

## ENACTIVATING RADICAL LOVE:

JOE L. KINCHELOE'S 10 PRECEPTS  
OF TEACHERS AS RESEARCHERS

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### *Abstract*

Joe L. Kincheloe always acknowledged the many influences that he had in the works of Paulo Freire, the Frankfurt School, Michel Foucault, feminists of many colors, and W.E.B. Dubois, among many others including his peers and colleagues (Kincheloe, 2008; Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994). That his work has had far-reaching impact is evident in the efforts made by next-generation scholars around the globe to acknowledge him and the many ways in which their theory and praxis were guided by his personage and his scholarship (Agnello & Reynolds, 2016). It is interesting that Joe did not write about radical love per se, but I believe as do others who knew him that he just did not have time to write all that he had outlined and in production, if not being inscribed, then for sure in his head. This paper makes connections between the precepts that Joe carefully outlined as ten dispositions (Kincheloe, 1991) of teachers as researchers and the enactment of radical love as an important characteristic forming the radical listener, which Joe personified so unselfishly. Radical love for the purposes of this paper is defined as dedicated to, want the best for, concerned about, care for, encourage, support, connect with, recognize, praise,

guide, inspire, be inspired by, humanize interrelations with, go beyond the call of duty for, stick up for, protect, mentor, work with for world transformation (Agnello, 2001; Freire, 1970/2000, Kincheloe, 1991, 1993, 2008a,b). The author argues, if teachers manifest these qualities, they would indeed possess the dispositions to be radical listeners as they reflect on the important work they do with their students.

*Keywords:* teachers as researchers, radical love, enactivating radical love, teacher dispositions, enactivism

## MEANS AND ENDS

The neoliberally reformed educational setting was and is not the desired goal of the Civil Rights movement, the women's and green movements, the Occupy Wall Street movement, nor the most recent populist movement observed during the presidential primaries during the long election season of 2016—especially that articulated by Bernie Sanders and his proponents. The progressive populist movement has envisioned affordable university tuitions, empowered workers, including teachers, and strong public institutions embodied in the public schools that we took for granted up until the last decade. Teachers find themselves divorced from what they teach, more controlled by testing, and vilified by those who wish to undercut salaries and privatize schools, including conservative governor Scott Walker in states like Wisconsin and Mayor Rahm Emanuel, mayor of Chicago, where unions, university faculty, and public school teachers have been targeted in conservative and reactionary modifications in policies and practices, many of them diminishing worker power, salaries, and tenure. Nonetheless, teachers who embrace radical love continue to work for students' benefits on several levels. Often such practitioners are teachers as researchers even though many of them may not know how well they are moving beyond the machinations of classroom management to interacting with students through an enacted radical love. Also, many of these critically compassionate educators possess these attributes of radical love which I have defined for the purposes of this paper as *dedicated to, want the best for, concerned about, care for, encourage, support, connect with, recognize, praise, guide, inspire, be inspired by, humanize interrelations with, go beyond the call of duty for, stick up for, protect, mentor, and work with for world transformation* (Agnello, 2001, Freire, 1970/2000, Kincheloe, 1991, 1993, 2008a,b).

Joe L. Kincheloe was always quick to credit those whose influences he found compellingly important to his work. As was his way, he considered the meaning of enactivism as it was articulated by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela part of the action of making the world—not in a “pregiven” way, but rather in an “enacted” fashion (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 176). In his words, Kincheloe declared that “...enactivism is a theory of mind that begins with an understanding

[of the relationship] between mind and its contextual surroundings. Such an understanding demands that we ask why we see mind and its contextual surroundings. Enactivism places great emphasis on how an entity interacts with its environment. In such interaction, enactivism assumes that entities actually create themselves” (p. 176). Interestingly, the tenth precept that Kincheloe included in his litany of desirable traits that researching teachers possessed was that teachers as researchers were **guided by consideration for human interrelationships**. Joe spent a good deal of time explaining and pontificating about how Western civilization had gone astray with the works of science credited to Descartes, and it was the Cartesian mind/body split that had ushered in the decline of people to things—a dehumanizing force that easily enables the reduction of education to a passing of bits of information. He stated elegantly, “Positivism with its naïve view of objectivity makes an effort to shield knowledge producers from an understanding of the way they and the knowledge they produce is inscribed by history, culture, and ideology” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 138).

