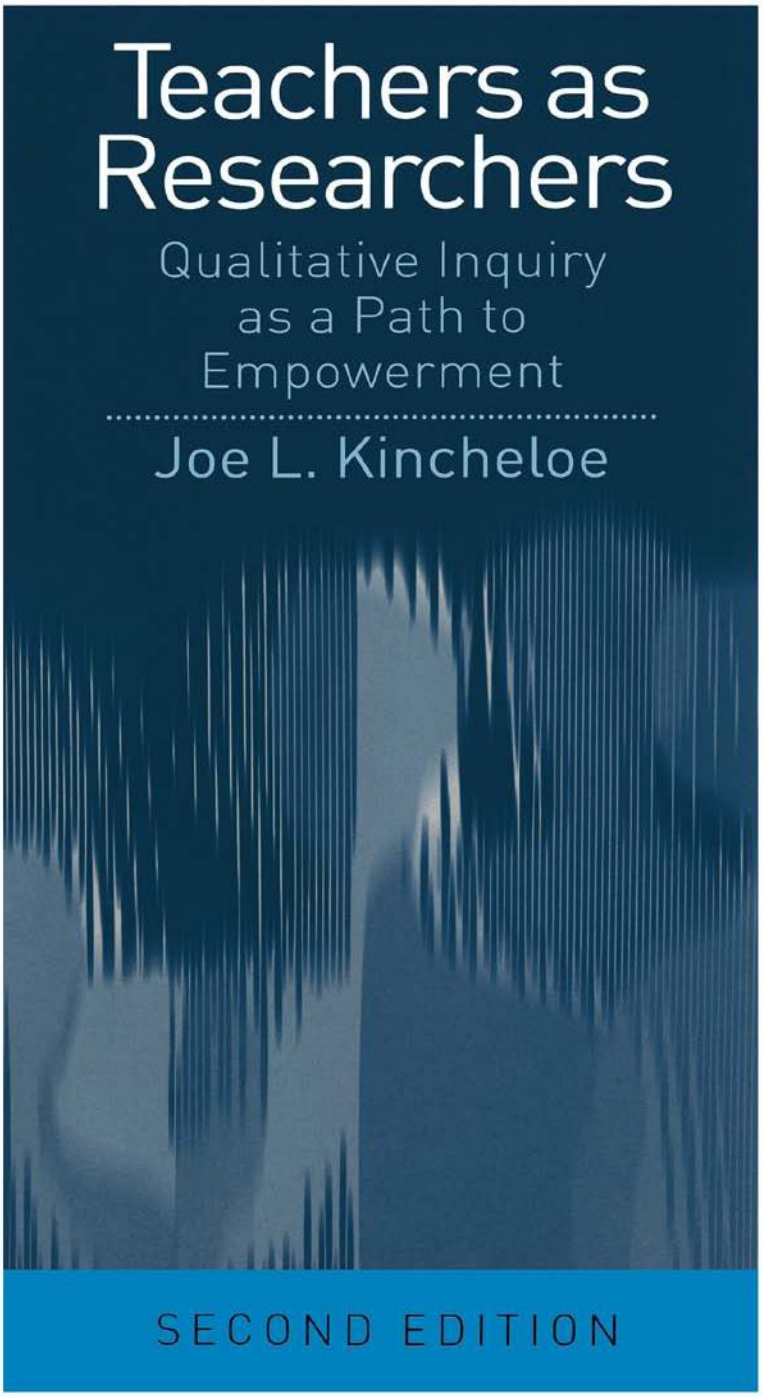

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Second edition

This book urges teachers—as both producers and consumers of knowledge—to engage in the debate about educational research by undertaking meaningful research themselves.

Teachers are now being encouraged to carry out research in order to improve their effectiveness in the classroom, but this book suggests that they also reflect on and challenge the reductionist and technicist methods that promote a 'top-down' system of education. The author, a leading proponent of qualitative research, argues that only by engaging in complex, critical research will teachers rediscover their professional status, empower their practice in the classroom and improve the quality of education for their pupils.

Postgraduate students of education and experienced teachers will find much to inspire and encourage them in this book. Updated and revised for this new edition, it retains both its clarity and insistence on sound research practice.

Joe Kincheloe is Professor of Education at the City University of New York Graduate Center and Brooklyn College. He is the author and editor of many books on critical pedagogy and qualitative research in education.

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Teachers as Researchers

Qualitative inquiry as a path to empowerment

Second edition

Joe L.Kincheloe

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Positivistic Standards and the Bizarre Educational World of the Twenty-first Century

When I first wrote this book in 1991 I was very concerned with a number of disturbing educational trends operating in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The following is the preface I wrote delineating those concerns and their relationship to *Teachers As Researchers:*

> I am a teacher. I want to do good work. Having attended, worked in, and visited many schools in North America, I believe that at the end of the twentieth century teaching is not good work. As I listen to teachers talk about their jobs or watch hierarchical interactions between administrators and teachers, I sense a crisis in the teaching profession. Never sure that I am characterizing the crisis accurately, I listen intensely to the brilliant teachers who talk to me of resigning, to the brilliant teacher education students who can't get hired or who have trouble in student teaching because of their intelligence, and to the great teachers who have worked invisibly for years, rarely rewarded for their dedication.
>
> The crisis seems to have something to do with a *general* lack of consciousness—a garbled sense of purpose, of direction. What I feel in the schools is not simply a failure of schools and school leaders, but a more general inability of Western peoples to conceptualize a system of meaning—i.e., an ethical sense on which they can build humane and evolving institutions. The only social/educational visions which have gained public attention in the last years of the twentieth century have come from people like Ronald Reagan or William Bennett who offer a misleading vision of a return to a romanticized past, a golden era when teachers enforced rules and students learned the basics. Such an authoritarian vision underlines the crisis I describe; it lays the foundation for educational reform movements that assume that if order can be reestablished, if educational leaders can just lay out what it is teachers should do and teachers just do it, schools may return to their previous glory.
>
> Such a socio-educational vision is naive and dangerous, viewing schools as if they had nothing to do with the world that surrounds

