Joe’s ability to engage in a conversation with scholars, students, and teachers was unique. He understood the importance of creating an accessible teacher discourse without sacrificing the essential language of rigor. Indeed, in the past fifteen years, he chose to write in a style, which reinforced the need for rigor in critical studies. Bouncing against the faux arguments against critical pedagogy and critical theory, Joe’s work recalled the essential elements within Freire’s and Giroux’s work: that teachers are political beings, that schooling is political, and that teachers as cultural workers must recognize and declare themselves as change agents. His own work in New York City informed him at an educational crossroads which began with Reagan-inspired Back to Basics schooling, fascist Giuliani anti-intellectualism, and Bush Daddy’s 2000 vision. SS

JOE L. KINCHELOE

10. THE KNOWLEDGES OF TEACHER EDUCATION

Developing a Critical Complex Epistemology

The first decade of the twenty-first century is an exciting and frightening time for supporters of a rigorous, practical, socially just, and democratic teacher education. It is a time of dangerous efforts to destroy teacher education and of brilliant attempts to reform it. A sense of urgency permeates discussions of the topic, as studies indicate that presently there is a need for more teachers in a shorter timeframe than ever before in U.S. history. About 1,025 teacher education programs graduate around 100,000 new teachers annually. The problem is that over the next few years 2 million teachers are needed in U.S. elementary and secondary schools. Many analysts argue that the problem will be solved by lowering standards for teacher certification or simply doing away with the certification process and admitting any one who breathes regularly into the teaching ranks (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Such capitulation to short-term needs would be tragic.

I wish I had a dollar for every time someone in higher education or the professions reacted condescendingly upon learning that the individual with whom they were conversing was a professor of teacher education or pedagogy. Understanding the history of teacher education, one is provided with plenty of reasons to look at the domain askance—but not any more than other elements of higher/professional education. Too often the condescension toward teacher education and teacher educators is harbored for all the wrong reasons. Contempt for teacher education and pedagogy emanates not from knowledge of their historical failures but from a generic devaluing of the art and science of teaching as an unnecessary contrivance.
“As long as one knows her subject matter,” the clichéd argument goes, “she doesn’t need anything else to teach.” Anyone who makes such an assertion should be mandated to teach the fourth grade for six weeks. Such a crash immersion may induce a reconsideration of the platitude, as the complexity of doing such a job well becomes apparent.

Indeed, the complexity of the pedagogical process and the intricacies of a rigorous teacher education are central concerns of this article. What is a critical complex teacher education? What types of knowledges should professional educators possess? In a climate as hostile as the first decade of the twenty-first century the ability of teacher educators to articulate a case for particular knowledges is not merely important, it may just be a survival skill. In its devaluation, pedagogy has been rendered invisible in many higher educational settings. Teacher educators, teachers, and teacher education students must not only understand the complexity of good teaching, but stand ready to make this known to political leaders and the general population. If we are not successful in such a political effort, we will witness the death of the scholarly conception of teacher education to the degree it now exists. While such articulations of teacher education are not dominant, many scholarly, rigorous, and democratic teacher education programs exist and produce excellent teachers. At the same time in countless mediocre programs great teacher educators ply their trade in unfavorable conditions, turning out good teachers despite the circumstances.

THE CRITICAL COMPLEX VISION: TEACHERS AS SCHOLARS AND POLICY MAKERS

The vision on which this essay is grounded involves the empowerment of teachers in an era where teacher professionalism is under assault. I want universities to produce rigorously educated teachers with an awareness of the complexities of educational practice and an understanding of and commitment to a socially just, democratic notion of schooling. Only with a solid foundation in various mainstream and alternative canons of knowledge can they begin to make wise judgments and informed choices about curriculum development and classroom practice. In this context they can craft a teacher persona that enables them to diagnose individual and collective needs of their students and connect them to their pedagogical strategies and goals. It is naïve and dangerous to think that teachers can become the rigorous professionals envisioned here without a conceptual understanding of contemporary and past societies and the socio-cultural, political, and economic forces that have shaped them. Such knowledges are essential in the process of both understanding and connecting the cultural landscape of the twenty-first century to questions of educational purpose and practice (Bruner, 1997; Ferreira, & Alexandre, 2000; Horn, & Kincheloe, 2001; McGuire, 1996; McNeil, 2000).

Few seem to understand the demands of high-quality teaching of a critical democratic variety in the twenty-first century. After listening, for example, to former mayor of New York, Rudolph Giuliani and other high ranking city officials chastise and degrade New York City teachers over the last decade, I understand the anger