of the neoliberal self. One such self is called communal selfhood (Martin, 2007). It is a self that is understood to take form and emerge in a historical time and place. The communal self is relational and recognizes its historical constitution by reflecting on its constitutive forces. This self is about awareness, but not for the purposes of self-mastery or control, but connectedness and civic responsibility.

Critical psychologists discuss other notions of the self, which include, but are not limited to the dialogic self (Hermans, 2001), hermeneutic self (Sugarman & Martin, 2010), and relational being (Gergen, 2009). These concepts are organized around the idea that self is emerging, in process, constitutive, historical, and not independent of the workings of power. Gergen’s (2009) terminology reflects somewhat of a departure from other notions. He uses the term “being” to avoid the essentialism of self that is so fitting for neoliberalism. Gergen is concerned that the notion of “self” produces the self, which is a concept that connotes coherence, calculability, and boundaries of identity.

Even with critical conceptions of self, the danger of mind and world dualism lingers—a foundational condition for pursuing mastery over oneself. If the notion of self is difficult to avoid, then perhaps the organizing principle of self can shift. That is what many critical psychologists work to do (e.g. see Corcoran, 2009; Sugarman, 2009). The organizing principle is not to measure, know, proclaim, express, manage, and improve features of self, but engage in struggle to understand and change structures of power that hold existing forms of language and selfhood in place. Sources of information about the self are not seen as individual or communal

qualities, but qualities of discourse. Thus, the organizing principle of self examines those historically-contingent discursive practices that reify selfhood. The principle of self brings one to continuously call into question the inscription, practice, and process of identity.

With these kinds of selves at its foundation, thinking and learning skills can function differently or may even dissolve as a sensible educational aim. In contemporary education discourse, thinking and learning skills complement the scientific, empty, bounded, and expressive selves, in addition to the over-responsibilized individual. Teaching individuals strategic self-mastery to overcome educational inequalities may not make sense in a context of communal responsibility and solidarity. That is not to say that thinking and learning skills are not valuable. Raising concern about thinking and learning skills, and challenging its presence in schooling is not about endorsing inflexibility, rote learning, homogenization, technical procedures, stagnation, and habituation. Like Corcoran (2012), this critique is about ensuring that pedagogical and curricula aims are not endorsing what they are supposed to resist. It is not about trying to reproduce the status quo by disabling individuals from thinking and learning in ways that improve social and democratic processes. However, when foundational assumptions of self that underpin thinking and learning skills are ignored, it is difficult to resist the cultivation of the neoliberal self.

#### CONCLUSION

An educational commitment to the institutionalization of thinking and learning skills may seem appealing to those who endorse humanistic and democratic purposes of schooling. Given this association, an educational focus on teaching and learning skills can be rationalized as resistance to neoliberalism and its problematic requirements for selfhood. However, it is through these skills that neoliberal ideology is at work. Thinking and learning skills, especially those related to SRL and 21CC, are entangled in a neoliberal commitment to foster adaptive, self-regulated, flexible, problem solvers who can navigate and compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. “Liberating” individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by values for efficiency and productivity must rely on the inscription of a particular brand of selfhood, which is radically individualistic, committed to self-betterment, responsabilized, strategically self-governing, and construed in terms of human capital. This selfhood is associated with exacerbating inequality, dehumanizing students, and eroding democratic participation and civic virtue.

The primary goal of this analysis is to invite conversations about thinking and learning skills that provide the conceptual and pedagogical tools to divorce these skills from neoliberalism. A way to achieve this goal is to examine conceptions of selfhood that underpin the discourse of thinking and learning skills. As Martin and McLellan (2013) argue, the intrusion of certain types of psychological discourse within schooling contributes to the production of the self that aligns with

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neoliberalism. Schools can also be places where selfhood is formed and inscribed differently. Inscribing the selves of critical psychology can invite a different interpretation, meaning, and purpose of thinking and learning skills.

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## **11. PSYCHOLOGISM, INDIVIDUALISM AND THE LIMITING OF THE SOCIAL CONTEXT IN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY**

### INTRODUCTION

Recent scholarship in the evolution and development of personhood makes it clear that individual persons can be understood only in terms of their sociality. It is within particular sets of social relations and interactions that human beings have evolved and develop important aspects of personhood such as first-person perspective and experience, self and other understanding, rational and moral agency, social and psychological identity, and a personal, autobiographical sense of their lives and life projects (Martin & Bickhard, 2013). When the extent of our reliance on interactions with others within our historically established sociocultural communities and contexts is recognized, it seems remarkable the extent to which so much contemporary theory, research, and practice in educational psychology emphasizes biological (neurophysiological and genetic) and psychological (personality traits and cognitive strategies) determinants of student conduct and experience, minimizes classroom and school interactions of students with the teacher and each other, and mostly ignores the broader social, political, and economic orders within which such interactions occur.

Unfortunately, the history of psychology reveals that psychologists frequently have given short shrift to the social, cultural context of human action and experience (Danziger, 1990, 2000). Early German memory researchers such as Ebbinghaus effectively removed social, cultural context in their studies by reciting previously learned lists of nonsense syllables at rapid rates, techniques intentionally employed to minimize social and cultural effects on memory. Similarly, the first American experimental social psychologists employed approaches suggested by Floyd Allport and others to limit the possible sociocultural impact on their experimental findings to readily observable, immediate, and highly scripted interpersonal exchanges between subjects and confederates of the experimenters. Not surprisingly, within such highly artificial and controlled circumstances, results obtained can be attributed primarily to psychological processes, such as cognitive dissonance, theorized to exist inside the private minds of participating subjects. The extremely popular use of a wide variety of psychological tests and measures that can be completed by participants in psychological studies without much regard to formative social and cultural contexts is yet another way in which psychologists have effectively reduced and

ignored the sociocultural settings in which individuals think and act. An important and highly questionable result of this diminution of sociocultural context is that it has allowed psychologists to privilege the psychological interiors of individuals over the interactivity that occurs between individuals within broader social, cultural, historical, economic, and political practices, traditions, and contexts. Consequently, when attempting to explain their results, psychologists locate their explanations in cognitive, affective, and volitional structures and processes internal to individuals without much consideration of the explanatory power resident in situations, contexts, and practices of living, learning, and developing within socially and culturally established ways of living with others.

Consistent with this emphasis on psychological explanations, highly publicized research and intervention programs in educational psychology in areas such as self-esteem, self-concept, self-efficacy, and self-regulated learning have promoted inner psychological and biological causes of student conduct, experience, and learning and minimized social and cultural constituents of student's educational experiences and outcomes. One important way in which this "table-tilting" has been accomplished by educational psychologists has been to develop and employ measures of self-esteem, self-concept, and self-regulated learning that treat these phenomena as if they were the private properties of individual students. Another, related technique used by these same psychologists is the adoption of inferential statistical procedures that confuse individual differences between groups of learners with a supposedly scientific understanding of individual learners. In this chapter, the ways in which the measurement and analytic research practices of educational psychologists have served to limit our understanding of important, historically and culturally established social, economic, and political effects on the classroom and school experiences and achievement of students will be explained. Given these typical modes of inquiry, it is the height of hubris to claim a science of educational psychology that warrants application to individual students in classrooms and schools. For the sake of brevity, examples will be limited to those drawn from the research and intervention programs of educational psychologists in the areas of students' self-esteem, self-concept, self-efficacy, and self-regulation. A critical consideration of these examples and what they reveal about the theoretical, research, and methodological orientations and practices of educational psychologists uncovers a metaphysical tradition of psychologism and individualism that privileges aspects and properties of individuals as prime causes of their activities and accomplishments. How this metaphysics operates as a backdrop to individual and communal life and to the functioning of social institutions such as schools is illustrated with a brief consideration of American individualism.<sup>1</sup>

#### MEASUREMENT?

Measurement in the physical sciences typically consists of determining the size, speeds, and distances of and between objects by the exacting application of standard units of measurement or metrics to whatever is being measured. In much the same

way, but with considerably less rigor and instrumentation, we employ tape measures, measuring cups and spoons, and clocks and watches calibrated in the relevant metrics (e.g., metres, litres, and minutes) to lay carpets, bake cakes, and tell time. In all these measuring activities, we use a standard unit or metric to measure particular spatiotemporal quantities. However, when educational psychologists measure students' self-esteem or self-concept, they do something very different. They use procedural rules for assigning numerals to what are supposed to be indicators of students' self-concept or self-esteem. There is no application of a standard unit or metric to a known spatiotemporal quantity. The indicators typically consist of students' responses to items on questionnaires that ask students to indicate the degree to which they judge themselves, their thoughts, or their actions to be similar to the descriptions contained in the items. Students' responses are then counted, tallied, and aggregated in various ways that allow educational psychologists to determine scores that are considered to be measures of students' self-esteem or self-concept. If standardized questionnaires are not used, educational psychologists sometimes count the number of times that students in classrooms say or do particular things, using a check-list of descriptions of focal statements or actions. Here again, the observed indicators are counted, tallied, and aggregated according to rules that do not include the application of specific units of measurement to unambiguously quantitative properties of the spatiotemporal world. Confusing the foregoing ways of measuring is a staple of psychological inquiry (see Michell, 1999). In physics and many everyday measurement tasks, what is being measured and its quantitative structure (e.g., length, weight, volume) are directly evident. Psychological measurement is different in that the psychological attributes that are hypothesized (e.g., self-esteem) are not obviously quantitative in the manner of physical attributes.

