Educational Psychology

An Application of Critical Constructivism (2008).

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Introduction

The essential question for all preservice teachers and educators is "How do children learn?" This question is so simple, yet the implications for the children, their teachers, and ultimately, the community these new and future citizens will inhabit are profound. Our work to prepare children for a world of dynamic change, characterized by unknown opportunities and obstacles, is inextricably linked to this question: How do children learn? Although many receive the call to come to the classroom to teach, the process of comprehending the meaning of the question of how children learn is complex, and your learning the answer to this question begins as you encounter the writing of the authors of this book and will continue throughout your career.

Your responsibility as a preservice teacher or educator is to develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary for all children to be able to

learn and to develop themselves to their full potential. As you strive to live up to your own expectations of what it means to be a teacher, you will progress through a series of stages in your own development of becoming an accomplished and successful professional. What you will discover as you work to fully comprehend how children learn is that you will be the leader in the community of learners known as your classroom. Teaching is a mutually rewarding endeavor.

When I graduated from the University of New Hampshire and began working in the public schools, I remember confronting obstacles for which I felt completely unprepared. Angry and demanding parents, frustrated and disaffected students, disgruntled and burned-out colleagues all made me question my decision to become an educator. I was seeking excitement and stimulation, and I was meeting resistance and refusal to change. Immediately, I felt that my college professors failed to prepare me for the reality of the public school. I needed to blame someone for the collision between my expectations and the reality I discovered.

Forty years later, as I reflect on my experience, I understand that the process of becoming a successful educator is more like becoming a Jedi knight, a 5th degree black-belt, or any other highly accomplished professional. This esteemed position is not given. It is attained through many years of hard work, motivation, reflection, and the strength of purpose within one's self. As I learned at Outward Bound: To serve to strive and not to yield. The answer to that simple question: How do children learn? is continually evolving in my brain and being fostered by my soul.

As you begin your career, remember to always consider this question: how do children learn? This book can guide your inquiry into many of the techniques and theories of learning, but more importantly these authors call to you to consider why it is so important to teach, to lead, and to care for our children. Simply, our future depends upon these

young people. How we treat and teach them and how and what they learn are critical for our survival as a world community and as an ecosystem. As the planet flies through space, slowing one's personal pace to reflect and consider the importance of teaching and learning can create a reinforcing loop to maintain our motivation to continue to strive for the success of all of our students.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Challenging the Dominant Discourse

Suzanne Gallagher

Introduction

Teaching can be both an exciting experience and a daunting enterprise. Some teachers appear to meet the challenges of the classroom with courage and hope. Others seem to be ruled by the fear that they will lose control, and the students will steal the show, creating chaos and confusion. In fear-based classrooms, challenging the teacher or the curriculum is not allowed. We all have experienced the teachers who appeared to feel annoyed, angry, or threatened when either they or the content of their course was challenged. Some teachers try to dispel any questioning in their class, as if query were a deterrent to the completion of the delivery of more important information. In effect, these teachers are saying: "Stop the stupid questions and let me just teach!," when, in fact, they are acting out of the fear of losing control!

Critical Educators
dividuals who teach for social justice.

Conversely, emotionally objective and psychologically secure educators believe that questioning and challenging are necessary activities because both add a zestful, enlivened quality to the learning process. These are the courageous and **critical educators** who believe that we all need to query the world around us; we need to ask more and better questions to discover the truth and meaning of what we are learning. To me, this is not just a value added dimension of learning and teaching; it is an imperative to learning. I think the following story, which I have told elsewhere (Gallagher, 2003), can illustrate how a student's challenging and questioning of my work led to improving professional development as a teacher.

