The Need for a Continuing Assessment

of Our Educational Philosophies

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Gaining a thorough understanding of philosophy is essential for educators, as is a regular assessment as to how our philosophy, theory and practice all interrelate. Educational practice is informed by theory and theory develops out of philosophy. Thus in order to have a solid understanding of theory, it is necessary to have the philosophical knowledge, both general as well as our own personal philosophy to ensure that the theory we work from best aligns with what we believe and what will work. This knowledge is also helpful for us to derive appropriate actions in those instances in which, perhaps, the academic institution that we work for has a philosophical foundation which does not match ours and enforces policies which we may not agree with. Instead of blindly following along, we have sufficient knowledge and foundation from which to argue for changes in policy or at least exceptions in policy. In this way, we are more likely to move education forward to respond proactively to the rapid changes taking place in our world today, such as the rapid technological changes that challenge us on a daily basis to make decisions about how we should or should not be using it in the educational process. Without a solid understanding of philosophy, theory, practice, and how it all interrelates, it becomes difficult to assimilate, comprehend or even to communicate anything more than just our mere opinions.

This paper begins by defining the important terms so that the reader understands how they are being used in context of this discussion about philosophy. Next, I present my personal very eclectic philosophy. Following that are discussions of major educational issues relating to the work I am actively involved in and how I view and act on these issues through my own

unique philosophical and theoretical lens, as significantly influenced by the work of the late Joe

Lyons Kincheloe (1950-2008).

Education, Philosophy, and Possibilities

Before developing or defining a philosophy of education, it is beneficial to gain a clear

understanding of the definition of education itself. How one defines education will have an

impact on one's philosophy. It should also be noted that when one clarifies their philosophy it

may also impact how they define education, because the two are interrelated and intertwined. My

personal view of education stems from the awareness that there are more forms of logic than

deductive and inductive logic as presented in the textbook for this course (Gutek, 2004) and my

belief that, while deduction and induction are essential skills, our primary focus in education

should be to facilitate and encourage the more creative eductive forms of logic. This leads to the

notion that we need to expand outside of deductive logic which forces a "logical flow" as well as

the "inductive" constructivist approaches that ultimately feel constraining because they control

too tightly what the student is able to produce by predetermining the desired outcomes

(Kincheloe, 2005a). Although a learner may be constructing knowledge with a constructivist

approach, it typically still becomes directed by the teacher with some predetermined end product.

Eductive logic, on the other hand, opens up great possibilities by taking an entirely open ended

approach. And by opening up many more possibilities, we also move away from the limiting

dualistic, either-or, divisive thinking that is so entrenched in Western society and which serves

the hierarchical class system by exaggerating differences. We also move away from the linear,

Newtonian-Cartesian processes that establish for everyone the same way to get from point A to

point B. All of a sudden, we can understand how learners in a discussion come up with "random

ideas" that appear to be unrelated to the conversation, or as often judged by teachers – a student

who is off-task or not able to follow the discussion. Throw out the Ritalin, Concerta and Adderall!

As a society, we need to move away from polarities in our conceptualizations that cause us to label and tragically abuse students. A good place to start is to come to the realization that our logic has many more forms than deductive and inductive, and indeed, these other forms are truly higher level cognitive abilities. And these forms of thinking can be learned! (Kincheloe, 2003; 2004a,b,c,d); 2005a,b; 2006; 2008a,c). It is easy to continue down the paths already paved for us, but this is where we need to assess the situation and see that by doing so, we are maintaining the very system that keeps people oppressed and limited in their knowledge acquisition. Eductive logic opens other sensory input such as psychic abilities, informed intuition, and creative impulses and has us on "treasure hunts" seeking out and producing new knowledge (Kincheloe, 2006). With eductive logic, 1+1 is 2, but it can also be 3,4,5, 10,000 or any other number or object which we wish to show it to be, because we are longer limited to linear or reductionist thinking or what has already been done before. Eductive logic expands consciousness.

What does it mean to "educate?"