> them. It assumes that Western industrial organization with its bureaucratic, hierarchical structure is the only model available for constructing institutions. In this context it views teachers as blue collar workers, passive recipients of the dictates of the experts. In other words, it disregards, as does the industrial organization it unconsciously emulates, the special knowledge of those who actually do the everyday work in an organization. It assumes that teachers cannot take greater responsibility in the administration of a school and that efforts in such a direction are dangerous. On the basis of such assumptions it supports forms of teacher education which serve to deskill teachers, teaching them not to think in self-directed, empowered ways. The professional training which emerges is obsessed with format over substance, with teaching teachers to be 'supervisable' to be team players, to fit into organizational structures.
>
> Teachers understand that something is not right. My conversations with them often touch raw nerves, an anger just below the surface. Such alienation finds its origins in their perception that few in the organization respect them, few value their voices, their knowledge of the educational process. Because of their sensitivity, I must be careful: I too, am perceived as an outsider, just another critic who talks at them from afar. I understand such feelings. I attempt to write this book with that understanding constantly in mind.
>
> Without romanticizing, patronizing, or denigrating them, I attempt to engage teachers with some ideas that may be helpful in their struggle to control their own professional destinies. These ideas revolve around the notion of teachers as researchers, an old idea which when reconceptualized in conjunction with a reasonable system of meaning may provide a starting place for a democratic reorganization of the way schools work. This democratic reconceptualization of education embraces a vision which takes seriously notions of social justice, racial, gender, and class equality, and alternative ways of seeing the world borrowed from people who have traditionally been ignored. I want students of education to read this book—but most of all I want teachers to read it. My hope is that it will serve as an abrasive grain of sand which induces them to name their discontent, to act on such an articulation. To embrace hope in this era of cynicism is a revolutionary act. But as long as we can formulate visions, possibility persists.

My concerns and interests have not changed over the last eleven years but conditions have. The right-wing deskilling trends I referred to in 1991 have in the ensuing years become institutionalized in the U.S. under the banner of the standards movement that was just emerging when the first edition of this book appeared. In this revised context it is important to discuss this

movement and its effects on educational quality and teacher work in particular. A cogent discussion of teachers as researchers, teachers as self-directed scholars cannot take place outside of this context.

The Age of Mediocrity: Top-down Standards and the Desecration of Teachers

We live in an age of mediocrity where dreaming about 'what could be' in the educational, psychological, cultural, economic, and political realm is somehow undervalued and even discouraged. Sometimes when I speak of these matters to groups, they see me as coming from a crack in a time warp. They seem to have never heard such talk in their lives. When we speak of social vision in contemporary Western societies, we seem to stay well within the bounds of the marketplace or neo-fundamentalist religions scarred by their ethnocentrism and disdain of difference. Imagination in this context is domesticated and directed to the realm of escapist entertainment or marketing. Indeed, as a society we don't seem very interested in the complex and deep processes that generate our dreams (defined in multiple ways) and our sense of purpose. After the tragic attacks of September 11, 2001, we speak of unity of purpose but few have taken time to consider what such a concept might mean in a rethinking of the global future.

Education in this globalized age of mediocrity devolves into an effort to make students competitive in the cold new economic order that faces them. The call for high educational standards in a global economy is touted as new and innovative educational policy; but even a cursory survey of twentieth-century educational history will reveal numerous times when 'innovators' instituted such reforms only to watch them fail. When educational purpose is defined as the process of training the types of individuals business and industry say they need, educational quality declines. In this situation reformers attempt to transform schools into venues for ideological indoctrination and social regulation while reducing teachers to deliverers of pre-packaged and homogenized information. Even by traditional canonical modes of evaluation, the sanctity of education is debased.

My purpose in *Teachers as Researchers* both in 1991 and in the present is to argue that these tendencies in educational history and in the present standards movement are not accidental. These technicalizing and deskilling approaches to education are the direct result of particular Western ways of seeing the world, the nature of human beings, the developmental processes of the young, the composition of the mind, and the production of knowledge. This book is based on the contention that Cartesian-Newtonian-Baconian science has produced a very restricted view of humans and their potentials. Indeed, in this framework the definition of a high-functioning student is one with the ability to mirror back the external world described by Western science.

In this reductionistic view the human mind receives information from the body's senses, stores it like a squirrel his nuts in data banks, and at best puts pieces of it together to construct a generalization. Any deviation from this procedure of reproducing 'objective reality' is condemned as a marker of psychological inability or cultural inferiority. In the present era described by many as a knowledge society run by knowledge workers in a knowledge economy, this view of mind and information is woefully inadequate. It is important to understand this view, however, because it has been complicit in all of the truncated perspectives that have historically shaped schooling in general and the lives of teachers in particular. In the contemporary conversation about knowledge workers and their education, understanding the reductionistic view and developing the scholarly and political skills to move beyond it become even more vital to the future of democracy and the pedagogical strategies that support it. Teachers becoming researchers is a necessary component of this important struggle (Grof, 1993; O'Sullivan, 1999).

Technical Standards, Standardization, and Educational Irrationality

The top-down technical standards of the contemporary reform movement are so specific in their prescribed list of 'facts' to be covered that the best teachers are handcuffed in their effort to teach complex concepts and to connect them to the lived experiences of students (Pushkin, 2001). In this irrational context such teachers are victimized by a simplistic and panicky response to social change, youth-in-crisis, or a decline in standardized test scores. Relying on reductionistic measurements of student memorization of unconnected fragments of information, advocates of top-down, imposed content standards have no basis for evaluating more sophisticated aspects of learning and teaching (Bereiter, 2002). Indeed, they cannot measure even the traditional skills of good scholars not to mention the innovative and evolving operations of intellects coming from diverse cultures and counter-Cartesian-Newtonian-Baconian locales. Even the work of Albert Einstein in physics—portions of which such as the Special Theory of Relativity are almost a century old—cannot be taught, learned, or evaluated in the intellectual and pedagogical quagmire of top-down standards (Kincheloe, Steinberg, and Tippins, 1999).

