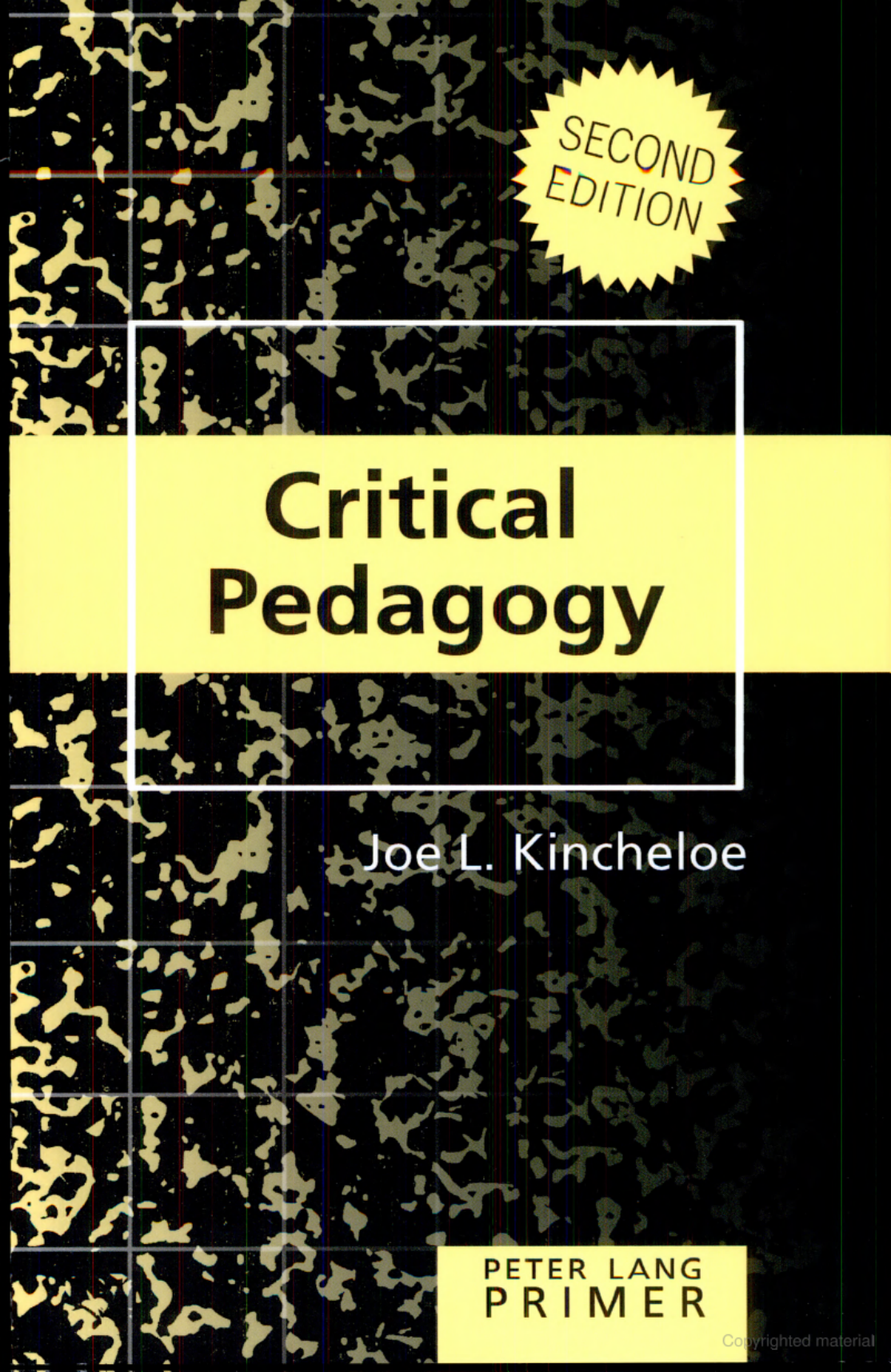

Joe L. Kincheloe

Critical Pedagogy PRIMER

Second Edition

PETER LANG
New York • Washington, D.C./Baltimore • Bern
Frankfurt am Main • Berlin • Brussels • Vienna • Oxford

The Library of Congress has catalogued the first edition as follows:

Kincheloe, Joe L.
Critical pedagogy primer / Joe L. Kincheloe.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
1. Critical pedagogy. I. Title.
LC196.K55 2004 370.11'5—dc22 2003027176
ISBN 978-0-8204-7262-1 (first edition)
ISBN 978-1-4331-0182-3 (second edition)

Bibliographic information published by **Die Deutsche Bibliothek**.
Die Deutsche Bibliothek lists this publication in the "Deutsche Nationalbibliografie"; detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at http://dnb.ddb.de/.

Cover design by Lisa Barfield

The paper in this book meets the guidelines for permanence and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council of Library Resources.

