

Book Review  
Educational Psychology:  
An Application of Critical Constructivism  
by Greg S. Goodman  
New York: Peter Lang, 2008

**Reviewed by Henry G. Brzycki**  
*Clarion University*

The discipline of educational psychology (Thorndike, 1914) emerged out of the need to measure people's intelligence in the early 1930s in order to justify categorizing students during a time of dramatic growth in the industrialization of America's school system. At this same time period in our educational history, John Dewey (1900; 1902; 1944), the father of progressive education, provided a vision of child-centered pedagogy where he "formulated the aim of education in social terms, but he was convinced that education would read its successes in the changed behaviors, perceptions, and insights of individual human beings" (Cremin, 1961, p. 122). When taking a look at who won this struggle for the hearts, minds and souls of American educators from today's *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) era, past Harvard University School of Education dean and historian Ellen Condliffe Lagemann declared, "Thorndike won and Dewey lost" (Lagemann, as cited in Gibboney, 2006). This declaration is sadly accurate when viewed from both schooling and the well-being of our children perspectives—our schools are cold, inhuman places, and trends in child well-being statistics are tragic.

Editor Greg Goodman wins in *Educational Psychology: An Application of Critical Constructivism* when he echoes Dewey's inspiring vision that will resonate with both pre-service teachers and seasoned master teachers alike in that he calls for "teachers to consider their

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*Henry G. Brzycki is an instructor in the Teacher Education Program at Clarion University, Clarion, Pennsylvania.*

role as fundamental to the development of their students' leadership, and awareness of social justice and equality in education as critical for a healthier and saner world" (2008, back cover). Additionally, he challenges educators in modernity to take responsibility for developing the professional perspective and skills to empower all children's learning so as to develop their full and unique potentials in life, not merely to be measured in state administered standardized tests which continue the cold technical rationality (McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007) begun by Thorndike and acculturated through NCLB. Goodman and all contributors to this edition win with today's preservice college students who want to dedicate themselves to a higher purpose in life, to make a difference beyond their own self interest, and to help make life better for all human beings in our global community. Their thesis is that educational psychology can be used to release the full and unique human potentials of all people through learning and schooling processes.

As valuable as this book and thesis are to college students and university professors of education, I would prefer to see less emphasis on using the lens of critical pedagogy to see our world, which inherently limits the very potential the editor and the book's contributors intend to empower. Critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2001), as the book's contributors see it, is the education pathway to liberation through changing the power and domination dynamic of various groups. Goodman and his colleagues would move even further on their admirable path to creating a new paradigm of teaching and learning where teachers are helping students see and achieve new possibilities in their lives, if they were to further reinforce those elements which focus upon that which is common to all human beings—the self—with its component yet highly integrated parts, including souls, feelings, psychological well-being, intrinsic motivations, hearts and minds, purpose and meaning in life, and the capacity to create a better life and world for ourselves and each other—in essence, the self attributes of positive psychology (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Goodman and his contributors accurately make the argument that as teacher educators we should be teaching preservice teachers about transformative thinking, that an individual can impact society, and that a student's personal epistemology and ontology include knowledge and beliefs about one's self. We use the information gathered from our everyday realities when living life to construct our understanding of our worlds and our selves, or what is commonly referred to as "the self as an architect of social reality" (Swann & Hill, 1982). Indeed, we reference every moment to our selves in a "looking glass" (Cooley, 1926) social interactionist (Cooley, 1926; Mead, 1934) manner. "The self is not seen

lying inside the individual like the ego or an organized body of needs, motives, and internalized norms or values” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 29), but rather is constructed through interactions with the world. Considering the lives of children and adolescents, therefore, the self is constructed through meanings made through schooling experiences. Reflecting the social interactionist’s view, educational theorist and thought leader Professor David P. Baker asserts that in every moment we are presented with the opportunity to change ourselves and the world in which we live through the sociocultural construction of reality, including knowledge and beliefs (Baker, in press). The self is a social construction, while at the same time, it is the mediator of the social construction of reality.

The book’s contributors in their specific chapters provide many helpful examples of applications of the new role of the self in education. One example in chapter 1 is Jeff Duncan-Andrade’s descriptions of *emancipatory pedagogy* and *transformative thinking* that are consistent with this new paradigm of teaching teachers about the self of students as a powerful pathway to realizing student potentials. Today’s preservice teachers genuinely connect in meaningful ways with this pedagogy. As a response to this chapter, my undergraduate students created a series of drama skits about “bullying” aimed at empowering middle school adolescent students to be better people, and in the process, they learned that they could make an impact and express their higher purpose in service to others.

Goodman’s use of *Constructivist Action Learning Teams* teaches pre-service teachers the use and importance of cooperative learning (Vygotsky, 1978) in today’s classrooms, and when my pre-service students use this approach, they learn experientially how to socially construct a better society through meaningful and purposeful pedagogy. Goodman is able to take traditional educational psychology concepts and make them come alive in a preservice classroom through multisensory, experiential ways. When reading the vivid, experiential examples in his work, one gets the impression of being on Hurricane Island in Maine or in the White Mountains of New Hampshire on an *Outward Bound* expedition learning how to empower one’s self and others in your group.

Teacher education is changing, and the ways in which teacher educators prepare future teachers will require views that integrate instructional methods with human development and learning. Here Binbin Jiang in chapter 10 makes an important contribution in applying a new paradigm of teaching and learning that places the soul of the self at the heart of her work with *English Language Learners*.

In chapter 9, Patty Kolencik provides invaluable insights into the new paradigm of teaching and learning called for in this edition with her concepts on “affective and motivational factors for learning and achieve-

ment.” Today’s college students are products of the NCLB era of cold technocratic rationality, and they connect in important and emotional ways to Kolencik’s thesis that “affect is the fuel that students bring to the classroom, connecting them to the ‘why’ of learning” (p. 167). How important it is, especially in this era of disassociated education (a clinical psychologist’s term to describe the separation of our feelings from our experiences in life) to teach future educators that the “teachers who have the best success are the ones who deeply care about their students. This caring covers not only the academic competency their students’ achieve, but it extends to the whole child. A caring and compassionate teacher knows that the feelings that the child experiences are an integral part of his or her life” (p. 180). I think Dewey would be pleased and proud!

*Educational Psychology: An Application of Critical Constructivism* broadens our understandings of the importance of placing the dynamic parts that make up the whole child at the center of a new teacher education model, an understanding that today’s college students absolutely love and actually use—experientially—to empower the quality of their own lives and that of others.

I have used three popular educational psychology texts in my college teaching career—Ormrod (2009), Woolfolk (2004), and now Goodman’s book—all with great success in terms of enhancing my students’ abilities to become highly effective PK-12 teachers. This text with its paradigmatic view *is* different in that today’s college undergraduates connect deeply with this view that they can impact the well-being of the whole child through pedagogy and can see it applied through each chapter. By using this text, students win!

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