Technical standards demand that teachers in the same subjects and grade levels cover the same content, assign the same importance to the content they cover, and evaluate it in the same way (Marzano and Kendall, 1999). Such standardization ignores the profound differences between diverse schools, school settings, student needs, and so on. As teacher-author Susan Ohanian (1999) puts it: 'a one-size-fits-all curriculum ends up fitting nobody' (p. 43). As it fits nobody, such an educational arrangement subverts

the possibility that self-directed teacher professionals might research school atmospheres, the communities surrounding schools, student needs, the disciplinary and counter-disciplinary knowledges constituting the curriculum, and the administrative *modus operandi* of both their districts and their schools. Informed by these understandings, such teachers as researchers could better develop and implement a curriculum connected to the vicissitudes and exigencies of their unique situations.

Such teachers are threats in the eyes of advocates of top-down, technical, and standardized standards. Such teachers seek out diverse perspectives, confront students with conflicting information and different interpretations of the same data. They raise questions in the minds of their students and colleagues—an unappreciated activity in the technicalized status quo. One thing that right-wing advocates of technical standards don't want is for students to question the 'facts.' In this desire they are similar to the educational agents of totalitarian political regimes throughout human history. Democratic educational leaders, simply put, don't repress questions about anything having to do with curriculum or pedagogy. In the contemporary context of top-down, unquestionable standards, the purpose of education becomes based more on the desire for social regulation than for emancipation and freedom. Teachers and students become objects of management, a mode of discipline that serves particular private interests (Weil, 2001b).

In these politico-educational arrangements students—the poor and racially marginalized ones in particular—face the consequences of this pedagogical irrationality: deskilled and dispirited teachers, over-emphasis on standards test preparation, already inadequate educational monies diverted to test preparation materials, and vacuous and fatuous skill and drill exercises (Linne, 2001). Unsurprisingly, many of the more academically talented teachers in this context leave the profession. Such teachers speak with great emotion of the anti-intellectual culture of such schools and the obstacles they faced in their desire to be challenging and inspirational teachers. Again, in this book I attempt to drive home the point that these disastrous realities are not accidental. A diverse set of social, political, and philosophical forces have historically coalesced to shape such situations. For example, the Cartesian-Newtonian-Baconian view of the mind is one of the numerous historical concepts at work in the technical standards fiasco described here. In this conceptualization the mind is not a constructor of reality but merely a filing cabinet into which unproblematized, objective data can be stored.

In this reductionistic modernist perspective not only is the mind a filing cabinet but knowledge is a discrete object that is found in people's brains and reference books. Good teaching, thus, becomes stuffing as much of this knowledge into students' minds as possible. Unfortunately, the Cartesian story goes, some of the students' filing cabinets are much bigger than others and there is nothing educators can do about that (Howley, Pendarvis, and Howley, 1993; Bereiter, 2002). The idea that mind and knowledge are

much more complex entities is lost in this context. The notion that understanding this complexity and using it as an embarkation point for future cognitive development and exploration of the cosmos is central to becoming a great scholar and a brilliant teacher is not understood in contemporary schooling. Here is a conceptual window through which we can escape the age of mediocrity and the dumbed-down schools of technical standards. It is the excitement of this venture that drives *Teachers as Researchers*.

Thus, this book opposes reductionistic efforts to construct: (1) education as memory work for objective standards tests; and (2) teaching as a low-skill activity where teachers do only what they are told. In the context of technical standards, teaching for understanding becomes an act of resistance. Advocacy of teaching for understanding would seem unnecessary except for the fact that it is undermined by these reductionistic reforms. In a Socratic vein I fear that forcing critical teachers to drink hemlock will experience a resurgence. Educators who teach for understanding, beware. The remarkable aspect of this contemporary technical reform is that it is actually taking place in the twenty-first century. The only learning that matters is a learning that engages understanding. Mindless memorization of data for standards tests, even from a crass economic perspective, has no value except for performance on the test itself. In a globalized, technological society it is this higher order of understanding that is needed for any type of vocation that involves working with data. Most of the cognitive functions tested on a standards test can now be automated.

But political and educational leaders in the electronic world of the first decade of the twenty-first century don't talk about teaching for understanding or issues of justice and education. Such leaders deal with surface features in a struggle for good public relations. 'I will set high standards for schools,' they tell us, 'and demand strict accountability.' Questions concerning the effect of such standards and accountability procedures are infrequently raised. Public discussion of the purpose of education in a democratic society or inquiries into the relationship between contemporary social problems and schooling are rarely heard in this Disney World of standards.

Even when leaders make grand pronouncements about setting tough new standards, such declarations are rarely accompanied by tangible resources to implement them. This is justified by free market references to the failure of the public space and the elevation of the private realm of business as the proper locale for educational endeavor. In this right-wing ideological context one might argue that standards reforms are set up to fail. In the wake of such failure it will be much easier to justify corporaterun, for-profit schools. In this privatized context the need for scholarly teachers who raise questions about the curriculum will be finally erased. In this cleansed context the work of ideological regulation can continue uncontested (Apple, 1993; Ohanian, 1999; Malewski, 2001b).

In the short run, however, technical standards work to destroy intellectually rigorous educational programs (Fenimore-Smith and Pailliotet, 2001) and undermine concern with the nature and best interests of learners. Studies suggest that once top-down technical standards are imposed, students become progressively disengaged from the process of learning. Curricular standardization particularly subverts the efforts of poor and minority students, as they quickly lose touch with the curriculum and classroom assignments (Novick, 1996). Indeed, technical content standards violate a key pedagogical principle: educational experience should be tied to the psychological and social investments of the learner. This does not mean advocacy of some simplistic effort to be relevant, but a more complex concern with engaging the libidinal energy of students with the pedagogical process.

Brilliant teachers when free from technical constraints work tirelessly to connect disciplinary and counter-disciplinary information with the fears, joys, questions, dreams, aspirations, and interpersonal relationships of their students. Without such connections education can be a supremely empty process. When the real-life experiences and personal investigations of students are no longer germane to curriculum development, the battle for a rigorous intellectual and motivating education is almost lost (Foote and Goodson, 2001; Schubert and Thomas, 2001). Teachers who are researchers study student backgrounds and needs in order to avoid such a pedagogical tragedy. These concerns encompass the basic themes of this book.