When educational psychologists measure self-esteem, self-concept, self-efficacy, or self-regulation, they do not use standard units to ascertain the physical dimensions of individuals' self-understandings or internal self-schemata. Instead, they typically count and tally individuals' ratings of themselves, their self-worth, self-confidence, and so forth, and make inferences that assume a pre-existing, interior self-structure, the location and quantitative dimensions of which are unknown. With these facts firmly in mind, it is not unreasonable to raise critical questions about the existence and nature of what is being measured, in addition to those critical questions already raised about the nature of the measurement procedures employed.

#### PSYCHOLOGISM

Psychologism is an explanatory bias that privileges the purported psychological interiors of individuals as the primary causes of individuals' experiences and actions. Successive generations of psychologists have theorized the psychological interiors of individuals to consist of basic mental structures and functions, information processing and computational structures, and relevant neural patterns and activity. For example self-efficacy and self-regulation typically are postulated by leading psychologists

and educational psychologists to be internal structures or schemata, computation-like information processes, or executive functions built into our cognitive structures and/or cortex, even though most of their research data are derived from students' responses to psychologists' questionnaires or observational checklists and rating forms. The already-noted loose connection between psychological measures and what they are assumed to measure permits a very liberal and imprecise set of assumptions concerning what is being measured. In fact, there is very little reason to be convinced by psychologists' claims to have scientifically discovered and mapped the kinds of psychological entities and processes they assert as the prime causes of varying levels of self-efficacy and self-regulation.

As an example of psychologism in educational psychology, consider the pervasiveness of mentalistic talk of cognitive and metacognitive strategies and executive functioning in contemporary psychological research and interventions in the area of self-regulation. Of course, many educational psychologists include situational and task factors in their models of student self-regulation, but there should be little doubt that it is mental, internal, psychological factors that are the primary focus of their theories, research, and interventions. "We assume that self-regulatory behavior is generated by an organized, dynamic cognitive-affective processing system" (Mischel & Ayduk, 2004, p. 102). "Metacognitive monitoring is the gateway to self-regulating one's learning because without the cognitive evaluations it creates, there is no standard against which to enact regulation" (Winne & Perry, 2000, p. 540). The core ideas are that it is mental processes and entities that are the real underlying mechanisms and causes of self-regulation, and it therefore is these processes and structures that must be the primary targets of educational interventions to enhance student self-regulation.

Despite occasional protestations to the contrary (e.g., Bandura, 1997; Mischel & Ayduk, 2004), the self in the vast majority of psychological writings in the area of self-regulation appears as an agentic neo-homunculus in the guise of cognitive and metacognitive systems and executive structures. This is a form of self theorizing that reduces the worldly activity of human persons engaged in purposeful interactivity within their sociocultural and biophysical worlds to the strategic machinations of a neo-Lockean self situated behind the scenes of human interactivity, at a comfortable and calculating cerebral remove, yet somehow regulating, directing, and controlling the actions of students and others. It is important to note how effectively this theoretical stance shifts the perspective of psychological understanding and intervention to an isolated cognizer who now is seen as the true initiator of her activity and as the individual almost solely responsible for that activity.

And yet, as so many past and present social developmental psychologists working within the more social, communal frameworks of American pragmatism (Gillespie, 2012) and Russian cultural, historical activity theory (Stetsenko, 2012) have demonstrated, "a fully functioning executive/regulatory system could never, by itself, deliver [the] contents of mental life" (Moses & Carlson, 2004, p. 142) because the primary sources of consciousness, meaning, mind, and selfhood are to be found

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in lives lived in interaction with others within historically established sociocultural practices and forms of life. The development and fostering of self-regulation would be impossible if human beings were shut off from the world as psychologism assumes. If we access the world only through our mental representations and models, we would be unable to detect errors in such models, let alone locate standards against which to self-regulate. This is because such errors and standards do not emerge within our Cartesian interiors, but in interaction with socially and publically sanctioned rules and ways of doing and knowing, however imperfect these sometimes may prove to be. What psychologism in educational psychology fails to understand is that our mental lives emerge within the worldly interactivity of persons with other persons, and for human beings, this is a world that is replete with historical sociocultural exchanges, routines, practices, artifacts, institutions, and traditions and ways of life. We come to regulate our actions by participating in this world, not through detached contemplation and strategizing about it.

#### WHY MANY OF THE FINDINGS OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS DO NOT APPLY TO INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS

It frequently has been remarked that the measurement practices and psychologism that typify so much educational psychology, especially in those areas that invoke students' selfhood, promote a kind of individualism that makes students themselves responsible for both their successes and failings at school (e.g., Martin & McLellan, 2013; Vasello, 2013). For, if the main determinants of self-esteem, self-concept, self-efficacy, and self-regulation ultimately reside in students' psychologized interiors, they really have no one to praise or blame but themselves. However, much less frequently remarked is the central paradox that the psychologism and individualism promoted, intentionally or not, by psychologists and their research, in most cases have surprisingly little relevance to students as individuals per se. In fact, despite the common practice of psychologists of extracting intervention strategies from their inquiries and applying them to individual students in schools, most of these inquiries have nothing to say about individual students and what might or might not be prescribed as possible aids to enhance their learning, school experience, or conduct. The reason is that most of the research of educational psychologists relies on research designs and statistical analyses that focus on group differences and such differences have no logical connection whatsoever to understanding individual students and what might or might not be or prove to be the case for them.

General truths of the kind enshrined in well-known scientific laws, such as Bernoulli's law of fluid dynamics or Fourier's law of heat conduction, hold true in that they apply to each and every relevant instance governed by these laws and their conditions of application. For example, Fourier's law applies to all instances of the transmission of heat in materials. In all such instances, the heat flux is proportional to the gradient of the temperature difference. Statistical truth, on the other hand, does not hold true across all relevant instances. To speak statistically is to speak about

what is true on average, and something that holds true on average is not true of all of the instances that contribute to the average. Thus, although self-regulation may be statistically correlated strongly and positively with success in school (assuming logically and methodologically independent measures of both self-regulation and school success), there will be some successful students who are not strong self-regulators. It simply is not possible to determine based on a statistical correlation whether or not any particular student, whether high or low in self-regulation, is or will be successful. Thus, it is not possible to move from knowledge of a statistical truth (such as those truths established through empirical research in educational psychology, even if they were to prove enduring across time and circumstances) to knowledge of any individual person. This basic critical insight was advanced by Kurt Lewin (1935) and Egon Brunswik (1943) in the early days of personality psychology and has been repeated and elaborated by several quantitative, historical, and theoretical psychologists since then (e.g., Danziger, 1990; Lamiell, 2003).

The most frequently made, but entirely inadequate, defense of the common practice amongst psychologists of using correlational research on groups as directly relevant to the assessment and/or interpretation of individuals and their conduct is that such applications are necessarily probabilistic. Given the complexities of human experience and action across time and context, it would be absurd to demand instance-specific or individual-specific certainty of the sort possible in some branches of natural science. The problem with such a defense is that the data on which the probabilities are based, at least in the vast majority of research in psychology and educational psychology, are aggregate data of groups of individuals rather than data drawn from the life histories of any particular individuals. Conclusions and predictions based on either sets of data are probabilistic, but these probabilities are not equivalent. As a simple illustration of the difference, imagine that you have been asked to estimate the probability that a particular baseball player will hit well over the course of a season. Would you use data concerning the batting averages of groups of baseball players and perform a calculation based on matching the physical and psychological characteristics of the individual whose batting performance you wish to predict against this information – i.e., if the player is a white, left-handed, neurotic, and conscientious person, base your calculations on the group batting averages of groups of white, left-handed, neurotic, and conscientious players? Or, would you dig into this particular player's past batting performance to derive your calculation of probability, perhaps supplementing your inquiry with an individualized clinical assessment of the individual player's current physical and psychological well being? Doing the former rather than the latter is much more typical of the statistically-based research practices of psychologists and the ways in which they draw implications for individuals from aggregated group data (e.g., consider the kinds of implications included in the discussion sections of many research articles that report such studies).

Consequently, when educational psychologists claim knowledge of individual students derived from their studies of groups of students as a basis for predicting and intervening in the educational experiences and lives of individual students,

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they are on very shaky ground. The paradox that presents itself is stark. Despite the individualistically focused psychologism of educational psychology that claims knowledge about the psychological interiors of individual students, educational psychologists in fact have little or no such scientific knowledge of individuals because their typical scientific practices do not warrant predictions and interventions concerning individuals. Instead, they have an individualistic and scientific ideology that assumes (not discovers or scientifically supports) such applications of their research to individual students.