It is interesting to note that eductive logic actually relates directly to ancient views regarding the purpose of education, long before we entered the industrial and information ages during which the purpose of education has changed so drastically to meet the needs of the machine. It's not that there is anything wrong with educating (training) people to do work, if that is what they want to do (Kincheloe, 1999). But people need to know what the choices are and they need to be fully conscious of their own abilities, interests, and talents before they can decide what it is they want to learn to do and how they would most enjoy making a contribution to the

world. Our current education system fails to accomplish this for a growing number of learners, in fact, for the majority of learners. According to Jackson (1978): "The Latin word from which our word "educate" is derived is itself a derivative. Educare ab educere: "educate" from "educe", that is, "draw forth," "bring out". In its primary sense it is applied to plants, and expresses the process by which man imitates, carries on, and adapts to a determined human purpose, the work of education (evolution, development) performed by Nature. What Nature has educed, man educates or trains up." Jackson (1978) continues by explaining that Nature is educative or educing in an active sense and this is not the same thing as having the potential to be educated nor is it the final product that has been "educed." Therefore, less significance is placed on the educability of the learner or the proof of their learning, but rather the focus is on *drawing out a natural and inherent quality* – a potential from the learner. I like to view the purpose of education as facilitating (not teaching per se) a learner to becoming empowered to make use of their full potential – which is far more potential than we typically assess learners to have (Kincheloe & Thomas, 2006; Kincheloe 2008 a, c). Thus, we move away from spoon feeding students fragmented bits of decontextualized knowledge that they find little relevant use for. This amounts to Freire's (1970) "banking" education in which learners' minds are the banks and teachers provide deposits. Instead, through eductive thought, learning suddenly becomes an exciting, interesting proposition that centers on the learner's passionate interests.

In my conceptualization of learning, learners are center stage. This is an important consideration as it has been shown that the reason the school drop out rates are so high is due to how our society's form of education de-centers learners (Webster, 2007). As Webster states, "what is of concern here is that in this era where the subject has been decentered by post-structuralist literature, the subject has been removed from having an educationally important role

in school frameworks and curricula" (p. 520). Webster continues by pointing out that "powerful self-determining freedom lies within the subject [learner]" (Lacan, cited in Webster, 2007, p. 521) and that has been stripped away and this disenfranchisement leads to increasing drop out rates. Students just want to be free to learn and if they cannot accomplish that in the classroom, if their freedoms continue to be stripped away as we have seen with the heavy hand of the No Child Left Behind Act, then these same students must escape. As Dewey (cited in Webster, 2007) pointed out, education is "not something done to learners, but . . . rather something which learners themselves actively participate with and develop" (p. 521). Unfortunately, today, education has become increasingly something that is done "to" the students with few to no intrinsic, much less extrinsic rewards and, to top it all off, their consciousnesses are being forced into tighter, more constraining and more painful boxes. Who, in their right minds can even continue to subject themselves to this suffering, which no doubt occurs in varying degrees depending upon the state, the school district, the school, and the teacher?

What is philosophy?

Simply stated, philosophy means *wisdom*. The Oxford dictionary defines philosophy as "the use of reason and argument in seeking truth and knowledge of reality, esp. of the causes and nature of things and of the principles governing existence, the material universe, perception of physical phenomena, and human behavior. 2. a. A particular system or set of beliefs reached by this. b. a personal rule of life. 3. Advanced learning in general. 4. Serenity; calmness; conduct governed by a particular philosophy."

My definition, which is influenced by a leaning toward Idealism, is that ***philosophy is wisdom that leads to serenity.*** Thus, the purpose of education is to empower people to attain wisdom for the purpose of creating a peaceful, loving, serene, socially just society.

How does one reach serenity through wisdom?

While all philosophies, as in particular systems or sets of beliefs such as presented by Gutek (2004), have something to offer, none of them are satisfactory in and of themselves. A better approach which will serve us well as societies become increasingly globalized is a highly eclectic approach, and I would classify myself as extremely eclectic in both my educational philosophy and in the theory that informs my practice. Eclectic refers to "deriving one's beliefs, etc. from various sources" (Oxford, 1996). While I have had an affinity for many of the ideas within the Idealist framework and an aversion, in general, toward Theistic Realism, there were attributes of the former that do not fit my views and attributes of the latter that do fit my views. Other worldviews also heavily influence my philosophy and are like treasures that can open our minds, expand our consciousness, and guide us toward taking better care of the environment, living in harmony, and creating a better world for everyone (Kincheloe, 2008c). Metaphysics is a component of my philosophy; however, metaphysics is a vast, sweeping, and very complex discipline: **"metaphysics – however defined – is an impossible enterprise"** (Stanford, 2007). We must not limit metaphysics, as Gutek (2004) has done, to the educational association with merely the curriculum ("what we know") (p. 4). By making this mistake, Gutek is throwing out diverse ontologies, multiple perspectives, and many possibilities, since what we know about developing a curriculum is so clearly definable in many minds due to the indoctrination through our education system in the United States that limits possibilities for what we learn about. On the other hand, metaphysics is nearly indefinable and would force us to stretch our minds in very productive ways, thus expanding the curricular content in positive and productive ways. As graduate students it is important that we point out these potential roadblocks to greater knowledge and then do the research to support tearing them down so that we might experience