Knowledge in Top-down Standards

As we dig deeper into the educational effects of top-down technical standards we begin to realize that many problematic assumptions are hidden within them. One assumption that is central to the focus of this book involves the nature of knowledge. In many ways the technical standards view of knowledge is philosophically impaired. How advocates of technical standards describe knowing, assess what is worthy of being known, and evaluate knowledge exerts profound impact on the nature of classroom teaching (Mayers, 2001b). Technicist educators, John Dewey (1916) argued decades ago, view knowledge as an entity complete in itself unconnected to other forces.

The technicist, positivist tradition of producing knowledge—from which contemporary top-down standards emerge—seeks to provide a timeless body of truth. This so-called 'formal knowledge' is not only unconnected to the world but separate from issues of commitment, emotion, values, and ethical action. The objectivity inscribed in formal knowledge often becomes a signifier for political passivity and elevation to an elite sociopolitical and economic location. Thus, in its lofty position, positivistic formalism refuses to analyze the relationship between

knowledge production and educational practices. In technical standards teachers are presented with formal knowledge and expected forthwith to deliver it to their classrooms.

The delivery of such formal knowledge to students involves pronouncements such as: 'after the first Thanksgiving dinner the Pilgrims and the Indians lived happily ever after'; or in its application to practice, 'the research tells us to teach secondary science in this manner.' The problem in the latter example involves formalism's failure to study the complex relationship between professional knowledge and the teaching act. Once again, formalism fails to discern the complexity of teaching, that is, the complicated ways that knowledge, consciousness, everyday life, and professional practice intersect. Without this critical recognition, knowledge production in colleges of education is somewhat irrelevant to teachers. Formal knowledge production too often fails to question the relationship between professional knowledge and indeterminant zones of practice characterized by complexity, conflict, ambiguity, and uniqueness. Such a practical zone exists outside the boundaries of positivism and the formal knowledge it produces. Formalism can't cope with everyday life's and the classroom's ill-formed problems.

The vision of education advocated in this book positions teachers as professionals who produce knowledge about their practice. It is dedicated to transcending the reductionism of formal knowledge. Aware of the complicated nature of curriculum development, the role of power in all aspects of the pedagogical process, and the complexity of educational practice, teachers as researchers understand the flaw of the formalist conception of knowledge. It is simply not possible, I argue throughout this book, to produce objective knowledge that corresponds to and reflects an unchanging, independent world. When advocates of technical standards propose to do this, they are perpetrating a fraud on both the larger society and the educational community. They are arrogantly asserting that they undisputedly possess the one correct interpretation of the world and that the job of teachers is to meekly pass this information along to students.

Knowledge that purports to reflect an independent, external world is ensnared in a web of reductionism. To preserve its sanctity, advocates of formalism must protect knowledge from confrontations with disorderliness and irrationality. In the classroom such epistemological tidiness exhibits itself in the obsession with correctly grasping the author's meaning. Thus, despite what one may see in a text when examined psychoanalytically, epistemologically, politically, culturally, philosophically, and so on, the author's meaning becomes a transcendental object that is the *raison d'être* of the pedagogical task.

The fetishization of the author's meaning is one more part of the puzzle of formalist knowledge. These parts, these things-in-themselves and their relegation to the mental filing cabinet take precedence over conceptual totalities, constellations of ideas and their uses in the world. Indeed, in

formalism and the technical standards it supports these totalities and constellations of ideas are deemed irrelevant. In higher education, disciplinary gatekeepers work in concert with advocates of technical standards in elementary and secondary schools to maintain an irrational—although always expressed in the name of rationality—*status quo*. In this context meaning is sacrificed for formalistic order and pseudo-tidiness (Madison, 1988; Schön, 1995; Thomas, 1998).

Reductionism and Technical Standards: The Jail Break to Complexity

This obsession with order and tidiness is one aspect of Cartesian reductionism (Lemke, 1995). In this paradigm—the way of seeing that supports technical standards—scientists assert that the behavior of the whole can be grasped by knowledge of the properties of the parts. In this reductionistic Cartesian analytic the parts of a phenomenon cannot be studied any farther, unless we break them into even smaller parts. On this conceptual foundation Western education has rested. After a series of challenges to the framework in the twentieth century, it has returned with a vengeance in the twenty-first century. Implicit in this Cartesian reductionism is the belief that there are limited and correct meanings to be derived from any phenomenon. And the purpose of schooling is to simply pass on such meanings to students.

Thus, in a reductionistic pedagogical context meanings need to be discovered, rediscovered, and copied. Student analysis and interpretation in this context are an attempt to reconstruct what the scientist produced or, again, the meaning the author intended. These epistemological dynamics tacitly shape the purposes of schooling and the nature of classroom life. A reductionistic paradigm discourages the preparation of inquisitive, knowledge-producing, critical students and teachers; a more complex paradigm encourages more skeptical participants who appreciate the hidden dimensions of knowledge production and the complicity of power in all aspects of the pedagogical process. My argument here is direct: reductionist ways of seeing, teaching, and learning pose a direct threat to education as a practice of democracy (Madison, 1988; Capra, 1996).

Educators who support teacher professionalism look at the reductionistic technical standards with fear and trembling. Because teaching is viewed as a neat and tidy act, it can be standardized and monitored. Susan Ohanian (1999) describes a question-answer session at a Reading Summit in Illinois in 1996. After an advocate of technical standards had spoken on the need for 'highly structured, intense [reading] programs that explicitly teach application of phonologic rules to print,' an educator in the audience raised questions about the desirability and feasibility of controlling a teacher's methods of teaching and individual style. The speaker replied:

> We had careful monitoring of the teachers. First there was thirty hours of training during the summer. Then every teacher was monitored in the classroom every other week—or every day, if necessary. We were breathing down the necks both of raw recruits and veteran teachers. The teacher variable does not contribute significantly above and beyond the curriculum, so what we have here is a powerful mathematical model. My hypothesis is the teacher variable will be less significant within the direct instruction group.
>
> (Ohanian: 49)

This is the language—'teacher variable'—and mind-set of reductionism. The chilling implication here is that teachers are less important than the standards and techniques employed by the experts. The obvious question that arises in this context is why employ educated teachers if this is the case. Find friendly young people, preferably large for purposes of classroom control, who can read at about the seventh grade level; provide them with scripted material and a six-week training course in teaching techniques and turn them loose in the school. Much money could be saved—hell, we could pay them minimum wages. As soon as the technology is ready, we can replace these functionaries with computer-teachers. No need for teachers as researchers here.