The story takes place as I was beginning to teach my first course of educational psychology. I was a doctorial student, and I had been studying the field for several years. I was inexperienced in the classroom, but I was eager to share what I had learned with my students. I was especially excited to try out all of the things I had learned about educational psychology on these very first students of mine. Among the techniques I chose to apply to check on their learning of the material was the pop quiz. Pop quizzes are an excellent example of variable-interval schedule of *reinforcement* that follows from a behavioral theory of learning; you'll find schedules of reinforcement covered in almost every educational psychology book. I felt that these surprise quizzes would keep my students studying the materials as we moved along the course, and of course it would keep students coming to class. I further assumed that since students wanted a good grade, they would see the need to study and attend class every day because they never knew when I would pop quiz on them. I also had learned that a more consistent study of material helped students store the information in long-term memory; in other words, spaced study was more effective than "massed" study, e.g., cramming for a test. This all made perfect sense to the educational psychologist within me.

Contrary to my belief, not all of my students shared my enthusiasm for this process. When one of my students asked me why I was giving pop quizzes, I explained my reasoning using bona fide concepts I had learned from graduate-level educational psychology courses. I gave the student perfectly valid reasons why I chose this mode for one of my marking methods. But no matter how I tried, the student was not satisfied. My student felt as though I was trying to control her if she wanted a good mark. I was looking at it from my professor's perspective, but she was letting me know that she had a very different response to what I considered my benign methods. Was I wrong or was I correct? Could my methods assist students in learning the material? Maybe. But they were also over-controlling students and evoking a negative emotion. The student wasn't feeling free to learn, and I began to question the practice.

As a response to this scene with my student, I began to get a sinking feeling that educational psychology had an underside. There was a lot more going on in this discipline than simply advancing the learning and teaching process. The amount of time and energy that teachers spend trying to make students learn educational psychology, for example, and trying to control the environment so that students will learn, needed to be more deeply examined. Rather then using the techniques of educational psychology in a clinical fashion, teachers need to spend the time and energy engaging students in meaningful and interesting aspects of the content and process of our subjects and courses. The teacher's control of the classroom needs to be balanced with cooperation in an atmosphere of mutual enhancement (Miller, 2003). The feminist in me was feeling the need to liberate both myself and my students from the traditional tools of control and domination.

In overt forms among the brave and in covert fashion from the meek, students do challenge teachers and course materials in many ways. Most often this is done in informal places and ways, far away from the ears of the teachers, outside the course spaces: in the dorms, in the hallways, or in the café over coffee. Sometimes the challenge is never even spoken. It's that internalized question that arises in students as they listen or read. There is something that seems not quite right, yet the learner senses that their position or point of view is not worthy of being voiced in class. To combat this disabling of student voices, teachers need to open spaces where challenge is a welcomed dialogue (Freire, 1992). Freire, mentor to many critical educators, supported the notion that good conversation is a key component of any learning process. At its best school is a place where students can ask their questions and mount their arguments in such a way that learning is advanced and understanding of content is deepened.

I like to believe that I would have eventually been drawn to examine this underside of educational psychology at some point along in my study, but I will always be grateful to that student who challenged my conception of the discipline and my authority. As I have grown in my professional career as an educational psychology professor, I have come to realize that there were more questionable practices within the discipline, and I have considered them as both a feminist and as a critical thinker. In this chapter, I will share my challenge to some of educational psychology's tenets, and I will point out some of the undersides of the discipline of educational psychology. I want to expose how the discipline has the power to mark students in such a way that their educational experience can be liberating and, conversely, in ways that could make educational experiences oppressive. Educational psychology is a powerful **discourse**, and those who espouse education as their profession need to be willing to examine it critically.

Discourse
Conversation.

Dominant Discourse

As a beginning student of this aspect of psychology, you may well ask: what is the dominant discourse of educational psychology, and why does it need to be challenged? Educational psychology has long been considered the branch of psychology that deals with issues related to the learning and teaching process. Most generally, the content of educational psychology is presented in exhaustive texts covering the content of the discipline in hundreds of pages of tedious reading. The major goal of such textbooks, or of a class related to educational psychology, is to assist pre-service teachers to teach well. Many people think that good teaching entails learning a variety of scientific discoveries about how learning happens. Students then learn how to apply these scientific discoveries to the practice of teaching. There is a promise implied that if a pre-service teacher learns the stuff of educational psychology, they will become a good teacher. An example found in a textbook says: "Effective teachers know that the principles of educational psychology and educational research will help them guide students' learning" (Santrock, 2008, p. 2). In an online review for another text, students are told that educational psychology "arms students with the current, practical knowledge they need to become effective teachers" (http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/education/edpsych/).