#### THE METAPHYSICS OF INDIVIDUALISM

What is missing from the mainstream programs of research and intervention employed by educational psychologists in their studies of self-esteem, self-concept, self-efficacy, and self-regulation (as well as in many other areas of inquiry) is a focus on students acting individually and collectively in schools and other contexts. What psychology and educational psychology really need is a different metaphysics, one that is much more directly relevant to the social and cultural nature, constitution, and sustenance of persons.

Despite the paradoxical fact that the methods favored by psychologists have little to say about individuals, individualism as a metaphysical doctrine is rampantly evident in the vast majority of educational psychology, even much of that which claims to be socially and culturally sensitive and concerned. Individualism is a metaphysical doctrine that takes the individual to be ontologically and morally prior to, and constitutive of, the social world and political order. With such a metaphysics in place, society is taken to result from the choices and activities of essentially pre-constituted individuals in pursuing and realizing their purposes. In such a society, when anything goes wrong or requires fixing, the way to proceed is to identify individual members of the society who appear to possess and cause the difficulties and to subject them to socially-imposed punishments and interventions intended to protect mainstream society.

Opposing metaphysical individualism, American pragmatic philosophers like John Dewey and George Herbert Mead proposed a naturalized, post-Hegelian, evolutionary perspective in which the individual is constituted through interactivity with others within a historically established and constantly evolving social context. In this pragmatic metaphysics, biological individuals need societies if they are to be transformed into social and psychological persons, and societies require the coordinated interactivity of persons to reproduce and expand interactive practices, and produce shared understandings, customs, artifacts, institutions, and forms of communal and individual life. Somewhat ironically, these American pragmatists held that metaphysical and moral doctrines of individualism (like all informal and formal systems and codifications of ways of life) consist in social, linguistic understandings and practices that result from processes of historical, evolutionary, and developmental interactivity.

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Understood in this way, practices of individualism, to quote de Toqueville, enable a calm and considerate feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself ... [Eventually,] there are more and more people who, though neither rich or powerful to have much hold over others, have gained or kept enough wealth and enough understanding to look after their own needs. Such folk owe no man anything and hardly expect anything from anybody. They form the habit of thinking of themselves in isolation and imagine that their whole destiny is in their hands. (as quoted in Bellah et al., 1985)

To the pragmatic philosophers, individualism flies in the very face of the reality of individuality, which necessarily requires social, communal interactivity. The facts of individuality, those familiar attributes and capabilities so much thought about and studied by both philosophers and psychologists are products of the evolving, coordinated interactivity of biological human beings within their social, historical contexts. Both the facts of individuality and the metaphysics of individualism, on the pragmatists' account, have their origins in communal, social interactivity.

Unfortunately, much scientific psychology and philosophy of mind and psychology has adopted a metaphysics that eschews fields of interactivity and historical, evolutionary, and developmental emergence for an entity-based, reductive ontology and an epistemology that venerates mechanistic, efficient causation as an ideal explanatory tool. Within this paradigm, persons are understood as individuals who exhibit a suite of cognitive capabilities that include first-person perspective, self-consciousness, intentionality, and agency. However, within this fixed-substance, reductive metaphysics, such capabilities are considered to be properties of individuals, and explanations for them are sought primarily within biological and psychological causes internal to persons. For example, a great deal of contemporary cognitive neuroscience is devoted to a search for neural, biochemical causes and mechanisms thought to be responsible for consciousness and intentionality, and to which consciousness and intentionality might be reduced. When and if aspects of reality external to individuals are considered, these typically are construed as factors or variables that facilitate, inhibit, or otherwise alter pre-existing tendencies, impulses, and capabilities, affecting the development of structures and processes already possessed in some basic form by the individuals being considered.

In cognitive psychology more generally, cognitive structures, processes, schemata, and representations are taken to be the real causes of individuals' thoughts, experiences, and actions. When anything is amiss in the psychological functioning of individuals, psychological interventions are targeted theoretically and practically at the inner psychological components of afflicted individuals. Entire systems of psychological inquiry and intervention depend on understanding persons as independent psychological and biological individuals. When social factors or

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variables clearly seem to affect the psychological and/or biophysical functioning of individual persons, psychologists frequently attempt to equip individuals with cognitive and metacognitive strategies and techniques that can be deployed to isolate, immunize, or otherwise render individuals resiliently resistive to external influences, so as to improve their psychological health. Social support of various kinds might be enlisted, but primarily as a temporary prosthesis awaiting removal at a time when natural, that is solo, functioning is resumed.

Despite well-known difficulties with most of the immediately foregoing assumptions and practices, psychologists react quite negatively to any suggestion that their scientific and professional enterprises venerate and promote metaphysical, moral, or political individualism. Why is this? I think it is because they assume that the facts of psychological individuality they quite correctly perceive all around them warrant the framing of psychology as a science of individuals, and don't comprehend the extent of, or see any viable alternatives to, the individualism they end up embracing. The fact that, after a period of infancy, most children, adolescents, and adults clearly exhibit and profess self-consciousness, intentionality, first-person perspective and experience, and self-determined agency typically is taken to necessitate and warrant assumptions of metaphysical individualism. The alternative of choosing a pragmatic, interactivist, and more social metaphysics over a metaphysics of reductive individualism is mostly blocked by the strength and prevalence of individualistic assumptions and practices within psychology and increasingly within the broader society.

#### THE CASE OF AMERICAN INDIVIDUALISM

So, why does any of this matter? To answer this question, I want very briefly to consider American individualism. Authors such as Robert Bellah and his colleagues (1985) in their *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, David Sprintzen (2010) in his *Critique of Western Philosophy and Social Theory*, and several others have noted that many Americans have come to feel that they only are someone if they have "made it" in a manner that enables them to look down on others who have not. However, this dream of being a star ("the uniquely successful and admirable one"), at least in much American history, has been coupled with the idyllic image of creating a new life and home – a new "city upon a hill" that could redeem the Old World and save us all. Several penetrating analyses, including those to which I just have referred, circle around a basic tension between individualism and communalism in American life. The basic story line is that immediately prior and subsequent to American Independence, life in the New World was of necessity more or less communal. However, perhaps spurred by the deeply rooted individualism of Reformed Christianity, motivating energies and opportunities pulled ever in the direction of the individual. A vast, abundant, and mostly unpopulated land was open to individual initiative in ways not easily held within established social and moral orders and images of character. Remaking the world as they remade themselves,

American adventurers and entrepreneurs molded religious and Enlightenment visions of rebirth and improvement into a secular and economic ideal of the self-made individual embracing a world open to opportunity, justified by “the promotion of human happiness, celebration of individual freedom, and the defense of the innate rights of [the person]” (Sprintzen, 2010, p. 166). During the nineteenth century, the scientific and industrial revolutions further fueled the exploitation of the potential of the New World for individual ascendance and accomplishment, under a banner of national progress and freedom for all, or at least all who possessed the personal, bodily, and ethnic characteristics to join the race.

However, through all of this, the tension between individualism and communalism persisted – “the ‘can do’ attitude of the ‘self-reliant’ was ever ambivalent about whether [she] was building a new community or [whether he was] making it on his own” (Sprintzen, 2010, p. 169). Suffice it to say that “American individualism has had a long and ambivalent attitude toward community”. “No one tells me what to do” and “It’s my life” have become almost synonymous with democracy, eclipsing the obvious fact that democracy is collective self-governance, not unbridled individual freedom. Nonetheless, at the same time that Americans value individual freedom above all else, they increasingly seem to crave often idealized notions of community – the New England town meeting, the home town, the college fraternity or sorority.

In our recent book, *The Education of Selves: How Psychology Transformed Students*, I and Ann-Marie McLellan (2013) agree with much of this conventional story-line concerning American individualism and its teeter-totter existence with communalism. However, we argue that in the second half of the twentieth century, existing and escalating commitments to economic and political forms of individualism in American and Canadian life<sup>2</sup> were aided and abetted by psychological forms of individualism, as psychologists became increasingly active in promoting programs to enhance the self-concept, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and the self-regulatory, enterprising capability of individuals. After the 1960s, belief in high levels of self-concept and self-esteem as necessary foundations for almost any undertaking in Western life achieved an almost taken-for-granted status. In psychotherapy, social work, community development, and education, considerable energy and resources were targeted at ensuring that such presumed psychological foundations were in place. A positive self-regard was considered to be almost synonymous with any kind of competence that might possibly be seen to benefit anyone. As the twentieth century wound down and the twenty-first century began, the excesses of narcissistic attachments to one’s self and one’s interests and projects, with little regard for more communal undertakings and goals, were increasingly obvious (e.g., Lasch, 1978; Twenge, 2006; Twenge & Campbell, 2009). In comparison, as historically inclined scholars (e.g., Guignon, 2004; Taylor, 1989) have pointed out, prior to the 1960s, relatively scant attention was paid to matters such as self-esteem, with little obvious detrimental impact on everyday social life compared to the deteriorations in common civility and respect for others widely noted in more recent decades (e.g., Stout, 2000).