something new, more creative, more mind expanding, and more exciting – and open up these possibilities for others. Yes, it can be radical, extreme, and a rollercoaster ride, especially as compared to going down the worn road that shuns real change and simply maintains the status quo. Personally, I take great pleasure in embarking on the wild "theme park rides" Joe Kincheloe (2008) has discussed in his last book, *Knowledge and Critical Pedagogy: An Introduction.*

What is the Difference between Ideology and Philosophy?

The major difference that stood out in my mind first is that philosophy can be compared to freedom and ideology can be compared to prison. If we have the right mindset, philosophy, especially when we adopt an eclectic approach, can allow us to freely consider and choose our belief systems from which we can then derive ideologies. Unfortunately, we are unwillingly thrust into various contexts that force ideologies upon us which can often conflict with our philosophies. Also, unfortunate, ideologies, no matter what the context, seem to be dictated from a few onto the masses. Our educational environments are especially notorious for creating inflexible ideologies that force us to act in ways that are contrary to our underlying philosophies, essentially imprisoning us from being and expressing who we really are as individual, thinking human beings. If everyone were to adopt a more flexible, changing and evolving philosophical standing, we would all continuously evaluate our philosophies and ideologies and how they interrelate with practice so that we can continue to work toward improving the human condition, including schooling. This appears to be a utopian idea, however.

Thus, unless we build into our philosophy the concept of continuous change, philosophies and ideologies alike can imprison us, so in this sense, there is no difference between ideologies and philosophies. There are many, many people, upon my observation, who have constructed prison bars for themselves due to their philosophies which can be just as inflexible as the various

ideologies we become entrapped within. We are often bounded by what our philosophies tell us we should believe and then these carry forward to construct even less flexible boundaries for enacting our philosophies within various contexts, whether educational, cultural, religious, societal, organizational, political, disciplinary, professional, etc., all which effectively serve to create imprisoning ideological dictates. Of course, there is method behind this madness: people want to protect their position on the hierarchical ladder and ensure their own selfish interests in upward mobility. This approach, however, harms them as well as causes great pain to those who are subjected and oppressed by their constructed ideological and quite insane rules, regulations, and behaviors (Freire, 1970).

Thus, no matter which philosophy or ideology one discusses or partakes in, there is often little or no difference between the roles and outcomes if we allow them to imprison our minds from consciousness expansion, creativity, imagination, and the ability to envision alternative and better ways to be in the world -- or as Kincheloe's (2008a) defined this concept through his highly important notion of *critical immanence* in which we can freely imagine possibilities that can lead us toward creating a future that we envision. This critical immanence and the freedom to fully engage in it with our "creative imaginations" is a powerful motivator for knowledge production – the creation of new knowledge that can move the evolution of human beings to whole new "mind spaces," as Kincheloe describes it (Kincheloe, 2008a). Scientists are only beginning to gain a grasp of the magnitude by which we have the ability, through our consciousnesses, to create realities and knowledge. Joe Kincheloe's (2008c) critical psychology of complexity and his critical bricolage research methodology incorporate scientific complexity, chaos, and enactive theories as we comprehend concepts from multiple perspectives and examine similarities and differences and how they interrelate and enhance our understanding and

knowledge. Thus, examining phenomena through the bricolage lens, by which we pick and choose appropriate research methodologies to examine phenomena from various angles, we can grasp more holistic understanding of these two concepts, philosophy and ideology and why it is essential to continuously explore them and their interrelationships while, at the same time, we are also open to change within the different contexts in which we find ourselves relating. We no longer need to create unnecessary prisons for other people which can manifest as a form of hegemony that also serves to create prisons for ourselves as well.

To be continued….

<div align="center">References</div>

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