

# **RADICALLY LISTENING TO RADICAL LOVE:**

TOWARD ENACTIVISM IN EDUCATION  
AND EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

TRICIA KRESS  
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS, BOSTON

PATRICIA KRUEGER-HENNEY  
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS, BOSTON

---

## **INTRODUCTION**

At the 2014 annual meeting of the American Educational Studies Association (AESA), a group of scholars convened a panel honoring the life and work of Joe L. Kincheloe at the five-year anniversary of his passing. Dozens of scholars from around the world attended and engaged in a discussion about Kincheloe's influences on their work and his contributions to critical pedagogy and educational scholarship more broadly. From that session, Mary Frances Agnello and William Reynolds recruited authors to contribute to an edited volume about Joe Kincheloe's contributions to teacher education (Agnello & Reynolds, 2015). One of these authors was Tricia Kress who (with Melissa Winchell and Kenneth Tobin) wrote a chapter further developing Joe Kincheloe's notion of radical listening (Winchell, Kress, & Tobin, 2015). The following year, AESA issued its call for proposals for the 2015 annual meeting requesting papers that addressed the conference theme "Where is the love?" In response to this call, Tricia Kress, Mary Frances Agnello and William Reynolds brought the conference theme of "love" into conversation with radical listening by drawing from Paulo Freire's notion of radical love, and they invited Patricia Krueger-

Henney, Robert Lake and Kimberly Frazer-Booth to contribute to a symposium about the topic. This special edition of *The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* is the culmination of nearly three years of development and conversation about the potential of and for transformative dialogue in educational spaces and the ways in which this both affords and requires a commitment to radical love.

Foundational to critical pedagogy's goal of education for social transformation and social justice is the ability to engage in dialogue. For Freire, dialogue is not simply talk, but it is a relationship in which multiple parties work together to hear each other and learn with each other as they engage with difference with the goal of self|other|world transformation. Creating dialogic spaces requires educators to approach their work and those with whom they work with humility, respect, and love (Freire, 2005). In considering education as a means of resisting contemporary neoliberal, neocolonial social structures that breed gross inequalities, alienation, and dehumanization of minoritized groups, the very acts of listening and loving with the intention of enacting change become, in themselves, radical. For Freire (2005), love is humble, courageous, indignant and fundamental to the critical educative process. Love of this sort is not romantic, rather it is an "armed love" or "fighting love" fueled by anger and outrage (p. 72). But for love to lead to action it must always be in dialectical relationship with the act of dialogue; we cannot love that which we do not know. At the core of dialogue is the act of what Joe Kincheloe called "radical listening" (Tobin, 2009; Winchell, Kress & Tobin, 2015), that is, a commitment to dialogue in which the listener opens himself or herself to change by hearing others and not imposing his or her own schema and judgment upon the other.

The objective of this special issue of *The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* (IJCP) is to bring together a collection of papers that make salient the relationship between radical listening and radical love in facilitating social change through education and educational research. The contributing authors have responded to this calling by offering expressions of how radical love, by way of showing a willingness to do messy work, is unfamiliar, complicated, moody, insecure, intimidating, un-scripted, uncontrollable, off-radar, and vulnerable

work that demands from the human body to act as a membrane between self and our heteronormative patriarchal racist realities. While the body can absorb some of the shocks and jolts of social inequalities it encounters throughout its life journeys, it also catalyzes the transformation of destructive social forces into humanizing and socially liberating possibilities. This group of scholars has created the following necessary tension to deliver the palpability of enactivism of radical love through education and research: a willful endurance and weathering of some of the daily epistemological and ontological storms that ready the growth and hope for something new. Listening, dialogue, and (critical) pedagogy are fundamental spatial-temporal instances through which authors theorize, narrate, reflect, and mobilize possibilities for radically listenings to radically love. This issue opens with conceptual and cautionary pieces (Ali-Khan, Reynolds, Krueger-Henney), followed by applied conversations that examine dialogical classroom pedagogies guided by Freirean notions of radical love (Agnello, Lake, Kress & Frazier-Booth, Siry et al.). To fortify the praxis and dialogue between the thought and act of radical love, these two groupings make visible the multidimensionality and versatility of radical love by way of, through, and with radically listening.

## CONCEPTUAL AND CAUTIONARY RENDERINGS OF RADICAL LISTENING AND RADICAL LOVE

By reflecting on her autoethnographic teachings, in *“Dirty Secrets and Silent Conversations: Exploring Radical Listening through Embodied Autoethnographic Teaching”* Carolyne Ali-Khan enmeshes corporeality with biopower to argue that both teacher and student bodies are non-neutral sites where patriarchy materializes. Ali-Khan warns that educators who invite students to speak up about endured oppressions in their lives run the danger of perpetuating the violence of patriarchy instead of dismantling it. Radical love, in light of unspoken trauma, requires educators to listen to their own embodied experiences and acknowledge the extent to which their power and privilege are complicit with patriarchal structures of violence.