Printed in the United States of America

Table of Contents

Preface to the Second Edition

Over the past few years I have written too many second editions to books that begin with words such as "When I first wrote this book in _____ I had no idea that it would be more germane to the political and educational world of _____ than it did when I wrote the first edition of the book." Yet, here I am again, writing the preface to the second edition of the Critical Pedagogy Primer that could easily begin with exactly the preceding words. Indeed, I wrote most of the first edition of the book during 2003—the book was published in 2004—in the process of watching the horror of George W. Bush's absurd invasion of Iraq play out in front of me. It seemed so obvious to me—and literally millions of other people around the world—that the war was so unnecessary, so misguided, so fueled by the greedy neo-conservative attempt to enhance the geopolitical and economic position of the United States in the world no matter what the human cost. In the ensuing years, I have watched all my fears about the war materialize. I was wrong on a few counts: I didn't believe that the situation would be quite as horrendous as it has turned out to be; and I thought the preinvasion antiwar movement would not fade away as it has.

With these pessimistic thoughts in mind I entered into the writing of the second edition. Is it the burden of all critical theorists/pedagogues to confront the dialectic of their critical hope with the pessimism that comes from what generations of criticalists before me ironically called "progress?" I felt that it was important to rewrite the book with more emphasis on the need for a worldwide critical community to counter the empire building of imperialists in the United States and their political, corporate, and educational allies in the Western world and increasingly around the planet. Consider the last years of the first decade of the twenty-first century where we now are ideologically:

- Preemptive wars by the United States against imagined enemies have now been established as precedent.
- Teachers who support these wars in their classrooms are viewed as moderates; those of us who criticize them are viewed as dangerous subversives who should be and often are fired.
- Transnational corporations and their political allies in Western governments are relatively free to engage in the transfer of wealth from the poorest nations to the richest people in the richest nations of the world.
- Traditional constitutional rights, long regarded as sacred, are being undermined by fear mongers who use the perpetual "War on Terror" as a justification to institute a more authoritarian state (and corporate government) with the highly regulated politics of knowledge that operates to uphold the dominant power.
- School curriculum in the standardization movements of contemporary school reform is controlled by the dictates of educational leaders who know their funding and survival is in jeopardy if they don't ensure that their teachers teach to the tests. Brave school principals and teachers still resist such control of knowledge, but now they do it at their own risk.
- The move toward teacher deprofessionalization is well underway and is supported by numerous interest groups. Teachers who are not aware of critical pedagogy and are less familiar with world and local events are more unlikely to protest the standardized curriculum designed to uphold the status quo. Thus, many policy makers and educators prefer less-educated teachers to well-educated teachers.

- Teacher scripts—manuals that teachers read to students taking away any professional input on the part of the professional educator to the curriculum—are more common than ever before.
- Right-wing fundamentalist Christian influence on school boards has continued to increase. Such school boards push not only policies and curricula that mandate the teaching of fundamentalist creation stories but also a xenophobia that censors even the inclusion of literature and perspectives from "non-Christian" groups—for example, indigenous peoples, Buddhists, homosexuals, and individuals who have challenged the status quo, and so on.
- The move toward the corporate privatization of education—for-profit schools—is alive and thriving. Such schools will not be especially friendly to critical pedagogy.
- While there are many brave journalists in traditional and new media, corporate ownership and government pressure on news organizations to stay away from criticism of the status quo increases.
- Those who are ethically concerned with issues of oppression and violence toward poor people, people of color, women, non-Christians, and gays and lesbians are demeaned as proponents of an oppressive "political correctness" that makes the real victims of oppression "regular people"—white, economically prosperous, male, Christian, heterosexuals. In this configuration those of us who join the struggle for critical emancipation are the true oppressors in the contemporary world.
- Social justice is being removed from the mission statements and policies of many educational and other social institutions because of its "oppressive tendencies."

I could go on with these descriptions of the current ideological-cum-educational situation that confronts us. Such a morose delineation is not meant to depress us, but to alert those of us with a passion for fairness, justice, freedom, and human dignity to make our presence felt, to pick up the torch for a new generation dedicated to the struggle for the social good and the sanctity of a rigorous and social justice based education. In this dark hour of the human condition, my beloved wife and partner, Shirley Steinberg, and I have been blessed with the opportunity to initiate

the Paulo and Nita Freire International Project for Critical Pedagogy in the Faculty of Education at McGill University. In this endeavor we have created the basis for bringing together a worldwide community of critical educators concerned with the issues referenced in this Preface. We want people from diverse backgrounds to join the community we are putting together via this project.

We invite people working both inside and outside of traditional educational structures to share with us the socially, politically, cognitively, of course, educational transformative work they are doing in the world. In the short time we have been involved with the project, we have been overwhelmed and humbled by the large number of people who are doing good works in all corners of the world. Please let us know about your critical work by contacting our Web site. In this way, we can use contemporary technologies to bring together committed and creative people to collaborate in ways that can devise unique and pragmatic approaches of resisting the oppressive dimensions of the political and educational status quo, while developing our social and educational imagination. Such an imagination—that exists in the individual and collective intelligence of dedicated peoples and groups around the world—despite the darkness around us can change the world in general and education in particular. This is the ambitious goal to which The Paulo and Nita Freire International Project for Critical Pedagogy and this primer are dedicated.