There is something surreal about such perspectives. Proponents of such reductionist, top-down, dehumanized modes of pedagogy and regulation seem to operate at what Ed O'Sullivan refers to as a 'preconscious, nonreflective state' (1999:34). In this Cartesian trance individuals seem to operate without any consciousness of the contradictions operating in their positions, without an awareness of the anti-democratic strategies they implement, without insight into the way their plans degrade and demoralize the teaching profession. In this reductionistic jailhouse questions involving the educational gaps between the rich and poor are deemed inappropriate. Questions about indoctrination fall on deaf ears. Such problems do not lend themselves to neat reductionistic measurement with handy quantitative results.

Technical standards offer profoundly simplistic answers to difficult socio-educational questions. How is it possible to solve educational problems that are connected to so many social, cultural, historical, political, philosophical, and economic dynamics circulating around them? If the lived world is a complex place, then the lived world of school is a complex place squared. Appreciating the complex and diverse forms of knowing that are needed to deal with the lived world is sobering to even the most brilliant among us. Formal thinking and the formal operations of breaking down phenomena into their smallest parts for analysis fail to raise questions of value to employ the insight of diverse contextualization. Without these more complex dynamics at work we end up with technical-standards-driven schools that stupidify more than they edify (Hinchey, 1998, 2001).

Western Knowledge and Power: Understanding Ethnocentrism

A central theme of *Teachers as Researchers* involves the understanding of these complex elements of the research and knowledge production process—insights that propel teachers to the status of professional knowledge workers. One of these complex elements involves the ability to identify and trace the effects of ethnocentrism within the Cartesian-Newtonian-Baconian tradition. Over the last few centuries the Western belief in the superiority of such frameworks of knowing has been so assumed and widely accepted in Western societies that it was thought not to deserve comment. Knowledge producers who operated outside the boundaries of Cartesian science were viewed as not only inferior but uncivilized. In the traditions of Western education, Cartesian science is not merely the best way to understand the world, it is the only way. With this broad epistemological brushstroke most of the knowledge production methods and wisdom of human kind is trashed (Grof, 1993).

In this ethnocentric view 'true knowledge' can only be produced by a detached, disinterested, external observer who works to ignore background (contextual) information by developing objective research techniques. In human history most of the great wisdom generated has not been constructed in this manner (Shotter, 1993, 1998). It is not surprising that no institution has carried these Cartesian blinders more zealously than education. As we see so clearly in the contemporary standards movement—a movement that in a socio-political and cultural context might be labeled as part of a broader Cartesian recovery impulse—any historical analysis of what has motivated this mode of pedagogical reform is irrelevant. The concept of a globalized perspective on the standards movement's hyper-Cartesianism cannot even be contemplated by its proponents outside of a crass feeding of the U.S. directed globalized economy. A planetary insight with awareness of and respect for diverse ways of knowing, cultural humility, and an ecologically sustainable and ethical conception of progress is not on the conceptual map.

In 1994 when Lynne Cheney (wife of Vice-President Dick Cheney) was attacking the National History Standards from her post at the conservative think tank, the American Enterprise Institute, she objected to their excessive coverage of women and minorities. The professional historian, she argued, who wrote the 'disastrous' standards were out to destroy Western Civilization and the Enlightenment (i.e., Cartesian) tradition (Wiener, 2000). Even the most minor attempts to include diverse voices in the history curriculum in the U.S. schools are met with vicious objections. Note that the National History Standards were not calling for an inclusion of global, non-Western, and non-Christian information. The call for diverse global understandings and respect for other cultures' epistemologies, as found in this book, are dismissed as an assault on 'all we

hold dear.' It is essential that progressive Westerners understand this arrogance, its numerous consequences around the world and within Western societies, and develop the skills to counter its expression and negate its unfortunate consequences (Apple, 1993).

In this cultural context the technical standards movement's call for standardization takes on even more ideological baggage. Not only a manifestation of hyper-rationalization, the standardization of curriculum becomes a means of insuring ethnocentrism in the classroom. Such an ethnocentrism is suspicious of concepts such as diversity, multiple perspectives, criticality, difference, and multiculturalism. Ideologically, it works covertly to promote the interests of the dominant culture over less powerful minority cultures. Such interests involve the power of the privileged to maintain their privilege, as students from economically poorer families, those students whose families possess the least formal education, are transformed into 'test liabilities' (Ohanian, 1999; Vinson and Ross, 2001). In such a category their problems in school can be blamed on their inferiority—'we tried to teach them the information mandated by the standards but they just didn't have the ability to get it. There's nothing more we can do.'

In this power-centered context dominant European interests and needs are validated while those individuals who fall outside dominant cultural borders are forced to struggle for legitimacy. Technical standards become regulatory forces that limit the professional discretion of teachers while insuring that the individual needs of students in some way alienated from the culture and discourses of schools are rendered irrelevant (Giroux, 1997). In both a macro- and micro-social context we watch the fragmentary influences of Euro-modernism and the ethnocentrism it produces do their 'bad work.' At the macro-level Westerners are alienated from other cultures around the world, as Cartesian ways of seeing and producing knowledge fragment the wholeness that connects us to both each other and the planet in general (Capra, 1996). In a micro-context this Cartesianism separates classroom knowledge from its embeddedness in the lived world and its meaning in our lives, rendering it abstract data to be learned for an absurd standards text.

Positivism and Learning: Certifying Fragmentation

As connections are severed and meanings subverted, Cartesianism's epistemology of positivism takes center stage in education and knowledge production. The detailed delineation of the definition of positivism is a central theme in *Teachers as Researchers,* but for the purpose of situating ourselves, a short description of positivism is in order. Positivism is the prevalent view of knowledge (epistemology) in the history of Western science. Coming into general philosophical usage in the nineteenth

century, positivism assumes that nature is orderly and knowable via the scientific method and that all phenomena have natural causes. In a positivistic educational context human-created knowledge is conceptualized as a physical substance handed from one individual to another via the process of teaching. The receiver in this positivistic context is nothing more than a passive recipient who merely accepts the 'physical entity' that has been passed along to him or her (Lee, 1997).

