Understanding, Mapping, and Exploring the Terrain of Public Pedagogy

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We look across the perfectly lined and spaced products in any suburban grocery store, angled slightly to highlight their curled and bolded logos and glowing palely under fine-tuned fluorescent lights—and we learn the aesthetics of pop-glitz and oversaturated colors, all bounded within staccato linearity, Warhol’s critique turned into its object. In a museum of natural history, we slowly amble down designated paths from entrance to exit, marveling at the narrative of human evolution—from a primal, savage, and dark body to an efficacious, civil, clean white one. Walking down public streets, we are taught where we can and cannot be, our teacher oft en the baleful gaze of the police. In the guerilla gardens of Detroit, Los Angeles, and London, we learn to reclaim post-urban spaces as sites of production and community support, the crops a small, defiant green beacon that refuses suffocation by the labyrinth of dull grey. An artist’s lyrics and music intertwine to create passion, rage, and action, where before there was only overwhelming alienation and acquiescence.

We are constantly being taught, constantly learn, and constantly unlearn. Education is an enveloping concept, a dimension of culture that maintains dominant practices while also offering spaces for their critique and reimagination. The pedagogies we have described here, as well as myriad other instances are full of complexity, contradictions, and diversity. Many chapters in this volume do not directly deal with schools or the process of schooling, they deal with the bigger, more pressing issues of cultivating a pedagogy of humanity, which ultimately has implications for schooling and non-school settings. These are public pedagogies—spaces, sites, and languages of education and learning that exist outside of the walls of the institution of schools. As this collection illustrates, however, they are just as crucial—if not more so—to our understanding of the developments of identities and social formations as the teaching that goes on within the classroom. Via the examples and analysis offered herein, the editors hope to raise crucial questions for educational researchers, questions that center on how we might open our inquiry into the places and people who exist outside of the schoolyard fence or the university campus and how we might address the challenge of recognizing and exploring the very pedagogies that undergird our own private and public lives.
A Brief History of Public Pedagogy Scholarship

Increasing numbers of educational scholars, from a wide range of contexts, are interested in the learning and education happening outside of formal schooling systems and position informal spaces of learning such as popular culture, the Internet, public spaces such as museums and parks, and other civic and commercial spaces, including both old and new social movements, as sites of pedagogy containing possibilities for both reproduction and resistance (Cremin, 1976; Crowther, 2006; Ellsworth, 2005; Giroux, 2004a; Grace, 2001; Holst, 2002; Kilgore, 1999; Kincheloe, 2002; Schubert, 1997; Welton, 1993). These scholars often draw upon what is termed public pedagogy (Giroux, 2000) to describe these various sites of education. However, this term has historically been given a variety of definitions and meanings by those who employ and apply it in a variety of contexts.

Even when divided into its constituent words, public and pedagogy, the term represents old, complicated, and ongoing conversations within educational discourse, especially within the field of curriculum studies. What does a public, in terms of space, identity, democracy, and education, mean? What are the lines of demarcation that divide the public from the private, and just how porous are they? Within the current neoliberal order, are publics just fictions we recite in the service of private interests? The concept of pedagogy, too, has given rise to distinct and diverse “lines of flight” (Reynolds & Webber, 2004) in educational research and theorizing—from its historical origins as an extra-institutional practice (see Roberts & Steiner, this volume), to Freire-inspired demands for critical engagement inside and outside of schools (see Schubert, 1981, this volume; Schultz, 2008; Schultz, Baricovich, & McSurley, this volume), and Luke (1996, this volume) and Ellsworth’s (2005) reconceptualization of the embodied spaces and workings of a multiplicity of pedagogies.