Hope is alive, but it must be a practical and not a naïve hope. A practical hope doesn't simply celebrate rainbows, unicorns, nutbread, and niceness, but rigorously understands "what is" in relation to "what could be"—a traditional critical notion. No one will let us have our sociopolitical and educational dreams without a protracted struggle. The work is hard, and we will often be vilified for taking part in critical activity. Sometimes we will wonder whether we are the crazy ones as we sit in a crowded room as the only persons making the critical arguments discussed here. We will have to stay sane as we are attacked, and we will have to know more about history, philosophy, social theory, cognition, and pedagogy—from mainstream Western and subjugated perspectives from North America and Europe and especially from Africa, Latin American, Asia, and indigenous peoples from around the world. Hell yes, critical pedagogy involves a lifetime of rigorous

and too often unappreciated work. Nevertheless, I believe with every fiber of my being, it is worth the effort. What else are you going to do with your life? Be a cog in the engine of the mechanisms of dominant power that harm people in all of our communities and around the world. I hope not. Please visit the website for the Paulo and Nita Freire International Project for Critical Pedagogy (http://criticalpedagogyproject.mcgill.ca/drupal-5.1/). Here you will find updates on events in the world of critical pedagogy, new research in the domain, videos on the topic, archived materials, essays, blogs, and a variety of other forms of information. Everything on the site is free to anyone who logs in. The project is working to produce innovative research in the domain of critical pedagogy, while creating a worldwide community of critical pedagogues who can work together on a variety of projects. Project Director Shirley Steinberg and I invite you to become involved in our effort to connect individuals engaging in critical pedagogy in diverse and creative ways and in different settings.

agency
persons' ability to shape and control their own lives, freeing self from the oppression of power.

ideologies
traditional definition involves systems of beliefs. In a critical theoretical context idealogy involves meaning making that supports form of dominant power.

must concurrently deal with what John Goodlad (1994) calls the surrounding institutional morality. A central tenet of pedagogy maintains that the classroom, curricular, and school structures teachers enter are not neutral sites waiting to be shaped by educational professionals. Although such professionals do possess **agency**, this prerogative is not completely free and independent of decisions made previously by people operating with different values and shaped by the **ideologies** (see Chapter 3 for definition) and cultural assumptions of their historical contexts. These contexts are shaped in the same ways language and knowledge are constructed, as historical power makes particular practices seem natural—as if they could have been constructed in no other way (Bartolomé, 1998; Berry, 2000; Cochran-Smith, 2000; Ferreira and Alexandre, 2000).

Thus, proponents of critical pedagogy understand that every dimension of schooling and every form of educational practice are politically contested spaces. Shaped by history and challenged by a wide range of interest groups, educational practice is a fuzzy concept as it takes place in numerous settings, is shaped by a plethora of often invisible forces, and can operate even in the name of democracy and justice to be totalitarian and oppressive. Many teacher education students have trouble with this political dimension and the basic notion that schooling can be hurtful to particular students. They embrace the institution of education as "good" because in their own experience it has been good to them. Thus, the recognition of these political complications of schooling is a first step for critical pedagogy-influenced educators in developing a social activist teacher persona. As teachers gain these insights, they understand that cultural, race, class, and gender forces have shaped all elements of the pedagogical act. They also discover that a central aspect of democratic education involves addressing these dynamics as they systematically manifest themselves (Crebbin, 2001; Gergen and Gergen, 2000; Knobel, 1999; Noone and Cartwright, 1996).

Critical pedagogy is a complex notion that asks much of the practitioners who embrace it. Teaching a critical pedagogy involves more than learning a few pedagogical techniques and the knowledge required by the curriculum, the standards, or the textbook. Critical teachers must understand not only a wide body of subject matter but also the political structure of the school.

They must also possess a wide range of education in the culture: TV, radio, popular music, movies, the Internet, youth subcultures, and so on; alternative bodies of knowledge produced by marginalized or low-status groups; the ways power operates to construct identities and oppress particular groups; the modus operandi (MO) of the ways social regulation operates; the complex processes of racism, gender bias, class bias, cultural bias, heterosexism, religious intolerance, and so on; the cultural experiences of students; diverse teaching styles; the forces that shape the curriculum; the often conflicting purposes of education; and much more. This introduction to critical pedagogy issues a challenge to teachers, to educational leaders, and to students to dive into this complex domain of critical pedagogy. Many of us believe that the rewards for both yourself and your students will far outweigh the liabilities.

Nothing is impossible when we work in solidarity with love, respect, and justice as our guiding lights. Indeed, the great Brazilian critical educator Paulo Freire always maintained that education had as much to do with the teachable heart as it did with the mind. Love is the basis of an education that seeks justice, equality, and genius. If critical pedagogy is not injected with a healthy dose of what Freire called "radical love," then it will operate only as a shadow of what it could be. Such a love is compassionate, erotic, creative, sensual, and informed. Critical pedagogy uses it to increase our capacity to love, to bring the power of love to our everyday lives and social institutions, and to rethink reason in a humane and interconnected manner. Knowledge in this context takes on a form quite different from its more accepted and mainstream versions. A critical knowledge seeks to connect with the corporeal and the emotional in a way that understands at multiple levels and seeks to assuage human suffering.

The version of critical pedagogy offered here is infused with the impassioned spirit of Freire. I experience this spirit in my life when watching and listening to

- an A.M.E. church choir from New Orleans singing gospel songs
- Native American women making tremolo at a Sioux college graduation
- a rock band in a groove that shakes an audience to its core

- a Spanish calypso singer squeezing out every last note as the audience fills the air with heart-felt "olés"
- a dedicated and well-informed teacher bringing a group of students to life with her knowledge, passion for learning, and her ability to engage them in the process of teaching themselves and others.

