Key Works in Critical Pedagogy
Joe L. Kincheloe

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Key Works in Critical Pedagogy: Joe L. Kincheloe comprises sixteen papers written within a twenty-year period in which Kincheloe inspired legions of educators with his incisive analyses of education. In a career cut short by his untimely death, Kincheloe led the way with an approach to research and pedagogy that incorporated multiperspectival approaches that examined a wide range of topics including schooling, cultural studies, research bricolage, kinderculture, Christo-tainment, and capitalism. The articles in this book were selected to encompass Kincheloe’s impressive scholarly career and to draw attention to the necessity for educators to take a critical stance with respect to the enactment of education to reproduce disadvantage. The selected chapters and associated scholarly review essays constitute a reference resource for researchers, educators, students of education – and all of those with an interest in adopting a deeper view of ways in which policies and practices shape education and social life to produce privilege and disadvantage simultaneously in ways that are often hidden from view.

Key Works in Critical Pedagogy
Bold Visions in Educational Research
Volume 32

Series Editor
Kenneth Tobin, The Graduate Center, City University of New York, USA

Tribute
Joe L. Kincheloe was the founding co-editor of the series. Long before we had the series Joe had the idea to have a Key Works feature and invited me to write such a book. It is fitting that Joe’s Key Works is a part of the series that was primarily his idea. It is indeed an honor to publish Joe L. Kincheloe’s Key Works because this collection of scholarly works and the associated commentaries will be essential reading for serious educational scholar researchers.

Scope
Bold Visions in Educational Research is international in scope and includes books from two areas: teaching and learning to teach and research methods in education. Each area contains multi-authored handbooks of approximately 200,000 words and monographs (authored and edited collections) of approximately 130,000 words. All books are scholarly, written to engage specified readers and catalyze changes in policies and practices. Defining characteristics of books in the series are their explicit uses of theory and associated methodologies to address important problems. We invite books from across a theoretical and methodological spectrum from scholars employing quantitative, statistical, experimental, ethnographic, semiotic, hermeneutic, historical, ethnomethodological, phenomenological, case studies, action, cultural studies, content analysis, rhetorical, deconstructive, critical, literary, aesthetic and other research methods.

Books on teaching and learning to teach focus on any of the curriculum areas (e.g., literacy, science, mathematics, social science), in and out of school settings, and points along the age continuum (pre K to adult). The purpose of books on research methods in education is not to present generalized and abstract procedures but to show how research is undertaken, highlighting the particulars that pertain to a study. Each book brings to the foreground those details that must be considered at every step on the way to doing a good study. The goal is not to show how generalizable methods are but to present rich descriptions to show how research is enacted. The books focus on methodology, within a context of substantive results so that methods, theory, and the processes leading to empirical analyses and outcomes are juxtaposed. In this way method is not reified, but is explored within well-described contexts and the emergent research outcomes. Three illustrative examples of books are those that allow proponents of particular perspectives to interact and debate, comprehensive handbooks where leading scholars explore particular genres of inquiry in detail, and introductory texts to particular educational research methods/issues of interest to novice researchers.
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Giuliana Cucinelli, cover artist is a professor of media and youth culture, and an independent artist and filmmaker. Giuliana was as close to Joe Kincheloe as a daughter and was with Joe and Shirley when he died. She was a source of love and strength. She can be reached at gcucinelli@gmail.com.

The royalties generated by sales of this volume will be paid to: The Friends of Joe L. Kincheloe Foundation for The Paulo and Nita Freire International Project for Critical Pedagogy (http://freireproject.org).
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Joe Lyons Kincheloe, Jr. was born on December 14, 1950, in Kingsport, Tennessee. He was the son of a rural school principal, Joe Sr., and a third grade teacher, Libby Bird. Since he was a junior, he was called Jodie until his thirties. An only child of older parents, he found himself alone a lot, and found ways to amuse himself. Jodie learned to do what he called “routines” in the mirror, mimicking the characters he observed as a kid, and teaching himself the piano.

For the first twelve years of his life, he was apprenticed to his uncle, Marvin Kincheloe, a rural circuit preacher in the Methodist Church. Every Sunday, dressed in his Sunday best, Joe visited the elderly and sick parishioners, and attended Marvin’s church. At 12, Joe realized he would never be saved, and refused to continue along the soul saving path. However, he did learn how to preach.

Joe’s parents were staunch democrats, unusual in the mountains of Tennessee. He describes his youth: “Growing up among grotesque forms of classism and racism in the South of the 1950s and 1960s, I soon found a means, while still in high school, to bring people together and move them as a blues musician and songwriter.” By 16, he was the leader of the VIPs, a 4 piece band of white kids in Kingsport who played weekly at school dances. Joe began writing songs at a very young age, and wrote well over 600. He also started a satirical newspaper in 8th grade with his friends, called DRUT, TURD spelled backward.

Obsessively and consciously political, Joe’s grades were never great, and he tended to piss teachers off with his disagreements, his dislike of segregation, and his defense of underdogs. His high school counselor told him that his aptitude tests showed that he could never be more than a piano tuner, and he should seriously consider vocational school. Joe went to Emory and Henry College, a small Methodist College in Virginia, where he was promptly put on probation for his participation in anti-war rallies and his long hair. He did eventually graduate with a C average, and went to the University of Tennessee for a Master’s in history, a Master’s in education (where he read Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed), and a Doctorate in educational history—he completed his dissertation on the evangelical camp meetings of fundamentalist Christians in the 1800s in 1980.

I titled this preface after a song by Warren Zevon. Joe was a volunteer, both metaphorically and literally. Joe followed in his parents’ footsteps as a crazed, insane follower of the Tennessee Volunteers Football team. All things Tennessee orange were his, and he made sure everyone who knew him, knew the Volunteers. Who ever heard of a team called the Volunteers? His orange passion was legendary, and
there is not a friend, neighbor, or student alive that wasn’t aware of Joe’s team. Every September heralded in the next great hope for his beloved Vols, and he relished the start of NCAA football like the arrival of a most welcomed guest. One winter holiday, we all schlepped to Arizona to watch the Vols play in the National Championship. Partnered by an orange-painted Chaim, Joe was a bouncing little kid watching his team clench the championship. Along with the Vols, he was a fervent Braves fan, and as the Vols began their season, he often would stress at the Braves’ inability to consummate a world series...they did it once. Joe never lost hope, and followed his teams from the beginning of each season...He never abandoned them, and had no respect for fair-weather fans. Joe was always aware of the contradictions in male sports. He celebrated the crashing of some barriers and raged against others. He understood the complexity of gender relations yet didn’t essentialize them...and he was an unabashed lover of the game. I smile when I recall his absolute disdain for the Boston Red Sox—they were the last team to integrate, he would never, ever cheer for them.

Joe’s first job was probably his most significant, serving as the department chair of the education department at Sinte Gleska College on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation in South Dakota. It was there he began to publish and research on the disenfranchise-ment of Native Americans. In 1982, Joe was given the Lakota Sioux ceremonial name of TiWa Ska, meaning clear, loving, or brilliant mind. His time on the Rosebud informed his work, his life, and his context. Those two years allowed him the time to establish himself as a scholar, and to do work which really, really made a difference.

After two years on the reservation, Joe became an assistant professor at Louisiana State University, in Shreveport, where he started a doctoral program in curriculum studies. In 1988 he moved to Clemson University as a full professor having published his first two books. In 1989, he attended the Bergamo Conference—a radical Marxist, feminist, reconceptualist curriculum conference in Dayton, Ohio. Joe and I met when he overheard me talking about working on the Blackfoot Reserve. He politely interrupted my conversation and said that he had worked on the Rosebud Sioux Res. He was very proud that he knew I was living in Canada, as he heard me refer to the Reserve not the res, or the reservation. He wanted to continue our conversation, and after he assured me that he was neither gay nor married, we engaged in the one-night stand that never ended.

Although I lived with my four kids in Alberta, within six months we were all in Clemson, South Carolina; and Joe was the father of four: Ian, Meghann, Chaim, and Bronwyn. How he loved those kids: they were spiritually his. We raised them in several states at different universities. We lived through Hurricane Andrew two weeks after moving to Florida International University, and Joe often said it was the most relaxing time of his life, he couldn’t write—he just had to find food, ice, and water.

While at FIU, and after several new books, we began editing a book series. We were committed to publishing voices that had been marginalized by mainstream educational discourse. We moved to Penn State in 1994 and Joe and Henry Giroux became colleagues. Henry had been a huge inspiration and support to Joe, publishing
his work and giving advice, and advocating his hire at Penn State—how cool was that, to work with Henry? I finished my doctorate, and in 1997, Joe was offered an endowed chair at Brooklyn College. After two years in this position, he was invited to join the CUNY Graduate Center faculty and to create the urban education doctorate. Joe marveled at the fact that he had become (in his words) a calloused, urbane sophisticate. This kid from East Tennessee was an endowed chair, and a man who co-created the doctoral program at the Grad Center, wow…and he never stopped the wonder. The doctoral program flourished, joined by Phil Anderson and Ken Tobin (Joe relished that he could have two colleagues with the intellect and humor as did Phil and Ken), the program drew from urban teachers who were committed to teach urban kids. And as far as groups of students go, the students Joe worked with at the Grad Center were magnificent; Joe celebrated their successes til the day he died. By the end of the century, Joe had written about 40 books, hundreds of articles, and edited well over 400 volumes in our combined series. He was an international speaker, traveling over the world discussing critical pedagogy, cultural studies, and education…all tied to the notion of social justice and equity. He did love to preach.

In 1998, we hosted a luncheon in San Diego and invited several friends/scholars to dine with us and discuss the possibility of their contributing a volume to our Westview series. I sat between Joe and John Willinsky, and we quickly determined that discussing rock n’ roll was far more important than pontificating social theory. John said he had been working feverishly to learn the electric guitar, and I told him that Joe played keyboards and was an old rock n’ roll band member. I think it was my idea (Joe always said it was his), but around the same time, the three of us decided to start a band. The band would play every year at the American Educational Research Association. John knew a drummer and a bass player. In those days we called the band the SIG GIG…and a couple of years later, it morphed into Tony and the Hegemones. Next to our family, friends, students, and his teams, this incarnation of rock n’ roll became the center of Joe’s life. John and Joe were soul brothers, and quickly our annual band became twice a year, three times a year, four times a year…practices occurred from New York to British Columbia, and gigs were planned from coast to coast, North to South, between Canada and the US. John was our long lost sibling, and the three of us bonded through music, loud laughter, silly routines, sarcasm, and the reality that the academy was just a tad better than bullshit. Those years were precious, those gigs the absolute best. I know that Joe and John spent more than a few hours and a few dollars cooking up their next gig, next recording scheme. By the new millennium, conferences became places to have a gig, speeches and presentations the vehicle to get to the gig—and sometimes there were back-to-back gigs, lasting much longer than any scholarly presentation. In the last few years, the band started to highlight Joe’s music. I think that was the ultimate compliment to him—that John would urge him to sing and play his songs. At that point, I was happy to be with the band.

We stayed in New York City until 2005, when Joe was hired to come to McGill University as a Canada Research Chair (the chair award was given by the Prime Minister of Canada). Once again, the kid from the Blue Ridge Mountains had
attained a rank previously held for Ivy Leaguers and the politically mediocre. He
was full of wonder. Joe founded The Paulo and Nita Freire International Project for
Critical Pedagogy. The only one of its kind in the world, the Project is a virtual and
literal archives of global initiatives in critical pedagogy; deeply committed to the
study of oppression in education… how issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, and
colonialism shape the nature and purpose of education. In the spirit of Freire’s
work, Joe understood the project as a means to “support an evolving critical pedagogy
that encounters new discourses, new peoples, with new ideas, and continues to
move forward in the 21st Century. The project is understood as continued evolution
of the work of Paulo Freire.” He chose to name it after Paulo and his wife, Nita, as
a celebration of their partnership and radical love.

After Joe died, I was told the
Project didn’t fit the mandate of the Faculty of Education, and it was scheduled to
close. I took the virtual Project off campus, where it remains strong and global.

Joe was simultaneously writing his 56th, 57th, 58th, 59th, and 60th book when he
died, and editing eight different book series. He was the senior and founding editor
of The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy and the blogmaster to the several
thousand registered readers and bloggers of the Freire Project blog. In addition to
his scholarship, Joe remained committed to teaching classes and supervising students.

2008 was a long year: Joe realized that the greener grass in Montreal was parched,
and felt that he didn’t want to spend any more years there. The lack of collegial
support was strong, and a passive aggressive environment drove him to search for
another job. We were poised to leave in 2009, and that notion gave him peace of
mind. When we left for Jamaica, Joe was ready to relax and chill. He was burnt out,
and mentioned that the only good to come out of 2008 was the election of Obama.
After losing our dear friend, Marisa Terrenzio, on the day of the American election,
Joe remarked that death was not his greatest fear. Indeed, he said that other than
leaving the kids and me, he was looking forward to the next chapter, the next level,
and elevated cognitive and spiritual states. He also said he had so many more
books to write.

On his 58th birthday, December 14, 2008, Joe attended the Whitehouse, Jamaica
Church of God of Prophecy with our dear friends Sadie and Mackie Gordon and
our beloved Giuliana Cucinelli. The pastor asked him to speak, and he took the micro-
phone and preached a mini sermon on the importance of faith, humility, and the
human body as the vessel for great minds. Giuliana caught this on her camera. As a
cynical Jew, I stayed back at the house, waiting for their return. That was the last
time Joe spoke in public, and what an audience. One can barely hear his words on
the tape, over the Amens, Hallelujahs, and Praises shouted by all. The next few
days were spent floating in the warm waters of Jamaica, laughing with friends and
our students, Myunghee, Suhun, Maria, and Giuliana. He died in Kingston,
Jamaica on December 19, 2008, after spending the day before with Giuliana and
me in 9 mile, Bob Marley’s home. I have a vivid image of Joe joining in with the
Rasta men singing Marley’s Three Little Birds. This is exactly how Joe would have
chosen to spend his last week. His last Facebook post was: Joe is regenerating.

Joe was passionate, he had many radical loves: his family, rock n’ roll, his students,
and writing. Joe’s passion fueled his struggles against inequality, oppression in all
of its varied forms, and the stupidification of education. He is recognized for his scholarly contributions to a range of topics that include postformal thinking, critical constructivism, critical multiculturalism, critical indigenous knowledge, and the work we did on critical cultural studies topics such as the notion of kinderculture and christotainment. In addition to his scholarship, Joe taught countless classes and supervised scores of doctoral students, most of whom are now well-established scholars and professors all over the world.

Joe Lyons Kincheloe, Jr.—Jodie, lived a full and loving life. He was humble as he was confident, gentle as he was strong, a father to Ian, Christine, Meghann and Ryan, Chaim and Marissa, and Bronwyn, a zaide to his precious Maci, Luna, Hava, Cohen, Tobias, and Seth. Joe was loud when he yelled at the TV, watching a bad play in the second quarter of the Florida/Tennessee game; he was quiet when he looked out on our snowy birch trees and smelled the fresh, cold night air. Joe was a passionate lover of people, and a radical hater of those who oppressed. Joe was patient with others, impatient with himself…he told me that he just didn’t know if he had time to write all the songs, all the books he wanted to write. He never sought out approval, just hoped for respect; you didn’t have to like him, he just wanted to do his thing and love his peeps.

On October 27, 2009, Milo Joe was born to Chaim and Marissa, the sweet punctuation of the bitter sentence of 2009. Milo Joe has ushered in our gentle memories and strong commitment to continue Joe’s work. I hope that we will commit ourselves to a better world, a better way to articulate, a better path to educate, and a hell of a lot more rock n’ roll.

This book is a collection of some of Joe’s seminal chapters and articles. Each chapter is followed by a commentary from a dear friend and colleague, who wanted to punctuate Joe’s work and impact in pedagogy and in life. An italicized commentary prefaces each chapter. As Joe was the ultimate contextualizer, I wrote each mini-preface in order to give a polysemic body to the text, and to place Joe within each piece.
A big part of growing up in Australia involved being with my mates, peers with whom I developed strong social bonds in the process of my day-to-day life. Mates were close friends I looked out for, enjoying their successes, helping them when they were in trouble, confiding in them knowing they would protect my interests, and when necessary giving them advice, even when it was not invited. When I came to the United States I missed my mates and even more so the institution of mateship. However, Joe Kincheloe, who was from Tennessee, was an exception—he was my mate.

It was Joe Kincheloe’s idea to have a Key Works series of books. I was visiting him at Penn State and he excitedly told me about an idea he and Shirley Steinberg had to publish a collection of papers that represented a scholar’s career trajectory. He invited me to contribute to the series and the idea was immediately appealing—although I have yet to submit my own collection of articles as a contribution to the series. Neither Joe nor I would have imagined at the time of our meeting at Penn State that his Key Works would precede mine, a selection of articles that reflect Joe’s stellar career as a leading scholar.

As the articles in this collection of key works clearly attest, Joe Kincheloe made a huge contribution to education through his prolific writing over a career that came to a premature ending with his death in Jamaica. As a science educator I became aware of Joe’s scholarship through Deborah Tippins, who was co-author with Joe and Shirley on the book entitled The Stigma of Genius (Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Tippins, 1999). Having been alerted to Joe’s work I was anxious to meet him because it was evident that he was not only a distinguished contributor to education research but also was a person who reached out to junior faculty to get them involved in publishing their work. Subsequently I met Joe at an annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association where, even though it was almost impossible to get uninterrupted time with him, he was friendly, articulate, jovial, witty, and deeply substantive. Based on my very positive impression of him, I invited Joe to present a keynote address at a large science education conference I was organizing in Miami, Florida. The meeting involved several hundred elementary and middle school science educators who were immediately in sync with Joe’s presentation on critical pedagogy.

As my career aligned more closely with urban education Joe and I communicated frequently and eventually became colleagues at the Graduate Center and neighbors in a small city in South Amboy, New Jersey. For several years we collaborated
over our ongoing research projects, including work of doctoral students. I had mixed feelings when Joe was appointed to the prestigious Canada Research Chair at McGill University—delighted with the opportunities this position afforded him and his line of research, and disappointed to no longer have the proximity of a close friend and colleague. The loss of his intellectual prowess at the Graduate Center was enormous. Joe was a tower of strength in terms of designing and enacting the doctoral program in urban education. Whereas he was open to improving the program in myriad ways, Joe steadfastly resisted efforts from outsiders to hijack the program and enact changes in ways that would better align with their interests rather than those of students.

TEACHERS AS RESEARCHERS

Joe and I shared a strong interest in teachers and students doing research on their own practices. Also, we had strong interests in the ways in which sociocultural theory could provide a methodology for urban education and a framework for substantive issues to focus research and inquiry in urban education. I had the privilege of sitting in core and elective courses Joe taught in the urban education doctoral program. I read books and articles he assigned and participated in rich dialogues that unfolded in those classes. Almost without exception, students were enthusiastic and active participants. Many of the urban education students worked with Joe as advisor, but many did not, including those who opted to work with me. As an advisor I soon found that I could rely on the fact that students who had been taught by Joe were extremely well prepared to understand the methodologies we employed in our research and to raise important questions concerning the teaching and learning of science, mathematics and literacy in urban schools—especially those in New York City. Joe’s teaching was highly influential and in many ways inspirational for students who worked with him. They brought a critical edge to their scholarship and willingness to continue to learn throughout their careers. As is often the case, I soon took this for granted and it was only after Joe left the Graduate Center that the magnitude of his contributions became apparent. The constantly positive impact of his teaching was sorely missed, even though his products accrued at an amazing rate and were accessible not only to scholars at the Graduate Center but to scholars around the world. I rationalized his departure with the thought that at McGill University Joe was well placed to have an even greater impact on the world at large, especially because he received a national grant to establish the Paulo and Nita Freire International Project for Critical Pedagogy.