As receivers uncritically take in information in the decontextualized positivistic framework, they are anesthesized into believing that meaning resides in the information fragment itself rather in the network of relationships from which it was retrieved. When educational leaders operate with such a tacit belief embedded in their consciousness, it is much easier for them to fall into an obsession with standards test performance. Losing sight of the complexity of knowledge production and the contextualized nature of teaching for understanding, superintendents, supervisors, and principals focus on the mastery of those factoids included in standardized tests. The stories teachers tell about these obsessions are chilling. As one teacher in Brooklyn described it:

> Our principal has gone nuts. He checks all classrooms to make sure we display charts he made depicting our place in the rankings of school test performance in the city. One teacher had temporarily taken down the chart to put up some student work. The principal screamed at her in front of the students. She was a mess; we thought she was going to get fired. For over two months before students take the test, we are not allowed to do anything but prep them for it: test-taking skills, rote memorization, flash cards, and things like that. He has spies checking up on us to make sure we do nothing else. I can't stay there another year. It'll make me as crazy as he is.

What is so disconcerting in these positivistic, fragmented, and irrational contexts in twenty-first-century schooling is the inability of most observers to view them in a larger analytical context. Too often observers in educational leadership, teachers' unions, political action committees, parental groups, and so on cannot connect these disturbing situations to social, political, philosophical, economic, or cultural forces that rest outside of the immediate perceptions and circumstances of the individuals involved. Critical scholar teachers must understand these ideological and discursive forces and be able to delineate the specific hidden ways that they construct consciousness and everyday educational practice. This is a central concern of critical scholar teachers as researchers.

If we are unable to accomplish this task, positivist education will continue to fragment meaning and mystify reality. Such education will continue to subvert dialogue about the construction of knowledge, view

students and teachers as objects of regulation, induce students to ignore the ways their consciousness is produced while isolating them from the world (Zeno, 1998). Indeed, we can see in this panorama the ways that learners are removed from curriculum construction in the technical standards-driven school. And, as always, poor and minority students are the ones hit first and hardest by this positivistic process because of their already existing cultural distance from the workings of schools (Novick, 1996).

In the positivistic context the dumbed-down and inequitable dynamics of education continue to promote their 'bad medicine.' I am amazed when I observe and talk with teachers about life in contemporary standards-driven schools how few questions they are allowed to ask about the process. Authoritarian political/educational leaders know that extensive questioning would constitute a challenge to the *status quo* (Hinchey, 1998, 2001). In the disciplined and sanitized new educational order this is simply not acceptable. 'What is our larger purpose in educating students in a democratic society?' 'Would you hold your questions, please, for a later time?'

Positivistic standards rip through the schools like an Oklahoma tornado, leaving destruction in their wake. Teachers are infuriated when standards-driven district leaders and administrators give them scripts that they must read to their classes in lieu of their own personally devised lessons. The teachers I have interviewed are livid about such disrespectful practices:

> If I had thought I was going to have to read from a script to my students, I would have never, ever gone into teaching. I have master's degrees in both English and education and I am not trusted to prepare a lesson. I am not going to stay in the profession unless this changes. I feel so degraded every day I go to school.

There is no doubt that positivistic deskilling will demoralize our best and brightest teachers. Teaching to a multiple-choice test will undermine the motivation for teachers and students.

Top-down standards ignore the fact that different students are ready to learn different concepts and skills at different times. Brilliant teachers keep tabs on such 'dispositional readiness' and attempt to discern and generate interest before teaching particular lessons. This is a subtle and complex process that becomes an art form when exercised by adept teachers. With one brushstroke positivistic standards destroy it by determining when and how particular lessons will be taught. The theoretical concept here involves the notion of an epistemology of practice. A modernist Cartesian epistemology of practice emphasizes that there are universal steps in formulating the one best practice in pursuing professional activity. Technical top-down standards are based on such an epistemology of practice.

In *Teachers as Researchers* I devote much energy to challenging such positivism. I argue that the realm in which humans live and work is much too multifaceted, complicated, and culturally diverse for the

implementation of universal approaches to professional practice. In this context teacher researchers explore their unique situations to generate not a 'correct approach' to practice but a dialogue about the teaching act. Expert-devised systems of practice handed down as positivistic truth to practitioners never work as well as locally produced practice-in-action. Empowered teacher researchers are always engaged in a dialogue with numerous colleagues and scholars about practice and act on their synthetic understandings of a constellation of insights—not by a sequence of rules (Capra, 1996). Devisors of top-down standards have never understood this concept (Apple, 1999; Morris, Doll, and Pinar, 1999; Purpel, 1999; Agnello, 2001).

As a result of this lack of understanding, positivism certifies the fragmentation of the workplace, the undermining of the sanctity of the educational act, and the subversion of education as a practice of democracy. Positivism in its top-down standards disguise tears away at the heart and soul of teacher, sapping energy and dedication. Teachers have to be tough and smart to survive this assault on the profession. Unfortunately, so do students. It is difficult to watch this process unfold, to observe new generations damaged by these positivistic dynamics. The standards frenzy undermines the efforts by smart teachers and administrators to provide lessons in critical and creative thinking, reasoning, and metacognitive understandings of curriculum and knowledge production (Weil, 2001c). In this positivistic briar patch schools intensify their historical functions of social regulation and what Donaldo Macedo (1994) has labeled 'stupidification.' Teachers as scholars and researchers are not welcome in this pedagogical thicket. Indeed, the fragmentation of meaning, purpose, and direction is adeptly accomplished in this context.

Positivism, Standards, and Student Needs

In the rule-orientation, epistemological *naïveté,* and decontextualization of positivist standards, many educational and political leaders maintain that the 'conditions of schools, the material well-being of families, and the dynamics of communities are not even worth thinking about' (Books, 2001). Such contextual features have nothing to do with schooling or its improvement in a positivistic cosmos concerned only with providing the correct data to be learned and the correct rules for teachers to follow in inculcating this eviscerated information. As long as the proper curricular information is clearly delineated and teachers follow the script, advocates of top-down standards assure the public that the economic, social, and psychological well-being of children and young people is a relatively minor variable. Such damnable nonsense is the commonsense of the twenty-first-century discourse of school reform.