I'm sure you sense this impassioned spirit in your own spaces. Critical pedagogy wants to connect education to that feeling, to embolden teachers and students to act in ways that make a difference, and to push humans to new levels of social and cognitive achievement previously deemed impossible. Critical pedagogy is an ambitious entity that seeks nothing less than a form of educational adventurism that takes us where nobody's gone before.

This impassioned spirit moves critical teachers to study power inscriptions and their often pernicious effects. The actions such teachers take to address them constitute one dimension of putting a critical pedagogy into action. Critical teacher educators must model this complex behavior for their education students in every dimension of professional education. This approach becomes extremely important when we understand the fear of the impassioned spirit and the hostility of many teacher education programs toward ideas that consider the effects of power on shaping and misshaping the pedagogical act. There are still too many teacher education programs that assume schooling is unequivocally a good thing serving the best interests of individual students, marginalized groups of students, and the culture in general. Such programs assume that the curriculum, institutional organizations, hiring practices, and field placements of the educational world are just and equitable and do not need examination on these levels. Critical teacher educators possess the difficult task of inducing students to challenge the very practices and ways of seeing they have been taught in their professional programs. Do "best practices," critical students ask, "help create a democratic consciousness and modes of making meaning that detect indoctrination and social regulation?"

Such critical pedagogical ways of seeing help teacher educators and teachers reconstruct their work so that it facilitates the empowerment of all students. In this context, critical educators understand that such an effort takes place in an increasingly power-inscribed world in which dominant modes of exclusion are

continuously "naturalized" by power wielders' control of information. "What does this have to do with teacher education?" Critics may ask. "We live in a democracy," they assert. Why do we have to spend all this time with such political issues? Isn't our focus teaching and learning? However, democracy is fragile, critical educators maintain, and embedded in education are the very issues that make or break it. Are teachers merely managers of the predetermined knowledge of dominant cultural power? Is teacher education merely the process of developing the most efficient ways for educators to perform this task? Do teachers operate as functionaries who simply do what they are told? Contrary to the views of many, these questions of democracy and justice cannot be separated from the most fundamental features of teaching and learning (Cochran-Smith, 2000; Grimmett, 1999; Horton and Freire, 1990; McLaren, 2000; Powell, 2001; Rodriguez and Villaverde, 2000; Vavrus and Archibald, 1998).

The chapters of this book analyze and expand upon these themes of critical pedagogy. Throughout the book, I focus on questions of democracy, justice, and quality in the pedagogical context. There is no doubt that these issues are complex and passionate feelings surround them. In this context, I attempt to provide a fair picture of critical pedagogy but not a neutral one. As a political animal, I hold particular perspectives about the purpose of schooling and the nature of a just society. These viewpoints shape what follows. The best I can do is to reflect on where such perspectives come from and decide whether or not I want to maintain my dedication to them. Be aware of these biases and make sure you read what I have to say critically and suspiciously. Furthermore, be certain to read all texts in this same way, especially the ones that claim an objective and neutral truth. As I tell my students, whenever individuals tell me they are providing me with the objective truth I guard my wallet. As critical pedagogy maintains, little in the world and certainly little in the world of education is neutral. Indeed, the impassioned spirit is never neutral.

The Central Characteristics of Critical Pedagogy

All descriptions of critical pedagogy—like knowledge in general—are shaped by those who devise them and the values

they hold. The description offered here is no different. Many will agree with it and sing its praises, while others will be disappointed—and even offended—by what was included and what was left out. As with any other description I would offer about any social or cultural phenomenon, my delineation of the central characteristics of critical pedagogy is merely my "take" and reflects my biases and perspectives.

Critical Pedagogy Is Grounded on a Social and Educational Vision of Justice and Equality

Educational reformers can discuss collaborative school cultures and reflective practices all they want, but such concepts mean very little outside a rigorous, informed vision of the purpose of education. Many educational leaders and school boards are crippled by the absence of informed discussion about educational purpose. Without this grounding their conversations about what to do in schooling go around in circles with little direction and less imagination. Clichés abound as wheels are perpetually reinvented and old wine seeks new packaging. In the contemporary era there are endless attempts at school reform with little improvement to show for the efforts. Without an educational vision, most educational reforms create little more benefit than applying Aspercream to ease the pain of a massive head wound. The educational vision, the purpose of schooling promoted here, demands a fundamental rethinking, a deep reconceptualization of

- what human beings are capable of achieving
- the role of the social, cultural, and political in shaping human identity
- the relationship between community and schooling
- the ways that power operates to create purposes for schooling that are not necessarily in the best interests of the children that attend them
- how teachers and students might relate to knowledge
- the ways schooling affects the lives of students from marginalized groups
- the organization of schooling and the relationship between teachers and learners.

A critical pedagogical vision grounded as it is in social, cultural, cognitive, economic, and political contexts understands schooling

and the rules of the system. Countless good teachers work every day to subvert the negative effects of the system but need help from like-minded colleagues and organizations. Critical pedagogy works to provide such assistance to teachers who want to mitigate the effects of power on their students. Here schools as political institutions merge with critical pedagogy's concern with creating a social and educational vision to help teachers direct their own professional practice. Any time teachers develop a pedagogy, they are concurrently constructing a political vision. The two acts are inseparable.