Kincheloe’s scholarship was adamantly opposed to the objectification of students and teachers. He argued that such “Objectivism undermines the most creative dimension of living organisms, of human beings in particular – the ability to not merely respond to the environment but to construct meaning about it, to represent it in a variety of ways” (p. 109). For criticalists like Kincheloe and Paulo Freire, education is a transformative enterprise, in which radical love is both an objective and a means through which purposeful human interrelationships are constantly under construction—not built once and for all. Such a dynamic transformationalism relies on the open-minded give and take of teacher and student to a level of study beyond intercultural competence and critical consciousness to an engagement and enactment of a spiritual love defined by the Greeks as “agape” and illustrated in Biblical metaphor of 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, NIV (Douglas and Nganga, 2013, p. 64). Teachers who are attentive, first of all, to the human interrelationships that they have with their students are those who are patient, kind, not boastful, not easy to anger, rejoicing in the truth while renouncing evil, and existential in their beginning anew with students every day and rejoicing in truth (Douglas and Nganga,

2013). Teachers as researchers and critical constructivists as defined by Kincheloe espouse these characteristics as they develop their teacher identities with their students and work with students to develop their own distinctive personalities as humans—not as robotic machines (Agnello 2001, 2016; Brock, Malott, & Villaverde, 2011; Kincheloe, 1991; 1993; 2008a, b); Kincheloe, Hayes, Steinberg, and Tobin, 2011).

## ENACTIVATING RADICAL LOVE

The utmost significance of human interrelationships for enacting radical love is connected closely to Kincheloe’s first characteristic of researching teachers as **inquiry oriented**. The teacher enactivist of radical love is unafraid to ask, “Why?” and inspired to teach students the importance of asking, “Why?” and gathering information to answer the question. By doing such tasks of reconnaissance, we as enactivists of radical love learn how to commune with students leading to interpersonal knowledge and skills, as well as understanding of people which is the cornerstone of human interrelationships where “liking and loving” begin. Radical listening, and thus hearing what students are saying, is the human receptor of the information upon which to engage with students in radical love (Winchell, Kress & Tobin, 2016). Such listening as an act of love assumes a human connection for getting to the root of problems, addressing needs, and problem solving. Often if teachers are able to inspire and energize students’ learning, part of their success can be attributed to their abilities to work within the context-specific classroom and community in which they are localized.

The second and third attributes of researching teachers are **recognition and acknowledgment of the social contexts of education**, in addition to being **informed about power**. As enlightened individuals, teachers with awareness of power formations recognize that certain social beliefs in the marketplace of ideas, such as the reliance on myths of literacy as measurable on test scores, meritocracy, and entitled elitist education versus diluted engagement in developing minds of the masses, have formulated the power hierarchy that predominates, as well as why such an arrangement is perpetuated. Students’ social capital (Bourdieu, 1977) and knowledges are recognized and are interwoven into classroom discourses of possibilities for student classroom,

social, and economic success. If teachers are guided by the pedagogical strategies of care, communication, and connection espoused by Joe in his embrace of feministic ways of knowing, understanding, creating, nurturing, and loving students who reciprocate with each other and the teacher (Kincheloe, 1991, 2008a,b) radical love is often the impetus or catalyst for change. However, radical love for Joe would encompass a range of emotions, including acceptance (of all students), embrace of blue or street knowledge and popular culture (Kincheloe, 2008a,b), and intense emotions including the desire to throw off the yoke of banking education (Freire, 1970/2000) guided by the awareness that the teacher is in a more powerful position than the students. The radically loving teacher willingly and gladly shares dialogues with students in pedagogical exchanges of teaching and learning. Critical pedagogues often confront acts of racism, sexism, and classism routinely. Because teachers as researchers are knowledgeable about their social contexts, as well as that of the bigger regional, national and international communities, they see the liminal spaces where change can be enacted, or acceptance exercised, or fear of difference can be explained and dissipated. Such moments for teaching important lessons are possible when teachers are well aware of their own raced, classed, and gendered positionalities. Such self-awareness is the predisposition that opens the channels of communication to bi-directional learning in the classroom where students and the teacher envision ideal societies and enact them as they practice dialogical teaching and learning leading us to the importance of researching teachers' commitment to world making.