If such student needs are not meet, young people will not learn well regardless of the brilliance of the pedagogy. Moreover, teachers who don't know their students well, don't know how their needs are or are not being met, or don't know what moves them, will always have trouble creating meaningful classrooms where learning takes place (Ohanian, 1999; Books, 2001). At this conceptual way station in the pedagogical journey teachers have to pause and carefully observe the ideological terrain around them. They have to wear their night-vision goggles to discern those forces that exist outside of their immediate perceptions and experiences. Schooling, like the culture in general, is a domain of struggle where knowledge and power are always functions of one another.

Positivism is a philosophical/political force of domination. It deftly blinds observers and analysts to the conflicts and interests that covertly shape educational policy and classroom practice. Any force that has the power to convince individuals that student well-being is not a central factor in improving education must be addressed. The exposure and neutralization of such a force must become a central objective of anyone who cares about children, teachers, democracy, justice, and the reform of education. Positivism's capacity to hide itself makes such a process as difficult as flushing terrorists out of remote mountain caves. Democratic educators must develop the capacity to persuade numerous groups and individuals that any pedagogy that dismisses student experience is inadequate for a humane democratic society.

Positivism in the guise of technical standards ignores students in the way it distorts understanding of self and world. Grounded on a reductionistic view of knowledge and curriculum, top-down standards consciously delete multiple perspectives on a topic and teach one ideologically inscribed perspective as truth. Such a perspective usually grants legitimacy to given institutional configurations, prevailing ways of seeing and being, and dominant cultural belief structures. The bloodstains left in the historical political struggle over these ideological positions are hidden, as conflict, oppression, and violence are conveniently erased.

Paulo Freire's (1970b) notion of the banking model of education still has the power to describe twenty-first-century standards curricula. The information transmitted is made only for deposit in mental filing cabinets—no interpretation is necessary. Such positivistic teaching does not encourage rigorous academic analysis; rather, it numbs the mind, producing intellectual passivity and blind rule following. Students and teachers are taught to accept and respect the power of dominant elites. Of course, not all of them will accept such teachings. Many will discern the ideological project confronting them and resist, while others will passively accept such attempts at consciousness construction (Giroux, 1997). Teachers as critical researchers expose this process and insist that it be analyzed and studied by their colleagues and students.

Studying Power: Ideological Consolidation in the Twenty-first Century

It is apparent to many that setting standards is not tantamount to producing a rigorous, challenging, and critical education. Surveying the landscape of standards reform in the first decade of the twenty-first century, one can sense that educational and political leaders have used the opportunity to centralize power over the institution of education. Moreover, standards reform has been deployed specifically to disempower teachers and remove them from the business of curriculum development, constructing educational purpose, and evaluating student performance. While these power plays have taken place under the flag of improving education, proponents of standards have concurrently slashed educational allocations to fund tax cuts for the wealthy (Ohanian, 1999; Thomas and Schubert, 2001). Observing contemporary educational politics in New York City, I am shocked by the degree to which politicians who advocate technical standards have reduced what were already meager schools funds. In this context power blocs are consolidating their capacity for domination, as they tighten their control of knowledge production, media, news programming, and schooling.

The type of critical inquiry and analysis I am advocating for empowered teacher researchers pays close attention to these issues of power (Horn, 2001). Critical teachers as researchers understand the centrality of power in understanding everyday life, knowledge production, curriculum development, and teaching. Power is implicated in all educational visions, it is omnipresent in reform proposals, and it is visible in delineations of what constitutes an educated person. It is the charge of teacher researchers to grasp these dynamics, to study them and to act on the basis of what they find. In such a process teacher researchers raise questions of intent and larger purpose in relation to particular practices. As students forge their way through elementary and secondary schooling, for example, are their experiences designed to adjust them to the existing social and economic order? What school experiences engage students in questioning the justice of that order and the desirability of such adjustment?

Studying the standards movement in numerous macro- and micro-contexts (Horn and Kincheloe, 2001; Kincheloe and Weil, 2001), I am struck by the absence of concern with the duties of democratic citizenship, the need for social change, and issues of justice. The notion of critique of counter-democratic forces, of threats to fragile democratic institutions, and of ideological indoctrination in the guise of education are simply not part of top-down, positivistic standards. Critical teacher researchers are alarmed by these omissions, as they watch state after state mandate authoritarian compliance audits to insure that there is no deviation from the official curriculum, from memorization of the

'approved knowledge of the Party.' The impositional nature of these reforms is a naked form of power that is so confident in its sovereignty it senses little need to mask itself. If such power is not challenged, the education it decrees is little more than an effort to produce social, political, and academic mind control (Nelson, 1998; Norris, 1998; Vinson and Ross, 2001).

The Vision: Teachers as Researchers

In the existing world of schooling and especially in the new educational order being created by technical standards, teachers do not live in the same professional culture as researchers. Knowledge in contemporary education is still something that is produced far away from the school by experts in a rarefied domain. This must change if democratic reform of education is to take place. Teachers must join the culture of researchers if a new level of educational rigor and quality is ever to be achieved. In such a new democratized culture teacher scholars begin to understand the power implications of technical standards. In this context they appreciate the benefits of research, especially as they relate to understanding the forces shaping education that fall outside their immediate experience and perception. As these insights are constructed, teachers begin to understand what they know from experience. With this in mind they gain heightened awareness of how they can contribute to the research on education. Indeed, they realize that they have access to understandings that go far beyond what the expert researchers have produced.

In the new school culture teachers are viewed as learners—not as functionaries who follow top-down orders without question. Teachers are seen as researchers and knowledge workers who reflect on their professional needs and current understandings. They are aware of the complexity of the educational process and how schooling cannot be understood outside of the social, historical, philosophical, cultural, economic, political, and psychological contexts that shape it. Scholar teachers understand that curriculum development responsive to student needs is not possible when it fails to account for these contexts. With this in mind they explore and attempt to interpret the learning processes that take place in their classrooms. What are its psychological, sociological, and ideological effects, they ask. Thus, scholar teachers research their own professional practice (Norris, 1998; Kraft, 2001; Bereiter, 2002).