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However, when psychologists elevated self-esteem to the status of an inner causal structure of core beliefs that determined success in school and life, classroom curricula and activities became replete with exercises to bolster self-esteem as an end in itself – “Make a list of all of the ways in which you are special,” “Let’s all focus on Daniel, and each of us tell him what we admire about him,” and so on. As John Dewey (1922) warned, “Many good words get spoiled when the word self is prefixed to them. ... The reason is not far to seek. The word self infects them with a fixed introversion and isolation. It implies that the act of love or trust or control is turned back upon a self which already is in full existence and in whose behalf the act operates” (p. 138).

It is sobering to reflect on the possible consequences to both individuals and societies of psychology’s continuing commitment to metaphysical individualism, especially if, as I have suggested, such a commitment undermines the flourishing of our communal attachments – thus choking important sources of robust forms of both individuality and community by depleting the social, cultural conditions of possibility that individuality requires. Psychological facts, mired as they are in strong forms of metaphysical individualism, must not be assumed to guarantee an unsupportable and possibly dangerous social and political commitment to the foundational persistence of these facts without regard for history, evolution, development, and circumstance. Contemporary facts about persons, as social, psychological beings, are not permanent fundamentals, but are constantly emergent and evolving through our ongoing constitution within the biophysical and sociocultural world.

#### CONCLUSION: RECLAIMING THE SOCIAL, CULTURAL CONSTITUTION AND MAINTENANCE OF PERSONHOOD

Failing to attend directly to the actual activities of students and teachers in classrooms and schools in favor of conducting educational inquiry using the decontextualized questionnaires and individualized, psychologized worldviews of psychologists is a mistake. Why would educational researchers and practitioners want to base their interpretations and conduct on psychologists’ measures of self-esteem or self-regulation that ask students to rate the extent to which their usual classroom experiences and actions are captured in sentences such as “When I study I try to organize the material in my mind”? Why not observe students as they study or do not study and talk to them about what they are doing or not doing? Doing the former privileges the theoretical frameworks and inquiry practices and convenience of psychologists over students’ activity in actual study contexts. It effectively gives scientific and practical authority to the realities of psychological methodology and theories over the realities of students’ and teachers’ classroom interactions. More broadly, rather than attempting to understand learning, development, knowledge, experience, actions, and interactions as activities and accomplishments of embodied, enculturated persons in interaction with each other (e.g., students, their peers, and teachers)<sup>3</sup>, educational psychologists ask students and educators to reduce the

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holistic complexity of their lives in schools to personal feelings and judgments about themselves as individuals that somehow can be understood outside of the sociocultural, relational, and interactive contexts of teaching and learning, and revealed through students' decontextualized ratings of statements such as "I feel confident that I will do well."

Reducing the contextualized activity and experiences of persons to what is measured by psychological instruments such as those frequently employed in the self studies of educational psychologists in the manner discussed above is deeply problematic. When we fail to think critically about psychological measures and interventions that reduce and decontextualize our actions and experiences, our attention is drawn away from the sociocultural contexts and interactions within which our actions and experiences are acquired and within which we achieve our collective and individual ways of being the kinds of persons that we are. In education, it surely is the case that the best way to understand students' individual and collective actions and experiences as learners is to examine educational materials, curricular content, teaching strategies, student-teacher interactions, participation in classroom discussions and projects, and so forth. Why do we, as individuals and citizens in our communities and in our schools, want to rely instead on the reductive, decontextualized measurement and research practices of psychologists who claim to be able to measure things like self-esteem and self-regulation using paper-and-pencil questionnaires that students complete when not involved in classroom lessons, study, or other educationally relevant tasks – especially when the science of educational psychology is demonstrably scientific in its metaphysical and methodological confusions and limitations?

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The choice of "American individualism" as an example is *not* meant to imply that other North American countries (especially Canada) or Western nations (such as Great Britain, France, or Germany) do not display many features of contemporary individualism. Nonetheless, it is in the United States that modern individualism is most clearly evident and this makes American individualism an appropriate basis for illustrative material in support of the critical concerns and arguments raised in this chapter.
- <sup>2</sup> The Martin and McLellan book focuses on American and Canadian individualism. However, much of what is said therein also would seem to apply to several other Western and Commonwealth (e.g., Australia and New Zealand) countries.
- <sup>3</sup> There are several extant examples of how educators and educational researchers can focus directly on educational practices and engagements involving teachers and learners, without theorizing needlessly about the inner workings of students' and teachers' self-concepts and cognitive or personality structures. For example, Selman (2003) has experimented with raising children's social understanding and ability in a direct manner by encouraging children to work together within activities chosen to both promote cooperation and engender conflicts that need to be resolved. Selman's specific aim is to help children become aware of and understand the actions, motives, and perspectives of others by working together with others in ways that require coordinated interactivity. As Hickey and Granade (2004) declare, understanding ourselves and others is "a function of our practices, of our lived experiences of participation in specific communities ... rather than our beliefs or values" (p. 233).

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## 12. TRANSFORMATIVE ACTIVIST STANCE FOR EDUCATION

*The challenge of inventing the future in moving beyond the status quo*

### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I engage key positions presently dominant across many strands of critical scholarship on the epistemological and ontological questions about the ways through which people get to know their world and about the nature of reality that backgrounds these processes. The term *post-objectivist critical (POC) scholarship* is used to designate a broad movement across social sciences (in disciplines such as education, ethnography, sociology, psychology, anthropology, science studies, and philosophy, among others) that contests the centuries old traditional objectivist canon according to which the pursuit of knowledge is a value-neutral endeavour independent of practices, histories, and contexts of its production. The POC scholarship, so conceived, encompasses feminist, critical race, (dis)ability and post-colonial discourse theories, critical literacy, postmodernist, hermeneutical, Marxist and post-Marxist frameworks, pragmatism, sociocultural and Vygotskian approaches, critical pedagogy and participatory action research, among others. It can be considered as unified in light of the central premise, common to all of these perspectives, about the entanglement of knowledge with the practices of its production inclusive of dimensions such as historically evolved power differentials, culturally situated interests and contexts, political values, and ideological positions.

Drawing attention to this underlying commonality shared by many critically oriented works (all the differences at other levels among them notwithstanding) can be beneficial for their potential integration in one strong voice that is urgently needed in the face of common challenges from the dominant, and increasingly bold and powerful, objectivist, positivist, and empiricist trends in social sciences. This choice of clustering multiple theoretical perspectives in one movement — based in their post-objectivist claim about knowledge production — is similar to, yet somewhat broader than, the designation of critical social theory (CST) as a unified multidisciplinary framework with the implicit goal of advancing the emancipatory knowledge (Leonardo, 2004). While not all forms of POC scholarship explicitly pursue emancipatory goals, they still offer important insights on the nature of knowing that make them potentially useful allies in advancing approaches that are needed today in response to the mounting socio-political challenges that necessitate

creating alternative futures including in education. For example, approaches that are structured around notions such as “communities of practice” and “learning as participation” do not necessarily take side on issues of social justice/transformation (cf. Gutierrez, 2013); pragmatism even in its forms that include Marxist elements (cf. Wood, 2000) does not systematically challenge power hierarchies to support radical social transformation; post-modernist works (such as by Derrida, Butler, Foucault) do challenge power differentials though do so as “perennial outsiders,” without an explicit commitment to social activism pursuant of specific political agendas. Yet they all present an important antidote to objectivist views that naturalize development, knowing, and learning along the lines of traditional ontology and epistemology by presenting them as value-free, pre-defined essences independent from social practices. Whereas theoretical lineages and commitments vary widely across POC scholarship, the abiding sense of resistance, rejection and alteration of traditional canons of value-neutrality and “normativity” potentially unite them as allies in one powerful current of thought.

In expanding on the key insights of POC scholarship and while building on Vygotsky’s dialectical approach, I present a position termed transformative activist stance (TAS). This position engages ontological and epistemological questions and offers a radical perspective that paves the way for analytical advances in support of research with *activist agendas of social transformation*. While integrating contributions made by POC scholarship, I also delineate contradictions and dilemmas still complicating its progress. This concerns the unresolved tensions in understanding the basic reality foregrounding human development and the ensuing character of knowledge and its production. The continuing conundrum is that, on the one hand, it is very clear (after decades of work in POC scholarship) that a one-to-one correspondence between reality and knowledge posited by objectivist science leads to intractable problems. On the other hand, the post-objectivist position that knowledge is situated within practices, organized by discursive resources, and therefore contingent, contextually relative, and historically specific, has come to be associated, especially within the postmodernism, with the view that it is impossible to discern among competing knowledge claims and justify choice among them to ground social actions. As a result, although groundbreaking and progressive in many respects, the postmodernist strand of POC scholarship leads to relativism and radical indeterminacy that are ontologically mute and politically indecisive and thus, generally, unsatisfying. Most critically, these works do not provide grounds for how knowledge claims could be justified if it is understood that they are not impartial and instead, de facto always pursue specific interests and agendas. As a result, insofar as researchers accept that values, interests and power dynamics permeate knowledge, they still are facing, and themselves grapple with, the charge of ideological partiality that is considered to be incompatible with the traditionally understood “objective” science. To be able to provide strong answers to these charges, and for the POC positions to hold in general, since “objective” foundations and warrants for knowledge are rejected, the radically revised ontology and epistemology, and

a general worldview that embeds them, are required. If POC scholarship is to pursue the goals of social change and action beyond those of interpretation and deconstruction (inevitably limiting the scope of political commitment and action), it requires a worldview that implicates that knowledge is perspectival (i.e., not value- and politics-free), yet the grounds are provided for adjudicating among knowledge claims and legitimizing how human beings come to form accurate and veridical, albeit neither disinterested nor incontestable (and in fact always, in a sense, partisan) understandings about and knowledge of the world.