As serious students, we want to learn whatever we can in order to become better teachers and to assist our future students in their learning. We want to be knowledgeable regarding these important facts and concepts, and to prepare ourselves, we want to do well in educational psychology classes. And, of course, we want to pass the test. These are worthy goals, and if we approach the material of the textbook or course uncritically, we may attain our goals; yet, as teachers we may miss the mark. We miss the mark if in our application of this knowledge we are not required to ask questions, and we don't allow for the development of critical thinkers.

The Role of Discourse

When we talk about discourse we mean what is said in written or verbal form and also what is discussed in the name of the discipline. Formal or critical discussion is the discourse of a particular subject. According to feminists Karen Watson-Gegeo & David Gegeo (2004), "Discourse is action with social consequences" (p. 244). Discourse can help to give us a structure for thinking about the subject, and the outcomes could be liberating or debilitating (as in maintaining a dominant culture). The dominant discourse is the material that fills traditional educational psychology textbooks. For example, when we consider physics or biology, we will encounter a particular language, a specialized set of concepts, particular research methods, etc., that are used for study or discussion. Educational psychology also has a discourse comprised of a particular academic language, a specialized set of concepts, research methods, etc. This discourse builds a structure which facilitates the way teachers have come to view the field of educational psychology: the study of learners and learning.

Teachers frequently rely on textbooks as compendiums of knowledge for the discourse of educational psychology. Because these books are often written by scholars of the discipline, the students studying educational psychology consider that these textbooks contain the sole truth of the subject. On one level, students are correct because textbooks do contain the "truth" of a subject, or at least what is taken as true. Take a look at a typical educational psychology textbook and you'll see many are over 600 pages. It would seem that these exhaustive textbooks could not possibly leave anything out of the discussion. However, this is not true. The discourse we find in textbooks is usually the dominant discourse of the discipline. It is what many educational psychologists think pre-service teachers should learn. It is often written by well-known names in education; it appears neutral, and such texts have been used for decades as a way to

introduce newcomers into the profession. As such it is powerful. However, these encyclopedias of the discipline, massive as they are, do not contain the whole truth of how learning and effective teaching happens. Wrapped in the guise of current information within glossy, recent editions, much of what is represented as the most current information is no longer seen as appropriate information in a diverse and multicultural world. For example, "research has seriously challenged the notion that the 'stages' of human development are universal in the Piagetian sense" (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 2004, p. 244), yet the theory of Piaget is still considered an essential educational psychology topic. And it is often included in the Praxis exams.

Since the development of the foundational aspects of the discipline of educational psychology, there have been many new perspectives and ways of thinking about learners and learning. My perspective is that important new material has been left out completely or covered incompletely, and emphasis has been give to materials that are passé or material that does not serve all students' educational experience. Therefore, I think an important question is: Why we would still use materials that don't serve to enhance the educational experience of today's students? How can this field disregard the contributions of critical constructivism and feminist theory?

The discourse of the discipline of educational psychology has been in the process of being gathered formally for just about a century, and it has been collected by members of a particular community. These folks speak a language through which they communicate with each other and with those who will apply the tenants of the discipline. Members of the educational psychology community are led by well-known names in the discipline, and they tend to agree with the major concepts of the discipline. When I say "agree," I recognize that there are often disagreements and debates among members of this discursive community. Consequently, much

of what this scholarly community says is the truth, or at least worthwhile, gets put into textbooks, pronounced at conferences, and is rewarded by professional organizations. Throughout the history of the discipline of educational psychology, there have been many controversies, disagreements, and arguments regarding what is said regarding the scientifically proven facts and how these scientific theories should be applied to teaching (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 2004). This dimension of history of educational psychology is important, yet it is rarely mentioned to students aside from mentioning a few dissenting voices.