There are many purposes for teachers and other school participants to design and enact research on their practices. Chief among these is the identification of oppression and the resources to overcome disadvantage. However, Joe made it clear that doing research involved much more than interpreting the status quo. It would not be sufficient to look at test scores and figure out ways to reduce the gaps associated with social categories such as social class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and proficiency in the use of English. Effectively enacting practitioner research necessarily involved new ways of thinking about education and places in which it
is conducted. Understanding teaching and learning in schools necessitates deep understandings of the communities in which schools are embedded, including their histories, not only as they are portrayed through the voices of the mainstream, but also those histories as they are expressed in the voices and lives of those who are oppressed and represent minorities. Just as Lawrence Stenhouse advocated teachers as researchers as a hedge against the domineering effects of positivism (Stenhouse, 1975), Joe regarded teachers as researchers as a hedge against the perpetuation of oppression through the well-intentioned efforts of educators (Kincheloe, 1991). Whereas Joe identified positivism as pervasive and dangerous, he also recognized many other dangerous ideologies and associated practices that reproduced disadvantage and oppression (Kincheloe & Tobin, 2009). Accordingly, Joe regarded practitioner research as a priority.

THEORY AND RESEARCH

Joe embraced the necessity for researchers to inform their intellectual work with rich theoretical frameworks. Doing research was necessarily more than an empirical activity and may not involve empiricism at all. Accordingly, another standpoint we shared was opposition to the tradition of describing research in terms of the qualitative/quantitative binary. Many of Joe’s students described their approach to research as theoretical—as if to emphasize a non-empiricist stance. After Joe’s death I worked with a number of his former students and was forced to address just exactly what was meant by theoretical research. A side remark from a colleague at the Graduate Center reminded me that this was an important issue when he asked in a whisper (during a doctoral examination of one of Joe’s former students)—“do you think this is research?” At the time I was astonished and answered emphatically “absolutely!” What I did not realize was this perspective was the tip of an iceberg. Many of my colleagues embraced an axiology of preferring/requiring empirical studies for doctoral education in urban education. The whispered remark was a sign of a widespread problem—acceptance of an empirical ideology that included continued use of a qualitative/quantitative binary.

It is surprising to me that scholars accept a qualitative/quantitative binary as a viable way of thinking about preparing researchers. Due largely to Joe’s careful planning we have a core course in the urban education doctoral degree called the Logics of Inquiry. The course examines different ways of undertaking scholarly inquiry in education through the lenses of a variety of theoretical frameworks—in other words, the course allows doctoral students to examine the viability of a range of methodologies, including positivism and behaviorism, constructivism (e.g., social, radical, critical), cultural historical activity theory, hermeneutics, phenomenology, historicity, cultural sociology, and the sociology of emotions. Also, the theoretical underpinnings are examined for research that employs (for example) quasi-experimental designs, inferential statistics, ethnography, conversation analysis, and discourse analysis. Unfortunately, the course is a direct challenge to the qualitative/quantitative binary and many of my colleagues do not value the course or support its presuppositions.
They adopt the view that what students need are research methods and prefer a structure that stipulates that all students should study at least one quantitative and one qualitative methods course. They like to use the term mixed methods and what they mean is to use a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. Hidden beneath their preference for this binary system is a reality that most research is profoundly theoretical and that the theories permeate the methods employed and the research issues that focus the research. Unwillingness to probe the theoretical standpoints associated with research methods can lead to unwitting acceptance of ideologies such as positivism and empiricism, just to name two.

The preoccupation with methods is associated with good intentions—to ensure that doctoral graduates are well educated to produce and consume research. A common argument is that doctoral students should do a minimum of three methods courses, having at least one qualitative and one quantitative course. Often the purpose underlying this standpoint is to prevent students from dodging quantitative courses (assumed to be hard), focusing instead on qualitative courses (assumed to be easy). The well-intentioned goal is to ensure that all students can be literate consumers of published research, with an often-unstated intention that they should be able to understand data tables and associated statistical analyses. This deficit-laden position has many shortcomings, including several that I briefly touch on. First, the binary classification system of qualitative and quantitative methods is an empiricist standpoint that masks more complex systems that reveal the impossibility of studying all useful methods in a doctoral degree. Second, studying just one quantitative course fails to acknowledge that any one course would be a palpably inadequate preparation for making sense of publications with a statistical orientation. Advocates of lifelong learning might argue in favor of allowing doctoral students to specialize in learning methods that are germane to their scholarly interests and to learn other methods when and as necessary.

PURPOSES OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

There are many purposes for doing research in education. Some of my collaborators, such as Wolff-Michael Roth, embrace an axiology that research should emphasize the development of theory. In contrast, since I first began to work with graduate students in science and mathematics education in the 1980s my research program has been oriented toward the teaching and learning of science and mathematics in classrooms. Accordingly, there has been a strong focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning while learning more about learning and learners, teaching and teachers, and learning environments. As I moved from doing statistically oriented research prior to the mid-1980s toward genres of research grounded in hermeneutics, phenomenology, and ethnomethodology, I adopted an ethical stance that all participants in a study should benefit directly from their participation in the study. This standpoint is grounded in ethical concerns I had with researchers who argued that benefits could accrue when the results of research were applied in practice at some time after the research had been completed. Also, the hermeneutic approach we adopted in our research emphasized learning from different perspectives, bringing
LEARNING FROM A GOOD MATE

into question the assumed ascendancy of coherence and parsimony over difference and complexity. Initially we ensured that we understood what was happening in our research from the perspectives of the participants—using approaches that embraced polyphony. Since we were also cognizant of people who are placed differently in social space having different stories to tell, we gradually incorporated polysemy into our research. In the late 1980s we adopted Guba and Lincoln’s authenticity criteria as a basis for planning and judging our research (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Accordingly, all studies in which I was involved were planned to have ontological, educative, catalytic, and tactical authenticity. The first two criteria (i.e., ontological and educative) oriented toward theoretical products and the second two (i.e., catalytic and tactical) toward transformation of the institutions and people involved in the research.

Because we were involved in participative observation types of studies in which we rejected the researcher/researched binary, all participants were considered to be researchers and all were considered to be learners and teachers. For this reason it made sense when Joe suggested that all participants should change their ontologies as a result of being involved in research. Previously, we had aimed for the university researchers to show evidence of progressive subjectivity—i.e., gradual changes in both the stories they used to represent what they had learned and evidence provided to support assertions pertaining to the research. Joe pointed out that all participants should change their stories as a result of them changing their positions in social space as they participated in research on their own education and that of their peers. Because of the symmetry we sought in the roles of all participants, it made sense to consider the ethics of research as a priority and to regard the four authenticity criteria as dialectical constituents of a whole; equally applicable to all participants in a study.

LEARNING COLLABORATIVELY

One of Joe’s ever-present virtues was his willingness to listen attentively to what was being said and to comment on it, as often as necessary, and with hermeneutic intent. His oral contributions oriented toward making sense of what was being proposed, testing possibilities, and responding in an emotionally positive way to others’ contributions. Joe wrote about this process in a revision of a book he and I co-edited, referring to it as radical listening (Tobin & Kincheloe, 2010). Making an effort to understand others’ standpoints without seeking to change them is referred to as radical listening. When persons enact radical listening they listen attentively to a speaker, ensure that they understand what has been said, and identify the key components of the speaker’s standpoint. Then, rather than arguing a case against what is being proposed; radical listeners endeavor to adopt that standpoint, thereby exploring the possibilities. Only when the possibilities have been reviewed in terms of their viability for the collective are alternatives considered based on different standpoints. Radical listening, therefore, is a respectful way to deal with others’ ideas, thereby increasing the possibility of adopting good ideas associated with others’ culture.
Attentive listening is at the heart of effective dialoguing. Radical listening is a process that has the clear purpose of making sense of others’ oral contributions with the express purpose of ascertaining what they can contribute. Each person listens carefully and when questions are asked and comments are made their purposes are hermeneutic, to push on the idea and figure out the affordances the idea provides. Any talk is oriented toward expanding the conversation around a particular contribution, not to suggest alternatives but to identify possibilities and boundaries, strengths and weaknesses. The goal is an expansion of the dialogue not contraction and certainly not to provide alternatives that pursue different directions. Accordingly, a dialogue that involves radical listening will thoroughly explore the contributions of all participants, regarding them as resources for the group, structures to expand possibilities and accomplishments. Only when consensus has been reached and the group has taken a given idea as far as it can go can alternatives be introduced as part of the ongoing dialogue. When radical listening is a constituent of dialogue all contributions are offered for the purposes of expanding collective agency, structures that can afford the process of attaining a group’s motives. At the same time oral contributions, as structures, are associated with passivity. As such all participants create culture as they listened attentively to the ongoing verbal interactions within the context of an ethical commitment to speaking only for the purpose of testing ideas that are already on the table and expanding them in ways that align with the group’s motives.

RESEARCH ON AND WITH COGENERATIVE DIALOGUE

Cogenerative dialogue (i.e., cogen) has been a path for ongoing research for more than a decade (Tobin, 2010). We designed cogen as a field in which teachers, students, and others with a stake in the quality of teaching and learning could come together to discuss ways in which enacted curricula could be improved. At the time we did not have radical listening as a construct. However, the rules for cogen addressed the necessity to share the number of turns at talk and the duration of talk among all participants. Furthermore, it was the responsibility of all participants to ensure that everybody was involved. If a person was silent others had the responsibility to bring that person into the conversation in productive ways. We embraced the idea that talking should be not only for the self but also for the other. We also had a rule that the topic of conversation should not be changed until the group had reached consensus on what was to be done regarding that topic in future lessons. Taken together these rules are consistent with radical listening, which we adopted as part of the rule structure for cogen as soon as we knew about it. At the present time we regard it as central to effective cogen.

As is the case with all social constructs, radical listening is theorized to expand the possibilities of the construct. For example, polyphony necessitates all participants contributing to the dialogue, saying what is on their mind in regards to a given topic. It is important that all individuals’ rights to participate by speaking their mind is respected by all participants and no matter what is said, all contributions are considered thoughtfully in relation to the ongoing dialogue.
component of radical listening and cogen is the respect shown for all contributions and the value given to difference as a resource for a group. Difference is accepted as a resource in the sense that each structure is considered as an expansion of the capital produced and created within the field. Similarly, acceptance of polysemy allows a group to focus on the hermeneutics of making sense of each oral contribution, examining its potential to contribute, rather than questioning its viability. If all oral contributions are regarded as potentially viable then the group’s motives can orientate toward working collectively to expand possibilities.

An important outcome of the research we undertook in Philadelphia, before I came to New York City, was that cogen was a seedbed for the production and creation of culture. When we first envisioned the field of cogen we selected participants to be different from one another in as many ways as possible. The rationale for so doing included polyphony and polysema. We expected the participants in cogen to learn from difference, and we expected each participant to learn different things in different ways while contributing to the group’s motives. After a number of years of research it became apparent that the participants in cogen learned to produce success through the creation and production of new culture. At this time the outcomes of cogen began to focus more on what happened during the cogen rather than what happened subsequently in the whole class. It was not as if the class suddenly became unimportant, but that success was occurring without the necessity for all participants to become the same. The valuing of difference afforded participants interacting successfully with one another, while focusing on reaching consensus on shared goals/motives and how to succeed.

Our project on cogen incorporates a standpoint that includes myriad dialectical relationships between social constructs that are often regarded as binaries. For example, we recognize the salience of the individual | collective dialectic and acknowledge the importance of individuals accomplishing their goals while contributing to the group’s motives. Both are important. Accordingly, it does not make sense for individuals to be held accountable solely for their personal success or for a group’s success. On the contrary, all participants in cogen, for example, are responsible for one another’s successes and failures. The failure of any one individual to be successful is a matter of concern not only for the individual but also for the group. Not surprisingly, in a field that is structured as cogen is structured, a strong sense of solidarity emerges that is conducive to forging new identities associated with the group’s accomplishments in cogen.

THEORETICAL RESEARCH

I had to struggle with the idea of theoretical research and its nuances. Initially, I understood theoretical research to involve narratives that presented personal experiences of various sorts, explicating salient issues through the aegis of theory. It was not that human subjects were not involved in this research, but that the experiences on which the research focused had already happened at the time the study was designed. A researcher reflected on experiences and designed a study to highlight issues that were of salience. Research of this sort readily emerged from critical pedagogy, where issues of power, oppression, equity and social justice are studied
in everyday life. In this genre of research a scholar’s day-to-day experiences become the focus of deconstruction. Many of the chapters in this book are of this genre. For example, Joe’s experiences with McDonald’s afforded *The Sign of the Burger: McDonald’s and the Culture of Power* (Kincheloe, 2002), a social analysis that examined the globalization of the problems within the framework of American ideology—including capitalism, democracy, and neoliberalism (Kincheloe, 2002). Hence, some of the ingredients of theoretical research, as it was often described, were history, existing data of various sorts, and narratives. For the most part the research consisted of narratives into which theory was woven. Points were made usually through storytelling rather than analysis of qualitative and quantitative data resources. In this genre of research, which I regard as hermeneutic/phenomenological, the approach is essentially non-empirical.

In my own research I had used narrative as a part of ethnography ever since I began to do interpretive research in 1984 (Tobin, 2000). Initially, my approach to analysis was highly reductionist and I viewed stories/narratives as resources for identifying themes and associated contradictions. That is, my approach was empiricist. Recently, I am very much more aware of the importance of stories being holistic representations of systems of knowing. Much can be missed when reductionist approaches are used in a process of learning from stories. Once stories have been told and included as part of the research it can be left for the reader to make from the stories whatever meanings are possible. For this reason, stories can be included as wholes in research reports, including dissertations. This approach acknowledges the holistic aspects of narrative and recognizes that reductionist attempts at analysis will not produce the best meaning, the only meaning, or complete meaning. Whereas I would once proclaim that stories cannot speak for themselves, I now acknowledge that stories can be included as artifacts in research reports; resources for the hermeneutic endeavors of readers. Basically the stories can be objects on which to focus dialogues from which meanings can unfold.

Other artifacts can be regarded in an analogous way. For example, we have used text boxes to allow for “voice over” techniques to be used in research reports. The texts provided in text boxes are not part of the ongoing flow of the manuscript but are related to it in a variety of possible ways. The idea is to present texts as multiple voices; an approach grounded in an axiological preference for polyphony. Of course, the text inserted into a text box might be from many different genres including songs and poems. The text box may contain graffiti or a combination of text and picture. The possibilities are endless. The idea is to display many texts and allow the “reader as hermeneut” to build meaning through single and multiple readings.

Photographs, pictures, video files, and other artifacts can contribute to the communication of meaning in research. Obviously, it is not possible to include all artifacts in textboxes and the ways in which research is packaged will expand in the next several years. If this is the case it seems important that educators move beyond oversimplified binaries such as qualitative/quantitative when it comes to describing research genres. It is important that researchers have the theoretical tools to undertake thoughtful research that makes a difference in the variety of ways that creative individuals seek to improve the quality of social life.
As a bricoleur a researcher can appropriate multiple methodologies (i.e., theories of method) to employ in a study and also utilize multiple theories to frame substantive research. The foci for the research unfold as the research is enacted and there is no need to settle on a focus at the stage a study is designed. Also it is desirable neither to lock in on a genre of research that must begin with questions nor to rule out entirely the possibility that at some stage questions will focus a study or part of it. Why limit the repertoire of possibilities when it comes to doing research? Joe laid out the possibilities in his work on bricolage, using a pastiche of methodologies and theoretical frameworks in research that is ongoing. Initially, I thought of bricoleur and bricolage in relation to a particular study, but more recently I perceive bricolage in relation to grain size. Like most social constructs bricolage can be used to zoom in and zoom out—to focus at micro, meso, macro and global levels of social life. Accordingly, I find it useful to examine my methodologies and frameworks over a research career and stand amazed at the rich breadth of theory that has informed my research. Similarly, at a given point in time I can see my methodologies and frameworks in terms of bricolage and seek to unsettle equilibria so that what we do is always under scrutiny in terms of its viability. When we come to the table to do research it is always appropriate to subject what we are doing and what we are not doing to detailed scrutiny from within. Since, whenever culture is enacted, it is both reproduced and transformed, it is as well to incorporate searching for possibilities for change as part of the methodology for research, both in the immediate and long term futures.

Joe was a prolific writer who loved to write every single day. His many books and articles represent a vast reservoir from which we can continue to learn through Joe’s accessible written texts. Like a good mate, Joe told it as he saw it, looking at social life through a plethora of rich social frames. The collection we have assembled in this volume and the associated companion texts honor a trajectory that shows brilliance, willingness to learn from others, and emerging maturity. Through these works and many others like it Joe L. Kincheloe continues his scholarly tradition of being an exemplary teacher | learner. Mate, we appreciate all you have done and commit to learning from your endeavors.

REFERENCES

TOBIN


Joe was a younger brother to the Giroux generation, which ushered in a welcomed cynicism to federal educational interventions; he was disgusted and angry at the Republicans’ attempts to change schooling by launching empty initiatives and slogans. This article highlights the technocratic, deskilling nature of schooling, and is an early discussion of the intervention of technology into the modern era. Never a Luddite, and never a technological genius, Joe was aware of the challenges we were to face with the advent of a media society. One of the first to buy a fax machine, he would sit cross-legged on the floor to fax work back and forth to colleagues, and started an early theoretical read of the need of immediate gratification and the new nature of cognition due to technology. This piece highlighted his awareness and fear of positivism, a theme which would follow him throughout his writing, alas, one of his final pieces was with Ken Tobin, attempting to shed light on the continued academic obsession with what Joe called, the God of Objectivity. 

JOE L. KINCHELOE

1. EXPOSING THE TECHNOCRATIC PERVERSION OF EDUCATION

The Death of the Democratic Philosophy of Schooling

INTRODUCTION: TECHNIQUE AT THE EXPENSE OF UNDERSTANDING

In Anna Karenina, Leo Tolstoy writes an interesting passage concerning the meaning of the word “technique.” Some art patrons are discussing an artist’s work in which Christ is a main figure.

“Yes—there’s a wonderful mastery!” said Vronsky… “There you have technique.” …The sentence about technique has sent a pang through Mihailov’s [the artist’s] heart, and looking angrily at Vronsky he suddenly scowled. He had often heard this word technique, and was utterly unable to understand…a mechanical facility for painting or drawing, entirely apart from its subject.¹

Tolstoy’s passage provides insight into the themes we attempt to develop in the following pages. In modern American society and modern American education technique often takes precedence over meaning. Colleges of education in their teacher-education curricula have often moved away from the exploration of educational meaning. In the process, they have devoted more and more time to teaching technique—techniques examined outside of a social, political, and philosophical context.

Like Tolstoy’s painter, Mihailov, we are disturbed by the use of the word “technique” in the contemporary discussion of education. The over-emphasis on

¹ From Leo Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina.
technique at the expense of contextual understanding is in part a product, we think, of twentieth-century technological development. In the following pages we attempt to delineate the impact of technology on school and society. In our discussion we refer to the concept of technocracy—a situation in which society is guided by the demands of the current technology and not by democratic concerns about the welfare of people. In other words, in a technocracy the technology becomes the master of the people not their servant. We also refer to technicalization. This term is used to describe the process by which technique comes to take precedence over purpose. In the technologically-driven society we argue that technique is viewed as an end in itself—in Tolstoy’s words, “entirely apart from its subject.”

To avoid the dehumanization that such over-emphasis on technique brings about, educators must first recognize that there is a problem. Once recognizing the problem, they must attend to the subtle and insidious ways that technicalization invades our workplaces, our schools, and our assumptions about human nature and education. This chapter is not in tune with the Zeitgeist of the 1990s—a time whose spirit is marked by too much complacency and unquestioned acceptance of the technocratic spirit. We hope that our essay serves to, at least momentarily, disrupt that spirit.