With empowered scholar teachers prowling the schools, things begin to change. The oppressive culture created by positivistic standards is challenged. In-service staff development no longer takes the form of 'this is what the expert researchers found—now go do it.' Such staff development in the new culture gives way to teachers who analyze and contemplate the power of each other's ideas. Thus, the new critical culture of school takes

on the form of a 'think tank that teaches students,' a learning community. School administrators are amazed by what can happen when they support learning activities for both students and teachers. Principals and curriculum developers watch as teachers develop projects that encourage collaboration and shared research. There is an alternative to top-down standards with their deskilling of teachers and the stupidification of students (Novick, 1996; Jardine, 1998; Norris, 1998).

Promoting teachers as researchers is a fundamental way of cleaning up the damage of technical standards. Deskilling of teachers and dumbing-down of the curriculum take place when teachers are seen as receivers not producers of knowledge. A vibrant professional culture depends on a group of practitioners who have the freedom to continuously reinvent themselves via their research and knowledge production. Teachers engaged in complex, critical practice find it difficult to allow positivistic standards and their poisonous effects to go unchallenged. Such teachers cannot abide the deskilling and reduction in professional status that accompany these top-down reforms. It is this concept that generates the subtitle of this book: *Qualitative Inquiry as a Path to Empowerment*. Indeed, teacher empowerment does not occur just because we wish it to. Instead, it takes place when teachers develop the knowledge work skills and pedagogical abilities befitting the calling of teaching.

Technical standards are both based on and promote a reductionistic, truncated view of educational, social, and psychological research. The profound advances in research produced over the last thirty years are virtually ignored by advocates of positivistic standards. What we know or have developed the capacity to know about the complex world of teaching and learning grants educators a far more compelling and diverse view of schooling and its relationship to social, cultural, historical, economic, and psychological forces (Coben, 1998; Symes and Meadmore, 1999; Willinsky, 2001a). It is frustrating to watch these advances in research and knowledge production (Clough, 1998; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) relegated to the trash heap, while outmoded and destructive modes of inquiry are recovered and legitimated. With their official status, such practices are rendered unquestionable. Teacher researchers have the difficult task of questioning the unquestionable.

Raising the Questions: Teacher Researchers and Educational Rigor

Questioning the unquestionable has never been a picnic in the park. In this complex context critical researchers analyze educational situations with the aim of improving the quality of activity connected to them. In the spirit of complexity, however, teacher researchers move to a new conceptual terrain, as they raise questions about the situation itself so as not to be confined by

the assumptions embedded within it. This dynamic raises a central theme within this book: critical teachers as researchers develop the capacity to expose the assumptions behind, the interest served by, and the unarticulated purposes of particular forms of educational activity (Lester, 2001; Raven and Stephenson, 2001). These are key issues within the complex critical form of teacher research presented here. Some forms of action research or practitioner research developed over the last several decades have not conceptualized questions at this level of assumptions, hidden interest, and unarticulated purpose.

In order to produce smarter teachers and higher-quality education, critical teacher researchers push the conceptual envelope. They understand that in some forms of action research issues of historical, sociological, cultural studies and philosophical influences on schooling are irrelevant. Despite the hard work in which teacher researchers might engage, an understanding of forces outside of their immediate experiences was lost. Questions such as the following are not to be found in some action research contexts:

- What is the social role of schooling in a democratic society?
- What discourses shape the form that schooling takes?
- What unseen forces help to construct student performance?
- What are the ideological inscriptions of the curriculum?
- How do epistemological assumptions affect the everyday life of the classroom?
- What is the political impact of particular educational practices?
- Who defines what teacher research takes place?

(Goodson, 1997, 1999)

Efficacious teacher research that leads to more rigorous and just forms of education assumes the importance of these questions and inquiries like them. In such research contextual factors are carefully studied and then classroom practices are analyzed in relation to them. Connections are made, relational links are discerned, and processes and patterns are exposed. Teachers in such a context not only learn about knowledge production, but also learn how to expand their cognitive abilities in relation to interconnected concepts. Obviously, positivistic standards preclude the need for such sophisticated teacher activity, as meaningful tasks and meaning making itself are subverted. The possibility of the development of rigorous education is undermined. I employ the term 'rigor' here not in its positivistic usage: the careful following of the fixed and predetermined steps of the scientific method. I appropriate and redefine the term as the

democratic expression of the best education possible. Throughout this book I will argue that critical teacher research is a pathway to a rigorous education.

Teaching for understanding and democratic social action is a central aspect of this rigorous 'best education possible.' The research process in these contexts is a central aspect of staff development, curricular policy, solving problems that face the school, and classroom activity (Novick, 1996). As we will explore throughout the book, a rigorous and just education demands that teachers research their students (Cannella, 1997; Soto, 1997, 2000; DuBois-Reymond, Sunker, and Kruger, 2001). We need to understand social and psychological conceptions of children and young people, as well as children's and young people's perceptions of themselves. Teachers as researchers explore their students' relationships to the world, the information climate produced by media and popular culture, and new modes of socialization and enculturation in the twenty-first century. Teacher researchers monitor students' reactions to and perceptions of the new rigor and educational experiences in general. The point is simple: a sophisticated pedagogy cannot take place if teachers don't know their students (de Oliveira and Montecinos, 1998; Zeno, 1998).

If teachers don't know their students, what they know and don't know, their fears and their dreams, their failures and successes, they cannot help them construct a compelling and in-depth view of the world and their role in it. Without such insight, teachers cannot help students become knowledge workers in a knowledge-driven world. Students will find it difficult to make sense of existing data while learning to produce their own knowledge. When teacher researchers know their students, become experts in subject matter, and are adept knowledge workers, they are beginning to put together the skills that will help them become great teachers who motivate and inspire their students. As such teachers engage students with the world, they simultaneously make schools more rigorously academic and more practical in the world. This is the vision of teaching on which *Teachers as Researchers* is grounded.