In any teacher-student relationships, the teacher is charged with leading the student to a different, usually higher level of knowledge and skills within the broad disciplines of the curriculum. Such higher level learning moves beyond educational discourse as factoids to debate, critical analysis, theatrical improvisation, and artistic performance (Kincheloe, 1991, 1993). However, such a journey is not always linear; on the contrary, it can be circuitous, redundant, reverberating, maybe explosive, among many other possibilities. For Joe, Paulo Freire, and many criticalists and feminists, world making is a transformational process whose discourse is often referencing or

connoting those at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder acquiring self-esteem, self-awareness, and power to act or enact, and those at the top in positions of power gaining awareness of how their power can be or is oppressive and taking remedial action. Beginning with human interactions in meaningful and loving pedagogical contexts, the radical love exchanged between and among teacher and student interaction derives legitimacy from teachers dedicated to making change happen with students for their development. Such **world making or transformation** becomes the space where teachers exercise their power and become more informed about how power has worked to de-humanize students or can inspire social transformation. Within a classroom where students construct knowledges with the teacher reciprocally, students know when they are treated fairly and when democratic ways of exercising power are being practiced. Teachers who radically love their students do everything they can to protect and provide for students, despite the difficulties and often in spite of resistance from bureaucratic forces beyond the classroom. They listen to stakeholders and mediate their positions so that the best communication possible can be achieved in particular educational settings promoting a vision of an improved world and allowing students to define what such a world would look and be like—and take actions to create such a world.

In a dialogical classroom, life begins anew every day as researching teachers who unconditionally love their students dedicate their acts and actions as an unrehearsed and **improvised art** to think on their feet as they teach, reflect, and react to their students. In an open and non-threatening atmosphere of the classroom, emotion shows healthily from the heart. The classroom is a place where students feel the love of the teacher rather than scorn or insult or fear or reprisal. In my teaching experiences, students always appreciate a teacher's effort to remember information about them, their thoughts, or their projects in future contexts. An improvisationally adept teacher is inspired to create learning and loving exchanges in the moment as rudimentary learning becomes more scaffolded and complex. Although radical love can be enacted freely and improvisationally, teachers who expect to transform the world with students must be prepared with invigorated and rigorous learning props, materials, media, and discourse. Such tools

allow teachers who enact radical love to not know all of the answers or questions or experiences that students bring to the classroom, but to rejoice in the discovery together with their students. Such researching teaching brings free-flowing exchanges of dialog to the attention of those who feel welcome to participate. Radical love exudes enthusiasm about living to learn and learning to live and responds authentically to what is happening with students and what they are doing, saying, and learning within and outside the classroom.

As researching teachers participate in the lives of the minds and the worlds of their students, they are **professionally driven by critical, self- and social-reflection**; they constantly ask themselves if the teaching is working, and/or if students are responding. They work with the students to understand the social environments that affect the classroom—be it the macro- or microcosmic environments. By enactivating a community of learners who believe in their own abilities and value their own contributions in both small and large groupings, students can work together with the teacher to question popular culture, media, power, and political discourses to reinforce the importance of a loving engagement with learning. It is in the protected sanctuary of the classroom that teachers can ensure that students are getting what they need to become engaged citizens—both autonomously and within their social settings. By critically self-assessing themselves, teachers can discern what students need beyond the props that the teacher provides. Through social reflection, the teacher can discern in the act of radical love how students can and cannot mediate the worlds of the classroom and their own lives, ultimately responding as appropriately as possible.