Many times, unfortunately, those who develop pedagogies are unconscious of the political inscriptions embedded within them. A district supervisor who writes a curriculum in social studies, for example, that demands the simple transference of a body of established facts about the great *men* and great events of American history is also teaching a political lesson that upholds the status quo (Degener, 2002; Keesing-Styles, 2003; 21st Century Schools, 2003). There is no room for students or teachers in such a curriculum to explore alternate sources, to compare diverse historical interpretations, to do research of their own and produce knowledge that may conflict with prevailing interpretations. Such acts of democratic citizenship may be viewed as subversive and anti-American by the supervisor and the district education office. Indeed, such personnel may be under pressure from the state department of education to construct a history curriculum that is inflexible, based on the status quo, unquestioning in its approach, "fact-based," and teacher-centered. Dominant power operates in numerous and often hidden ways.

Peter McLaren (2000) writes that this power dimension of critical pedagogy is central and that practitioners must be aware of efforts to dilute this power literacy. Today, critical pedagogy has been associated with everything from simply the rearrangement of classroom furniture to "feel-good" teaching directed at improving students' self-esteem. Simply caring about students, while necessary, does not constitute a critical pedagogy. The power dimension must be brought to bear in a way that discerns and acts on correcting the ways particular students get hurt in the everyday life of schools. When critical pedagogy embraces multiculturalism, it focuses on the subtle workings of racism, sexism, class bias, cultural oppression, and homophobia. It is not

sufficient for a critical multiculturalism (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997; Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, and Chennault, 1998) to build a program around supposedly depoliticized taco days, falafels, and Martin Luther King's birthday.

The ability to act on these political concerns is one of the most difficult tasks of critical pedagogy. Over the decades many conservative educators have participated in a Great Denial of the political dimension of education. In this denial, curricula and syllabi that fail to challenge the status quo are viewed as neutral documents presenting essential data. Students who want to become teachers have oftentimes encountered courses in political denial. Throughout elementary and secondary schools they were presented the facts unproblematically as if they were true. In college their liberal arts and sciences courses many times simply delivered the facts in biology, physics, sociology, psychology, or literature. The idea that these courses presented only one narrow perspective on the field in question, that they left out competing forms of knowledge produced by scholars from different schools of thought or from different cultures, was never mentioned. The political assumptions behind the curricula they encountered were erased. To ask such students to start over, to relearn the arts and sciences in light of these political concerns, is admittedly an ambitious task. Even so, this is exactly what critical pedagogy does, and those of us in the field believe such an effort is worth the time invested. A first-year teacher cannot accomplish such a huge task in the first year of his or her practice, but over a decade one can. Critical pedagogy challenges you to take the leap.

An important aspect of the Great Denial is that politics should be kept out of education and that is what mainstream curricula do. Critical pedagogy argues that such pronouncements are not grounded on an understanding of power. The political dimensions of education should be pointed out in all teaching and learning—critical pedagogy included. We must expose the hidden politics of what is labeled neutral. Such calls are often equated with a pedagogy of indoctrination. The critical educator Henry Giroux (1988) responds to such charges, contending that such criticism is flawed. Giroux argues that it confuses the development of a political vision with the pedagogy that is used in conjunction with it. Advocates of critical pedagogy make their own commitments clear as they construct forms of teaching

consistent with the democratic notion that students learn to make their own choices of beliefs based on the diverse perspectives they confront in school and society. Education simply can't be neutral. When education pretends to be politically neutral like many churches in Nazi Germany, it supports the dominant, existing power structure. Recognition of these educational politics suggests that teachers take a position and make it understandable to their students. *They do not, however, have the right to impose these positions on their students.* This is a central tenet of critical pedagogy.

In this context it is not the advocates of critical pedagogy who are most often guilty of impositional teaching but many of the mainstream critics themselves. When mainstream opponents of critical pedagogy promote the notion that all language and political behavior that oppose the dominant ideology are forms of indoctrination, they forget how experience is shaped by unequal forms of power. To refuse to name the forces that produce human suffering and exploitation is to take a position that supports oppression and powers that perpetuate it. The argument that any position opposing the actions of dominant power wielders represents an imposition of one's views on somebody else is problematic. It is tantamount to saying that one who admits her oppositional political sentiments and makes them known to students is guilty of indoctrination, while one who hides her consent to dominant power and the status quo it has produced from her students is operating in an objective and neutral manner. Critical pedagogy wants to know who's indoctrinating whom. These political dynamics won't go away and teachers must deal with them.

Critical Pedagogy Is Dedicated to the Alleviation of Human Suffering

Knowing and learning are not simply intellectual and scholarly activities but also practical and sensuous activities infused by the impassioned spirit. Critical pedagogy is dedicated to addressing and embodying these affective, emotional, and lived dimensions of everyday life in a way that connects students to people in groups and as individuals. In this context, the advocates of critical pedagogy are especially concerned with those groups and individuals who are suffering, whose lives are affected by the sting of discrimination and poverty. Acting on this concern

critical educators seek out the causes of such suffering in their understandings of power with its ideological, hegemonic (see Chapter 3), disciplinary, and regulatory dimensions.