THE NATURE OF TECHNOCRACY

Americans have traditionally placed great faith in the power of technology to solve the myriad of social, economic, and political problems which have faced us. Often in our enthusiasm for technological benefits, however, we failed to anticipate the social and environmental side effects of technological innovation. As Issac Asimov had maintained, anyone could have predicted the automobile, but few could have forecast the traffic jam; anyone could have predicted the television, but few could have forecast the soap opera. We would extend Asimov’s paradigm to technological change in general. Anyone could have predicted the assembly line but few could have forecast the ____ (fill in the blank). Anyone could have predicted behavioral objectives but few could have forecast the ____ (fill in the blank). Anyone could have predicted the computer, but few could have forecast the ____ (fill in the blank). It must be the concern of educators to complete the statement. Our modern obligation is to devote attention not merely to the sophistication of educational technique, but to the educational and social side effects of the new technology.

Despite our historical faith in technology, a tradition of technological suspicion has emerged in the last two centuries. This fear of unchecked technology can be traced in the literature of science fiction from Samuel Butler’s Erewhon written in 1872 to Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451, Arthur C. Clarke’s 2001: A Space Odyssey and countless other works of the modern era. For example, consider just a few of the authors who have pointed to the possibility of dangerous side effects of computers. Butler, writing in 1872, warned of machines with artificial intelligence that might turn on their makers. These machines of great calculating ability, he wrote, may enslave man and supersede him. “Have we not engines which can do all manner of sums more quickly and correctly than we can?” The wise man of Erewhon fears that humans will someday relate to the intelligence machines as cattle now relate
EXPOSING THE TECHNOCRATIC PERVERSION OF EDUCATION

to man. Moved by his argument the inhabitants of Erewhon destroy these proto-computers. Thus begins the science fiction tradition of the computer as villain.  

The Industrial Revolution alerted many individuals to the underside of technological progress. The fear of the sociopolitical side effects of technological change is well-documented by Karl Marx. Social revolutions, he wrote, occur when a new mode of production breaks the constraints of established laws and relationships. Those who control the new “technology,” Marx argued, emerge as a new class destined to become the ruling elite. Technology has created “new modes of production” as the information and service sectors of the economy have surpassed the agricultural and industrial sectors. Indeed, the gap between the information economy and other modes or production continues to grow. The implications of Marx’s analysis for the future of the American economy are interesting. If his interpretation is applicable to the modern era, then modern technology and the information society it brings with it may widen the gap between management and labor and rich and poor. Thus, it becomes more important than ever to study education in the context of technological change. To view educational goals and teaching outside of this larger context is to misunderstand the forces which direct educational policy.

Albert Einstein argued that the results of technology have posed a threat to mankind since they have fallen into the hands of morally blind exponents of political power. Echoing Marx, Einstein maintained that technological innovation has “led to a concentration of economic and also of political power in the hands of small minorities which have come to dominate completely the lives of the masses of people who appear more and more amorphous.” But what is even worse is that this concentration of power made possible by technological innovation has served to prevent the development of truly independent human personalities. Again, the theme emerges—unchecked technological change limits human freedom. Like the warnings of the science fiction writers, technology comes to enslave human beings.

How exactly does technology come to limit human freedom? When most of us think about technology we often concentrate on its labor saving aspects which grant us greater control over our time. In this context technological innovation does not constrain human activity but allows greater choice over how we live our lives. The automobile and the interstate highway, for example, grant us more expendable time than our ancestors could have ever envisioned.

There is another side to technological innovation, however. Other than labor-saving devices, technology has rarely served to make for a humane workplace in modern America. In fact, technological innovations such as the assembly line and accompanying efficiency procedures have often served to limit worker options. New technologies of worker control, often called scientific management, may have extended the tendency of industrial supervisors to view workers as objects to be manipulated. Too infrequently have techniques of scientific management served to encourage a view of workers as human beings with emotions to be considered and individual talents to be cultivated.

Industrial managers have often sought specific worker personality types to meet the needs of the technicalized workplace. According to many industrial analysts, workers who possess the following personality traits are more valuable to the
enterprise than employees who do not: 1) an acceptance of a subordinate role in the hierarchy; 2) submission to the rigid discipline required by the bureaucracy of the workplace; 3) comfort with the lack of concern for human emotions and the subtle dynamics of human interaction that are characteristic of the technicalized, bureaucratized workplace; 4) and acceptance of innovation based not on the value of the work itself but on external reward structures such as monetary incentives.

The role of education often revolves around the production of these personality traits in students. Men and women are students before they are workers. Workers who give up their control of the planning and direction of the activities which comprise their jobs, first surrender their autonomy to a teacher. This teacher plays the role of the boss, granting rewards and assessing penalties. As far as discipline is concerned, the schools succeed in preparing the future worker for the requirements of the dehumanized, bureaucratic workplace. Some of us have experienced that workplace directly through our own work histories. Others have experienced it vicariously through the stories of our friends or by reading about the line workers in Studs Terkel’s *Working*. It is a structured world marked by highly standardized routines and degrading requirements of conformity to time schedules, regulations, and stifling technocratic procedures. Schools prepare our psyches for such a place with their, paraphrasing Charles Silberman, oppressive and petty rules which govern student behavior.

The schools often condition students to remove their emotions from their schoolwork—a characteristic highly valued in the workplace. The more “dehumanized” a bureaucracy becomes the more “success” it attains. When love, hatred, irrationality, and other emotional elements are removed from the official business, then rules and regulation can work more predictably. Thus, as educational studies have indicated, teachers tend to value student personality traits related to the cognitive mode of expression. Students with highly developed affective personality traits are often not rewarded for their compassion and emphatic insight. Also, students like workers frequently are not intrinsically interested in their work. In both cases the organization has to rely on external rewards such as grades, pay incentives, class ranks, or titles to motivate the individual.

What are the implications here? Simply put, this view of schooling turns our conventional notions upside down. To see one of the roles of school as the production of personality types which better suit the needs of those who run the technical workplace challenges the assumptions on which many modern discussions of education rest. We often look at schooling as a force which frees us from ignorance, helps us envision alternatives, gives us choice in the direction of our lives, and opens the doors of opportunity. Viewed in the context of “personality adjustment” school serves not as a force for freedom but as a vehicle of constraint. Instead of granting us power to shape our lives, it often manipulates us so that we better serve the needs of the workplace. This is not the way many Americans interpret the role of schools in a democratic society.

If schools serve this sometimes manipulative role, why don’t more Americans understand that this is the case? Why do we rarely hear this view expressed in the public discussion of education? The answers to such questions are very complex.
and ambiguous and this is not the forum for a full discussion of them. Suffice it to say that many Americans intuitively understand that something was wrong with their education—they have just not articulated precisely what it is. Many Americans, especially those who have worked in low-status factory jobs, know that school was similar to work. And in neither school nor the workplace do these Americans feel that their talents were appreciated or that they have much input into what went on. It is important that these voiceless workers, these victims of technocracy, understand that school does not have to be an institution which limits choice. It is important that the concerns of these Americans be considered in the national conversation over educational policy. The concepts of technocracy and technicalization are valuable in the attempt to understand the role of schooling, for they provide us with a means of articulating our vague feelings that modern society and modern education are somehow hostile to individuality.

What is the nature of the process by which technocracy squashes the individuality of the worker? Because of its complexity and subtlety it is often unrecognized. The process merits examination in some detail.

Employers to exist must extract labor from their workers. In this society the employer must make an effort to avoid the appearance of treating labor harshly. The ideal situation, employers have reasoned, would involve a labor force which “voluntarily” cooperated with management to increase profit margins and to boost productivity.

Through the use of scientific management employers have found several ways to avoid harsh treatment of labor and to contribute to the creation of a cooperative workplace. The procedure which has worked best, however, has been to design technologies which simplify and specify the activities of workers. If the technology is sufficiently sophisticated, workers will not have to think for themselves as they merely follow a redesigned routine. The employer does not have to worry as much about supervision, as the workers relinquish their control of the process of production. The technology not the employer forces the employee to follow orders.

One of the most important outcomes of this technicalization of the workplace is the creation of a strict hierarchy. The hierarchy accentuates the division of labor and de-emphasizes thinking and decision making by the workers. Such a workplace conditions workers to take orders. Since workers do not control decision-making about the execution of their jobs the hierarchical structure necessitates the hiring of many foremen and supervisors, quality-control specialists, administrators to coordinate production, efficiency engineers, and researchers and consultants to provide the information necessary for the few at the top to make intelligent decisions. Unfortunately, this description of the technicalization of the workplace and the solidification of the workplace hierarchy sounds hauntingly familiar to the organization of our school systems.

The hierarchy in the workplace keeps those workers at the lowest rung of the ladder ignorant of the way the production process works as a whole. The low level workers see only a minute part of the process and they see it in isolation from the logic of the process. This ignorance requires that these workers accept the fact that decisions regarding their work be made by higher-ups. Some workers sometimes
think that they could perform jobs at a higher level of the hierarchy just as well as the people who now hold them. They are discouraged by the higher formal education requirements necessary for such high level jobs. Seeing access to higher education as limited, the low level worker gives up his or her aspirations to higher positions. Thus, in many cases workers come to accept the view that their “ignorance” justifies management’s relegation of them to non-thinking jobs.

Workers in this situation come to separate their “spirit” from their work. Work is not a time of fulfillment of creative impulses nor is it a time of unification of themselves with other workers. As a result, the workers seek gratification in other spheres of his or her life. Some analysts have argued that workers turn toward consumption of goods as an activity for happiness and fulfillment. A new boat, car, motorcycle, computer, or swimming pool substitutes for meaningful work activity. As a recent pop song puts it, employees start “working for the weekend.” Older workers work for retirement.

As workers find that the possibility of promotion to higher level jobs is minimal and learn to devote their energies to concerns outside of work, management devises new ways to minimize their indifference to their work. One such way is the use of mini-hierarchies or job ladders for low level employees. Such ladders give workers hope of at least some advancement and encourage stable work behavior. The ethic of “not rocking the boat” or “not making waves” comes to dominate the workplace. Workers who offer too many creative suggestions or appear to be too enthusiastic about doing a job are not viewed as ideal employees but as potential troublemakers. Left unrestrained, these workers may disrupt the orderly flow of daily events and initiate discontent among fellow workers. Employers come to want employees with a moderate interest in their work—enough interest to do what they have to do but not enough to want to devise ways to do it better. Thus, technocracy in a bizarre way celebrates mediocrity.

Another result of the hierarchical structure produced by the technocratic workplace is the disruption of common interests between the workers. As low-status employees gain seniority and conform to the ethic of the workplace, they move up the rungs of the mini-ladder. As a result they acquire an interest in the preservation of the system and lose concern for the welfare of their workmates on the lower rungs. Worker camaraderie is further damaged by the fact that management arranged a situation where the lower-level workers rarely come into contact with persons near the top of hierarchy. The agent who supervises them is another worker—a foreman, an efficiency supervisor, or a quality control administrator. Their frustrations and resentments are directed toward one another. This serves to hide the exploitative role of both the technology and individuals at the top of the hierarchy who use it to control worker behavior.

Our schools tend to prepare students for the place in hierarchy which best fits their social class origins. Thus, the poorer kids are trained to adopt the personality traits necessary for low-status jobs. The more affluent children are socialized for managerial and professional roles. Most of the time such differential training takes place within individual schools, rationalized by so-called ability grouping and level testing. Any observer can notice the difference between the management of a “low
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The low group is subjected to a high degree of external discipline. There are copious rules accompanied by rigid disciplinary procedures. In these situations students learn to take orders and respect authority. Low-level students have few choices, as they are prepared for their low-status role in the workplace.

Advanced students are subjected to fewer rules with less consistent enforcement of rules which exist. For such students conflicts are often settled through negotiation and discussion rather than through the arbitrary action of authority. Such experiences serve to prepare the more affluent students for decision-making managerial or professional positions. The relative freedom of school will correspond to the relative freedom such students will find in their adult roles in the workplace.

As technology changes in modern society the type of education provided slowly changes. Schools in America typically are designed to meet the needs of industry. It logically follows, therefore, that when technology mandates new types of industry, schools slowly adjust their curricula to produce new types of workers. It is true that the job market of the next quarter-century will see a need for more scientifically-trained students. Indeed, the “high-tech” economy will be an important part of American life in the first decade of the twenty-first century, but it will require relatively few workers. The fastest growing employment category will be service jobs, e.g., secretaries, office workers, etc. with the decline of jobs in hard industries, such as steel and automobiles, the nature of the American workplace is changing. It probably was not necessary that an automobile assembly-line worker educated in 1955 be able to read and write to perform his job. To perform competently the new service worker in addition to the “desirable” personality traits of the workplace must possess basic literacy skills. Thus, it is not surprising that 1983 was the year when the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) called for a dramatic reform of education to rescue “a nation at risk.”

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What is the relationship between the reform movement initiated by the NCEE and the technocracy with which we are concerned? The NCEE assumed that the role of school was fundamentally an economic one. When all is said and done, present “excellence” reformers agree, schools serve economic ends and curricula can be justified only to the degree those ends are accomplished. In the present economic situation technological improvement is paramount. Thus, education is viewed as a means of furthering technological improvement and providing workers to serve the new technology.

American business in the 1980s found itself in a technological crisis. Let us briefly examine the genesis of that technological crisis and its effect on education. Such an examination may help illustrate the role education plays in a technocracy.

The 1970s were years marked by declining productivity, reduced capital investment by American industry, and high employment, especially among young, entry-level workers. High unemployment resulted from the baby boomers coming of age and
entering the workforce. Because of this circumstance, governmental education policy focused on youth unemployment. Career education and vocational education were pushed by all levels of government.

American business responded to the labor surplus by becoming more labor intensive and by reducing expenditures on new machinery. Many companies decided to add second and third shifts in lieu of replacing equipment which had grown old and obsolete. As a result, productivity declined—American workers were producing less than their Japanese and Western European counterparts. Between 1960 and 1977, American productivity remained virtually the same, while Japanese productivity increased by 255%.

In the 1980s the situation changed dramatically. The baby boom ran its course and fewer and fewer youths were entering the job market. In the 1970s, 2.5 million workers were entering the labor force annually—in the late 1980s that number decreased to around 1.5 million new workers per year. Simply stated, there were fewer young people in the 1980s than there were in the 1970s—in the 14 to 24 age group, about 20% less.

What is important to our discussion of technocracy in this brief economic history involves the response of American business. There were two main business responses in the educational sphere: 1) business sought to improve the basic education of youth who would have been marginally employable in the 1970s; and 2) business sought to improve the technological training (math and science) of those who would work in high-prestige industrial jobs (engineers, scientists, and technicians).

Let’s examine the first response. As the baby boom subsided fewer qualified employees were available for entry-level jobs. Knowing that too great a decrease in labor will drive up wages, business responded in its own best interest and sought to maximize the number of potential laborers. Thus, business concerned itself with improving the academic competence of the marginally employable student of the 1970s. It called for a renewed concern for “the basics” and strict accountability to insure that such basic teaching and learning took place.

The second business response also merits further analysis. Because of the reluctance of manufacturers in the 1970s to improve equipment, American business had to face the consequences of a technological crisis in more recent years. One result, of course, was reduced productivity. When productivity declined, American industry found itself less able to compete equally with foreign competition. Thus, like with the challenge presented by Sputnik in the late 1950s, American business in the late 1980s and early 1990s called on the schools to supply them with technically competent professionals. Business leaders have consistently called for increased math and science requirements for high school graduation. Reading the NCEE report, one is reminded of a call to arms against a more technologically competent enemy.

Our nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world...If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war...The risk is not only that the Japanese make automobiles more efficiently than Americans and have
government subsidies for development and export. It is not just that the South Koreans recently built the world’s most efficient steel mill, or that American machine tools, once the pride of the world, are being displaced by German products. It is also that these developments signify a redistribution of trained capability throughout the globe. Knowledge, learning, information, and skilled intelligence are the new raw materials of international commerce and are today spreading throughout the world as vigorously as miracle drugs, synthetic fertilizers, and blue jeans did earlier.7

The NCEE report reflects the concerns of the business community and its desire to solve its technological problems. Many of the members of the NCEE were directly associated with the Shell Oil Company, Bell Labs, the California Farm Bureau, and the Foundation for Teaching Economics. The economic concerns of these organizations were translated into the educational concerns of “A Nation at Risk.” When the NCEE report is compared with other studies of American education (such as John Goodlad’s or Ernest Boyer’s) the economically motivated technological focus of the NCEE becomes apparent.

The strategy business has taken involves marshalling public support of the business-directed educational goals of expanding the numbers of potential employees—a move which will reduce wages. If business is successful, the job market by the late 1990s will be flooded with: 1) high school graduates with the “proper” personality traits and minimum literacy skills for entry-level jobs and; 2) college trained, highly qualified scientists and engineers. If such events take place, schools (from the perspective of the business-oriented reformers) will have performed their jobs well. The needs of business will have been met.

Many educators are uncomfortable with the business-oriented call for reform and its assumptions about the role of education. These detractors argue that: 1) schools do not exist to meet the short-term needs of business and industry; 2) the short-term demands of business and industry do not necessarily result in benefits for the economy in general or the individual in particular; 3) the technological and labor problems of business and industry were not caused by the failure of the public schools. Indeed, it was not school leaders who chose not to invest in new plants and equipment in the 1970s; 4) it is difficult to predict manpower needs for business and industry and there is little agreement that an educational curriculum specifically designed to address those needs even accomplishes its goal. Many agree that a general education steeped in the sciences as well as the humanities may in the long run best serve not only the nation’s economic but even its spiritual needs.8

Thus, the business-oriented educational reforms of the 1980s served as a celebration to technocracy. If technocracy implies that the demands of the prevailing technology come to outweigh our democratic concerns about the welfare of people, then American education is in part a servant of the technocracy. The curriculum, if the business-oriented reformers prevail, will not be dictated by the desire to learn those skills and that knowledge which are of most worth; students will be presented material that best prepares them to adjust to the technology of the workplace. In the process, humane concerns in educational planning disappear; democratic participation is ignored as a goal for schooling; and the celebration of the individual as the free
agent who plots his or her destiny is viewed as an inefficient impediment to economic growth. What matters is determined by the technological demands of the moment. Humans surrender to the needs of the machine in the name of international competition.

THE TECHNICALIZATION OF EDUCATION: CHANGING OUR VIEW OF THE NATURE OF LEARNING

The technocratic culture implicitly asserts that any subject which fails to lend itself to quantification is, by definition, not worthy of the label, basic. This technocratic mentality invests more faith in the IQ than in human judgment and in the multiple choice test than observable behavior. In this technocratic context the jargon of education is transformed into a perverse lexicon. Technocratic educational language originated in the industrial revolution—not in any revolution of learning. To the terms “input,” “output,” and “quality control,” the technicalized culture has added its latest and most pervasive component of technocratic language, “behavioral objective.” If subject matter cannot be arranged in behavioral objectives, then it is not worthy of inclusion in the curriculum. What the technology measures not only takes on exaggerated importance but in a sense becomes “reality.”

There is religious dimension to this process of technicalization. Only through technicalization can we discover what is true and valuable. Modern TV promotes this technical religious creed in many of its programs and especially in its commercials. Analyze a random sample of current TV commercials. What is the solution each one promotes to the problem it poses? The omniscient, quasi-divine voice dubbed over the babblings of the mere mortals lamenting their ring around the collar, tells us that we shall find happiness and fulfillment through the application of a specific technology. The voice tells us that there is a vegetable cutter that will end kitchen drudgery, a mouthwash that will grant us social acceptance, an analgesic which will kill our pain, a cake mix that will insure the love of our family, or a car that will open new vistas on our sex life. The technology, not God or human reason, provides salvation and by implication we mere mortals must kneel humbly in the presence of its power.