Because researching teachers comprehend the infinity of knowledge and students' characteristics, they are concerned with students becoming their own agents of learning. As autonomous learners, students are able to **exercise democratic self-directed learning**. The sharing and exchanging of radical love in the classroom environment is based on the consideration of students' interests, needs, problems, goals, difficulties, in addition to career interests. Allowing and encouraging students to think, articulate, and pursue their own learning, the researching teacher facilitates, guides, and sometimes consoles. By enacting radical love the teacher researching with students promotes students' abilities and rights to be inquisitive, curious, skeptical, in-



novative, and speculative. Students who feel love and acceptance are inspired by such freedom; however, often students who have never had such freedoms in the classroom before can be resentful of flexibility and wanting of structure and guidelines. The improvising researching teacher provides guidance and tools as well as models before expecting students to perform in ways that feel uncomfortable to them.

The eighth quality of teachers as researchers that Joe illustrated is **the ability to be cognizant of and responsive to many cultures**. The informed teacher who enacts radical love builds on the many cultures that students bring to the classroom. Often students from non-dominant cultures, already overpowered in hegemonic societies, experience similar marginalization in schools. The researching teacher works to transform the world with students helping to further student understandings of self and other from many cultural perspectives. More than one cultural truth is accepted in a loving environment and students are encouraged to value and love their differences, as well as acknowledge their similarities and likenesses. Looking to marginalized cultures and excluded knowledges, individuals and societies gain information, insights, and ways of seeing and being in the world that can improve life on the planet. If we consider the phenomenon of global climate change or the pollution that many minoritized neighborhoods confront daily, we present, emphasize, and re-inforce the empathy needed to walk in others' shoes and thus be able to understand the lives of many who gain the least from neoliberal economic policies but who suffer the most from their results. Racism, classism, and sexism require conscientization through critical literacy moving beyond superficial mediated images that perpetuate stereotypes. Working with students to understand that almost all humans have presumptions and beliefs that need to be questioned will not guarantee success at conversion; however, not working toward such critical literacy will ensure ignorance possibly leading to violence or negativity that can follow individuals throughout their school and working lives. Interweaving traditional, formal, post-formal, and popular forms of knowledge into classroom discourses helps to push the boundaries of what is accepted and respected human culture—inclusive of many cultures (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1993).

Armed with the knowledge of many cultures and visions for imagination, in addition to popular media, texts, and new technologies, researching teachers and their students are equipped with the ninth attribute Kincheloe and Freire and many other criticalists advocate/d to be invaluable—**that of taking action for transforming the world**. Praxis—the putting into practice of our thoughts and theories is essential to life-making and to betterment of situations that need addressing. Problem posing is the strategy of articulating needs and the problem solving usually requires some action. Teachers with critically aware consciousness are unafraid to work with students through radical love to change the world (Freire, 1970/2000).

## IMPORTANCE TO EDUCATION

Illustrations of Joe L. Kincheloe’s “teachers as researchers” lend us insight into what it takes to be ready for present day classrooms. Unlike the canned curricula and rehearsed, essentialized, sanitized, and overly simplified teacher education that is currently being implemented in the United States and in other nations under the evil spell of neoliberal reforms, Kincheloe’s teacher as researcher is prepared to be a public scholar – critically thinking and responding with students to the many questions they bring to the classroom. Kincheloe knew and wrote in many different ways about how we must reflect on our positions in society, because as teachers and as world makers we are in key positions to be parts of our students’ problems rather than solutions. Should teachers choose the anti-oppression route, they become the radical enactivists engaged in world transformation. If they choose the status quo, they embrace the hypocrisy, racism, sexism, and classism rampant in our society. Radical love is both a means and an end of education (Douglas and Nganga, 2013) that defies stupidification and complacency of people as powerless. Rejecting notions of education as mind and body control, critically implemented radical love lights the fires of mental, physical, radical love, and spiritual inspiration to become part of and enactivating a more loving world in the making—a more just and caring world aware of the limitations of capitalism and the dangers of ethnocentrism, sexism, classism, and racism.

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