Indeed, the very origins of critical pedagogy—the tradition that lays the groundwork for critical pedagogy and is concerned with power and its oppression of human beings and regulation of the social order—are grounded on this concern with human suffering. Herbert Marcuse, one of the founders of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory who is discussed in Chapter 2, and Paulo Freire were profoundly moved by the suffering they respectively witnessed in post–World War I Germany and Brazil. Although I am committed to a critical pedagogy that continues to develop and operates to sophisticate its understandings of the world and the educational act, this evolving critical pedagogy in education should never, never lose sight of its central concern with human suffering. One does not have to go too far to find suffering. In the United States, suffering is often well hidden, but a trip to inner cities, rural Appalachia, or Native American reservations will reveal its existence. Outside of the United States, we can go to almost any region of the world and see tragic expressions of human misery. Advocates of critical pedagogy believe such suffering is a humanly constructed phenomenon and does not have to exist. Steps can be taken to eradicate such suffering if the people of the planet and their leaders had the collective will to do so. In recent years, however, market-driven, globalized economic systems pushed on the world by the United States and other industrialized nations via the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have exacerbated poverty and its attendant suffering.

Understanding at the theoretical level, both how diverse influences insidiously shape what we perceive and don't perceive about the world and how we can better cultivate the intellect, is a central dimension of critical pedagogy and must always be connected to the reality of human suffering and the effort to eradicate it. Sometimes scholarship and teaching operating exclusively on the theoretical level remove us from and anesthetize us to human pain and suffering. This insensitivity is unacceptable to the critical educator. In critical pedagogy the theoretical domain always interacts with the lived domain, producing a synergy that elevates both scholarship and transformative action.

Indeed, the very definition of a critical consciousness involves the development of new forms of understanding that connect us more directly to understanding, empathizing with, and acting to alleviate suffering. Sophisticated understandings and engagement in the struggle against inequality characterize a critical consciousness. Such a struggle engages the lived suffering that comes out of oppression while it studies its consequences in the realm of knowledge production (Barone, 2000; Giroux, 1997; Hicks, 1997; Madison, 1988; McLaren, 2000; 21st Century Schools, 2003).

Pedagogy That Prevents Students From Being Hurt

Critical Pedagogy mandates that schools don't hurt students—good schools don't blame students for their failures or strip students of the forms of knowledge they bring to the classroom. In a recent book I coedited with Alberto Bursztyn and Shirley Steinberg (2004), I began the introductory essay with the proclamation that "I don't trust schools." What I was trying to get across involved the understanding that those of us concerned with critical pedagogy have to be very wary of the goals schools embrace and the ways they engage particular individuals and groups. To exemplify my concern, I often ask students in my classes and audience members in my speeches if any of them have ever studied at any point during their schooling the story of the European colonization of Africa and the effects of the slave trade. The slave trade killed at the very least tens of millions of Africans; some scholars say two hundred million—estimates vary.

I often find that no one in a classroom or audience has encountered this human tragedy in any systematic detail in his or her schooling. In this context, I typically point out that I simply could not trust an institution that routinely ignored such information. The very idea that these millions of unnecessary deaths would not rate as one of the most important events of the last millennium is hard to understand. An institution that would not engage students in wrestling with the moral responsibilities accompanying acquaintance with such knowledge is both intellectually and ethically impaired. Something is wrong here. In no way do advocates of critical pedagogy blame teachers for this failure. They, too, have been victimized by the same social systems that have produced this situation. Indeed, their job is hard enough and so little respected that they don't need flack

connect what they decoded on the printed page to an understanding of the world around them. Thus, a synergistic relationship emerged between word and world. After exploring the community around the school and engaging in conversations with community members, Freire constructed generative themes designed to tap into issues that were important to various students in his class. As data on these issues were brought into the class, Freire became a problem poser. In this capacity, Freire used the knowledge he and his students had produced around the generative themes to construct questions. The questions he constructed were designed to teach the lesson that no subject matter or knowledge in general was beyond examination. We need to ask questions of all knowledge, Freire argued, because all data are shaped by the context and by the individuals that produced them. Knowledge, contrary to the pronouncements of many educational leaders, does not transcend culture or history.

In the context of reading the word and the world and problem posing existing knowledge, critical educators reconceptualize the notion of literacy. Myles Horton spoke of the way he read books with students in order "to give testimony to the students about what it means to read a text" (Horton and Freire, 1990). Reading is not an easy endeavor, Horton continued, for to be a good reader is to view reading as a form of research. Thus, reading becomes a mode of finding something, and finding something, he concluded, brings a joy that is directly connected to the acts of creation and re-creation. One finds in this reading that the word and world process typically goes beyond the given, the common sense of everyday life. Several years ago, I wrote a book entitled *Getting Beyond the Facts* (2001a). The point of the title was to signify this going beyond, to represent a form of reading that not only understood the words on the page but the unstated dominant ideologies hidden between the sentences as well.