The TAS, developed on the foundation of Vygotsky's approach steeped in dialectical philosophy and progressive socio-political ethos of equality and social transformation, undertakes a bold reassessment of basic assumptions about human ways of being, doing, and knowing with the goal to elaborate foundations for a non-neutral, *activist critical scholarship* that embraces social action and agency based in political imagination, vision, and commitment to social transformation. Central to this position is the shift away from the ethos of adaptation (so far not sufficiently challenged within POC scholarship) that takes the world for granted and assumes that individuals have to fit in with its status quo, towards the notion that the deliberate, goal-directed and purposeful *transformation* of the world based in a commitment to, and a vision of, social change is the foundation for human development in all of its expressions encompassing processes of being, doing, and knowing.

#### THE PRESENT LANDSCAPE IN CRITICAL SCHOLARSHIP

The approaches within POC scholarship offer diverging answers to the questions about knowledge construction and its relationship to the world. The major trend among these is the postmodernist approach according to which there are multiple versions of reality, all understandings are contextualized, and knowledge cannot be achieved from “nowhere” because it is entangled with social and symbolic resources, contexts, practices, and interactivities. In this broad theorizing, solutions focus on politics of difference and identity where local constituents speak for themselves and produce partial knowledge. This important and progressive scholarship has consistently and successfully argued that knowledge cannot be usefully conceptualized to simply mirror reality in disconnection from social practices and knowing subjects, contrary to traditional mainstream “correspondence of truth” approaches. Many authors have revealed with striking clarity that traditional accounts ignore social contingencies and power dynamics inherent in knowledge production, inevitably ending up in an untenable position that there is one true answer to any inquiry and problem — typically produced by those in power. In place of this “knowledge-as-mirror-reflection” canon, contemporary works in POC scholarship have advanced many useful notions and approaches.

Much of the work in this tradition has placed discourse at the forefront of theoretical and analytical approaches, explaining knowledge through symbolic and power structures of *language* that enable and constrain agents to interpret and understand

the world. Other critical authors, especially within practice theories (e.g., Bourdieu, Giddens and late Foucault), have paid more attention to the material aspects involved in the production of knowledge, creating frameworks for analyzing synergistic relations between bodies, practices, discourses, and knowledge. These works are successful in resolving the dualisms of structure versus agency, and body versus mind, endemic in objectivist science, in that they treat practices as the unit of social analysis and reveal how knowledge is directly situated and embodied in these practices. In this position, the world and the knowing subject are mutually co-constituted within social practices, whereby their historically formed constellations and power relations define what counts as knowledge. All the differences notwithstanding, the resulting answers in most postmodernist approaches as to how competing knowledge claims can be justified, prioritized, and most importantly, taken as the grounds for action, often entail relativism or its slightly updated versions represented, for example, by ‘plural realism’ modeled on Heideggerian philosophy. According to this position, reality can be revealed in many ways and none of these can be prioritized over others.

There are many counterexamples of critical and sociocultural scholars openly embracing political agendas of empowerment and social action (see Prilleltensky, 1997), for example, in “politics of resistance” in Freirian tradition (e.g., Giroux, 1983; McLaren, & Jaramillo, 2007), participatory action research (e.g., Cammarota & Fine, 2008), transformative research (Mertens, 2009), and Vygotsky’s and activity theory tradition (e.g., Sawchuk, 2013). These approaches build on traditions of political consciousness that had been squashed but never completely eliminated under the weight of objectivist models.

However, unlike these activist approaches, the dominant trends in postmodernism are still focused on the “historical present” without much regard for how the future might be implicated in shaping the present and knowledge derived and shaped by it. Indeed, Judith Butler is unequivocal in stating that “[t]he critical point of departure is *the historical present*” (1999, p. 8, emphasis in the original). Not surprisingly, Butler’s works reveal a limited engagement with issues of institutional change, focusing instead on politics as a playful, parodic performance. This position is also broadly consistent with American pragmatism according to which knowledge is inseparable from human action, yet action itself is understood as embedded within and defined by the immediately given context in its situational concreteness, rather than as goal-directed and oriented towards the future.

The disconnection of action and knowledge from human intentionality, goals and purposes, and from related notions of political imagination and vision, is a position that is still central to most postmodernist directions in POC scholarship. Its persistence can be attributed to a reluctance of affiliating with what is perceived to be an old-fashioned and presumably wrong-headed ‘teleology’ of development. Indeed, when intentional constructs are posited as a-historical, timeless universals and transcendental absolutes, or as fixed ontological endpoints and teloi that are true “once and for all,” which is indeed the case in positivist science, then any account of such constructs inevitably leads into the mentalist and hegemonic discourse and premises.

However, with the purging of all types of endpoints and articulations of any political vision — rather than of the ones that are a-historical and timeless, imposed top-down through indoctrination and without regard to ongoing struggles and their historical expressions — any grounds on which claims to knowledge can be appraised and judged is abandoned too. As Appadurai has commented, “[t]he importance of value-free research in the modern research ethic assumes its full force with *the subtraction of the idea of moral voice or vision...*” (2001, p. 13).

Relinquishing political vision and endpoints leads to a full elision of grounds for warranting knowledge and, by extension, to intractable problems in formulating and claiming positions especially by those who struggle to overcome oppressive practices and hegemonies. As Cornell West has formulated, a critique of society needs to “put forward the correct understanding of this society in order to change it” (quoted in Wood, 2000, p. 91). Without a hope for such understanding, and with an exclusive focus on knowledge that is local, partial, and shaped by immediately given discursive and practical constellations, knowledge is stripped of its transformative power. Such a power has to do with people’s ability to imagine *what does not yet exist*, what they think needs and ought to be created and struggled for, through imagination and action that are challenging the present and stretching *beyond the status quo*. Knowledge that is merely situated in the present and the local is tacitly adapting to the world rather than challenging its status quo and as such, is not sufficient for social agency and activist position in dealing with matters of social significance including the goals of overcoming alienation and social injustice. As a result, the postmodernist versions of POC scholarship can neither claim nor articulate a common position and vision that are necessary to mobilize movements for collective social agency and change (cf. Carpenter, 2012). Focusing on the practical, embodied know-how within everyday social interactions and practices can hardly serve as a sufficient basis for a transformative practice.

This elision of links between material reality and agency, directly associated with gaps in theorizing the future, makes it impossible to establish specific *direction* for social change — which goes to the very heart of the relativist position marked by political and epistemological indecision, doubt, and uncertainty. Indeed, many postmodernist works operate only with a narrow vision of the possibilities for change. Foucault, for example, is strongly opposed to any suggestion that a vision for change might be needed in producing knowledge of any sort — because engaging such a vision, according to Foucault, inevitably involves normative ideals and, therefore, must be seen as inherently oppressive. As Foucault stated, “[w]hen you know in advance where you’re going to end up there’s a whole dimension of experience lacking (cited in Apperley, 1997, p. 22).

Much of the work in postmodernism (though with important exceptions) can be read as a descriptivist position (cf. McHoul & Grace, 1993) whose task is to incisively characterize historical phenomena in *the present* regimes of power while diagnosing, contesting and resisting their injustices, rather than as an activist scholarship with a *future-oriented agenda*, a political instrument for activism and social change.

This is not to eschew the important achievements made by postmodernist scholars. Indeed, they have brought dissonance and a sense of resistance into social theory by deconstructing and questioning the authority of established cultural and social norms, thus helping to celebrate diversity through exposing hypocrisy of ideologies of “pure knowledge,” and raising responsiveness to communities and individuals ignored and degraded in traditional approaches. Yet their focus is firmly on problematizing the present, rather than on imagining the future and charting the course of actions that could help achieving social change. The underlying broad claim is that we cannot develop programs for the future because the future is unknowable. In Foucault’s (1996, p. 225) words,

I dream of the intellectual destroyer of evidence and universalities, the one who, in the inertias and constraints of the present, locates and marks the weak points, the openings, the lines of power, who incessantly displaces himself, *doesn’t know exactly where he is heading nor what he’ll think tomorrow because he is too attentive to the present...*(emphasis added)

Without positing a program for action in pursuit of positive goals of social transformation, postmodernism ends up in a “radical indecision” ***that is in sharp contrast with the*** notions of active struggle and activism. Important exceptions can be found in works that evoke the role of imagination and of what one believes is possible in one’s own future, focusing on a “way to imagine living in the future tense” for young people who “carry their desires for a tomorrow of meaning, hoping for rich enabling contexts” (Fine & McClelland, 2006, pp. 300, 324).

