Psychology's contribution to education has produced a persuasive and burgeoning literature willing to measure (e.g. intelligence quotients), categorise (e.g. learning and/or behavioural difficulties) and pathologise (e.g. psychiatric disorders) 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 worlds in which they learn. There is however increased acknowledgement that contemporary practice demands alternate ways of working. As learning communities and educators endeavour to make a difference in peoples’ lives, they are critically questioning how their use of psychology in education constitutes future possibilities for personhood and psychosocial action. In this book, a group of respected international scholars examine controversies presently facing the enduring relationship between psychology and education. The book will appeal to readers who are interested in the innovative development and application of psychological theories and practices in/ to education. The book will be of interest to transnational audiences and is accessible to scholars and students in disciplines including psychology, education, sociology, social work, youth studies, public and allied health.

The volume includes contributions from: Tom Billington, Christopher Boyle, Lise Bird Clalborne, Tim Corcoran, Greg Goodman, Jack Martin, Athanasios Marvakis and Ioanna Petritis, Jace Pillay, Isaac Prilleltensky, Anna Stetsenko, Jeff Sugarman and Stephen Vassallo with a Foreword by Ben Bradley.

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Artwork front cover by Evie Watson
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
For my father Bill Corcoran – academic-practitioner.
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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 remonstration?

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.1

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 …2 Were we successful, a bonus could be that more students would stay in school longer and so improve their occupational opportunities.
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.3

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.4 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?5 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.6

Looked at like this, a critical psychology of education would need to reconsider the push to ‘de-school’ society.7 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.8

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.9 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.’10 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
FOREWORD

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.’11 Echoes of Wordsworth:

Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy … 12

The Romantic trope of school as prison-house, concreting over the paradise that childhood should be, still lies at the heart of psychology.13 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.14 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

2 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.
5 (Cf. out of sight and out of mind.) If this is their main purpose, they often fail at it even so! (See Chapter 5).


Donaldson (op.cit), p.12.


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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.

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
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.
INTRODUCTION

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 antinomality 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 antinomality, 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 heterotopics² 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
INTRODUCTION

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

1 For this I remain indebted to Professor Mike Innes.

2 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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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. 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
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 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
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
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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.

For 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
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.
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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
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,3 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.
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.

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 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.
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

1 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.
2 Sara Acland and Teresa McGuire.
3 Claiborne (in preparation).
4 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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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
I. PRILLELTENSKY

(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 on 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 &
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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 (Tornblom & 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
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.
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(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.
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 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
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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 is 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.

**REFERENCES**


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