Overawed by the superiority of technology (an idea so aggressively promoted by the modern information environment), we begin to lose confidence in the human ability to think, analyze, and assign value. As a result we willingly transfer these functions to the technology and let the technical instrument place a numerical designation on human intelligence. The technicalization process in all phases of human life insists on the measurement of everything for everyone. All of our information will be objective; all human subjectivity will be defeated. Those irritating elements of the education process that are complex and ambiguous will be substituted with the precision of technocratic salvation. In the millennium of complete technicalization we will always know, to the nearest hundredth of a point, how well we are achieving our goals.

Technology is always an idea disguised as a piece of machinery. For example, the IQ is an idea or an assumption about the nature of intelligence, the ways it is expressed, and its relationship to time. In many Native American cultures the mark
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of a wise person is that he or she pauses to think about an answer to a question for a few moments before offering a response. The silent period following the question is used to survey a wide range of experiences and to formulate a well-conceived answer based on the information available. Often a questioner with a European heritage will misinterpret the silence as inability to answer and will interrupt what he or she perceives as an uncomfortable interlude with forced conversation. Euro-questioners may attempt to clarify the question or answer it themselves. Thus, they may leave the conversation with the impression that the Native is intellectually shallow or “slow.” Given the biases of Western culture, the word, slow, commonly means unintelligent.

Operating within the confines of Western culture, the IQ test accepts the proposition that intelligence and time of response are directly related. Placed into the context of the IQ testing situation, the wise Native who values a thoughtful, measured response would “test” low on the scale. Because of the culturally-biased “ideas” behind the IQ test, the native’s behavior is not perceived as intelligent. Thus, technicalization has occurred when the educator in doubt deems the technique as right and life as wrong. The story of the Native American gives us a good example of the technocratic approach. Though reality may tell us that the Native American is wise and holds great insight into the nature of life, his or her IQ is 85 and that is below normal.

This distortion of reality emerging from the need to quantify reflects the way we often choose to study education. In an attempt to emulate the empirical research methods of physical science, modern education research emphasizes the measuring or quantification of experience. Often this need for quantification takes precedence over the need to understand the significance of educational experience. Why don’t we better understand the social and political results of education? Stated another way, why don’t we know more about the impact education makes on the lives of individuals from various social backgrounds? These are complex questions, but one reason for our limited success in this area concerns our method of studying educational phenomena. Many argue that we are bound by what is called a “culture of positivism.” This culture of positivism serves in the long run to further the technicalization of education.

THE CULTURE OF POSITIVISM AND THE GOD OF OBJECTIVITY

Positivism is a way of “knowing” which assumes that knowledge worthy of being known can be derived from sense experience. Thus, positivism revolves around the quest for certainty and the need to reduce experience to a set of measurable facts. Researchers and educators caught in the culture of positivism focus on explaining the components of experience, predicting future situations, and controlling future experience by manipulation of technical means. Critics have charged that research methods which lean toward positivism often ignore questions concerning what should be. The attempt to produce “facts” which are empirically verifiable takes precedence over the search for purpose, meaning, and ethical outcomes.9

When analysts offer this critique of positivism and its uses in an educational context, they do not mean to imply that quantification never has a role in educational
research. Quantification is a necessary component of research in any field. Some questions are best answered by the use of quantitative inquiry. The point is that there are many questions—especially questions in the people-centered field of education—which do not lend themselves to quantification. The attempt to quantify these experiences results in a violation of their nature. Thus, a new type of research methodology must be utilized to understand these types of experiences. The new research must ask qualitative questions. Such questions examine the quality of the experience, analyzing those aspects of experience which transcend its measurable factual nature. The qualitative researcher attempts to understand the unspoken assumptions behind an experience and the context in which an experience takes place. They examine the unity of the experience, meaning they attempt to take into account all features of an experience which ultimately give the experience meaning.10

The means of researching questions in education are very important to our discussion of technicalization. Without a research methodology which examines questions of implicit assumption, context, and larger meaning of experience, the process of technicalization remains unrecognized and unchallenged. The connection between academic research and the concern for improvement in the human condition has been torn apart in the twentieth century. The classical Greeks were concerned with the connection between the search for truth (research) and ethical outcomes. Many researchers in the field of education in the present era have forgotten the ends that research once served. In the name of objectivity researchers justify the separation between improvement of the human condition and research.

This notion of objectivity in research rests on some questionable assumptions. Knowledge itself is assumed to be objective and value free. Questions concerning how we deem certain knowledge worth knowing, how we organize and use knowledge, and how we evaluate it are not considered subjective features. Indeed, many times they are not even considered at all. Knowledge taken from the subjective world of intuition, insight, human-based learning, and lived experience is not viewed as real knowledge—it is “unverified.” Values are viewed as emotional responses and are viewed as the opposite of that which is “factual.” The proceeding points constitute a specific, value-laden position. Yet, it is this position which is defined as objective. All positions which disagree with it are subjective and thus inferior. In this way the culture of positivism has established the rules for inquiry in modern society.

When knowledge and research are separated from values many argue that the interests of learning are served. The fact is that when such a separation takes place, more is hidden than uncovered. The notion of objectivity in any field reflects the values and assumptions of the scholars working in that field. In the name of objectivity these values and assumptions are hidden. It is impossible to separate values from facts and inquiry from ethics. Think about a map maker’s attempt to draw a map that represents every physical and human-made detail on a specific territory. Space on the map limits what can be represented. The map maker must decide what to leave out and what to include. He or she must make a value judgment concerning the importance of each feature. Even an object like a map represents a subjective set of decisions by its maker.
When in educational research we study the effect of certain teaching strategies on student performance we are like the map maker. While claiming to be objective, we constantly make assumptions and value judgments in the research process. One of the most important assumptions in such studies involves our acceptance of the validity of our evaluative instruments. In order for a quantitative evaluation to proceed, we must assume that the standardized, "objective" tests administered to our subjects of study are accurate measures of performance. Such tests are usually factually-based. A factually-based test assumes that the salient feature of the learning experience is the acquisition of facts. What about conceptual learning? If significant conceptual learning took place would it be measured by the tests? What about the interest students possessed before they came into the study? We assume that differences in student interests do not affect the outcomes of learning. It is a variable we cannot control. What about hard to define, subtle differences in teacher personality? Might such personality differences bring about important changes in student responses regardless of what method is used? We assume that the effect of teacher personality is unimportant, for in this situation we are focusing on a question concerning which teaching strategy is better. In complex human situations such variables are infinite and uncontrollable.

The effects of such a research methodology are numerous. The most obvious effect is the inaccurate picture we get of social phenomena. Cursed with a distorted picture of reality, we find it difficult to recognize problems which exist in our political and educational life. Another effect involves the removal of larger questions of ethics and political context from educational decision making. Devoid of this ethical and political dimension, educational questions become merely technical problems with technical solutions. Our quest becomes not to figure out what ethically and politically is desirable but what is technically possible—a key characteristic of technicized education. In social studies education, for example, we sometimes fail to ask what types of historical and political knowledge are of most worth; instead, we ask what information delivery system most effectively serves to raise standardized tests scores. The question of technique takes precedence over the question of purpose. For all of the assumptions the culture of positivism makes, it fails to base its view of the world on the pretext that humans should be free to direct their own lives. Filling the vacuum left by this failure to embrace human emancipation is an insidious form of social engineering. It is insidious in the sense that it does not admit its true nature. It is social engineering in the sense that it views humans as entities to be manipulated. The positivistic culture consistently denies the possibility that it begins with specific presuppositions. Examined thoughtfully, the failure to assume that the furtherance of human freedom is basic to any truly humane view of the world or any research question is a frightening assumption. The nonpositivistic advocates of human freedom may begin their research with an assumption; but at least it is an openly-stated assumption.

Worshipping the god of objectivity, the culture of positivism succumbs to what has been called the "fallacy of objectivism." This fallacy occurs when a research methodology is self-limiting to the point that it cannot reflect on its own presuppositions. It cannot reflect on presuppositions because it claims they do not exist.
Trapped by its adulation of empirically-grounded fact, the culture of positivism fails to acknowledge the historical and social context which gave birth to it. Devoid of such context it fails to see itself clearly—it cannot perform self-analysis. Thus, it renews with a vengeance its focus on “what is.” Typically, the result of the analysis of “what is” is that the status quo is basically sound. Teaching that is based on this culture uncritically passes “facts” along to students outside of any social or historical context.

POSITIVISM, TECHNOCRACY, AND THE FRAGMENTATION OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE

To meet the requirements of positivistic investigation all human activity must be fragmented. Schools steeped in the culture of positivism teach the outcomes of such fragmentation—isolated facts. The attempt to comprehend the world as a network of interconnections is lost. North American students are taught to attack problems as if they emerged in isolation, detached from the dynamic social and political forces which bestow meaning.

Let us examine more closely the educational implications of this fragmentation of human experience. Teaching only the outcomes of this empirical fragmentation, school curricula fall prey to what we might call, ready-made subject matter that composes our standardized tests. It is the successful rote memorization of this ready-made subject matter that separates the successful from the unsuccessful student. It is the possession of this information that defines the educated person. Unfortunately, it is often the case that the manner in which this subject matter is learned as well as the subject matter itself contributed only minimally to the creation of thoughtful, analytical scholars.

The subject matter is ready-made in the sense that it is presented as an end in itself. It does not have to be connected to any other experience; it has only to be committed to memory. Not only does the knowledge come ready made, but it is second hand as well. It is second hand in the sense that it is the result of other people’s exploration and discovery. Where the knowledge came from or how it was arrived upon is not important. Devoid of context, like other reflections of the culture of positivism, the second-hand knowledge is learned in isolation from lived experience.

Analysis of the process by which the knowledge was discovered, provides the learner insight into the logic behind the knowledge. It is this study of the process of discovery which allows for the understanding of context and significance. It is the critical analysis of the process which helps the student understand the nature of knowledge production or in other words, research. Thus, by studying the process by which knowledge is produced the student learns about the nature of learning. It is in this way that students accomplish that all important goal of education—learning to teach oneself. One who learns to teach himself or herself has engaged in one of the most basic acts of human emancipation. Because it is unconcerned with the attempt of humans to control their own destiny, the culture of positivism is indifferent to learning which pushes beyond the acquisition of second-hand, ready-made facts.

When the culture of positivism fails to embrace the norms based on a belief in people’s right to control their own destiny, it extends its passive model of humans. As it extends this passivity, the culture leaves humans vulnerable to the manipulation
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of the modern era. Passive individuals cannot protect themselves from the manipulations of the workplace, the mass media, advertisers, and religious zealots. The soullessness of this objective quest for certainty suppresses the free will of the individual and the collective, shared interest of human beings. The culture of positivism contributes to the despair of existential loneliness. The community of men and women is fragmented and individuals see themselves alone in an impersonal world. Emphasis on those hard to quantify qualities which constitute our humanness is de-emphasized. As the culture of positivism studies the world, facts continue to be empirically registered but the basic questions about humanity remain unasked.11

One of the larger goals of school, many argue, is to produce critical thinking. (By the 1980s and 1990s critical thinking has become a popular buzzword in educational circles—universally accepted but rarely examined.) Too often the critical thinking promoted by the schools is a diluted form of analytical thought, presented without social or historical context emphasizing only technical academic skills. The critical thinking exercises are presented with only minimal information and are calculated to elicit a pre-determined outcome. The form of sequential logic required is also pre-determined, and the narrow range of outcomes acceptable does not challenge prevailing wisdom. Admittedly, the level of thought necessary for these so-called critical thinking exercises is more demanding than mere memorization, but the process is still controlled and pre-determined. Political and socio-economic power relationships are undisturbed, and the larger assumptions of the technocracy are unchallenged. The critical thinking lessons we have observed in the schools rarely give consideration to the social consequences of the knowledge acquired or the method used to acquire it. Examination of the application of the knowledge in the historical past or an exploration of its use in the future is irrelevant.

THE ESCAPE FROM TECHNOCRACY: THE POLITICS OF CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking is by nature an active process which encourages individuals to examine contextually the meaning of the information encountered so as to better understand the world and to contribute to the control of their own lives. If these assertions are valid, then the culture of positivism takes a specific political position, as it serves as an impediment to this process. It is a political position because the act of controlling one’s own life (emancipation) is always a political act. Such a desire dictates the political position one must take in particular circumstances.

Critical thinking itself is a political act in that it is a mode of reasoning which supports the realization that “I am able.” One might ask at this juncture, “what about objectivity?” If critical thinking with its emphasis on the origin, development, and purpose of knowledge constitutes a specific political act, then isn’t it unethical for schools to promote that value? Advocates of human emancipation reply, “what is the choice?” The alternative is to deny the importance of human emancipation, and such denial is undoubtedly an act with specific political consequences.

Think of some specific examples which illustrate the implicit political consequences of educational acts. Ask any fundamentalist conservative about the political implications of educational policy in modern American schooling. He or she will argue that curricular design not only has political but theological implications as well.
While by no means endorsing a New Right critique of American education, we would argue that on one level the fundamentalist is correct. There are tacit aspects of the modern curriculum which do challenge fundamentalist precepts. The efforts of curriculum planners to move the classroom toward more critical thinking has raised a red flag in the faces of the soldiers of the New Right. Though it is heard more at the theoretical level than witnessed in the classroom, this emphasis on critical thinking, with its analysis and questioning, rubs against some basic fundamentalist assumptions concerning learning.

We have previously referred to critical thinking as a political act—political in the sense that it empowers the learner to understand a cultural norm in such depth that the assumptions which undergird it may be analyzed. When assumptions behind these ideas are laid bare then the learner is more capable of rejecting or accepting such norms. This allows the learner more confidence in questioning conventional wisdom—a frightening possibility to the fundamentalist conservative. Instead of serving to buttress traditional theological, political and economic “truths” through catechistic training, critical thinking serves to undermine them by exposing the vulnerability of their assumptions. The result, the fundamentalists know all too well, is that the status quo is challenged. In fundamentalist words, traditional values are destroyed by their political enemies—the forces of evil.

Though the process of critical thinking may be threatened by the advocates of absolutist political or religious dogmas and may be stymied by the culture of positivism, education which does not promote it is an impediment to human self-determination. Critical thinking as a political act means that men and women can take an active part in the affairs of the world. Instead of being controlled by history, individuals can help shape history. In other words, critical thinking enables humans to “transcend” their own histories or backgrounds so that they can escape the helplessness which comes from an unexamined heritage. Before one can achieve personal emancipation or liberation, a person must understand the social, political, religious, ethnic, economic, and educational forces which molded him or her. Only through contextual analysis (an act basic to critical thinking) can one accomplish that liberation which comes from an understanding of personal formation.12

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

What might the average teacher or administrator learn from the preceding discussion of the process of technicalization in education? Hopefully the analysis of technicalization forces us to think more clearly about the purpose of education, the powers that determine the purposes, and what the purposes should be. Before American educators can arrest the continuing drift toward technicalization they must understand how technicalized education conflicts with the various goals of education in a democratic society. It is difficult to think about the purposes of democratic education without a few references to John Dewey.

Dewey’s writings on education were founded on the assumption that we should be working toward the most democratic society possible. An education which allows the self-interest of business to dictate its purpose cannot reach its democratic potential. An education which hallows the self-perpetuating momentum of an educational
bureaucracy to mandate goals cannot be responsive to democratic impulses. Democratic education seeks purposes which serve the best interests of as many groups and individuals as possible. Purpose should be determined by asking: what knowledge is of most worth? It should not be determined by asking: what knowledge is of most worth to powerful interests?

In modern discussion of educational purpose many commentators connect educational purpose to vocational preparation. Dewey warned against such a connection early in the twentieth century. Students, he argued, should be encouraged to develop their abilities to the point they are capable of choosing their own careers. The spirit of democratic opportunity is lost when schools attempt to fit students in advance to specific work roles. There is a direct relationship, he argued, between the social and economic conditions of one’s birth and the vocational role typically chosen. The purpose of democratic education is not vocational preparation. Educational purpose in a democracy certainly is not a form of vocational preparation designed by industrialists for the needs of industry. Teachers and administrators need to understand this.

Dewey argued that school should not train students for specific jobs. Education should be an end in itself with no specific outcomes outside of an increased intellectual ability and a heightened capacity to understand the ethical dimensions of human situations. When students are trained for specific jobs other areas not ostensibly related to the job are neglected. The pursuit of intellectual and ethical goals is thus stifled and the student is left with merely the technical aspects of a vocational skill. Unable to understand the larger social, political, and economic picture, the student has difficulty gaining control of his own life. He or she is left in a permanently subordinate position. Seventy years ago Dewey recognized the tendency in a technicalized, industrialized society for the conception of work to be separated from its execution: specifically trained workers find themselves in the position of “executing the intelligence of others who have a calling which permits more flexible play and readjustment.”

Schools, Dewey contended, must not become merely the extension of manufacturing, industry, and commerce. He warned that education will be pressured to transform itself into an undemocratic trade education. If this were to occur, schooling would become an instrument of perpetuating the existing industrial order of society. Many would argue that Dewey’s fears have moved closer to becoming reality as the forces of business have played an increasingly larger role in determining educational goals.

What is the proper relationship between work and school? Education should begin with the assumption that every person desires to be occupied in work which will make the lives of others better worth living. Such a view of work accentuates the ties which bind human beings together; it tears down the antidemocratic walls which separate us from one another. Guided by such ideas, one role of educators involves the development of ideas which lead to the expansion of socially beneficial jobs. Educators need to ponder what constitutes “good work.” Part of the educator’s role as a democratic citizen is to support the policies of business, government, and education which help create dignified, worker-involved employment and to oppose those policies which fail to do so.

One of the great evils of technicalization is that it increases the numbers of people who work in jobs which do not appeal to their intelligence, creativity, and democratic
social concern. There is a great difference, Dewey recognized decades ago, between jobs where the employee merely carries out the plans of others and those jobs where he or she forms original plans. Teachers and administrators must seek to disrupt an educational system which determines who will go into one of these job categories or another on the basis of socio-economic background.

How do teachers and administrators disrupt such an unfortunate form of educational predetermination? They must recognize and resist technicalization in every form—from pre-designed curriculum materials to business-designed curricula. They must make the school “vocational” in a new way. The vocational education we refer to here does not involve the training of certain students to master certain technical skills of the workplace. It is vocational only in the sense that it uses the world of vocations as a curricular starting place—a point to begin our study of the world.

The vocational education we promote engages students to understand the relationship between academic skills and the world of work. In other words it uses work as a real context in which the academic disciplines gain significance. It uses work as a laboratory where academic knowledge is applied. This new type of vocational education examines the intellectual and social meaning of work in a democratic society. This requires historical examination of how present conditions in an occupation came to be. Sociology, economics, political science, and geography are studied by the future worker to acquaint him or her with the problems of work and the society at large. The meaning of work and what constitutes good work in a democratic society are considered. Such studies would include not only an examination of problems but explorations of the various strategies offered to solve them. Science would be studied in order to understand the agencies of production in a modern industrial state. It would be viewed in a context which allows future workers to make sense of the technology which will confront them. In other words, this new vocational education grants students more control of their work lives; it provides them with the power to escape being victimized by the technical obsolescence which comes from narrow technical training combined with a constantly changing workplace.

Please do not misinterpret our vision of what schooling can be. Vocational considerations alone do not determine our curriculum! Schools exist to teach the fundamental skills of reading, writing, math, and analytical thinking. Aesthetic education is a basic component of any well-rounded program. We enthusiastically support the inclusion of health and physical education.