Because of these difficulties and conundrums epitomized in relativism, especially in terms of the void it creates for political imagination and collective agency, there has been a revival of interest by critical scholars in the long standing tradition of Marxist philosophy and critical thought. However, the answers provided by this tradition carry their own dilemmas that require continuing contestation and interrogation — in the spirit of this approach itself — rather than their uncritical acceptance as if they were established and immutable dogmas. In particular, the common view that Marx conceived of reality as objectively existing outside of social practice, history, and human agency, and of knowledge as reflecting independent objective reality needs to be carefully interrogated and debated. Marx himself did not hold the view that the relationship between reality and consciousness is unproblematic. He explicitly questioned the very notion of objective reality “out there” and of pristine nature, proving to be sharply critical of mechanical materialism that treats nature in isolation from society and history when writing that “...the nature that preceded human history ... *is nature which today no longer exists* anywhere (except perhaps on a few Australian coral islands of recent origin)...” (1978a, p. 171, emphasis added). The whole sensuous world as it now exists, writes Marx, “is an unceasing sensuous labor and creation” (ibid). In this emphasis, nature is understood as a human-made realm, in its dynamic, historically evolving entanglements with human material practices, and not as an a-historical and timeless “given.”

Yet at the same time, by insisting on the primacy of material, economic conditions (often interpreted as independent from human beings) in connecting thought to its socio-historical practical origins and contexts, Marx did provide some grounds for ambiguities in understanding the world as ‘objective’ in the sense of it being stripped of human dimensions and agency. Many Marxist scholars advocated the notion that to be “materialist” means to acknowledge that consciousness and knowledge are reflections of the material world. This tradition began very early on, with Plekhanov (who influenced generations of Marxist scholars, especially in Russia, from the very dawn of Marxism) arguing for a strictly naturalist understandings (1940, p. 20),

By entirely eliminating teleology from social science and explaining the activity of social man by his needs and by the means and methods of satisfying them ... dialectical materialism for the first time imparts to this science the ‘strictness’ of which her sister—the science of nature—would often boast over her. It may be said that the science of society is itself becoming a natural science.

Many strands within POC scholarship have been affected by canonical understandings of Marxism about reality existing independently of human beings and social practices and known through some kind of “reflection” in consciousness. These understandings have not been sufficiently and explicitly challenged by Vygotsky’s followers such as Leontiev and Davydov, at least in part due to them working under the pressures of a unidirectional, top-down ideology (see Stetsenko, 2005, 2013b). Among more recent works, Paulo Freire seemed to insist that there is a world that exists as “an objective reality, independent of oneself, capable of being known” (1982, p. 3), even though he also suggested that the “objectivity and the subjectivity are incarnating dialectically” (Davis & Freire, 1981, p. 62) and that consciousness is not a pure reflection of the world. The resulting views within critical pedagogy today remain somewhat conflicted, with some scholars interpreting Freire as rejecting that reality can be directly understood ‘in itself’, while others associate this interpretation with a Kantian tradition and therefore treat it as unacceptable (see Au, 2007).

Recent works by Marxist-feminist scholars and educators have begun to chart a reimagined notion of the social as a historically subjective human practice, thus more directly connecting human experience and social relations (see Bannerji, 2005; Carpenter, 2012). In particular, these works trace the notion of experience to a complicated social reality as constituted by “*human sensuous activity*” (Marx, 1978b, p. 143) and suggest that the ways for people to organize their collective life are always bound up in complex forms of human relations. These authors stress that the Marxist emphasis on material relations is not an argument for the economic determinism stripped of subjective dimensions, because these relations are *historical* and thus, include mutual determination of subjectivity/experience and the material production of life. Marxist-feminist ontology, therefore, insists on the dialectical relationship between forms of consciousness and the active human social relations that make up everyday experience. That is, the focus is on how knowledge

is constructed from experiences which entails delineating the historical and material relations that condition experiences such as the ones stemming from participation in disjointed social relations.

This interpretation is progressive in that it departs away from the notion of materiality as if existing outside of human relations and instead addresses the complex dialectics between consciousness, experience, social relations, and material production. This position aligns well with the non-dogmatic reading of Marxism that shifts away from an ontology of a reified “objective reality” that can be known in abstraction from human activity inclusive of forms of being, doing, and knowing. As explicated early on by Antonio Gramsci (1971),

...the idea of “objective” in metaphysical materialism would appear to mean an objectivity that exists even apart from man; but when one affirms that a reality would exist even if man did not, one is either speaking metaphorically or one is falling into a form of mysticism. We know reality only in relation to human being, and since human being is historical becoming, knowledge and reality are also a becoming and so is objectivity... (p. 446).

A closely related position has been explicated within cultural–historical activity theory (e.g., Stetsenko, 2005; Stetsenko & Arieivitch, 2004; for elaborations, see Sawchuk & Stetsenko, 2008) endeavoring to reformulate its premises away from canonical Marxism and towards a more dialectical interpretation. In these works, the suggestion has been to consider the processes of the material production of human life, the intersubjective exchanges (i.e., social relations) accompanying and realizing these processes, and the human subjectivity (consciousness) entailed and implicated in them, as together forming a *unified three-fold dialectical system* at the core of human life and social dynamics. Focusing on the constant manifold transitions among dimensions of this system across all levels as its *modus vivendi* reveals individual and collective processes to be interrelated and co-evolving levels of activity that are derivative of, and embedded in, social practices including human labor, yet at the same time instrumental in carrying out these very practices as their legitimate dimensions. In this approach, human subjectivity is ontologically defined through its status, role, and practical relevance within material social practices and social relations, whereas material practices are redefined to include social relations and human agency to highlight their human relevance and dimensions.

To summarize these overlapping lines of works, Marx’s conception of reality as a practical sensuous human activity, or social practice — inclusive of human intersubjectivity and subjectivity (i.e., collective and individual agency and consciousness) — locates the relationship between knowledge and reality within ongoing social practices, thus highlighting them as ontologically mutually co-constitutive and their relationship as dynamically changing. However, the implications from this line of work concerning the nature of knowledge and warrants for its claims are in need of a careful further consideration and debate. In

particular, the ambiguities in whether knowledge claims can be warranted without an appeal to an objective reality knowable “in itself,” need to be further addressed and interrogated.

#### THEORIZING THE FUTURE IN TRANSFORMATIVE ACTIVIST STANCE

The POC scholarship reviewed in the previous section has made many important and progressive advances in deconstructing and refuting objectivist canons of the mainstream science to instead reveal how knowledge production processes are historically and culturally contingent and situated in terms of positionality especially vis-à-vis power relations and differentials. Feminist Marxist pedagogy is making especially important progress in advancing non-orthodox materialist dialectics. However, all of these approaches still leave ambiguities and unresolved tensions especially pertaining to the question of how knowledge claims can be evaluated vis-à-vis reality in terms of their accuracy, reliability, and validity. What is needed to resolve this lingering problem, in my view, is a revision of the basic onto-epistemology of human development including a more resolute contesting of the notion that adaptation is the putative ground of human life and societal development. This includes a thorough revision of how we understand the future and the role of political imagination in the production of knowledge conceived as an activist pursuit of social transformation.

The extant approaches, even those linked to a dialectical understanding of the social reality as composed by dynamic processes of human practice, are still limited in that they are firmly rooted in the “praxis of the present” (Lather, 2004, p. 257). In this emphasis on the present, the connotation of human beings adapting to and coping with the world as it exists now is unavoidable. This connotation inevitably brings about undesirable socio-political implications because adaptation pictures individuals as compelled, in order to survive, *to fit in* with what is given in the present — what exists in the world as its socio-cultural and political status quo. Adaptation is implicitly tailored to social Darwinist and mechanistic understandings that assume a static society composed of individuals who are reduced to engaging in survival through competition for existing resources by having to fit in with the given social structures and processes presumed to remain stable over time or, at least, to not directly depend on human agency. By extrapolation, learners are understood to prepare themselves for the future that is somehow expected to arrive no matter what they do and how they contribute to social practices of their communities, with unfortunate implications of passivity and quietism.