Modernist project

Much of what the educational psychology community agrees is the appropriate discourse of the field has evolved from a modernist worldview. Modernism is the term used to describe the period beginning with the Copernican revolution and extending until the end of World War II. The main theme of modernists is that the world can be described logically and through application of scientific thinking. The philosopher Rene Descartes (1596–1650) contributed, "I think; therefore, I am": the cornerstone value of modernist thinking. Members of the modernist community want to discover the scientific truth about students and teaching; they want to discover what makes students do what is desired so that our students can learn more effectively. Science, especially much of educational psychology's research efforts, is viewed as the gateway to this truth. It is viewed as being part of progress. Science holds the promise of progress as it is purported to give teachers control of the classroom and, thereby, make students' behavior predictable. Perhaps to understand the modern worldview it is helpful to consider a pre-modern worldview.

For a pre-modern worldview we can look at earlier times, before scientific technologies were developed and humans turned to their own reasoning for answers. In these times people came

to know the truth from folk stories, from God, or from the king; what was believable was mediated by their representatives. Very simply put, the truth was transmitted to the common folks through those in power, or those given the authority to speak. The discourse of those speaking with power at the time was rife with superstition, magic, and fantasy. Common folks were told about the world, how the world worked, and who they were through these representatives. In this world, the earth was the center of the universe.

In *Precious Bane,* Mary Webb tells the complex story of Prudence Sarn, who was born with a clef palate, sometimes referred to as a harelip. The story is set in the countryside of England early in nineteenth century, a time when multiple influences like folklore and superstition helped to shape life in the society in which Pru lived. Rather than the congenital influences that we understand today, folklore held that a harelip was the result of a curse resulting from a hare, or rabbit, running across the path of an expectant mother at a particular time in her baby's gestation. The result was the child's being born with a lip resembling that of a hare. This characteristic was thought to be the "mark of the devil," and often people, even children, born with the characteristic were feared and scorned. Pru's life was influenced by this mark of distinction as she responded to what others thought about her and how they treated her.

Today, this thinking seems ridiculous because it is based on superstition. In pre-modern times though, this was a powerful perspective. People's lives were certainly marked by such conditions. The work of modernity was to undo superstitions such as this. The power of "man's" rationality, through use of the scientific method, was thought to "replace pre-modern fantasy, faith, and superstition with scientific knowledge" (Gallagher, 2003, p. 39). As Usher and Edwards (1994) tell us, science now becomes the guarantor and route to truth, and when we have found the truth, we are free.

They write: "The emancipation of humanity thus requires that people are given access to scientific knowledge, since the condition of their emancipation is that they live subject to the 'laws' uncovered by science" (p. 172).

The research of education psychology is set firmly in the modern era's desire for truth, freedom, control, and progress. Pre-modern ways of thinking have been replaced by science. Now, science tells us about the world, how it works, and our place in the world. However, the discipline did not just appear, whole and complete, with smooth unfolding. As a discipline educational psychology developed over time as the number of children attending formal schools grew and teachers needed ways of organizing them for education.

As a discipline, educational psychology is just a bit younger than psychology. Although issues that we consider the concepts of educational psychology, e.g., learning and testing, can claim a long history dating back to the ancient philosophers, I would like to recognize the "father" of educational psychology, Edward L. Thorndike (1874–1949). The first formal attempt to gather the discourse was in 1910 with the first publication of the American Psychology Association journal *The Educational Psychologist* with Thorndike as the editor. Some, Levine (2004) for example, have paid him homage because of "Professor Thorndike's enormous contributions to the field of educational psychology" (p. 173). Educational psychology texts generally name him as a founding person of the field as well. It matters that Thorndike is regarded as the father of this discipline.

Thorndike matters because he set in motion a particular research agenda based on the question of how learning happens and how teachers can control and increase learning in their students. It's important that we understand Thorndike's perspective. His work was influential in making the field more scientific, which was very important to scholars at the beginning of the twentieth century. The more a discipline looked scientific, the more it could be considered legitimate. To reinforce a more scientific authority, Thorndike retreated to a laboratory and chose cats as his favorite subjects. For example one of his questions was how a cat learns to escape from a box. From this experimentation grew laws of learning that directed teachers in exactly what they needed to do in order to get students to do what they wanted them to do. Direct instruction is the progeny of teaching and learning from this perspective.