In a society increasingly beset by a dehumanization of the workplace, however, it is essential that education avoid anti-democratic policies which contribute to deskilling and technicalization. The use of a reconceptualized vocational education as a means of gaining insight into the context in which modern work developed, the scientific principles on which the means of production rests, the nature of the problems of the workplace and the possible solutions offered is a realistic way of improving America’s workforce. It is an excellent means of tying the school to the lived world. Such educational policies would be designed by community members and educators for the benefit of students. They would not be designed by business people for the benefit of profit margins.
This vision is not offered as a panacea. It is naïve to think that school alone can solve such a pervasive and complex problem as the technicalization of our work and society. It is offered simply as a question-raising device which seeks to move the school away from the anti-democratic domination of business. If successful, such a reevaluation of the social role of school would produce more thoughtful workers and citizens. The outcome we envision is very modest. It would involve the creation of a corps of thinking American workers whose thoughtfulness would allow them to avoid manipulation by those members of society who want to use others for their own self-interests. Indeed, it would involve the creation of a corps of American citizens capable of using their minds to identify, understand, and even offer solutions to problems created by the developing and ever-changing cultures of this planet.

NOTES

14 Ibid, p. 311. (Selected articles as modified used with permission of Editor of Review Journal of Philosophy and Social Sciences.)

Joe Kincheloe was always ahead of the curve; he seems to have seen and thought beyond what we experience in the present. Joe saw so far ahead of the curve that the curve became a circle, or rather a cycle that he saw strengthening as it spiraled out of control. In his 1991 chapter “Exposing the Technocratic Perversion of Education: The Death of the Democratic Philosophy of Schooling” in James J. van Patten’s *The socio-cultural foundations of education and the evolution of education policies in the United States*, Kincheloe recognized the same cycle of technicalization in education and society that envelops us today. Technocratic society imposes technique-centered policies upon education, which then feed technocratic-minded citizens back into the society to perpetuate the cycle. Kincheloe engages dialectically with recent historical and current educational and cultural dynamics in anticipation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which threatens to be the centerpiece of the societal technocratic overtaking of teaching. Although NCLB was not enacted until 2002, 11 years after the publication of Joe’s piece, in it he demonstrates his ability to foresee “the subtle and insidious ways that technicalization invades our workplaces, our schools, and our assumptions about human nature and education” (1991, p. 194), which he believed would be created by a laser-pointed, unconsidered focus on one-size-fits-all standardized testing.¹

Kincheloe’s philosophy is grounded in a participatory, critical theory of democratic education—one that promotes the interests of the people and practices social equality. At the conclusion of the van Patten chapter, in a section called “what is to be done,” Kincheloe lays out what are some of the guiding principles of his argument. On page 220, he insists that the “continuing drift toward technicalization” in education “conflicts with the various goals of education in a democratic society.” Referencing John Dewey, the father of American progressivism, Kincheloe maintains that we should be in a constant state of creating “the most democratic society possible.” He asserts that the truly democratic society “would serve the best interests of as many individuals and groups as possible.” Furthermore, democratic schools would be committed to passing along learning and knowledge to prepare and empower individuals and groups who would serve the ideals of democracy. His model school would not assign students social roles or career goals, but rather would teach learners to think deeply, critically, and freely; and to attempt to understand all dimensions of the human experience, so that they would be capable of choosing their own best-suited career paths. These schools would be liberatory for students, “free[ing] [them] from ignorance” (1991, p. 199). He says, “Education should begin...
with the assumption that every person desires to be occupied in work which will make the lives of others better worth living” (1991, p. 222). What Kincheloe exposes is the technicalization in education which he predicts will tempt teachers to teach to tests at the cost of context and meaning and thus manipulate students to perpetuate the status quo. Students (and teachers) shaped in this way cannot possibly serve as citizens who would further the aims of a free, constantly improving, lively, democratic society. “To avoid the dehumanization that such over-emphasis of technique brings about,” Kincheloe believes, “educators must first recognize that there is a problem” (1991, p. 194). Recognizing the problem, however, requires a breaking of the technique-focused mindset and, thus, the technocratic cycle.

Joe’s prediction has been borne out, perhaps beyond even his expectations. In 2005, after witnessing the effects of the first few years of NCLB, Kincheloe decries that “[i]n the twenty-first century, the idea that teachers understand the complexity of the educational world is a radical proposition in and of itself,” with “many educational reformers see[ing] no need for teachers to be rigorous scholars” (2005, p. 5). “Indeed,” Kincheloe continues, “the No Child Left Behind reforms require disempowered teachers who do what they’re told and often read pre-designed scripts to their students” (2005, p. 5). The disempowerment of the citizenry thus begins with the disempowerment of the public school teacher—the focal point of education for the majority of our young people and the leaders in the classroom. “[S]uch actions” as the NCLB reforms “are insulting to the teaching profession and are designed ultimately to destroy the concept of public education itself,” Kincheloe concludes (2005, p. 5). In his 1991 article Kincheloe outlines the subversive, perverting effects of technicalization that find their logical conclusion in NCLB. In the 14 years between his first article and Kincheloe’s 2005 critique, he watched NCLB insult the teaching profession, as well as individual teachers themselves, and begin the process of destroying the credibility and functionality of public schooling if not the notion of public education itself.

One of the most devastating consequences of high-stakes testing is the phenomenon of cheating by teachers. A series of Dallas Morning News stories in 2004 reports finding extensive test cheating on the elementary school level in Texas (Benton and Hacker, 2004). A state investigation identifies 22 teachers and other educators in poor, urban schools in Dallas and Houston as improperly assisting students on the TAKS test, including distributing answer keys in some cases. The false “Texas miracle” stands as the most infamous but just one of many cases of principals and teachers knowingly participating in academic fraud. (See also Grow [2004] for an overview of nationwide NCLB cheating by teachers.) In this extreme case, teachers were pressured by the educational and political systems, as well as their principals, to demonstrate that students could achieve passing (or improved) test scores—even if they did not, or could not. The stakes in the standardized test score game range in severity depending on many different factors, perhaps most importantly the amount of local funding of the school. If a loss of federal funding represents a significant piece of the school’s financial pie, the test results weigh that much heavier on a teacher’s mind. Disempowered, dehumanized as Joe predicted, and perhaps unconscious of the long-term consequences, these lost and desperate educators
discredit their profession and insult their students and themselves by buying into
the power of the test rather than questioning its validity as a measure of the worth
of their professional efforts. Moreover, teachers infected with such thought-destroying
fear and confusion could never provide rich, challenging, and intellectual curriculum
to their students. They would not have the mental freedom to focus on such a project.

Headline-grabbing stories of dishonesty such as those described in the “Texas
miracle” rise as peaks in the new landscape of education under NCLB, but the general
terrain is also destructive in a much quieter, “subtle and insidious” as Kincheloe
put it (1991, p. 194), yet equally devastating way. Knowing that the standardized
test waits, and dreading the consequences of failing scores, some teachers are resigned
to aligning too strictly to the course set out for them. To teach for broad and deep
understanding, to follow either their own interests or the interests of the students,
seems a dangerous and ill-advised path when the allocation of time and resources
can result in loss of funding for programs or schools. As Kincheloe argued in 2005,
here is where “many educational reformers see no need for teachers to be rigorous
scholars” (p. 5), because the “rigorous scholarship” has already been done for
the teachers by those who set the curriculum. Teachers become mere technocrats,
facilitators of the material and neutral conduits of an agenda-driven educational
program. In these schools, we begin the process of removing students’ emotions from
the learning environment. We dehumanize them. “The more ‘dehumanized’ a bureau-
cracy becomes,” Joe Kincheloe warned, “the more ‘success’ it attains,” with
“success” defined as the creation of a place where “rules and regulations can work
more predictably” (1991, p. 198). The “successful” teacher thus becomes one who
simply reads the assigned script designed to shape a new generation of passive
citizens and workers. Certainly subject content needs to be conveyed to the student,
but that content is too often fragmented by the technocratic method rather than
integrated meaningfully, as Kincheloe desires. Instead of opening up new worlds to
students by way of expansive lesson plans that teach students to link complex ideas
together, teachers narrow their teaching and deny their students the possibility of
meaningful learning. When young people are deprived of learning to think, what is
the significance of passing scores on a standardized test? When young people cannot
take a position on a complex issue, and compose an argument supporting that
position, what is the value of achieving the targeted score on a standardized test? If
we are not asking (and attempting to answer) in public schools the most difficult
questions that life and society pose, what becomes of the abilities of the more than
2, 649, 594 students who graduate from our public schools each year (Stillwell and
Hoffman, 2009)? What can we expect from them as citizens and parents?

It should be no surprise that the consequences of a steady diet of prescribed
learning can have a serious impact on prospective teachers. Since the implementation
of NCLB in January 2002, a large cohort of students who experienced only that
mode of education through secondary school and higher education now stand poised
to become the next generation of educators. Ironically, another component of the
NCLB Act is focused on providing a “highly qualified teacher” for every classroom.
What can that mean in practice? In a recent graduate-level course at the very
beginning of the program cycle, an exercise focused on the uses of active listening
in facilitating group discussion became a snapshot of the effect of NCLB on what students think about learning and teaching. (See Gordon and Burch, 1974, pp. 90–94, for the original script.) A scripted role-playing scenario was acted out in which a high-school level teacher asks an open-ended question about a reading on the Spanish-American War. The teacher’s objectives for the lesson are not stated, but the students inquire as to the role of girls and the perspectives of the Spanish people at the time of the war. Eventually the discussion focuses on whether or not history books can be (should be) accepted as accounts of truth—actual, partial, or biased—and what standards one should use when reading history books. The teacher allows the students to engage in the discussion for some time and at the end of the script, she incorporates the students’ interests in assigning tasks to be accomplished in a future class.

After the role-play ended, the professor initiated a debriefing session on students’ assessments of the teacher’s handling of the discussion. The majority of the graduate students disagreed with the teacher’s approach—in fact, they called it a digression—because the students did not spend enough time on discussing the war. They said that you must “teach to the test” or else NCLB will “cost you your job” and cost the students their school. The pre-service teachers labeled such rich discussions risky and irrelevant because they could lead students off the task of memorizing information that would be regurgitated on a standardized test. These graduate students initially resisted the counterargument that such digressions, such discussions, although requiring an investment of time away from the narrow conception of the mandated curriculum, could serve as a significant and valuable perspective-taking activity, enlarging students’ perceptions of a complex social reality as it existed during the Spanish-American War period. Even before facing any real possibility of lost jobs or funding, something they may never actually confront, these pre-service teachers allowed propagandized fear and dread to limit their thinking. We would argue, as Kincheloe did decades ago, that indoctrination into the NCLB mode, in which the teacher relinquishes her responsibility to create complex and meaningful curriculum compels new and old teachers alike to steer a straight path along a fixed curriculum and to avoid any “detours” no matter what benefits (i.e. interest, inspiration, and motivation) might accrue to students because of them.

After eight years of NCLB, many former students now looking to become teachers themselves know no other model of education than that infected by NCLB. The “perversion of education” Kincheloe speaks of in his title comes to fruition as the fact-peddling educational system itself creates its own future fact-peddlers. NCLB has successfully socialized students to value isolated facts over narratives that string those facts together into meaningful wholes. “North American students are taught to attack problems as if they emerged in isolation,” Joe writes, “detached from the dynamic social and political forces which bestow meaning” (1991, p. 215). Sadly, the idea that the Spanish-American War might have been an imperialist war of choice (or any of the other implications or repercussions of the conflict) loses the battle with names, dates, and other trivia that are truly “trivial” in the sense of lacking relevance for today. “The subject matter is ready-made in the sense that it is presented as an end in itself,” Kincheloe warns (1991, p. 216). Rather than students
learning to question, critique, and understand, a prescribed body of knowledge becomes the ultimate educational end as embodied by items on standardized tests. Instructors, including instructors-to-be, pass on the passivity of this approach to their students by thwarting active thinking, labeling it as wasteful digression rather than mind-opening and horizon-widening cognition.

The values of education thus become perverted to the point of being turned around almost 180 degrees, pointing the system, the students, and new generations of teachers in a counter-productive direction.

How then can education, as he saw it, in the age of NCLB, be pointed back in the right direction? While he warns of “the implicit consequences of educational acts” (1991, p. 218) that serve the agenda of positivism and the creation of a passive, unquestioning citizen, he believes that the answer lies in the hands of the teacher and his/her ability to take a critical and creative approach in the classroom. “Critical thinking enables humans to ‘transcend’ their own histories or backgrounds so that they can escape the helplessness which comes from an unexamined heritage,” Kincheloe asserts (1991, p. 219). To enable students to experience this transcendence, teachers must transcend prescriptive thinking through critical re-evaluations of their own. They must reflect and manifest a critical mindset in their dealings with young people and once that cognitive shift happens, critical and creative sparks begin to fly. “This emphasis on critical thinking with its analysis and questioning rubs against some basic fundamentalist assumptions [of NCLB and positivists] concerning learning,” Kincheloe argues (1991, p. 219). From this friction, generated when the positivist definition of learning rubs up against the critical theory definition of learning, emerge the human warmth and intellectual emancipation and enlightenment which are needed to cast off the chill and the emptiness of education as mere, disconnected facts. “Too often the critical thinking promoted by the schools is a diluted form of analytical thought,” Kincheloe posits, “presented without social or historical context emphasizing only technical academic skills” (1991, p. 217). Students are taught just enough critical-type thinking to be of service but not enough to pose a danger to the status quo either at work or of the government. “[E]ducation which does not promote [critical thinking] is an impediment to human self-determination,” Kincheloe believes (1991, p. 219).

Through critical mindedness, students themselves can ask for a better system of education and exercise their democratic right of self-determination. Teachers can inspire and guide students to question the educational system and participate in their own learning, thus becoming active agents, “responsible subjects… in the search for self-affirmation” (Freire, [1970] 1993, p. 18) instead of passive receptacles. In many schools, education conducted in the NCLB mode becomes the Freirian model of banking education (Freire, p. 53) which he, too, names dehumanizing. No one has a bigger stake in education than students, although they may not be awake to that fact. Teaching students the importance of assuming their rightful role in the educational process and authorizing them to take up the power of agency prepares them for a lifetime of participating in the workplace and government. With empowered students, Joe’s envisioned “modest” result of “a corps of American citizens capable of using their minds to identify, understand, and even offer solutions to
problems created by the developing and ever-changing cultures of this planet” (1991, p. 224) could be realized. Society’s hope and the true education’s bonus will be the ever-questioning, critically-minded graduate. The downward spiral of the technocratic cycle could thus be reversed into an upward spiral, beginning with the foundation of education and then cycling out of technocracy’s control to the workplace, the voting booth, and the global community.

NOTES

1 Joe L. Kincheloe wrote his 1991 article soon after Goals 2000, which some argue began the modern American fascination with accountability in schools. Standardized testing programs subsequently grew substantially after Goals 2000 to determine if U.S. students were meeting the goals.

2 This limited thinking of these pre-service teachers recalls Freire’s idea of “limit-situations,” i.e. obstacles that are more mental states than actual impediments ([1970] 1993, p. 80). “[I]t is not the limit-situations in and of themselves which create a climate of hopelessness,” Freire wrote, “but rather how they are perceived by women and men at a given historical moment: whether they appear as fetters or as insurmountable barriers” ([1970] 1993, p. 80). These pre-service teachers exhibit “a dominated consciousness which has not yet perceived a limit-situation in its totality [and] apprehends only its epiphenomena and transfers to the latter the inhibiting force which is the property of the limit-situation” (Freire, [1970] 1993, p. 85). In this case, the student teachers hand over power to such “epiphenomena” as “teaching to the test” at the expense of disempowering themselves and their students. This transference of power reinforces the resistance to a liberated mindset, as displayed by the pre-service teachers after the exercise, and is predicted by Freire ([1970] 1993, p. 85). By casting off the “fetters” of technocracy that compel them to “teach to the test,” however, these future educators can liberate themselves and their students to greater opportunities for learning.

REFERENCES


Not long after we moved in together, Joe received an enormous parcel in the mail from SUNY Press. It was the galleys of the book that he was co-editing. He explained to me that we had to “proof” the galleys. Other than my own writing, I knew nothing about publishing, and that fall day in Clemson, South Carolina was my first day in thousands...writing with Joe, proofing, editing, and reading. I was given the task of proofing Joe’s Morris piece. Well-tutored, I had been reading Southern novels, specifically Willie Morris, Pat Conroy, and Bobbie Ann Mason; and as a drama director I certainly had my share of Tennessee Williams. My Southern cultural capital had grown considerably while with Joe, and I read and proofed his piece with gusto. This is probably one of the best pieces Joe Kincheloe ever wrote. The chapter is an example of Joe’s lyrical, literary, informed style. His love of the South had always been a contradiction. The ghosts, the horrendous actions of Southerners were a counterpoint to the New Orleans ladies, the gentle breeze in the Blue Mountains, the raspy, rasty riffs of country musicians, and the accented voices distinguishable from town to town. Joe loved the South with every fiber of his being, and he hated much of its past. This article speaks to those issues, and celebrates both the brilliance of Willie Morris, certainly one of Joe’s favorite authors, and the genius of Joe’s own words.

JOE L. KINCHELOE*

2. WILLIE MORRIS AND THE SOUTHERN CURRICULUM

Emancipating the Southern Ghosts

In his speculations on the nature of a curriculum theory of southern studies, William Pinar draws upon the various strands of research that have informed reconceptualized curriculum theorizing. Grounded in critical theory and psychoanalysis, the southern curriculum is dedicated to a social psychoanalysis aided by the methodologies of historiography, ethnography, phenomenology, gender studies, autobiography, and literary criticism. In many ways Willie Morris brings together these approaches to southern studies in his corpus of work on his South.

Morris’s nonfiction draws upon historiographical and ethnographic traditions. His autobiographical sensitivity is innocently phenomenological, as he responds poetically to the southern ghosts that haunted his mind and body. His work is permeated with references to the process by which gender role is fashioned in the South. These references are sometimes presented consciously, other times they are uncovered only by gender sensitive readers who discover manifestations of gender
role formation by interrogating that psychic realm that is evidently not conscious to
the author himself and is determined by subtle social conditioning. For a plethora
of reasons, the work of Willie Morris is valuable in the reconceptualized southern
curriculum.

Morris’s work is primarily autobiographical, constantly relating his personal story
to the story of his place. He carries on a grand southern literary convention: The
writer’s exploration of the southern traditions and his or her attempt to document
the personal struggle to come to terms with those traditions in his or her own life.
Morris is a student of the southern traditions, and the southern mythologies—he
understands their variations, their nuances, and their death throes. He moves easily
among the structures and codes of southern literature, invoking the vocabularies that
were used by his literary ancestors without self-consciousness. As the twentieth
century with its interstate highways and McDonald’s mute the old voices, Morris
seems determined to pour through the family album one more time before consigning
it to the attic. His work is a eulogy—the interment will follow.

By the time Morris published his first book *North Toward Home* in 1967, the
journalistic motif of Southerner-in-struggle had fossilized. The ghosts had done
d their job well. The liberal sons and daughters of the South found themselves without a
home, their small towns and cities haunted by the specters of racism, violence, and
poverty. Critics sometimes blasted Morris’s work for its stylized quality—Faulkner
without the urgency. While such criticisms hold some truth, they miss some important
aspects of Morris’s work and place in southern literary history. Morris writes of
structures of feelings that are no longer his; he utilizes literary conventions whose
rules have been determined not by his but previous generations. The homage he
pays to the southern memories is self-consciously temporary—tomorrow, we feel,
Morris must move on to the business of the present. Today, however, he is showing
his kids “how it was” when he grew up. Indeed, Willie Morris is the weigh station
between Faulkner and postmodernist southern writer, Barry Hannah, the movement
from Southern League baseball to Lynyrd Skynyrd, from moonshine to cocaine.