This limitation is particularly salient in critical scholarship focused on knowledge as situated in contexts. In these “situationist” works, such as Deweyan instrumentalism, Rorty’s neopragmatism, and social constructionism, knowing is understood along the lines of a contextualist worldview – that is, as profoundly practical, inseparable from activities and their contexts, yet of these activities and contexts as they exist in the present. It is the *presently* unfolding human practices

that are believed to provide foundations for knowledge while the future does not interfere with, nor determines, activities and practices occurring in “the here and now.” In these frameworks, the future cannot be known in advance and thus has no efficacy — knowing and doing are carried out and can be grasped without forming or taking into account the role of goals, aspirations, visions, hopes, and commitments because these cannot be posited in advance of carrying out activities in the present. For example, for Dewey, knowing is only possible based on the *consequences* of carrying out activities, that is, on trying out ideas and seeing if they work out for one’s benefit. A similar understanding permeates postmodernist and constructivist accounts which, in this respect, have inherited much of the pragmatist legacy. Thus, while postmodernist, situationist critical scholarship claims to reject all dichotomies, it appears to embrace *the dichotomy between the present and the future*.

In Marxist feminism, the emphasis on the present to the exclusion of the future is not fully avoided either. Indeed, the notion of *experience* might not be fully suitable to provide an adequate epistemological basis to understand the process of knowledge construction in its direct connections to practice concerned with social change because experience is fully and inevitably immersed in the immediacy of the present. That is, by insisting on human experience as the starting point of being, doing, and knowing a sufficient engagement with the future-oriented dimensions of human practices is not fully exercised. Along similar lines, the premise that development and learning are rooted in experiential presence or experiential encounter with the world (Heron & Reason, 1997), central in some participatory approaches, does not completely avoid connotations of adapting to the status quo either. These and related notions of interpretation, dialogue and situativity of knowing have been important in challenging traditional “objectivist” models and accounts. Yet these notions require further critical elaboration to more resolutely break away from the idea that individuals need to adapt to what is “given” in the present in order to develop and learn. The notions of experience and participation as the basis for development and learning (e.g., Lave & Wenger, 1991) only partly revoke this connotation because they are premised on similar dynamics of learners being *situated* in community practices as they exist in the present, rather than on learners transforming and transcending these practices in creating a different future.

What appears to be under-theorized in the extant POC scholarship is the notion that people *transform* their world, while taking this process of transformation as the basic, foundational mode of existence at the core of both human development and social reality in all of their expressions and forms. Although the notion of transformation is very familiar to scholars in the critical tradition (and especially honored in Marxist strands of this scholarship), its radical implications at all levels of theorizing, including about the process of knowledge production and its warrants have not been fully addressed. In particular, the frameworks developed in the mainstream, traditional approaches, and even those critical perspectives that struggle to overcome their entrenched dualisms, insufficiently theorize the dual and ceaseless dynamics at the *shifting nexus* of people collaboratively transforming their

world while *simultaneously* being transformed by it. Working out this premise is fraught with difficulties — philosophical as well as political and ethical ones. Many critical and postmodernist scholars associate this premise with the legacy of Western approaches and practices that are perpetuating oppressive social structures and policies — as in fact they often do. This requires that conditions for reinstating this premise within a dialectical-transformative worldview (rather than a mechanistic and even a contextualist and relational one), underpinned by notions of social changes and activism and ideals of social equality and solidarity, are carefully worked out. The challenge is to develop alternative perspectives that explicitly integrate activism and social change into the very basic descriptions of human development and learning so that the resulting theory can be used to underwrite research with activist agendas of creating alternative, more equitable futures.

It is at this juncture that the perspective of a transformative activist stance (or TAS, see Stetsenko, e.g., 2005, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2013a,b; and for applications, see Vianna & Stetsenko, 2011) can be helpful. Its central emphasis is on the *transformative* nature of collaborative practices at the core of human development and social dynamics, and not as one among other features of these practices, but instead, as the *primary onto-epistemology* that explicitly integrates notions of social change and activism at the worldview level assumptions. The resulting transformative worldview suggests that it is directly *through* and *in* the process (rather than in addition to) of people constantly *transforming* and creating their social world that people simultaneously create and constantly transform their very life, therefore also changing themselves in fundamental ways while, in the process, coming to form their own ways of being, doing and knowing. Thus, TAS places *collaborative transformative practice* carried out through unique individual contributions to this practice at the very core of human development and social dynamics.

The twin assumption of TAS is that, first, the world is dynamic, fluid, and constantly changing (this assumption is shared by many authors in POC scholarship); moreover and most critically, the world is understood as changing through *people's own activities and activist contributions* to their communities and the world at large. The world therefore is like a continuous process that is turned into an *act-uality* through human *action* (Stetsenko, 2012) and made *real* to the extent that it is 'realized' (cf. Castañeda, 2002, p. 159) by people themselves, in their day-to-day lives, struggles, and pursuits. Second, human beings are agentive actors who *co-create* their worlds and their futures, the very reality they live in as they transformatively realize (enact and embody) this reality through their own acts and deeds, thus always incurring changes in the status quo, rather than merely adapting to what exists in the present composed of stimuli and outside influences.

*Ontologically*, the assumption is that the world is not just a "given" in its status quo, as a fixed and static structure "out there" that exists independently of us and unfolds on its own grounds, no matter what we do. Instead, the world is seen as historically evolving, that is, continuously changing and constantly moving *because* of what people do in their collaborative practices and enactments of social life.

Thus, the world is understood as being “in the making,” and not on its own, but in *the making by people*, that is, as composed of collaborative practices to which we all contribute in our own unique ways. The reality itself, therefore, is seen as an *arena of social practices*, enacted through human acts and deeds, on which human development and learning take place and which they constitute and are constituted by. A related assumption is that the future never simply awaits us but instead, is created by our own actions in the present – through even seemingly mundane deeds by common people in their ordinary lives (implying that actually *no* deed is completely mundane, *no* person completely common and *no* life completely ordinary).

*Epistemologically*, the process of knowing is understood to be contingent on activist involvements in and contributions to collaborative transformative practices. This is in line with the well known Marxist maxim that in order to know the world, we have to change it. This maxim is extended in TAS by highlighting that because change is impossible without an orientation to the future, a commitment to a destination of one’s projects and pursuits indelibly colors the process of knowing in all of its dimensions and expressions. Thus, knowing is fully reliant on how we position ourselves vis-à-vis ongoing social practices and their historically evolved structures and conflicts, yet such positioning is impossible without imagining what “ought to be.”

That is, what is critical both ontologically and epistemologically is that all forms of social practices are enacted in human ways of being, doing, and knowing and always premised on the goals and commitments to the future. Becoming and being human *and* our knowing about the world are closely intertwined as facets of *one and the same* activist, goal-directed pursuit, or life project, aimed at contributing to social practices in their constant dynamic transformations. What is highlighted in this approach is that human development is a constant work-in-progress by people who simultaneously create the world and themselves – a *collaborative achievement of an activist nature* in that it relies upon people forming and carrying out their future-oriented agendas and projects of social transformation. These agendas centrally involve taking an activist stance grounded in a vision, or “endpoint,” of how present community practices *ought* to be changed and, thus, what kind of future *ought* to be created. The key point is that our practices and therefore our reality (coterminous with our own becoming) is already shaped, or tailored, to a future that is sought after and posited as desirable and necessary – and not as an abstract notion but rather, as something one commits to and *brings into reality*. This horizon of where people strive to get, this “yet to come” reality, therefore, is taken as no less real than anything going on in the present.

At the center of the social dynamics and reality itself are human practical, material-semiotic activist pursuits – intentional actions at both collective and individual levels (which are never separate) that change the world according to plans and goals embedded in social commitments underpinned by social imagination, vision, and activist striving. The transformative onto-epistemology posits that we live in the world that we ourselves create, through social practices of labor and

while relying on cultural tools, always in relations with other human beings and in view of the goals and endpoints that people imagine, aspire, and commit to. Therefore, our knowledge too, being embedded in and derivative of social practices (as is also acknowledged in all POC scholarship), is at the same time, and most critically, premised on and constituted by our activities not merely in the “here and now,” but at the intersection of the past, the present, and the future. That is, ways of being, doing, and knowing are understood to be ontologically determined by *acts of transformation* in the connotation of creating novelty and moving beyond the given, thus transcending the status quo, rather than by the more passive processes of people being situated, merely dwelling in, or experiencing, the world (as the metaphor of ‘being there’ implies).

The notion of activist stance bears some similarity, yet is not identical, with several other notions that also tap into the future such as Bakhtin’s addressivity (e.g., 1990) and prolepsis (e.g., Cole, 1996) that both draw attention to the representation of a future as being already existing and affecting the present. The difference, however, is that whereas both prolepsis and addressivity highlight that the future is anticipated as if it *already obtains*, the TAS notion of commitment to the future predicated on what one believes ought to be is more agentive and purposive. The notion of commitment suggests that persons not so much expect or anticipate the future, but rather, *actively work* to bring this future into reality through their own deeds, often against the odds, that is, even if the future is not anticipated as likely and instead, requires struggle and active striving to achieve it. This refers to persons’ and communities struggling for “what ought to be,” thus bringing the future into the present *in spite* of the powerful forces that are pulling in other directions, that is, while resisting and overcoming the present in its status quo, power hierarchies, and contradictions. The notion of commitment, therefore, is agentive and political, as well as ethically-valuational, because it entails *struggle for the future* rather than merely its anticipation.