Thorndike wasn't the only one interested in how learning happened. Thorndike's contemporaries William James (1842–1910) and John Dewey (1859–1952) were also interested in the phenomenon of learning. However, while Thorndike was more scientific in his approach, both James and Dewey expressed a fundamentally philosophical understanding of the teaching and learning process. I think it's important to mention that James was troubled by his former student Thorndike's approach. He feared that the discoveries that emanated from the lab were but small peppercorns of truth that in the end would result in a mountain of misrepresentation of the truth, not the certain formula acclaimed by Thorndike. In his famous text *Talks to Teachers,* William James counsels teachers:

> I say moreover that you make a great, a very great mistake, if you think that psychology, being the science of the mind's laws, is something from which you can deduce definite programmes (sic) and schemes and methods of instruction for immediate schoolroom use. Psychology is a science, and teaching is an art; and sciences never generate arts directly out of themselves. An intermediary inventive mind must make the application, by using its originality. (http://www.des.emory.edu/mfp/tt1.html)

Despite the tensions raised by these two very different perspectives, the scientific approach to learning grew and was further developed by B. F. Skinner. In Skinner's perspective, **behavioral psychology**, all learners, e.g., pigeons, dog, cats, or chil-

Behavioral psychology
A scientific paradigm that proves that behavior is controlled.

dren are responding organisms subjected to the same laws and able to be trained and/or controlled by the same set of conditions established by teachers in the educational environment. Learning could be mapped on grids and measured, with speed as a decisive factor. The technological culture of the 20th century found this perspective very appealing. This was a perfect example of applying modernist thinking to educating children: pure science.

This modernist perspective was also fueled by developments in Europe. For example, in 1904 in France Alfred Binet (1857–1911) had been asked by the ministry of education to devise a method whereby children could be sorted according to their ability to access education. France had mandated universal education so children formerly excluded from schools because of learning difficulties would now attend school. These children would be placed in separate classes according to their ability to learn. Binet, along with a colleague, Theodore Simon, devised a test for measuring **intelligence**, which they termed the intelligence quotient or IQ. Now, educators had the methods to improve learning as well as a way to measure it.

Intelligence
A construct that includes logical thinking, linguistic ability, etc.

The term *intelligence* is a good example of the project of modernity. We educators use it so frequently; yet, we may be thinking of very different aspects of a person's mind. Further confusing this notion of intelligence, the term *cognitive ability* is often substituted for intelligence. Textbooks often report research educational psychologists have done related to these concepts: intelligence and cognition. For example, Howard Gardner's work on multiple intelligences is usually mentioned. Robert Sternberg's triartic theory of intelligence and Vygotsky's socio-historical perspective, among others, are also commonly discussed. However, the traditional educational psychology text's discourse turns quickly to ways of measuring intelligence and intelligence tests, and the thorny issues of what these mental processes have to do with emotion or other less rational mental dynamics (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 2004). Defining intelligence is the controversial piece of the discussion.

Santrock (2008) has said that intelligence is an "abstract, broad concept, that it is not surprising that there are so many different ways to define it" (p. 115). This well-known author explains that, "unlike height, weight, and age, intelligence cannot be directly measured. You can't peer into a student's head and observe the intelligence going on inside" (p. 115). However, in the typical educational psychology text, the conversation always gets around to a discussion of IQ tests. The assumption is clear that intelligence is a solid construct; yet the scientific community has always been conflicted about just what intelligence is: fluid, crystallized, or multifarious. It strikes me as strange that intelligence, a concept that is difficult to define, has so many sure ways to be measured.

Measuring this elusive thing called intelligence is problematic. What is rarely mentioned in traditional texts is that these IQ tests aren't measuring intelligence in the same way metric scales measure height and weight. They are measuring in an ordinal way. Ordinal numbers put things in order or rank from first to last. Those who respond to the most number of tasks or questions correctly get the highest ranking; their scores are placed in order, just ahead of those who respond to fewer test items correctly, on the so-called normal curve. We've all seen this pictorial description of a general population. It is often referred to as a bell curve because of its resemblance to the shape of a bell with most scores congregating around the middle.