Faulkner was truly a regional writer. No doubt, he challenged the myths, but the
myths still held the imagination. The modernist tendencies that Faulkner expressed
were couched in southern terms. Where Faulkner’s work is of the South in a particular
place and time, Morris finds his influences outside the temporal and spatial bound-
aries of Yoknapatawpha. Morris’s South is lost to him: he is no longer a small town
Southerner (though he eventually moves back to Oxford, Mississippi); and his land
is lost to itself as the myths fade away from memory.

This analysis of Morris concerns itself with emancipation or liberation, the
diversity of its expression, and the peculiar textures of southern life as they relate
to the concept of liberation. We are all familiar by now with the discourse of
emancipation, its poetic tone, and its dangerous implications for the preservers of the
status quo. We understand its attempt to render problematic that which had previously
been accepted as given, and its exhortion to reflect upon the essence of that which
before had only been considered in terms of its use, its instrumental value. More and
more educators have come to realize that liberation embodies a form of rationality
that involves the capacity to think about thinking (Gouldner, 1976).
Emancipation has come to be seen as praxis, that is, an understanding of the ways in which human beings are dominated as well as forms of actions that serve to counter dominating forces (Giroux, 1981). Emancipation involves a form of critical thinking that moves us beyond common sense assumptions into a new territory marked by an understanding of genesis and purpose (McLaren, 1989). In our new dialectical mode, we see past isolated events, as we begin to think in terms of processes. Thus, emancipator thinking allows individuals to participate in the socio-historical transformation of their society, as they begin to bring their work under their own control (Freire, 1985).

In our attempt to understand the conventions of our place and how they have shaped us, we engage in what William Pinar and I, in our introduction label “social psychoanalysis.” This social psychoanalysis may be referred to as “critical historiography.” Emerging from a critical theoretical tradition this social psychoanalysis/critical historiography is an essential feature of southern curriculum theorizing. Jurgen Habermas considers Freudian psychoanalysis a model for a critical science, for it is only psychoanalysis that serves as an example of a science incorporating a methodical process of self-reflection (Habermas, 1970).

As the psychoanalyst attempts to remedy the mystified self-perceptions of the analysand, the social psychoanalyst sees myth invalidation as an important step toward social progress (Held, 1980). Such an attempt, just like the effort of the psychoanalyst to confront patients with actual forces that helped shape their psyches, is thwarted by many factors: for example, the success of the logic of capital in late industrial societies in reifying existing social, political, and economic relationships; and the psychological distortions of past racial, gender, and social class role definitions in say southern culture. In the modern industrialized South, both of these prementioned factors may work in concert creating a symphony of unique distortions (Marcuse, 1964; Marcuse, 1978).

The power of such distortions on the individual and social level is undeniable—history is frozen and viewed as rational, as if it could be no other way (Jacoby, 1975). Until free people invalidate the myths and conceive of the possibilities offered by emancipation, slim is the possibility of authentic self-direction on the individual and social levels. The less social and individual self-direction which exists, the more it appears that society is governed by rational and intractable natural laws (Marcuse, 1960). This is the concern of the reconceptualized southern curriculum—to demystify southern experience in such a manner that distortions are confronted. In this way southern consciousness can be renegotiated with all participants—especially those previously excluded at the bargaining table. Such an undertaking allows for a language of possibility (Giroux and McLaren, 1989). The southern ghosts, who siphon their energy from the frozen history of race, class, and gender, find themselves exposed—they can no longer haunt with anonymity.

MYTH

Our discussion of social distortion—especially in the context of literature—cannot proceed without an examination of a Barthesian notion of myth. Roland Barthes
reflects Marcuse’s concern with the existence of natural and rational law as he focuses his notion of semiology on myth. Myth, Barthes argues, provides a natural image of reality, as it ignores the existence of the dialectical relationship between activities and human actions. Myth renders such activities “a harmonious display of essences.” Barthes contends that myth in talking about things, purifies them, makes them innocent, gives them a natural and eternal justification. Myth, he continues:

abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves.

Thus, the historical quality of things is lost. When myth conquers, individuals lose the memory that things were once made. As a complicated network of arguments, beliefs, and metaphors, myths become the vehicles through which societies deny historical origin and in the process support and authenticate their identities. Richard Gray writes that it is the recovery of the memory that Barthes is talking about here—“that things were once made”—that separates good southern literature from the mediocre (Gray, 1986, p. 272). For example, Faulkner demanded that we examine the codes and the hidden structures that grant insight into myth etiology. As Gray puts it, Faulkner “offers an examination of the way the world has been placed into words” (Gray, p. 272).

The myths of the South are great deceivers. The Patriarchal Myth of a cultural gentry with a superior notion of civilization, the Lost Cause Myth with its implicit justification of the Civil War aims, the Myth of Southern Womanhood with its glorification of feminine passivity, the Myth of the Happy Darkie on the benevolent plantation, the Gentlemanly Code of Honor Myth with its frozen notion of masculinity all claim to be drawing upon history, centering human action historically. The myths are charlatans, reifying the status quo, presenting themselves as an accurate account of essence of things. In providing answers to our southern identity search, the myths simplify and “explain” our origins. The only way to maintain our identity is via myth invocation and imitation—a process that Southerners have mastered over the decades, especially through their literature.

Myths may be used in a variety of ways. Political demagogues may employ the myth manipulatively to create allegiance to practices and symbols that serve the interest of the demagogue. Myths may be used innocently, as they are every day, to make sense of the world around us, to provide certainty in the chaotic lived world. In a critical sense myths may be employed by the demystifier. Like Claude Levi-Strauss, the demystifier may accomplish the task of deciphering the myth for all to see; or the demystifier may seek to locate the myth historically and understand the social forces that contributed to its sanctification. Whatever the process or combination of processes, the act of demystification is an act of social psychoanalysis as it uncovers the existence of social distortion, its genesis, its nature, and its effects. Curriculum theory grounded in social psychoanalysis and place is informed by Barthesian myth analysis and the subsequent process of demystification and myth explication.
The demystification process necessitates a well-developed sense of the past—a sense that must distinguish between history and myth. Traditionally preoccupied with the past, Southerners must draw upon their non-mythical historical sense to overcome the malformations of the present. Southern writer William Humphrey describes the historical sense of the region, arguing that: “If the Civil War is more alive to the Southerner than the Northerner it is because all the past is.” Colonel Sartaris in Faulkner’s *Flags in the Dust* (and many of his other characters as well) is so overpowered by things past that he seems pale in their reflection. In some ways, Willie Morris appears as a Faulknerian character in his own autobiographical writing—so powerful are his ghosts. Certainly this historical sense has begun to fade in the fast food, TV age. Contrary to more sanguine interpretations, the social amnesia that attends this fading does not destroy the myths. The mythological foundations of southern society remain intact—indeed, they are rendered more impervious to challenge—as the fading memory is accompanied by the fading possibility. The southern curriculum must draw sustenance from this traditional southern sense of the past.

Faulkner recognized the possibility of memory. The past was never seen as inert or buried but as a living presence always capable of growth (Gray, 1986, p. 181). Along with Robert Penn Warren and Allen Tate, Faulkner recognized the dialectical interaction between past and present—a recognition carried on by Willie Morris in *North Toward Home* and maybe most profoundly in *The Courting of Marcus Dupree*. This dialectical relationship involves alteration on both sides of the coin. Tate’s “Ode to the Confederate Dead” examines a man in crisis standing in a Confederate graveyard. As he imagines what the lives of those buried there were like, he measures his failure against them. The ghosts are there, but they are the ghosts of the man’s own invention—he constructs them with the bits of evidence available. The existence of *Tradition*, an ossified mythology, is not assumed in the poem. Tate’s concern is that tradition doesn’t merely exist, it is made. His character is making tradition, reinventing the past. Not only, the reader is reminded, does the past shape the present, but the present also shapes the past. The dialectic is celebrated, possibility is restored (Tate, 1970, p. 18). R. G. Collingwood reflected this idea of the human construction of the past when he wrote that all history is the reenactment of the past through the mind of the historian. We are not passive beings who surrender to the spell of *Tradition*. History, he concluded, is an active process, a reenactment of past thought. The reenactment takes place in the context of the historian’s own knowledge (Collingwood, 1962, pp. 215, 242–43).

We must become our own storytellers, Eudora Welty states. Nothing ever happens once and is finished, the past lives on. As Southerners tell their stories, enhance their reputations as raconteurs, they construct their individual versions of the past. Welty, too, views history as a dialectical process—an interchange between the “out there” (the objective) and the “in here” (the subjective). Each time a story is told there is a reweaving of facts—some details are omitted, some reemphasized. Tradition is challenged, the presentation of past as myth is overcome.

The southern victimization by Tradition takes many forms. Morris documents the power of the southern myths to evoke unquestioned allegiance from his fellow
delta dwellers. Was it the power of the myths that elicited such zealous support from the poor and non-slaveholding South that individuals were willing to give their lives to protect a “peculiar Institution” that certainly did not serve their economic interests? Erich Fromm examines this southern phenomenon psychoanalytically. Using Freud’s notion of narcissism, Fromm develops a theory of social narcissism to explain the tendency of some suppressed classes to be loyal to their social superiors and their rulers.

For an organized group to survive, it is important that the members of the group possess narcissistic energy. The members must consider the group as important or even more important than their own lives. Fromm labels the social narcissism benign if it is based on pride in a great achievement. It is malignant, he contends, if it is based not on something the group has produced but on something it has, for example, its splendor, its past achievements, its skin color, its code of gentlemanly behavior, and so forth… For those who are economically poor and socially excluded, narcissistic pride in belonging is an important source of satisfaction. Since their confined existence evokes little outlet for interest and little possibility for various forms of mobility, they may develop an exaggerated form of narcissism. The most extreme form of southern racism has traditionally come from the lower middle classes as its members view themselves as superior to the “inferior” Blacks; for example, the Bourbon protection of Blacks from lower middle-class Whites in post-Reconstruction era, the lower middle class following of George Wallace in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Even though I am poor and uncultured, I am somebody important because I belong to the most admirable group in the world—I am White. Thus, Southerners must escape the ravages of Tradition and the psychic mutilations it carries with it. Critical theoretical analysis with its discomfort with surface explanations offers hope.

Paulo Freire extends our thinking about the relationship between these psychic mutilations, historical location, anthropological context, and liberation. Arguing for a liberatory education, which frees humans from the oppression that traps them in the web of their historical reality, Freire ponders the risk of their emancipation. “Existence is not despair, but risk,” he tells us. Those who seek liberation must risk themselves, though the “form of the risk” will vary from individual to individual and from place to place. The liberatory risk of a Brazilian is quite different from that of a Swiss; indeed, the liberatory risk of a New Yorker is quite different from that of a Mississippian. Our sociohistorical context shapes the form of our risk. The attempt to universalize the form and content of the liberating risk is ill-advised and unacceptable, Freire posits, to anyone who thinks dialectically.

CHILDREN OF THE SOUTHERN PLACE

I am a child of the South, one who had sought to understand the rhythms of southern life and their effects on me. For many reasons, my first exposure to Willie Morris about twenty years ago provided much insight into my own southern consciousness.
So profound was the effect that I adopted Morris’s *North Toward Home* for my introduction to education classes when I came to Louisiana to teach. An excellent educational autobiography, I hoped that the work would touch the consciousness of my students. I hoped that it would promote an introspective analysis of personal educational experience that might lead to a better understanding of the social forces that shaped southern students.

Emerging from the Yazoo City, Mississippi of the 1940s and early 1950s, Willie Morris chronicles his journey from a small town provincial to New York editor of *Harper’s* to writer in residence at the University of Mississippi. Haunted by the power of Yazoo (even the sound of the word conjures ghosts), Morris struggles to comprehend the sway of the South in his life. Never far away from the consciousness of the southern sense of place, Morris presents a corpus of work that sheds light on the nature of liberation, its ambiguity, and its contextual contingency.

"Where are you from?" the Mississippian asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, where are you from? Where did you go to high school?"

The other man mentioned an Eastern prep school.

"But where did you grow up? Where are your parents?"

"Well, my father is in Switzerland, I think, and my mother is asleep in the next room."

Morris reports this conversation between a young Mississippian and a Harvard man. Awakened by the traumatic interchange the Mississippian confides: “For the first time in my life, I understood that not all Americans are from somewhere.” I think of myself as a teacher on the first day of class calling the roll and asking each student where they are from—somehow it is important as I match names with faces and attempt to learn something about them. To those from the small rural towns and parishes around Shreveport it is a natural question, and they talk with ease about life in Vivian, Greenwood, Plain Dealing, or Cotton Valley; to others, it is a strange, irrelevant question and they dismiss it—sometimes not even attempting an answer.

So strong is the southern awareness of place that when people from different towns meet they talk at length not only about where they are from but also where their parents are from. More often than not, the stranger will know exactly the location of the little hometowns. I know intimately the terrain and the now long dead personalities of my parents’ original homes in Bland, Virginia, and Hawkins County Tennessee. For Southerners, Thorton Wilder wrote, “place, environment, relation, repetitions are the breath of their being.” It is the charge of each Southerner to work out the power of place in his or her own existence (Morris, 1983b).

While Southerners have traditionally found themselves divided by lines of race, class, and gender, a sense of ambivalence (a sense that frustrates attempts to generalize about the South) renders such divisions problematic. This elusive southern consciousness of place seems to cut across racial and class lines, forming a tacit
alliance between the South’s professors, journalists, Black preachers, and hot rodders with Confederate flags on their rear bumpers. Indeed, both Black preachers and Klansmen agree that “the South is a good place to raise children” (Yoder, 1967). Morris recollects that during his exile in New York, he shared far more understanding with Black Mississippians than with the Yankee Wasps he met daily (Morris, 1967). North Toward Home is filled with references to his friendship with Black authors and fellow southern expatriates, Al Murray and Ralph Ellison. On New Year’s Day 1967, Morris describes their feast at Al Murray’s apartment in Harlem of bourbon, collard greens, black-eyed peas, ham hocks, and cornbread—the traditional southern New Year’s Day good luck dinner (p. 387). These southern connections are complex and often incomprehensible to outsiders. Consider C. Vann Woodward’s recollections of his thought while marching with Martin Luther King on the road to Montgomery: “I looked to the side of the road, and I saw the red-necks lined up, hate all over their faces, distrust and misunderstanding in their eyes. And I’ll have to admit something. A little part of me was there with them” (Woodward, p. 399).

THE GHOSTS

The struggle for emancipation for the Southerner is thus a complex enterprise inhabited by a potpourri of regional ghosts. Morris ponders the mindless racism, the origins of the acts of violence he and his boyhood friends committed against isolated Black children.

Hiding in the shrubbery, twelve-year-old Willie watched a young Black girl and her little brother walk down a deserted Yazoo sidewalk.

The older girl walked by first, and the child came along a few yards behind. Just as he got in front of me, lurking there in the bushes, I jumped out and pounced on him. I slapped him across the face, kicked him with my knee, and with a shove, sent him sprawling on the concrete.

Morris saw this violent display as more than a mere gratuitous act of childhood cruelty: “It was something else, infinitely more subtle and contorted.” Blacks were always viewed ambivalently by the Yazoo Whites. “They were always ours to do with as we wished” with their degenerate lifestyles and distasteful habits. Dirty Whites “kept house like a nigger”; a “nigger car” was dilapidated and didn’t run well; staying out all night and being seen with a variety of male companions made a woman guilty of “nigger behavior”; and conversation filled with lies and superstition was “nigger talk.” Yet, despite all of this, Whites harbored a vague feeling for a mutual past with Blacks—a bond of shared place.

He relives the religious tyranny, the public school teachers and the Sunday School “church ladies” who imposed a Christianity by fear and rote.

As a fourth grader, Willie found himself entrusted to public school teacher Miss Abbott and her white-bearded, king of clubs, American sympathizing anthropomorphic God. Miss Abbott passed along God’s pronouncements on the niggers and the Japs while the children of Yazoo spent a good portion of their morning memorizing and reciting Bible verses. The lessons, buoyed by the omnipresent threat of hell, were
not lost on the Yazoo youth. “Our fundamentalism was so much a part of us that its very sources, even its most outrageous gyrations and circumlocutions, went unquestioned.” So unchallenged was the Yazoo fundamentalism that Willie and his friends would go near the local Catholic Church only when they were taunted and dared. Knowledge of the exact nature of God’s will was rarely deemed problematic and was used to arrest the impulses of Willie and his adolescent peers.6

He describes the important struggle for the honor of being a “good old boy,” marked by self-conscious anti-intellectualism and male bonding rituals.

Nothing was more important than good old boyism. In the presence of one’s male peers, it was incumbent that the good old boy exhibit a well-cultivated cynicism about academic concerns. A boy’s real friends, those among whom he felt comfortable being himself, were to be found in the male peer group, for association with popular and attractive girls was not pursued merely for its intrinsic worth—such associations brought with them increased status in the male group.7

He writes of an elementary and high school education divorced from reality, a ritual so obsessed with form that knowledge of the outside world or knowledge of self was consciously repressed.

I read the books, Morris writes, to stay on the good side of the teachers and to get A’s, but they meant nothing to me and made no impact on the way I lived or saw experience. “I didn’t understand my own intelligence…I was extraordinarily dependent on the judgment of my elders…All the things I wrote and read in high school I relegated to the farther crevices of my mind.” High school was a preparation for entry into educated land gentry of Mississippi; it was designed to conform sensibilities to the needs of such a life not to understand its origins and contradictions. The Yazoo schools had left Morris ignorant of himself and the “world of moving objects” he was about to enter. Had he understood that great books “were for one’s own private soul rather than mere instrumentalities for achieving those useless trinkets on which all American high schools…base their existence” maybe he would have better understood the delta ghosts:

…perhaps I would have found in Faulkner some dark chord, some suggestion of how this land had shaped me, how its isolation and its guilt-ridden past had already settled so deeply into my bones.8

He reconstructs a southern middle-class enculturation, a process that explicitly delineated what exactly constituted the dominant cultural capital and the specific ways it was to be acquired.

All the middle-class kids in Yazoo tacitly understood that they would make it through school all right, someday becoming the leaders of the community—the planters, store owners, druggists, and lawyers. We were the ones, Morris writes, who “read faster and better than the slower children of the families from ‘out in the country’…we knew we were the teachers’ favorites; we knew that the stirring challenges they laid down were secretly meant only for us” (Morris, pp. 20–21). Morris’ first months as a student at the University of Texas were merely an extension of the quest for cultural capital. Surrounded by fraternity men in search
of fun and status, Morris received sartorial advice and harsh criticism about his table manners (Morris, p. 151). Joining a number of organizations, Morris was comforted by the assurance of his social success.

Versatility, gregariousness, the social graces, these were the important things, just as they had been in Yazoo; these were what the University of Texas could provide only bigger and better.9

He reflects on his familiarity with an intense sense of belonging to Yazoo, a comfort that was sufficiently powerful to crush the latent, shadowy desire of his friends and acquaintances to go beyond it.

It was a land that elicited love, Morris tells us (Morris, 1981). The sense of community that persists ties everything to everything else, everybody to everybody else. “Everything makes waves,” Neshoba County scholar-in-residence Seena Kohl observed (Morris, 1983b). Morris saw his place in Yazoo; he imagined marrying his majorette, buying his land, and settling into the warm southern comfort. What more could there possibly be, he only occasionally wondered. After a Saturday night of high school partying at the house of some Yazoo parents who had traveled to Oxford for the Old Miss football game, Morris was satisfied.