This going beyond is central to Freirean problem posing. Such a position contends that the school curriculum should in part be shaped by problems that face teachers and students in their effort to live just and ethical lives. Such a curriculum promotes students as researchers (Steinberg and Kincheloe, 1998) who engage in critical analysis of the forces that shape the world. Such critical analysis engenders a healthy and creative skepticism on the part of students. It moves them to problem-pose, to be suspicious of

neutrality claims in textbooks; it induces them to look askance at, for example, oil companies' claims in their TV commercials that they are and have always been environmentally friendly organizations. Students and teachers who are problem posers reject the traditional student request to the teacher: "just give us the facts, the truth and we'll give it back to you." On the contrary, critical students and teachers ask in the spirit of Freire and Horton: "please support us in our explorations of the world."

By promoting problem posing and student research, teachers do not simply relinquish their authority in the classroom. Over the last couple of decades several teachers and students have misunderstood the subtlety of the nature of teacher authority in a critical pedagogy. Freire in the last years of his life was very concerned with this issue and its misinterpretation by those operating in his name. Teachers, he told me, cannot deny their position of authority in such a classroom. It is the teacher, not the students, who evaluates student work, who is responsible for the health, safety, and learning of students. To deny the role of authority the teacher occupies is insincere at best, dishonest at worst. Critical teachers, therefore, must admit that they are in a position of authority and then demonstrate that authority in their actions in support of students. One of the actions involves the ability to conduct research/produce knowledge. The authority of the critical teacher is **dialectical**; as teachers relinquish the authority of truth providers, they assume the mature authority of facilitators of student inquiry and problem posing. In relation to such teacher authority, students gain their freedom—they gain the ability to become self-directed human beings capable of producing their own knowledge.

dialectical authority
Involves studies that account for the importance of opposites and contradicitons within all forms of knowledge and the relationship between these opposites. Knowledge is not complete in and of itself. It is produced in a larger process and can never be understood outside of its historical development and its relationship to other information.

Teachers as Researchers

In the new right-wing educational order that exists in the twenty-first century, knowledge is something that is produced far away from the school by experts in an exalted domain. This must change if a critical reform of schooling is to ever take place. Teachers must have more say, more respect, in the culture of education. Teachers must join the culture of researchers if a new level of educational rigor and quality is ever to be achieved. In such a democratized culture, critical teachers are scholars who understand the power implications of various educational reforms.

In this context, they appreciate the benefits of research, especially as they relate to understanding the forces shaping education that fall outside their immediate experience and perception. As these insights are constructed, teachers begin to understand what they know from experience. With this in mind they gain heightened awareness of how they can contribute to the research on education. Indeed, they realize that they have access to understandings that go far beyond what the expert researchers have produced.

In the critical school culture, teachers are viewed as learners—not as functionaries who follow top-down orders without question. Teachers are seen as researchers and knowledge workers who reflect on their professional needs and current understandings. They are aware of the complexity of the educational process and how schooling cannot be understood outside of the social, historical, philosophical, cultural, economic, political, and psychological contexts that shape it. Scholar teachers understand that curriculum development responsive to student needs is not possible when it fails to account for these contexts. With this in mind, they explore and attempt to interpret the learning processes that take place in their classrooms. 'What are its psychological, sociological, and ideological effects?,' they ask. Thus, critical scholar teachers research their own professional practice (Kraft, 2001; Norris, 1998).

With empowered scholar teachers prowling the schools, things begin to change. The oppressive culture created in twenty-first-century schools by top-down content standards, for example, is challenged. In-service staff development no longer takes the form of "this is what the expert researchers found—now go implement it." Such staff development in the critical culture of schooling gives way to teachers who analyze and contemplate the power of each other's ideas. Thus, the new critical culture of school takes on the form of a "think tank that teaches students," a learning community. School administrators are amazed by what can happen when they support learning activities for both students and teachers. Principals and curriculum developers watch as teachers develop projects that encourage collaboration and shared research. There is an alternative, advocates of critical pedagogy argue, to top-down standards with their deskilling of teachers and the "dumbing-down" of students (Jardine, 1998; Kincheloe, 2003a; Norris, 1998; Novick, 1996).

Promoting teachers as researchers is a fundamental way of cleaning up the damage of deskilled models of teaching that infantilize teachers by giving them scripts to read to their students.

> Teacher says: Class, take out your pencils.
> [teacher waits until all students have their pencils in hand.]
> Teacher then says: Class, turn to page 15 of your textbook.
> [teacher waits until all students have turned to correct page.]
> Teacher says: Read pages 15–17. When you are finished, close your books and put your hands on the top of your desk. You have ten minutes.

Deskilling of teachers and dumbing-down of the curriculum take place when teachers are seen as receivers, rather than producers, of knowledge. A vibrant professional culture depends on a group of practitioners who have the freedom to continuously reinvent themselves via their research and knowledge production. Teachers engaged in critical practice find it difficult to allow top-down content standards and their poisonous effects to go unchallenged. Such teachers cannot abide the deskilling and reduction in professional status that accompany these top-down reforms. Advocates of critical pedagogy understand that teacher empowerment does not occur just because we wish it to. Instead, it takes place when teachers develop the knowledge-work skills, the power literacy, and the pedagogical abilities befitting the calling of teaching. Teacher research is a central dimension of a critical pedagogy.