Unfortunately, what results from these tests is an image that more closely represents the socioeconomic background of the students more than any so-called intelligence. In other words, what these tests tell us is something most educators (and the public) already know, i.e., those with the most resources, who are able to access schools with up-to-date textbooks and technological materials, where teachers enjoy high status, generally do very well

on intelligence tests. Yet, despite this obvious bias toward white, middle-class students, schools in the U.S. continue to grow the testing business, although the rate of return regarding information reaped from tests is so low. Ironically, the only valid reason to administer tests is to use the results to improve the educational experience for students, yet this rarely happens.

An often unexamined result of test scores is the marks students receive, literally and figuratively. This is a kind of "marking" that can give teachers, and sometimes the students themselves, a very limited understanding of students and who they are as learners. This marking becomes significant if students receive a limited form of educational experience because of this mark. These are referred to as high stakes tests. We find this ridiculous in *Precious Bane,* yet the main consumers of these tests, our students and their parents, hardly notice or discuss the negative, unintended consequences of these tests in our current educational situation.

For example, schools often use scores from tests to track students, the result of which can cause different educational experiences. Tracking is a controversial issue, which is often presented in the most neutral of tones. Santrock (2008) explains that, "Between-class ability grouping (tracking) consists of grouping students based on their ability or achievement. . . . [and] has long been used in schools as a way to organize students, especially at the secondary level" (p. 129). He cites critics who argue that this practice "stigmatizes students who are consigned to low-track classes" (p. 129). Further, Santrock explains that critics assert that "tracking is used to segregate students according to ethnicity and socioeconomic status because higher tracks have fewer students from ethnic minority and impoverished backgrounds . . . In this way tracking can actually replay segregation within schools" (p. 129–130).

The textbook seems to leave the judgment to the reader to draw their own conclusion. To learn more

about the student's perspective, I've had debates about tracking in my classroom. We read texts that contest the use of tracking. Pre-service teachers understand that tracking doesn't work, is unjust, and undemocratic. I can say that many students are outraged by this kind of treatment of children in U.S. schools. However, I question whether this issue, and many others of social justice, are taken up in traditional educational psychology classes. It has been over 20 years since Jeannie Oakes exposed the deleterious effects of tracking in her classic work *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality* (1985). This text was selected by the *American School Board Journal* and celebrated as a "Must Read" book when it was first published. Sadly, it is infrequently read or even mentioned in today's educational psychology courses.

Why is the use of test scores a viable factor in the tracking of students? This scientific technology helps to advance the feeling of *meritocracy;* a quality that most Americans like to believe is operative in our schools. It has the veneer or mask of an objective and fair way to measure something that can't be measured, i.e., intelligence. This notion of intelligence then morphs into ability and eventually achievement.

Technical Rationality

From a modernist, and purely logical worldview, problems that are encountered in schooling, e.g., organizing students, have a technical solution. Therefore, these solutions can often have a scientific loading, like the one standardized testing gives to tracking. Tracking seems to work, and teachers find it appealing because it appears to make their very difficult job just a little easier. However, this is a vulgar pragmatism (Cherryholms, 1988), in other words—it works. Tracking has an efficiency that appeals to educators who see the school as a factory. We can organize students as in an industrial model; but, an unintended consequence is exposed. The unintended consequence is that the low track is

devalued by the school, and their educational opportunities become severely limited. I question: what should educational psychologists do in the face of these poor schooling practices?

Progress

Traditional educational psychology has been more concerned, I believe, with passing on the discipline rather than helping pre-service teachers explore more appropriate and socially just ways to assist students in their learning. We have made some improvements in the last 100 years, and these advancements need greater recognition within the field. At the end of the twentieth century educational psychologists espoused a shift in thinking regarding the field. For example Salomon (1995) asserted that educational psychologists now accept that learning is social. This is a dramatic shift in understanding as, for most of the twentieth century, the focus was the changes of behavior in the individual learner and what was going on in the person's mind. Salomon also explains the error in what he calls the "plague of reductionism," which occurs when a complex process, like learning, is broken down in to multiple, seemingly simpler, parts. These are the peppercorns that concerned William James. Although this call from Salomon and others came as the twentieth century ended, this perspective has not yet made its way into educational psychology textbooks used in today's courses.