Teaching with love and teaching through listening stand increasingly in opposition to current neoliberalized schooling processes

dominated by corporate greed, privatization, and technological obsession. Radical love is, according to William Reynolds, “the knowledge, by those we journey alongside in education that we will not give up on them.” Accompanied by autobiographic excerpts, in *“Imagine: Radical Love Abides in Cruel Unforgiving Times”* Reynolds argues that radically loving educators are hope-fully and fearlessly committed to caring for students’ lives and their educational well-being.

“What Are We Listening For? (Participatory Action) Research and Embodied Social Listening to the Permanence of Anti-Black Racism in Education” by Patricia Krueger-Henney introduces “embodied social listening” as a full body engagement with the structures of anti-Black racism. The author argues that it is through embodied social listening that education researchers can strengthen documentations of materially and discursively absorbed racism in the social spaces of Black lives. Connecting embodied social listening to participatory action research (PAR) suggests that its purpose is not be treated as an activity separate from the PAR process, but rather to be exercised as a central anticipatory form of action that implicates individual co-researchers with anti-Black racism and with each other.

## **ENACTING RADICAL LISTENING AND RADICAL LOVE WITH/IN DIALOGICAL CLASSROOM PEDAGOGIES**

In *“Enactivating Radical Love: Joe L. Kincheloe’s 10 Precepts of Teachers as Researchers”* Mary Frances Agnello revisits ten dispositions that Joe Kincheloe’s had mapped out to in|form radically listening teaching and learning conversations. Agnello weaves together a plush and eye-catching tapestry of radical love that consists of strands of different types of intentional labor that critical educators commit to: mental, physical, and spiritual. As both a means and an end, radical love rejects normalizations of social boundaries and categorizations of people.

In *“Radical Love in Teacher Education Praxis: Imagining the Real through Listening to Diverse Student Voices”* Robert Lake applies Martin Buber’s notion of “imagining the real” to incorporating listening as critical pedagogy in a pre-service education course. Lake draws

from student narratives to highlight how the praxis of listening for diversity in dialogical education can serve to tune the ear to participate in and resonate with the voices of others. In the shared dimensions of spontaneous and open-ended dialogue, there is a fuller experience of knowing. Lake argues the practice of this reality is central to moving beyond critical pedagogy as a mere method towards imagining ways that enable students to reach beyond their own thoughts and patterns of thinking and into each others' experiences.

Tricia Kress and Kimberly Frazier-Booth reflect on the potential and challenges of enacting radical listening as activism in teaching praxis in their co/autoethnographic piece, "*Listening for the Echoes: Radical Listening as Educator-Activist Praxis*". The authors frame "noise" as their controlling metaphor and unpack the ways in which they attempt to embody a radical listening stance in their daily practices. Their analysis unravels radical listening as an imperfect praxis of historicity in which the present is always also a reflection of the past and a trajectory toward a possible future.

Christina Siry, Michelle Brendel, and Roger Frisch draw from a collaborative research project with teacher inquiry groups to examine how dialogical learning is applied to science teaching with students in primary schools. The authors argue that dialogical learning can be socially transformative when anchored in radical listening. "*Radical Listening and Dialogue in Educational Research*" identifies different elements of radical listening, including the facilitation of interactive learning informed by and across social differences. Teachers embrace humility to understand the truth of students even when those truths are at odds with their own ideological perspectives.

In sum, radical love may signify the harvesting of a new language, new sights, new feelings, new sounds, new movements – the unfamiliarity with the not-yet. Radical love involves an unapologetic uprooting of the epistemological permanence of master narratives about teaching, learning, and loving. Radical love is hence the unfinished sentence, the incomplete crossword puzzle, the report without the conclusion, the unarticulated word, and perhaps the constant being out of breath throughout our everyday moments with students and with each other. The sprained ankles, the bloody cuts, the annoying head-

aches and throbbing bruises we collect along the way may be some of the most eye-opening reminders of the complex and contradicting ways through which we are profoundly human in this muddled but yet tender work of radically listening.

These intellectual offerings are also invitations to critically thinking about what one has to leave behind in order to enter unfamiliar spaces in education and research that may be ripe with transformative potential. To be in|with radical love requires a full-body, an all-sensical commitment to courageously welcoming sensations of the unknown, and participate in longingly embracing the unwanted, despised, distorted, disfigured, and dismissed. Radical love is not seducible by temporary and easily consumed gratifications. Rather, radical love moves teachers and learners into timeless and spaceless disposition towards each other, detached from conventions, pre-scripted procedures, and standards for measurable outcomes.

## REFERENCES

- Agnello, M.F. & Reynolds, W. (2015). *Critical pedagogy: Joe Kincheloe's influences in the field*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Freire, P. (2005). *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare to teach*. Cambridge, MA: Westview Press.
- Tobin, K. (2009). Tuning into others' voices: Radical listening, learning from difference and escaping oppression. *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, 4:505-511.
- Winchell, M.N., Kress, T.M. & Tobin, K. (2015). Teaching Radical Listening: Joe's Legacy Among Three Generations of Practitioners. In M.F. Agnello & W. Reynolds, Eds., pp.99-112. *Critical Pedagogy: Joe Kincheloe's Influences in the Field*. New York: NY: Peter Lang.