The activist positioning and taking a stand are dimensions present already at the level of even presumably “elementary” and putatively value-neutral processes, such as perception, memory, and experience, let alone at the levels of conceptual understandings and identity/personhood. For example, even ‘simple’ acts of remembering the past are actually never just about the past. Instead, memory too is determined by goals and commitments, and thus, by an orientation to the future and an activist striving to change the present. Remembering is the work of continuously re-creating the past and recruiting its resources *in the service of achieving something new*, including in one’s own identity, while moving beyond the past and the present into the future. That is, memory is a tool of creating novelty and inventing the future, including re-imagining what is possible and who one wants to be within the overall work of identity and becoming as activist projects. Rather than a neutral and merely cognitive process, remembering is fused with activist processes of being, doing, and knowing (including identity development) across the time scales as individuals continuously grapple to meet the challenges and address the dilemmas and social power dynamics of their contexts and lives.

The resulting conception is that knowledge is never about getting “impartial” facts about how things are, because things are constantly changing already by the mere act of our presence (especially because our presence is never “mere”) and even more so, by our investigations, our *posing questions* about how things are and by *envisioning them being otherwise and acting on these visions*. Thus, our “access” (if this term is appropriate at all) to reality, being carried out through and in the form of active engagement with the world that *creates* rather than mirrors it, is infused with our subjectivity — with the goals, hopes, expectations, beliefs, biases, and commitments. That is, because people always act in pursuit of their goals rather than mechanically react to the world as it “impinges” on us as if we were passive recipients of outside stimuli, the production of knowledge is profoundly contingent on what individuals and communities consider *should be* while actively realizing these commitments in the present. Moreover, because knowledge is seen as but one dimension within the ceaseless flow of social practices that constitute no less than reality itself, entwined with processes of being and doing, producing *knowledge too is an act of creating reality and inventing the future*. There is no place for relativity of truth in this approach — truth is not relative although it is not obtained through a direct correspondence with some putatively independent reality. Truth is obtained in and as the process of creating the world in overcoming its status quo — because no other world exists for human beings than the one they themselves create in their collaborative social practices, just as these practices create them as well. Knowing therefore is about neither copying the world, nor coping with it but instead, about *creating the world and knowing it in the very act of bringing about transformative and creative change* — in the act of making a difference in our communal forms of life and mattering in them, and through this, of us coming to be and to know.

#### EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Many recently developed approaches in education such as critical and dialogical pedagogy, participatory and human science frameworks, among others, focus on conducting research *with* rather than *on* participants, engage participants by giving them voice, and create collaborative spaces for partnership and communication (e.g., Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Daiute, 2010; Gutiérrez & Larson, 2007; Jaramillo, 2011; Luttrell, 2003; Penuel & O’Connor, 2010). These approaches place emphasis on the role of values, power, and politics in conducting research, and highlight the goals of increasing participation and facilitating trajectories toward more equitable futures. In this emphases, researchers shift away from the “objectivist” experimentation model that dictates that researchers act as disinterested, impartial, and neutral observers of reality (e.g., Harding, 1992; Howe, 2003; McLaren & Jaramillo, 2007). However, these innovative perspectives are developed not without much resistance from traditional positivist science, policy-makers and other powerful players who insist on adhering to traditional ideals of value neutrality and, for example, seek to enforce assess-and-control, evidence-based methodologies as the “gold standard” (Lather,

2004). Moreover, these critical approaches in education are themselves still often ridden with anxiety that adopting goals beyond providing students with disciplinary knowledge may lead to “partisan politics” and end up in not preparing students for future success in the world (e.g., Penuel & O’Connor, 2010). Some ambiguity is evident in that many researchers are often merely satisfied to *accept* that our knowing is from a perspective, calling on researchers to articulate and pay attention to what is seen as our own “partialities” presumed to somehow saturate or even “pollute” research and knowledge. The assumption in such approaches is that researchers cannot escape unfortunate perspectival “blind spots” and have to learn to live with what is understood to be an unavoidable limitation imposed on knowing and doing research.

The transformative activist stance opens ways to resolutely overcome the disguised ideology of “neutral objectivity” that in fact perpetuates existing injustices. The radical suggestion advanced by TAS is that it is *only* on the grounds of, and from within, an activist agenda of meaningful life projects and pursuits that any knowing including through conducting research is possible in principle. This position expands upon what has been described as “practical-moral knowledges” (cf. Corcoran, 2009) that highlight that knowledge cannot be dissociated from practical and moral concerns of human beings qua social actors in the world. It also builds on the central insight by critical scholars (Apple, Freire, Giroux, among others) that knowledge is only possible from a particular historical location. In expanding this position, the TAS maintains that all human beings, researchers not excluding – and *already* by virtue of being human — always *de facto* act and know from within their agendas and visions for the future, their commitments to what they take *ought* to be. In this light, it is impossible to avoid drawing on our commitments that are ineluctably embodied in every act of our being, doing and knowing. This grounding of knowledge and research in activist agendas and transformative pursuits and projects, moreover, is seen not as a limitation but as the *necessary condition* that in fact provides firm anchoring for research and knowledge validation. Therefore, TAS insists on exposing and critically reflecting upon ideological-political underpinnings of research so as to make them open to contestation and objection by others (note the etymological similarity between ‘objecting’ and ‘objectivity’), rather than leaving these hidden under the disguise of a traditional value neutrality of putatively “objective” facts. *To make knowledge objective is to make its assumptions and premises, including political and ideological ones, explicit and open to objection by others.* These assumptions can never be eliminated or purged; yet their presence in itself is far from being problematic because it is a part of how people get to know their world and thus, a part of the human condition itself. The problems arise when these assumptions are believed to be non-existent and thus in fact left unarticulated and *hidden* beneath the veil of presumed neutrality.

This includes that the warrants for knowledge claims need to be based on criteria such as whether knowledge provides conditions for the forms of social life consistent with the ethical-ideological commitments that the researchers take on and explicitly articulate. Instead of being subjective, such an approach allows for “strong

objectivity” (cf. Harding, 1992). An objective foundation for knowledge, therefore, is sought in explicating and clearly defining its practical orientation and relevance within always non-neutral pursuits that de facto intervene into and disrupt the status quo. This is achieved through the practices of critique and deconstruction of how things are in the present and their history (the goal shared by all critical scholars); yet this is augmented with an understanding that such practices are also shaped through and through, and right from the start, by *the future horizon and destination one commits to achieve and struggles to bring into reality*.

This approach not only elevates the need for researchers to reflect on and make explicit their values, goals, and commitments (Prilleltensky, 1997) but urges that these are used as *the core constituents* of theorizing, methodology and research design. The cornerstone of this research methodology is the claim that the commitment to social transformation, and the struggle to bring this commitment to realization, uniquely positions researchers to see *what is* through the prism of how the present situations and conditions *historically came to be*, while also explicating and focusing on *what one takes ought to be*. In this, the historicity and situativity of knowledge (the *standpoint* onto-epistemology) is ascertained alongside its future orientation (the *endpoint* onto-epistemology), thus establishing continuity across the time scales of the past, the present, and the future. In this move, the infamous dichotomy of ‘is-ought’ dissipates because ‘the ought’ is understood to indelibly color perceptions and understandings in the present, while the present itself is seen as historically unfolding — as continuing the past while preparing and de facto creating the future. Therefore, research is understood to *always* intervene into the status quo and move beyond it, if even in small and modest ways. Moreover, what is emphasized is that research needs to be directly and explicitly *designed to intervene into the status quo*, while being reflective of *how* this is indeed the case in each particular instance.

To summarize, the TAS provides the grounding for educational research as an *active project of intervention into the status quo* while focusing on creating conditions and providing the tools for participants to transcend the “givenness” of the world in creating alternative futures. In particular, the tools of knowledge are drawn upon for collective critique of existing practices in their historically evolving contradictions — and thus for locating ourselves in “the here and now” viewed through the lens of history. At the same time, this critique needs to simultaneously spur participants and researchers taking an activist stance vis-à-vis these circumstances – while, and more precisely *through*, committing to bringing a collectively imagined *possible future* into reality. The complex dialectics across the time scales highlighted by this position is that it is impossible to imagine a possible future *unless* we locate ourselves in the present moment and its history; however, the reverse is also true in that we cannot locate ourselves in the present and its history *unless* we imagine the future and, moreover, commit to creating it, thus de facto launching this future in the present. This is because it is from such a commitment to a better future, and in the form of such a commitment understood as a world-creating act, that a meaningful understanding, and any human form of being, knowing and doing, are possible The

role of knowledge and research is therefore radically recast – turning them into instruments of activism and transformative change whereby research is carried out *not* in ways that merely prepare learners for the future that supposedly will somehow arrive irrespective of what is being done in the present. Instead, the key focus is on how research contributes to creating, together with participants and based in learning that expands our common agency and horizons, the very future and its truth that can come through our own deeds – our activist being, doing, and knowing.

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