Teachers as Researchers of Their Students

A central aspect of critical teacher research involves studying students, so they can be better understood and taught. Freire argued that all teachers need to engage in a constant dialogue with students that questions existing knowledge and problematizes the traditional power relations that have served to marginalize specific groups and individuals. In these research dialogues with students, critical teachers listen carefully to what students have to say about their communities and the problems that confront them. Teachers

help students frame these problems in a larger social, cultural, and political context in order to solve them.

In this context, Freire argued that teachers uncover materials and generative themes based on their emerging knowledge of students and their sociocultural backgrounds. Teachers come to understand the ways students perceive themselves and their interrelationships with other people and their social reality. This information is essential to the critical pedagogical act as it helps teachers understand how they make sense of schooling and their lived worlds. With these understandings in mind, critical teachers come to know what and how students make meaning. This enables teachers to construct pedagogies that engage the impassioned spirit of students in ways that moves them to learn what they don't know and to identify what they want to know (Degener, 2002; Freire and Faundez, 1989; Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1998).

It is not an exaggeration to say that before critical pedagogy can work, teachers must understand what is happening in the minds of their students. Freire, Giroux, McLaren, Shirley Steinberg, bell hooks, Patti Lather, Deborah Britzman, and Donaldo Macedo are all advocates of various forms of critical teaching who recognize the importance of understanding the social construction of student consciousness, focusing on motives, values, and emotions. Operating within this critical context, the teacher researcher studies students as living texts to be deciphered. The teacher researcher approaches them with an active imagination and a willingness to view students as socially constructed beings.

action research
a form of research designed for practitioners that allows teachers, for example, to research practices, schools, students, communities, curriculum, and so on, for the purpose of improving their professional work.

When critical teachers have approached research on students from this perspective, they have uncovered some interesting information. In a British **action research** project, for example, teachers used student diaries, interviews, dialogues, and shadowing (following students as they pursue their daily routines at school) to uncover a student preoccupation with what was labeled a second-order curriculum. This curriculum involved matters of student dress, conforming to school rules, strategies of coping with boredom and failure, and methods of assuming their respective roles in the school pecking order. Teacher researchers found that much of this second-order curriculum worked to contradict the stated aims of the school to respect the individuality of students,

In the twenty-first century, classrooms in this society are structured by multiple layers of complexity. Typically ignoring this reality, top-down, standards-oriented reforms often view the educational world as one homogenous group—everyone comes from an upper-middle-class, white, English-speaking background. Even relatively simple distinctions such as the difference between the goals of elementary and secondary education are often overlooked by the present standards conversation. Elementary educators teach all subjects and are expected to be content generalists. Of course, secondary teachers teach particular areas in the present school configuration and are expected to be content specialists. Elementary teachers are now being presented with stacks of content standards in a variety of fields with little, if any, help in integrating them or making sense of how these bodies of content might fit into an elementary education.

Secondary teachers are now being provided with large collections of top-down content standards in their disciplines. If such teachers possess the skills such standards dictate, then they are induced to discard their disciplinary knowledge and experience and embrace without question a body of externally imposed data. Such a pedagogy fails to produce transformative action or intellectual challenge. Teachers always deserve to be a part of the conversation about standards and educational reform, not deskilled functionaries who mechanically do what they are told by external inquisitors. In a complex critical pedagogy, teachers must not only engage in a dialogue with standards devisors but also need to buy into the logic of such a critical complex rigor if improvements are to be made. Advocates of a critical pedagogy must be prepared to convince teachers that such goals are worthy. Such advocates must be prepared to help teachers move from their present understandings to a more complex view of the teaching act that includes social transformation and the cultivation of the intellect. No educational reform can work if teachers are excluded from the negotiations about its development and implementation.

Marginalization and Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is interested in the margins of society, the experiences and needs of individuals faced with oppression and marginalization. It is not merely interested in the experiences and needs of students who come from the mythical center of

The second edition of the ***Critical Pedagogy Primer*** not only introduces the topic but also provides a vision for the future of the critical pedagogy. Kincheloe's notion of an "evolving criticality" makes sure that critical pedagogy will continue to be a vibrant and creative force that makes a powerful difference in education and in the world in general. As it prepares readers for the challenges of the future, it focuses on the traditions and individuals who have helped construct the discipline. This attention to the past and the future provides readers with an introduction unlike most initiations into academic disciplines. In a richly textured but direct manner, Kincheloe captures the spirit of critical pedagogy in a language accessible to diverse audiences. Both the uninitiated and those with experience in critical pedagogy can learn from this unique and compelling perspective on the field.

Joe L. Kincheloe, Canada Research Chair in Critical Pedagogy at McGill University and founder of The Paulo and Nita Freire International Project for Critical Pedagogy, is a scholar of critical pedagogy, research, cognition, curriculum, and cultural studies. Kincheloe's recent book with Peter McLaren, *Critical Pedagogy: Where Are We Now?* (Lang, 2007) is a best-selling look at the future of critical pedagogy. His other books include: *Teachers as Researchers: Qualitative Paths to Empowerment* (2002); *Critical Constructivism Primer* (Lang, 2005); and *Changing Multiculturalism: New Times, New Curriculum* (with Shirley Steinberg, 1997).

www.peterlang.com

ISBN 978-1-4331-0182-3