Anderson, Blumenfeld, Pintrich, Clark, Marx, and Peterson (1995) express the shift in perspective well when they said: "Currently the heart of a contemporary psychological perspective is an image of learners as active constructors of meaning, and an image of learning as an act of construction through social interacting in many contexts" (p. 145). This is also a paradigm shift from concentration on the isolated individual.

Why Does the Discourse Need to Be Challenged?

The traditional text of educational psychology needs to be challenged for many reasons, but most importantly because it is a powerful discourse in the way it describes, excludes, includes, and constructs our students. Educational psychology can be a powerful force in schooling today. Pre-service teachers need to see the contributions of educational psychology as critical to the successful implementation of their classroom practices.

Challenging the Dominant Discourse

There are several helpful and effective ways in which we can challenge the dominant discourse of educational psychology that can assist students in looking at the way learning is enhanced. Key components of successful post-modern classrooms include the following.

Be Critical

Critics are held in esteem by the public: a literary critic, a music critic, a film critic. At other times critics can be thought to be people who make a habit of fault finding, who just carp on issues. I espouse a critical literacy; a literacy whereby we can read the word in the sense of decoding letters and symbols and arriving at meaning, yet we apply an added dimension to our reading. With critical literacy we read the word and the world as Freire (1992) insists. We are active in that we engage a text rather than just consume it. Sometimes we need to take an oppositional stance toward a text, and talk back to a text (hooks, 1989). We can only accomplish this critical reading if we are aware of subtexts and pretexts. From whose viewpoint is this text written? What are the political, cultural, economic underpinnings and values that support the text?

This kind of critique is a postmodern critique. Just as modernity leveled a critique against premodern ways of thinking, postmodernism levels a critique against modernism. The dominant dis-

course of educational psychology is what Usher and Edwards (1994) are talking about in the following quote: "The grand narratives of science, truth, and progress are discourses—'realities' we have created by and for ourselves. Stories we tell ourselves about the real, or more likely, stories told by more powerful others on our behalf" (p. 28).

Intertextual Reading

Intertextual reading is reading texts against each other. Texts are never neutral although some strive to take on a neutral voice. There are texts that contest and resist what the dominant discourse lays before students. There are texts that strive to present another voice, or a corrective to much of what is often taken for granted. An example would include the texts I've mentioned on tracking.

Ask Questions

We need to ask better questions as educators and students. For example, we need to inquire how well a program is working for this child instead of continuing of our continued obsession with how our students did test. In our current NCLB milieu we are so mired in paperwork, reporting, and test preparation that we hardly give credence to the fact that students are struggling in our schools as we use "scientifically approved" methods.

A question I always need to ask is *cui bono*? It is an ancient question coming from the Roman philosopher Cicero. By asking *cui bono*, I mean "who benefits?" from a particular way of thinking and acting. What we learn and then implement has a definite effect on our students' lives. For example, the tracking issue does more than simplify the instructional problem of teaching to multiple levels of student achievement. Tracking keeps the poor and slow students separated from the middle class and aspiring ones. Therefore, we must ask *cui bono* in all circumstances of school life. Who benefits from our grading systems, our assessment practices,

our methods of communication with parents and the community?

Many of our educational practices need to be challenged. You may have experienced some of these ill-conceived policies. Perhaps some of our readers have been told that they are not good students; that they shouldn't go to college, or, conversely, that they are better than other students. My mantra has become "says who?" Educational policies carrying negative consequences for our students need to be questioned and challenged.

Although I single out educational psychology in this chapter, I believe that all discourses need to be challenged, even this one. Now, that could keep a person pretty busy; however, the unexamined life is not for educated people. It is human nature to simply accept stories about the world, how it works, our place in the world, and ourselves. I believe that it is the educator's responsibility to teach students to question the status quo and to push for applications of social justice and equal opportunities for all students.