I was with the little plantation girl I loved, and old friends who had been friends for as long as I could remember in a town as familiar and settled to me as anything I would ever know, I would never wander very far away.10

Along with these regional ghosts exists an omnipresent sense of trauma in the southern upbringing, a blood and darkness which, on the one hand, obviously crushes the emancipatory impulse, but, on the other hand, provides a fertile ground for its cultivation. Morris refers to this thought as “the grace of character gained through suffering and loss.” Could it be the “dialectic of place?” Does liberation require trauma? The tyrannies of southern life are all too real: its shattered dreams, the failures of its history, the insights gained from living with a great human wrong, and an “un-American” poverty (Morris, 1981). Liberation, I believe, does require myth confrontation. Morris the high school senior was comfortable with the Patriarchal Myth with its notions of gentility and a superior civilization. The existence of the tyrannies of southern life simply did not fit the myth; thus, consciousness of the tyrannies was repressed and the party continued.

Such realities provide Southerners the possibility of a unique vantage point (I see it in my students) from which they may come to understand their own history, American history in general, and the irony of modern affluent America (Morris, 1967). The ghosts won’t let us forget. With its historical sense ever close to the surface, the south holds the possibility of memory with all of the subversive power memory provides. A sense of history allows us to understand the traditions that have formed our autobiographies and the textures of our intersubjective relationships (Giroux, 1981). Recognizing the sources of suffering in our past, we are empowered to initiate a discourse that refuses to assume that the present has been naturally or rationally constructed (Freire and Macedo, 1987).
The southern historical consciousness has been profoundly touched by the omnipresence of Black culture. Marked by an interesting dialectic of political, economic, and social marginality on one hand and cultural power on the other, Blacks represent the South’s blood and darkness. The Black man and woman are compelling emblems of Original Sin. In Faulkner’s *Go Down Moses*, young Roth Edmonds realizes that he can no longer sleep beside Henry Beauchamp, the Black boy who had been his closest friend. There was no specific event that motivated Roth’s decision, Faulkner writes. Just one day the old curse of his fathers came down on him; he inherited the racial prejudice and guilt of his ancestors. Hence, he re-enacts their Original Sin in his own life (Faulkner, 1960, p. 91). William Styron’s Stingo in *Sophie’s Choice* is another inheritor of southern Original Sin as he fights with the guilt derived from his awareness that he is the progeny of the slaveholders and has profited at whatever distance from the buying and selling of human flesh (Styron, 1980, p. 249).

Morris is aware of the power of this historical consciousness—an impulse that by its nature creates that sense of critical distance necessary for emancipation. There is a painful quality to the distance necessary for liberation, and Morris with his southern sense of the tragic is drawn to it. To really understand a place in one’s heart, he laments, “his heart must remain subtly apart from it.” The liberated Southerner must “always be a stranger to the place he loves, and its people.” While he may be shaped by the historical sense of the southern place and recognize the beauties within it, he knows that there are too many ghosts to embrace it completely. “He must absorb without being absorbed” (Morris, 1981). Faulkner understood this axiom on a variety of levels. Oxford, Mississippi was Faulkner’s expertise but it could not ever completely become his home. Richard Gray argues that Faulkner could only half enter it. Alternately in love with it and offended by it (again the dialectic place?), Faulkner had to pull back. His stories are authored by a double agent, “an insider and outsider” (Gray, 1986, p. 171). Standing on the football field at Philadelphia (Mississippi) High School with legendary running back Marcus Dupree, Willie Morris listened to this untraveled, Black high school football star talk about how much he wanted to stay in Mississippi. Reflecting back on the ghosts, Morris told Dupree: “Sometimes we have to leave home, Marcus, before we can really come back” (Morris, 1983b).

But what moved Willie himself to leave Mississippi is not exactly clear to him. There were fleeting awarenesses of worlds other than Yazoo. Reading Booth Tarkington’s *Seventeen* in high school study hall set the stage of an “out of mind” experience:

I gazed out the window and lazily soaked in the soft spring afternoon, and all of a sudden I felt overcome for no reason at all by the likelihood of a great other world somewhere out there—of streamlined express trains and big cities, and boats sailing to other countries; the teacher snapped, “Willie, get back to that book!”

Morris is haunted by the attempt to uncover the genesis of his desire to leave Mississippi. What constituted the abrasive grain of sand in his perception of things that scratched hidden ambitions and stirrings of independence? Though never exactly sure, Morris attributes his desire to remove himself from his deepest loyalties to
his imagination. It was his imagination that held his will hostage when he was commissioned to write the prophecy of the Class of 1952 of Yazoo High School. His presentation of an irreverent, harshly satirical projection of the fate of his classmates elicited an angry response from his previously adoring teachers. You might as well leave here, one teacher told him, “because it’s pretty clear that you don’t appreciate the people around you” (Morris, p. 144). His imagination was beginning to formulate a vision of life beyond the honor roll, popularity, and the comforts of delta life. The limitations of a life that focused on delta courtesies and delta manners were slowly becoming apparent; indeed, a deeper level of human understanding was possible. The word may have been unfamiliar to the graduating senior, but Morris was in the first stages of the search of his Lebenswelt.

Though he possessed a latent potential for liberation, Morris did little to expand the envelope of his consciousness in his first months at the University of Texas. As a fraternity boy, he endured lost night, the fatuous initiation ceremonies, and the sundry humiliations of pledging. His association with the student newspaper, The Daily Texan, opened a window of escape. His first assignment was a weekly column surveying what was being reported by college publications around the country. Here he encountered strange ideas like racial integration, academic freedom, and the possibility that Ike might be something of a bore. Such topics were the exceptions, as most student papers were more concerned with turning over a new leaf at the beginning of each semester, giving blood to the blood drive, collecting wood for the pep rally bonfire, or the virtue of using leisure time more wisely. “Something was out of order here,” Willie observed, but the exact nature of his discomfort eluded him (Morris, p. 162–63).

During the early period at Austin, Morris was invited to the apartment of a young graduate student and his wife. Morris was in awe of the books that lined their walls. Were they some special exhibit? Reflecting on the experience, Morris writes that it is disconcerting for many southern young people to see great quantities of books in a private home and to listen to ideas seriously discussed away from school. They were talking about ideas for pleasure! When the wife of the graduate student asked him what he wanted to do after graduation, Morris answered that he hoped to become a writer. Surprised by his response, Willie wondered why he had chosen that answer rather than sports announcer—his first vocational choice. That night, fascinated by the discussion and all the books, Morris went to the library determined to read every important book ever written (Morris, pp. 163–64).

Something had happened. Such exposures were beginning to provide Morris “an interest and a curiosity in something outside his own parochial ego.” He was beginning to attend not only to the power of language, but also the exotic world of experience and evocation made accessible by language. Books and literature did not exist for simple casual pleasure but were as “subversive as Socrates and expressions of man’s soul.” One “dangerous idea” led to another, as Willie’s provincial Yazoo mindset succumbed to the subversion of ideas (Morris, p. 165). Willie’s journalism began to focus on such precarious issues as the oil industry’s control of academic life of the University of Texas, the racism of the student body, and the spiritual vacuum of the university community (Morris, pp. 169–171).
Just as he was immersing himself in the controversial issues of the early 1950s, Morris traveled back to Yazoo for a few days with family and friends. The locals were buzzing with conversations about a meeting to form a local chapter of the White Citizen’s Council. The chapter was a response to an NAACP targeting of Yazoo as a location where the Supreme Court desegregation decision would be put in effect. When Morris arrived at the meeting, it was apparent that most of the White citizens of the town were in attendance. He knew them all. Amid cries of “let’s get them niggers,” the council delegated a list of steps that would be taken. Local Blacks who had signed an NAACP desegregation petition would be immediately evicted by their landlords, barred from buying supplies from White grocers, and fired from their jobs. Morris watched the proceedings with visceral revulsions (Morris, pp. 176–179). He was confronted with the realization that he was not the same person who had lived all his previous life here.

I looked back and saw my father, sitting still and gazing straight ahead; on the stage my friends’ fathers nodded their heads and talked among themselves. I felt an urge to get out of there. Who are these people? I asked myself. What was I doing there? Was this the place I had grown up in and never wanted to leave? I knew in that instant, in the middle of a mob in our school auditorium, that a mere three years in Texas had taken me irrevocably, even without me realizing it, from home.12

The existential separation of Morris and Yazoo was thus effected. Liberated from unexamined delta consciousness, Morris, like a child taking his first steps, entered gingerly the ranks of that strange group known as southern intellectuals. Southern intellectuals, Morris writes, always had the sense that they were the lucky ones, miraculously freed from all the disastrous alternatives of their isolated lower or middle class rearings. So different was the experience of the eastern Jewish intellectuals who struggled to determine which set of ideas they would accept. For southern intellectuals ideas were not a part of childhood or adolescence, and their discovery in early adulthood as entities worth living by was not taken lightly. We discovered not certain books, Morris reflects, “but the simple presence of books, not the nuances of idea and feeling, but idea and feeling on their own terms.” Because of such a late blooming, southern intellectuals are always cursed and blessed with a hungry, naïve quality that eclipses some insights but unveils others.

The southern intellectual is always a man or woman in danger. The exiled Southerner in search of liberation is ever vulnerable to the temptation to turn one’s back on his or her own past in the pursuit of some convenient or trendy sophistication. He or she must be aware of the seductions that move one to be dishonest with the most distinctive things about one’s self (Morris, pp. 381–19). The attempts of outsiders to dictate what a Southerner ought to feel about the South must be resisted. Morris was always impressed with Ellison and Murray’s refusal to view their own southern pasts as unmitigated disasters despite the prevailing consensus that they should do so (Morris, pp. 385–86). Since his awakening at the University of Texas, Morris had been ashamed of his Mississippi origins. While in New York, he came to realize that he must transcend such a sentiment, for shame was a simplistic and debilitating
emotion, “too easy and predictable—like bitterness.” The challenge was to understand the southern experience, to comprehend its distinctiveness and meaning in relation to the experiences of humans who came from other places (Morris, p. 386).

Another threat to Southerners in search of liberation (and to all Southerners for that matter) comes from the rationality of the twentieth century with its industrialization and alienation—the advent of the New South movement. The city of my birth, Jackson, Mississippi, Morris writes, has endured two distinct destructions. The first was engineered with surgeon-like precision by General Sherman in 1863; the second, by ostensibly friendlier hands, came at the urging of the New South developers and entrepreneurs of recent years. These deceivers wrapped themselves in the magical banner of progress while they laid waste the old neighborhoods and city blocks. Rising in the dust were the soulless shopping malls and suburbs—tombstones to much of that sense of continuity, that awareness of human history (Morris, 1981).

Of course, the South by any human measure had to reform, but the reform was effected via homogenization. Like in other regions of twentieth century, industrialized America, community in the South began to fade, the ties that bound us together began to disintegrate. There is a painful, twisted ambiguity to the New South of the malls and suburbs. To conquer its racism, sexism, and blood, does the South have to trade in its sense of community for the rampant commercialism that the Europeans call “Americanization?” (Morris, 1981, p. 239). The question is omnipresent as Morris stares at a picture of William Faulkner next to a portrait of Ronald McDonald in the new McDonalds near the Ole Miss campus. We cannot avoid the question when we listen to a member of the Greenwood, Mississippi Chamber of Commerce asks Willie, “What can we do to improve Mississippi’s image?” Let the people of the Bronx or Boston worry about Mississippi’s image, Morris replied, let Mississippians “concern themselves with their image among one another” (Morris, p. 243). “When the material can coerce the human spirit,” he laments, “we are doomed” (Morris, 1967).

The question inevitably arises: Has the South died and been reincarnated as the Sunbelt? Have the changes for emancipation bred in pain and suffering already been lost in a media-soaked postmodern nihilism? Walker Percy sardonically teases radical hopes with his portrayal of Blacks in his novels. Black Southerners are, as always, estranged in Percy’s South, but this time their estrangement is not the result of the traditional prejudice and oppression; it finds its genesis in alienation, the anomie of late capitalism. Like their enslavers, they are spiritually alienated, separated from the world and themselves. Thus, Black progress toward economic equality, from Percy’s perspective, is similar to the South’s quest for mobility—achieved only at a high psychic cost. The southern Blacks who “make it” economically contract through their exposure to the alienated marketplace and its accompanying values the displacement disease. What a strange form of racial equality Percy proposes—Blacks and Whites united in their disconnection from history, a postmodern racial rapprochement (Percy, 1971; Percy, 1977).

The Southerner who seeks authenticity must be aware of modern industrial alienation, the nature of its southern manifestation, and its effect on the soul of the
individual. The instrumental rationality that accompanies this alienation precipitates a dishonesty with the most distinctive things about one’s self; indeed, this destruction of self-knowledge may be its most insidious aspect. We are so physically mutilated by this alienation that we hold in disdain those who force introspection by inducing us to look beyond our prevailing common sense view of ourselves so that we might glimpse our essences. While I was in high school, Willie reflects, “I joined easily and thoughtlessly in the Mississippi middle-class consensus that Faulkner, the chronicler and moralist, was out for the Yankee dollar” (Morris, 1967, p. 142). Without an understanding of self, Morris could not possibly understand how he would hold on to and reinterpret that “Mississippi” that would be forever in his soul. Without self-understanding, however, he could not see the connections between himself and Mississippi; he had to transcend it to find it. He had to transcend it to find himself. The southern curriculum must confront the sources of the modern alienation by using its social psychoanalytical methodology. The etiology of the industrial and self-alienation of the sons and daughters of the “good ole boys” and their wives, “the little ladies” must be exposed. The literature on the subject is extensive.

THE TREASURES

The “southern treasures” that all of us native sons and daughters to some degree hold within us are powerful virtues—virtues not to be romanticized but to be interrogated in their dialectical relationship with the ghosts.

The South is a place where people maintain a closeness to the land and a feel for the rhythms of nature.

The powerful delta land, Willie writes, with all of its mysteries and strengths was always tugging at his soul. During one of his drives through the Mississippi countryside, Willie came upon a Black family in the September fields, burlap sacks of yesteryear draped over their shoulders, picking cotton. As he watched their silhouettes against a darkening sky, he was reminded in that instant of who he was, and where his people came from (Morris, 1983). We were never far away from the land, the growing plants, and nature’s wilder moods, he tells us. Like the southern past, there was nothing gentle about nature: “It came at you violently, or in a rush, by turns disordered and oppressively somnolent.” The overflowing Yazoo River and the tornadoes were especially hard on the poor Blacks, destroying their shacks on stilts built in the river bottoms (Morris, 1967). One’s closeness to the textures of the land with its sensual if not erotic rhythms staved off at least one form of alienation, as it constantly confronted one with births and deaths, the long forgotten victories and tragedies, and the sadnesses and joys of human existence in this unique place (Morris, 1981).

The South is a place where people cherish the importance of friendships that exist in reality, not in the effort—as in a Dale Carnegie “relationship”.

Morris is dismayed by the appearance of books in the 1980s on how to cultivate friendships. Such books could only appear in an alienated society where community is crumbling. Friends, in the southern sense of the term, were people one saw frequently and informally, and the word, friendship, carried with it a reverence: “I rank the
betrayal of a friend—even a friend from an earlier part of one’s life—as dastardly almost as child-abuse or manslaughter” (Morris, p. 188). In the South, you could organize a party on the spur of the moment and have trouble getting everyone to leave.

You shared certain things: a reverence for informality, an interest in what other friends were doing, an awareness of a certain set of beloved landmarks in themselves important to one’s everyday existence, a mutual but usually unexpressed sense of community (Morris, 1967, p. 408). When in New York, Morris, with his southern sensibilities was particularly attentive to the concept of friendship. One could designate a person a “friend,” he observed, if “you saw him once every four or five months, talked for a while, and got along.” It was absolutely not appropriate to drop in on one’s “friends” without warning. “We lunch twice a year,” a New Yorker told Willie of a good friend of his. He reported this to me, Willie confides, “without a trace of irony” (Morris, 1967, p. 409).

The South is a place where people appreciate the aesthetic of sport while lamenting the questionable values and aggrandizements that threaten its integrity in modern America.

Only with the knowledge that sports was a nexus for what was meaningful to Southerners (Morris, 1983a), can we possibly understand that when Willie last spoke with his father as he lay dying of cancer, the subject was baseball. The conversation was by no means trivial; it was very loving and intensely personal (Morris, 1967). So were his late night conversations with his grandmother, as they sat together on the front porch of her home discussing the subtleties of the Jackson Senators baseball game and eating her fried chicken that had been soaked overnight in buttermilk (Morris, 1981).

The significance of the rituals of sport for Southerners never ceases to impress Willie, who has devoted two of his books about the southern experience to sport. In The Courting of Marcus Dupree, Morris uses a Black running back, his high school football career, and the drama of his recruitment to the college ranks as the setting for the story of desegregation in Mississippi. Football illustrates to the Southerner the spectacle of the human adventure and as an observer of the South, Morris contends, he is obliged to watch football not only for its intrinsic aesthetic but also “for the ironic and picturesque detail and for the shadow behind the act” (Morris, 1983b). Nothing that mattered so much could fail to reveal something about who we really are. There is a magic to baseball, he writes, a quality that moves the children of the South to a new level of reality (“a dreamy and suspended state”) where nothing can penetrate their consciousness while they chase outfield flies (Morris, p. 103). Sport in the rural South shapes us. Willie recollects the coach of American legion baseball team, a poor farmer known as Gentleman Joe. Before Yazoo’s championship game with Greenwood, Gentleman Joe delivered his inspirational sermon to the team.

Gentlemen, he said, using that staple designation which earned him his nickname, “I’m just a simple farmer. Fifteen acres is all I got, and two mules, a cow, and a lot of mouths to feed.” He paused between his words and his
eyes watered over. “I’ve neglected my little crop because of this team, and
the weevils gave me trouble last year, and they’re doing it again now. I ain’t
had enough rain, and I don’t plan to get much more. The corn looks so
brown, if it got another shade browner it’d flake right off. But almost every
afternoon you’d find me in my pickup on the way to town to teach you
gentlemen the game of baseball…” Then with his pale blue eyes flashing fire,
half whispering and half shouting, he said: “Gentlemen, I want us to pray,
and then...I want you to go out there on that field and win this Miss’ippi
championship. You’ll be proud of it for the rest of your lives... You’ll think
about it when you’re dyin’ and your teeth are all gone.”13

_The South is a place where people gain a special sensitivity to the struggle of our
national experience through the medium of strained racial relations._

In the South, Black and White people actually know each other, and in that
knowledge and the knowledge of how they “knew one another” in the past they
gain insight into the truth and struggle of America’s national experience. A young
Midwestern journalism professor told Willie that Black people in Chicago are often
strangers to one another, not to mention to White people (Morris, 1983b). In the
South, there is a shared community between White and Black that hopefully will
be strengthened by remembering the past and by confronting its scars. “I like the
way White and Black people banter with each other,” Willie writes, referring to the
racially-conscious kidding that is becoming more and more common in the South
as the wounds start to heal (Morris, 1981). Only those who genuinely understand
the backgrounds of one another can turn the word, “nigger” inside out in order
to parody its traditional red-neck usage. Thus, the word is demystified and the
tension engendered by it diffused. Such a taboo-smashing demystification promotes
interracial understanding and unity, not hatred and divisiveness. During his years in
Texas, Willie often debated where the South ends. At first he thought the boundary
was somewhere a little west of Shreveport but later he came to realize that it ended
where this ambiguous but evolving relationship between Black and White died and
one’s feel for the guilt of the land faded away (Morris, p. 77).

_The South is a place where people hold the belief that time is a precious entity that
an individual controls by not letting it be filled with other-directed and organized
activity._

Though the instrumental ethos of the industrialized New South is subverting the
effort, Southerners control time better than many. Those long and heavy southern
afternoons with nothing doing (Morris, 1967), the mystical twilights when one is
comforted by the appearance of old friend Venus in the western sky as it oversees
the fading of the oranges, violets, mauves, roses, and lavenders below it, the humid
evening when the crickets and frogs provide a musical concert for the patient porch
sitter all contribute to an appreciation of the preciousness of time. These are times
when one feels best equipped to resist the time thieves with their insidious ability to
engender anxiety about the demands of the marketplace. We must never abandon
the southern fight to make time stand still without concurrently developing our
ability to transcend the blinders of the temporal.
The South is a place where people love storytelling and believe that this tradition builds community by linking us to our past.

