



ROBERT LAKE & TRICIA M. KRESS

PREFACE

Erich Fromm (1900-1980) was born in Frankfurt Germany and in his formative years, studied traditional Jewish ethics, and the newly formed disciplines of sociology and psychoanalysis. After completing his Ph.D. in sociology in 1922 he studied further to become a psychoanalyst. In 1930 he was invited to become a faculty member at the *Frankfurt School for Social Research*, the institution that is now widely held as the birthplace of critical theory. With the rise of Hitler, Fromm was forced to immigrate to America in 1934. The institute itself sought refuge in New York and was housed at Columbia University in 1935. By 1937, Fromm's humanistic readings of Marx and his rejection of Freud's biologically deterministic drive theories alienated him from the core of scholars at the institute. More specifically, Fromm emphasized the role social processes in personality formation and eschewed a hardline, depersonalized view of class struggle that cut across prevailing Marxist dogma. These views would eventually result in public disenfranchisement and denunciation from former colleagues such as Theodore Adorno and Herbert Marcuse who went on to become immensely popular with the New Left in Western thought. Yet Fromm's books went on to sell by the millions. One book alone, *The Art of Loving* (1956), has sold over 25,000,000 copies. Because he wrote about human relationships in a popular style that was more accessible to a wide range of readers, his work has been mistakenly stereotyped as "self-help" or "pop-psychology," but as the essays in this book attest, this is simply not the case. In fact, Fromm's work is particularly relevant in light of present, increasingly complex and often insane prevailing global conditions caused by greed, religious and political dogma, dehumanization and standardization.

In many ways Fromm's work is at least fifty years ahead of his time and brings to mind a metaphor that comes from the largest and oldest trees on the planet, the sequoia. These trees produce seeds in a cone that do not proliferate at the moment of maturity but are retained until the most advantageous environment for germination arises. This occurs after a fire when all the competing growth on the forest floor has been consumed in the heat. At that moment, the heat opens and releases the seeds of the sequoia. Present global geo-political conditions are indeed "heating up" considerably, but this heat can also create the environment for the dissemination of Fromm's work. For example if you read Fromm's (1968) work *The Revolution of Hope*, he clearly warned us of the peril of the misuse of technology when he wrote that if it "is permitted to follow its own logic, it will become a cancer-like growth, eventually threatening the structured system of individual and social life" (p. 15). Fromm offered the first expanded definition of biophilia (beyond a medical glossary) in his (1964) work, *The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil*, which included a passionate desire to preserve and



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nurture all living things. His use of the word has been appropriated by leading voices in ecology such as E.O. Wilson and David Orr. Conversely his use of necrophilia to describe man's perverse desire to possess and destroy is an apt description of the many-headed monster of neo-liberalism, nihilism, extreme fundamentalist beliefs and increasing standardization.

In many ways Fromm's work is at least fifty years ahead of his time and brings to mind a metaphor that comes from the largest and oldest trees on the planet, the sequoia. These trees produce seeds in a cone that do not proliferate at the moment of maturity but are retained until the most advantageous environment for germination arises. This occurs after a fire when all the competing growth on the forest floor has been consumed in the heat. At that moment, the heat opens and releases the seeds of the sequoia. At the present time, economic and social geopolitical conditions are indeed "heating up" considerably, but this heat can also create the environment for the dissemination of the sane perspective that Fromm's work represents. For example if you read Fromm's (1968) work the *Revolution of Hope*, he clearly warned us of the peril of the misuse of technology when he wrote that if it "is permitted to follow its own logic, it will become a cancer-like growth, eventually threatening the structured system of individual and social life (p. 15). Fromm offered the first expanded definition of biophilia (beyond early 20th century medical glossaries) in his (1964) work, *The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil*, which included a passionate desire to preserve and nurture all living things. His use of the word has been appropriated by leading voices in ecology such as E.O. Wilson and David Orr who wrote in 1994 of "the coming biophilia revolution." Conversely, Fromm's use of necrophilia to describe man's perverse desire to possess, control and/or destroy is an apt description of the many-headed monster of corporate greed, neo-liberalism, nihilism, extreme fundamentalist beliefs and increasing standardization. Issues such these are now written about continually by the leading scholars of critical theory and public intellectuals such as Henry Giroux, Naomi Klein and bell hooks just to name a few.

Though several Frankfurt School theorists' works appear to influence critical conversations about education, references to the works of Fromm are conspicuously absent, despite the fact that his work strongly influenced Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the volume which few would argue is foundational to what has come to be known as "critical pedagogy." Like Freire, Fromm saw love, hope and respect for life as fundamental to the growth of a healthy society and healthy individuals. The relevance of Fromm's work to education can be understood through the key concepts his thought expresses in the contemporary moment. The terms mentioned above along with his crucial distinction of "having" and "being" (Fromm, 1976) are vitally important when applied to education. Indeed, it is hard to separate his notion of the vast difference between consuming and possessing information, "having" and personal experience with the text, "being" from Freire's concept of the banking model of education. These two men spent time together on several occasions, and like all healthy dialogical relationships, it is clear that they both influenced each other on education and in their focus on an actively engaged praxis of hope. Additionally, Fromm's



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(1960) vision of learner centered, curiosity borne, inwardly free, democratic education is a concise yet potent description of the kind of schools we could only hope for in the current nightmare of painting by numbers curriculum. While Fromm's work makes a relatively small appearance in the education literature, his ideas were nonetheless influential and offer an additional lens through which to reimagine education as critical praxis that is hopeful and actively engaged toward recreating education and humanity to be more humane.

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