The concept of public pedagogy has also been taken up in the academic field of adult education, where very early work within cultural studies emerged. Woodhams (1999) asserts that adult education recognized the study of popular culture for improving critical pedagogical practices before the founding in 1964 of the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies in England, which for many scholars marks the beginning of the academic discipline of cultural studies (Barker, 2004). In fact, many of the early cultural studies scholars were adult educators, including Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, and E. P. Thompson (Steele, 1994). Adult educators in the 1970s and 1980s engaged again with the notion of popular culture and mass media as educative spaces (i.e., Brookfield, 1986; Graham, 1989). This popular-culture focused work has been taken up more recently by some adult education researchers (Guy, 2004; Sandlin, 2005, 2007; Tisdell, 2008; Tisdell & Thompson, 2007; Wright, 2007a, 2007b) who argue that popular culture has powerful effects on people’s worldviews.

In spite of these tensions and varied approaches, public pedagogy has come to signify a crucial concept within educational scholarship—that schools are not the sole sites of teaching, learning, or curricula, and that perhaps they are not even the most influential. Accordingly, the purpose of this edited handbook is to understand the use of the term public pedagogy and its various, multifaceted meanings through an exploration of its historical contexts, theoretical transitions, and various situations of practice. It is our overarching intent to put these largely disparate ideas and questions into dialogue with one another to engender a more robust conceptual map of public pedagogy, its applications, its silences, and its critical potential.

Whereas educational scholars from various fields have discussed the confluence of cultural studies and education, Henry A. Giroux (1994, 1999, 2000, 2004a, 2004b) has been a prolific and key figure in the development and popularization of the term public pedagogy to describe this intersection. His early work focused on public pedagogy as a means of producing critical
analyses of and interventions within mass culture and media; this work influenced many other educational scholars as they began investigating various forms of popular culture as (mis)educative. In response to this work's focus on the hegemonic aspects of popular culture, other scholars (e.g., Guy, 2004; Sandlin, 2005, 2007; Sandlin & Milam, 2008, this volume; Tisdell, 2008; Tisdell & Thompson, 2007; Wright, 2007a, 2007b, this volume) expanded on Giroux's cultural studies framework to begin explorations into popular culture's critical and counterhegemonic possibilities, focusing on the uses of popular culture as a potential site for social justice, cultural critique, and reimagined possibilities for democratic living. This focus on a more “critical” or resistant public pedagogy broadened over time, leading scholars to examine sites beyond popular culture as spaces of learning, including museums, public parks, art installations, among others (for examples, see Sandlin, Milam, O’Malley, & Burdick, 2008; and O’Malley, Burdick, & Sandlin, in press).

Responding largely to the acquiescence of state control to the corporate power that culminated during the G. W. Bush presidency, Giroux’s work in the early 2000s would itself shift, to center on the theoretical/political realm, in which neoliberalism emerged as the undergirding pedagogy of citizenship in a late-capitalist social order. In addition, contributions working on and through the issue of neoliberalism frequently cite the public intellectual as an interventionist figure, an institutional authority who seeks to denude dominating public pedagogies of their commonsensical logic and expose underlying hegemonic aims. Curriculum scholars such as Brady (2006) and O’Malley (2006), who focus much more on collective, grassroots social action as critical public pedagogy, articulate this new strand focusing on public intellectuals quite differently. Brady and O’Malley’s perspectives are also echoed within strands of adult education that discuss historical and contemporary social movements as sites of critical learning and education, as exemplified by the work of Dykstra and Law (1994), Finger (1989), Foley (1999), Holst (2002), Kilgore (1999), Sandlin and Walther (2009), and Welton (1993).