In the South, Willie writes, a story worth telling is worth telling again. The storyteller assigns his or her listeners the responsibility to pass the tale along to a different audience, hopefully in a distant future. In this way family and cultural continuity is assured. The stories are the proper province of one’s oldest living relative. They are most effective, Morris maintains, when they are told:

in the dark of a summer evening, the whole family gathered on a screened porch, quiet in their listening so that the thumping of the night-flying beetles against the screens and the whine of locusts and cicadas merge with the storyteller’s voice to become part of the tale. Such a setting, reaching past into the fiber of childhood, endures as vividly in the memory as the tale itself.14

The stories, Willie recalls, detailed the eccentric lives of old ladies of previous generations, recalled the impact of funerals of war heroes and other townspeople, traced tragic love affairs that were never consummated, and painted verbal portraits of old gentlemen with “tobacco stains on their whiskers” (Morris, pp. 239–40). My own southern heritage is exposed by the importance of storytelling in my childhood. The realization that the subjects of my father and mother’s stories—their cousins, uncles and aunts (most of whom I never knew)—are more familiar to me in my mind’s eye than some of the people I have called close friends in my life in the America of the late twentieth century is disconcerting. Eudora Welty extends Morris’s reverence for southern storytelling. In the South, status is gained via one’s proficiency as a raconteur. One of her characters expresses her desire to marry a particular man for his storytelling ability. Each tale belongs to a larger oral tradition—as Richard Gray puts it:

a continuum of storytelling: stories knit into one another, one anecdote recalls another in the series, and tales which we learn have been told many times before...15

Indeed, the stories help create place and, for that matter, the past.

The South is a place where people revere the impulses of the imagination that shape our speech, our music, our literature, our love of place, and our potential.

The atmosphere of small southern towns, Willie argues, did amazing things to the imagination of its children. When clocks moved slowly the southern sense of fancy had time to develop: “One had to work his imagination out on something” (Morris, 1967). Our imagination is our greatest asset; it saved Willie from the philistine concerns of the small town bourgeoisie of Yazoo and it can save the South from the ravages of modern alienation. A student asked Morris if in the face of all the “progress” and “development” Mississippi can retain its spirit:

I told him I did not know. I went on to suggest to the young student, however, that the preservation of those qualities must derive, in the future of Mississippi, from those old impulses of the imagination which have made the literature of Mississippi so impressive. It is no accident, I said, that Mississippi produced
WILLIE MORRIS AND THE SOUTHERN CURRICULUM

The southern treasures are real and they still breathe despite the standardization of the region. They are found in unlikely places among Black and White, rich and poor, male and female. The obvious caution that must be taken when a writer celebrates such treasures involves the tendency toward romanticization. The innocent country boy (who lives inside me) who played happily and carelessly in the mountains of East Tennessee must not impose his happy images of his South upon my present attempt to garner a mature understanding of the region. The treasures may exist, but they live within a complex dialectic of pain and malformations. Without a critical grounding, the treasures lapse into an apologia for the status quo and the myths that sustain it. Without the treasures, the critical analysis of the South lacks fullness and possibility.

THE POSSIBILITY OF PLACE

The genre of southern apologia has a long history. At the same time that Willie Morris published *North Toward Home*, Richard Weaver’s posthumous defense of the “southern tradition” found its way into print as *The Southern Tradition at Bay*. Weaver’s exemplar of the apologia genre highlights the difference between the southern curriculum’s guarded celebration of the treasures and a right-wing defense of *Tradition*. To Weaver and his followers the Patriarchal Myth represented the foundation of a southern greatness marked by Christian values, chivalry, men who lived by a gentlemanly code, and the last bastion of honor in the world. There was little room for gender or racial equality, the deconstruction of social role, socioeconomic mobility, the values of peace, or social evolution in Weaver’s *Tradition*. Weaver is a self-proclaimed member of the Old Order who understands that the intrusions of the twentieth century are destroying the place he loves. It is his identification with the myths, which grants him the insight needed to understand the changes: “It is not the …progressives…who discern what is at issue…. It is the men of the old order who see…the implications of the new” (Weaver, 1968, pp. 43–44). The South can continue on its present course to an amorphous standardized culture, Weaver concludes, or it can embrace the “fulfillment represented by the Old South” (Weaver, p. 391). This is not the message conveyed by our exploration of the southern treasures.

Willie Morris senses that buried in the experience of the South there exists something of great value for America. The project of the critical analyst of the southern curriculum is to unearth the buried treasures, to chip away the sediments of racism, sexism, and poverty, and to pursue a new level of consciousness. The South of the late twentieth century is a story of people trying—trying to forge a new life amid the impediments. As usual as the words may sound in a southern context, I feel that embedded in the southern treasures is a piece of the utopian vision of community—a vision that may serve as an antidote to the alienation of modern America. The southern treasures may give us direction in America’s coming fight to gain a sense of community and to repair the ravages of the twentieth century.
What happens in small town Mississippi, Morris contends, will be of enduring importance to America’s quest for its soul (Morris, p. 123).

Intelligence alone is not enough to fight this twentieth century alienation. Many of the intellectuals Morris encountered in the Northeast had an empty space where human understanding and toleration should have been. The partisans of intellectual thrills, Morris observes, seem “to desperately lack in experiences… They seemed devoid of any serious concern with real human beings in real human situations” (Morris, 1967). Thus, the southern curriculum based on social psychoanalysis seeks to explore the experiential in relationship to larger social forces. Cora Kaplan writing of the subordination of women captures the idea when she calls for an analysis of structures of feelings. Where Kaplan asks what feelings induce particular women to rebel or submit, the southern curriculum asks what feelings move a southern woman to reject the myth of Southern Womanhood (Kaplan, 1986). When confronted with modern southern alienation such analysis of feeling asks what allows some individuals to sense, expose, and overcome the deleterious effects of alienation in their lives and what blinds others to its existence.

Henry Giroux writes that one way technical/instrumental rationality contributes to the alienation of twentieth century life involves the fact that scholarship, theory, and intellectual pursuit are seen to possess no ethical dimension (Giroux, 1988). Scholarship serves the end of collecting “objective facts” that can be empirically verified. Thus, modern scholarship of this like has turned its back on the classical Greek notion that academic activity was designed as a method to free humans from dogma so that they could pursue ethical action (Giroux, 1981). Reflecting on his teacher, Texas newspaper editor Ronnie Dugger, Morris tells us that Dugger didn’t simply teach him the techniques of reporting and writing, but how to view public life as an ethical process (Morris, 1967).

I revere the southern treasures; their humanity, authenticity, and ethical orientation make me confront who I really am and the relationship between that person and who I would really like to be. The southern personality treasures offer a stark contrast to the so-called objective view of the world often taught in our elementary schools, high schools, and colleges, promoted in our businesses, and ground into our consciousness by television. The southern sense of history, its collective memory, may yield an American sense of possibility. Joan Didion writes that a “place belongs forever to whoever remembers it most obsessively, wrenches it from itself, shapes it, renders it, loves it so radically that he remakes it in his image” (Morris, 1981). Our memory, our understanding of the historical forces that pull our puppet strings, can liberate us, and hopefully save us. It is this vision that inspires the southern curriculum.

*To “Manny” Pridgen, a southern scholar, who first introduced me to the South as “place.”

NOTES

WILLIE MORRIS AND THE SOUTHERN CURRICULUM

5 Ibid., pp. 77–78.
6 Ibid., pp. 40–43, 52–54.
7 Ibid., pp. 135, 140–41.
8 Ibid., pp. 141–42.
9 Ibid., p. 153.
10 Ibid., pp. 139–140.
11 Ibid., p. 123.
13 Ibid., p. 121.

GOIN’ SOUTH

Shirley: October 19, 1989, Dayton Ohio…The Bergamo Conference Center

A long-haired dirty-blonde man interrupted me during a conversation with someone at the reception. After we exchanged information and flirtations, I asked him: “Where’s your accent from?” Not one for short explanations, Joe launched into an elongated description of being from the mountains of East Tennessee. He painted a landscape of his Appalachians and punctuated it by inviting me to see the “10,000 shades of green.” Five weeks later, he met me at the Atlanta airport, handed me strawberry incense, a bottle of beer, kissed me and said: “Welcome to the South.”

If you haven’t been there, you won’t understand that the South is a distinct geographic, metaphysical, cosmic place…that there may be a North, a West, or an East, but the South embodies so much more than the directional title it implies. This is what I learned in November of 1989.

Chaim: I remember the exact date I left Canada. It was July 12, 1990. My older sister and I were leaving by way of the airport in Great Falls, Montana. The trip took a little over three hours and I imagine we spent most of it in silence, our biological father driving down wide highways in an old blue and white van that had a middle row of captain’s seats. What I remember most about the trip was the left over ice cream cake that we ate out of a purple-brown Tupperware container. Compared to the small town in Southern Alberta that I had grown up in, Great Falls was a metropolis, and its airport seemed to be the greatest hub in the history of aviation.

As we stumbled wearily and warily through the Minneapolis and Atlanta airports, marked by little plastic pilot’s wings, it quickly became apparent how small our horizons had been. By the time we reached Atlanta and met Shirley and Joe, it was about 10:00 at night and the cool breezy prairie summer of western Canada had been replaced by the gloriously humid summer of the American southeast. We piled into a red Toyota van, and made the two hour trip east to Clemson, South Carolina; finally pulling into a little development of houses a little after midnight. It was my tenth birthday.

Shirley: Who would have imagined that less than 9 months later, Joe and I would be importing all four Albertan kids to live with us in South Carolina? I remember finding each day a marvel of cultural collisions. My first time at a supermarket, walking down two full aisles of pork products. Standing in line to check out, waiting for what seemed like hours while the cashier and customer exchanged lengthy “hey, howya doin’?” In fact, I waited all the time, the slow pace of the South dragged me like I was fixed in sludge. I learned quickly to take deep breaths and try to indulge in listening to the conversations and dialects, which never hurried along.
Chaim: It is not often the case that we can assign an exact date and time to life’s major changes, but for me the journey south always begins on the day I turned ten. Growing up in Canada I experienced Chinooks (warm winds off the prairies that could raise the temperature 50 degrees and melt mountains of ice), amazement at the 22 channels available on my grandmother’s cable, at least one Halloween dressed as a vampire stamping through 2–3 feet of snow, and an intensity of demographic homogeneity. But the South was entirely different. School would be cancelled for the threat of an inch or so of snow. Summers were hot, sticky, cut your way through the humid air, but at least there were fireflies.

If there were fireflies in Alberta, I don’t remember them. I do remember the idea of fireflies, popular in children’s books and TV shows, magic creatures that could be put in jars and used in place of a desk lamp or overhead light, but I can’t recall having ever seen them. A few nights after arriving in South Carolina, Joe took us for a walk around the neighbourhood introducing us to kudzu and cooling asphalt. I’m sure most of the woods that surrounded that little development have since been ploughed over and turned into student housing, but in 1990 they were full of fireflies. Luminous spots appeared by the thousands, a mini-Milky Way dumped like two scoops of raisins onto an unsuspecting landscape.

Shirley: The South has a smell, its very own scent. It is a scent of heat, of fried food, of sweat, work, poverty and privilege. It has themes: of narrative, of storytelling, of old couches on the front porch, of beer, of beat up cars, and people raising their hand slowly to greet every passing car. Becoming a Southernphile demanded work, I wanted to learn everything there was to know about the South. Why was it so different? So closed off from the other three directions of the US? Why was it so brutal? So soft? One of the first questions I asked Joe in Ohio that October day was “who was right? Neil Young or Lynyrd Skynyrd?” Without a beat, he replied: “Neil Young.” As much as he loved the South, he was painfully aware of her ghosts, and felt Neil had seen their aura. He did, however, feel Neil was uninformed as to the nuances of the South, and had Young spent time in the South, his Canadian dismissal of “Southern Man,” as simply barbaric and racist would have been more informed. That was one of the mysteries of the South: racism and hatred could be spewed by a working stiff, a redneck, yet that same man could be a daddy to his babies and twirl his own mama around a dance floor on Mother’s Day. The complexity of loving the words and music of Gregg Allman and the Brothers from Macon, Georgia, but knowing we would never cast the same votes for social change.

Chaim: While there was an undeniable magic to southern nights, the days had their own special qualities.... reruns. Not to offend the good people at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, but child cannot live by Mr. Dressup and The Raccoons alone. I’m grateful to Canada for its universal health care, its generous social net, the appreciation it has for all things frozen, but why did I grow up watching The Beachcombers, when I could have been watching reruns of MASH and Batman? There was nothing more glorious to ten year old sensibilities than Adam West and Burt Ward BAM, SPIFF, and SPLORTING their ways through the ranks of King Tut, the Joker, and Catwoman. ... Catwoman. I was not the first, nor am I the last young boy to have special place in my heart for Eartha Kitt and Julie Newmar.
Shirley: Joe introduced us to music. I mean really introduced us. I thought I was a pretty seasoned rock n’ roller, loving the blues and more savvy than most females of my generation. Joe was music. He saw music in his South, in the gentle waves of the trees, the deep draws of voices, and he was an expert at imitating every different Southern accent. When Joe would hear someone speak and note that it wasn’t the local accent, he would approach them and ask if they were from Bull’s Gap, or Greenville, or Memphis … wherever. He usually hit it within 20 miles. I fancy Joe saw himself as the Southern Henry Higgins, parsing out linguistic differences. He had the kids learning his routines, and tutored them in the fine art of Southernification. They are still able to fall into a slow drawl when prompted.

Chaim: My biggest case of culture shock centred on one particular aspect of life…. Black people…. Travelling to Alberta, one would notice, at least in the early ‘90s, that there was not a lot of ethnic diversity. I recall one Black family from my first ten years; they were so notable that I even remember where they lived: in a small house under a big tree next to the Bank of Montreal branch office. South Carolina was of a different color, many different colors. It was my first introduction to the vagaries of race and racial politics. Being so inexperienced in the issue, I had no idea it was even a big deal, one person seemed as normal as another. Gradually, I noticed that there was only one Black student in the advanced track of classes, and then I started seeing David Duke for President stickers on cars, leading up to the 1992 Presidential Primary season. A friend invited me to come along with him and his family to a Klan meeting, informing me, “we’re not racist, we just think everybody has a certain place in society.” Our house became, and continues to be, a highway of students: Black, Hispanic, White, Asian, etc… an environment grossly at odds to what existed within the halls of the local schools and university. Clemson was a university with buildings named after administrators (Tillman Hall) who had bestrode the doorway armed with a pitchfork, like a colossus of segregation, trying to keep the Black students out.

Shirley: I worked as a teacher development leader at a local pre-school. We decided to invite all the teachers to our house for a party, along with friends and students. I’ll never forget Cheryl and Bede, the infants teachers, taking me aside: “Miss Shirley, you don’t have to invite us.” I told them we wanted them to come over, and they told me they had never been invited to a white person’s house before. A few weeks later, I saw Cheryl at the store, and called out to her, she put her head down, I thought she didn’t hear me. So I went over to her, she greeted me quietly and whispered: “don’t feel like you have to speak to me in public.”

As our friendship grew, Cheryl and Bede mentored me in the curriculum of being Black in the South. Joe enhanced my education by introducing me to Pat Conroy, Bobbie Ann Mason, Willie Morris, and the Southern treasures. My romance with the South became full of love and hate. Southerness had multiple facets, and each South was filled with both love and hate, each bump was filled with contradictions. One day I went to visit Bede at her place. She gave me specific directions to get there: Go up the highway, turn at the old night club on Vista, drive about a half mile, and turn at the Black church. I drove back and forth from that night club, and I couldn’t find the black church. Finally, I went home and called Bede
and told her I couldn’t find her house. She asked where I had been, and I told her I followed her directions exactly, but when I passed the club, I only saw a red brick church, it was the only one there. Bede belted out a scream, started laughing, and told me that was the Black church…the Black church. I never ceased to be surprised at the ghosts.

Chaim: The move to Clemson was not only my first exposure to Southern life, but also to Americana. As is often the case with life’s first experiences, my sense of America is nonetheless deeply colored by the south. I hate boiled peanuts, but I appreciate their soggy place in the world. Southern baseball and college football are the important contributions to sports. You can’t live without pork and bottle rockets. Pepsi is Coke’s bastard cousin, and I may not like iced tea, but I’ll drink sweet tea any day. There was also shotgun shacks, redlining, implicit and explicit discrimination, family values for some families, but not others, and school field trips across the street so a local church could give us faux-leather bound, green copies of the New Testament without violating the establishment clause. America is a dichotomy, and nowhere is that more obvious than the American South. And to no one is that less obvious, except in hindsight, than to a ten-year-old from the western prairies of Canada.

Shirley: Joe’s article on Willie Morris helped me understand the South. It taught me that literature could speak as a multi-layered, polysemic cultural study of place. It taught me that place was more than a place…that place was integral to one’s being and one’s story. I never had a sense of place as a child. I used to blame it on my mother’s constant moves, but after internalizing place, I understand that it isn’t an it. Place defines us as we define place. From Blanche’s naïve refusal to eat an “unwashed grape,” to Willie Morris’s passion for pigskin, the South can be read in many ways, and sung to limitless riffs. And of course, for Chaim, for me, and for Ian, Meghann, and Bronwyn, Joe, with all his contradictions, was our Southern treasure.
In 1990, Joe was finishing his second book, Teachers as Researchers: Qualitative Inquiry as a Path to Empowerment. As we had just bought a new Mac, the first word processing computer with a hard drive, I offered to type the book for him. In those days, word processing was still quite cumbersome, and the nuances of cutting, pasting, and saving didn’t always work well. Long story short, after the book came out, Joe noticed that I had missed an entire chapter. I was embarrassed; he was depressed, so I said I would do anything to make it up to him. He quickly suggested that I co-author and re-work the missing chapter and create a piece for a journal, preferably, the Harvard Educational Review. We worked on the piece for a year, and it was submitted in 1992, it was during that time that my work on Piaget merged with Joe’s reconceptualization of cognition, and we developed Post Formalism. Joe mentored me with patience (and impatience) in the specific way to produce for an academic journal...he also allowed me the privilege of dealing the editors of the HER, a decidedly anal and serious group. I learned the primary lesson of higher education: that sometimes, writing for a “top tiered” journal was a pain in the ass.

JOE L. KINCHELOE AND SHIRLEY R. STEINBERG

3. A TENTATIVE DESCRIPTION OF
POST-FORMAL THINKING

The Critical Confrontation with Cognitive Thinking

In this article, Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg critique and challenge the reductionist conceptions of intelligence that underlie cognitive developmental theory. The authors formulate a post-Piagetian cognitive theory that is informed by and extends critical, feminist, and postmodern thought. By delineating the features of what they refer to as a “post-formal” way of thinking, the authors provide practitioners with a framework for reconsidering both curricular and pedagogical practices.

Postmodern analysis, though diverse in the ways it is conceptualized, has consistently laid bare the assumptions of Cartesian logic by exposing the ways that the structure of traditional science constructs imaginary worlds. Science, like a novel, is “written”; both the novel and science operate according to the arbitrary rules of a language game. Such postmodern understandings confront us with a dramatic socio-educational dilemma: how do we function in the midst of such uncertainty?

The contemporary debate over postmodernism is often framed in all-or-nothing terms—we can either completely accept or completely reject Western modernism. In our work, we have sought a middle ground that attempts to hold onto the