In this text, the authors have asked you to consider important issues of educational psychology and to apply critical thinking and query within your teaching skills, knowledge, and disposition. The authors of this text are united in their unfaltering belief in the possibility for the positive development of the soul and minds of all of our students. For you, the pre-service teacher, we hope to ignite the same fire and passion for the profession. Educational psychology is an art when we apply our attention to the whole student and respectfully deal with them within the social milieu they inhabit.

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Foreword

This book takes educational psychology out of the hands of scholarship that examines how people learn as individuals and places it squarely in the palms of lived realities of today's children and adolescents, arguing that learning is social as well as cognitive, and that learning has social consequences. All of the authors in this book ask readers to consider that *what* students learn is as important as *how* they learn it. To this end, the book seeks to engage readers in a dialogue about social justice, and the need to engage in school experiences where students pose critical questions about the curriculum, expose its vested interests and hidden agendas, and ultimately, become agents of change.

Much of the early work in educational psychology viewed learning as something that happens entirely inside the head of learners, which eschews the role of social interaction learners have with the

environment and thus avoids dealing with critical issues that impact students. From its beginning, educational psychology focused its attention on social, moral, and cognitive development, with an eye toward the creation of theoretical ideas that could be applied to educational settings, such as schools and classrooms. Teacher education programs, in particular, have relied on the seminal work of Piaget, Bandura, and Bloom, among others, to help students become acquainted with theoretical principles that underlie the strategies, lessons, and classroom management processes they will be expected to learn and use in teaching. While many of the principles created by these educational psychologists continue to inform teacher education programs, this book argues for a stance toward teaching and learning that goes well beyond individual learning, to one that necessarily ties teaching and learning to issues of social justice for children and adolescents who have been historically and are presently underserved and marginalized by school practices and policies.

It is important to consider that early theoretical ideas about teaching and learning were developed either in laboratories or in countries outside the U.S. long ago. Moreover, since social factors and social contexts were considered extraneous for understanding how learning occurs, the theoretical principles resulting from this early work were thought to apply to any and all contexts where students were in a position to learn. After all, if the conditions were right, so it was thought, students would acquire the knowledge inside their heads just as the teacher presented it, following the principles of learning dictated by theory that was discovered in laboratories and other places where conditions were controlled and learning was observed.

This book asks readers to reconsider educational psychology and to place it in real settings, where children and adolescents bring to classroom a wide range of experiences and background knowledge that earlier theoretical pioneers of learning theory could not have imagined. Remember that when Bloom, Bandura, Piaget, and Skinner (and to some extent, Vygotsky) created their theoretical work, they worked with students from dominant groups. Their work was developed at a time in the U.S. when schools for minority students were drastically unequal, when the lives and experiences of non-White students and other marginalized students were absent from the curriculum. Few of their followers questioned the generalizability of their work to situations where learners of diverse language, gender, social class, and ethnic backgrounds were together in classrooms. None of these early educational psychologists questioned whether their work legitimized the interests of the dominant groups and at the same time suppressed the knowledge and experiences of minority and marginalized groups. The authors in this book do, and they offer ways to counter social injustices that have accumulated from decades of neglect resulting from a concern for individual learning that ignores the social realities of poverty, racism, intolerance, and social stratification.

In today's classrooms, many students are immigrants and children of immigrants who live in poverty and are likely to enter school speaking a language other than English. Many schools in urban settings are likely to be hypersegregated, attended mainly by students of one ethnicity who are bilingual or becoming bilingual. There is a growing trend of schools where the overwhelming majority of students are African American, or Mexican and Mexican American, or Puerto Rican and African American, with few White students as classmates. Likewise, much like in the days of legalized segregation, there are schools where almost all of the students are White and have little or no contact with students of other ethnicities or language groups. As the authors of this book point out, in today's schools, it takes much more than understanding learning theory to address the learning needs of diverse school populations. It takes a critical stance