(De)Constructing the Field of Public Pedagogy Research

In this edited handbook, we use these various moments in the history and articulation of the concept of public pedagogy as an organizing framework, comprised of six sections: Historical Theoretical, and Methodological Perspectives on Public Pedagogy; Pedagogies of Popular Culture and Everyday Life; In/Formal and Activist Sites of Learning; <Inter>Sections of Formal Institutions, Classroom Practices, and Public Pedagogy; Neoliberalism, Fear, and the Control State; and Public Intellectualism. However, as in any process of division and classification of human activity, these thematic groupings are to some extent arbitrary and leaky. Public pedagogy, much like curriculum and cultural studies, calls for a radically interdisciplinary and contextualized sensibility towards research and theorizing, one that draws from a wide range of cultural discourses and that seeks to inhabit the complex, often ambiguous, spaces of pedagogical address. Accordingly, we do not propose these sections as ordinal principles, but merely as our means of constructing a narrative to contain authors’ work. The various sections of the handbook also suggest ways in which alternate understandings of public pedagogy and public intellectualism might engender research and theorizing that could complement the existing theoretical and empirical work in public pedagogy. It is our hope that educational researchers working on and in the institution, schoolpeople, activists, and other culture and curriculum workers can apply the concepts herein to their own daily lives and practice. Closely related to the notions of conviviality and deschooling forwarded by Ivan Illich (1971, 1975; Prakash & Stuchul, this volume), these expanded understandings of educational spaces and purposes open the possibility of educational discourse that crosses institutional borders and disciplinary fields, and reframes
inquiry into the relationships among pedagogy, democracy, and social action—regardless of where these relationships occur.

In attempting to achieve these ends, we worked to create a volume that brings together scholars from across a wide range of disciplines within the broader field of education (including curriculum studies, foundations of education, adult education, art education, higher education, consumer education), as well as fields outside of education (including anthropology, theology, linguistics, women's studies, justice studies, public health, African-American studies, inner city studies, philosophy, media studies), and beyond the academy itself (graffiti artists, social activists, performance artists) to explore the concept of public pedagogy as they cross borders of academia to speak to much broader public audiences. The handbook offers a wide range of differing, even diverging, perspectives on how multifarious “publics” might operate as pedagogical agents.

The scope of this handbook clearly includes the species of cultural analysis typically associated with the work of critical cultural studies and media theorists. We found, however, that current empirical studies that approach this form of critical public pedagogy (conceding that this body of work cannot be understood as cohesive, but rather as a loose collection of homonymic texts, each evincing different purposes and vectors within its field of practice) largely focus on spaces of display and spectacle. These studies are crucial for integrating the pragmatics of cultural studies into the discussion of education, as they refuse to reduce education metonymically to schooling (Schubert, 1981, 1997), but they either achieve their ends only interrogating sites that are consciously organized around institutional modes of pedagogy or they recapitulate Giroux’s notion of the intellectual as the only figure capable of cultural criticism. Therefore, we sought to extend the conversation around public pedagogy to also include social activist counterhegemonic and resistance efforts, including research-based and theoretical pieces that take seriously the pedagogical nature of “grassroots organizations, neighborhood projects, art collectives, and town meetings—spaces that provide a site for compassion, outrage, humor, and action” (Brady, 2006, p. 58). With this handbook, then, we publish further inquiry into public pedagogy that investigates public educational sites that exist on the periphery of what is commonly regarded as educational research in order to see learning that goes beyond or transcends more traditional views of education and schooling. Throughout the handbook, we also feature works that, in and of themselves, serve as forms and representations of public pedagogy and intellectualism. It is our hope that examples of public pedagogy created by artists, culture jammers, and other cultural workers, as well as the academic essays, illustrate the trans-disciplinary and highly political nature of public pedagogical work.

Our intent was to create a collection that, taken holistically, implores teachers, researchers, scholars, activists, artists, and theorists to reconsider their foundational understanding of what counts as pedagogy, of the potentially hidden pedagogies at play in their practices, and of how and where the process of education occurs. We contend that the basic assumptions undergirding most educational research cohere largely to commonsensical cultural constructs of what counts as teaching and learning in institutional settings—constructs that reify traditional forms of intellectual activity as the only possible mode of critical intervention (Ellsworth, 2005). The handbook’s authors work to decenter these taken-for-granted notions of education, teaching, and learning. Taken in this light, the analyses offered herein raise important questions regarding how, where, and when we know teaching and learning, about the relationship between the culturally reproductive view of public pedagogy and a reconsidered perspective that addresses sites of public resistance, and about the species of pedagogy occurring in public spaces that might still elude our vision. We feel these inquiries could open a dialogue to provide curriculum and educational workers and scholars at large with new ways of understanding educational practice, both within and outside of schools.
References


