In “Critical Pedagogy and the Knowledge Wars of the Twenty-First Century” (2008) Joe L. Kincheloe highlights the role of critical pedagogy as a tool to resist the unjust ways empires use knowledge to deceive and perpetuate a system of oppression and exploitation. Obvious examples, of course, are ways schools in the U.S. teach a social studies of white supremacist manifest destiny that situates Western civilization and industrial capitalism as evidence of progress and Euro-supremacy and, simultaneously, positions Indigenous peoples in America, Africa, and elsewhere, as backwards, primitive, and lucky to be under the protective care of their natural superiors, even if these bosses do have an occasional genocidal mean streak. Unlike many critical pedagogues, however, Kincheloe has consistently positioned his approach as dialectically opposed to not only political and economic indoctrination in the interest of colonization and domination, but to the dominant mechanistic form of educational psychology, which, ultimately, serves the same hegemonic functions.

For this, Kincheloe’s unique perspective is invaluable. That is, because education is founded upon psychology, a real, viable, critical challenge must address its underlying assumptions. What we find is that the behaviorist form of educational psychology is in fact not based on the objective science it claims to be, but is part of the empire’s knowledge wars. In this case, the goal is to control people through classroom management and curriculum, and to convince the population that the world is naturally organized hierarchically or that certain cultures produce smarter, more intelligent people—these are verifiable lies the empire deceptively presupposes are objective and thus neutral facts.

Mainstream educational psychology, to be sure, is founded upon the presupposition that the mind and consciousness are knowable and measurable properties, and therefore controllable. Since around the beginning of the twentieth century neo-mechanicalists, such as Frederick Taylor, have argued that intelligence is not only measurable, but is naturally hierarchical, rendering the elite few natural leaders. The mechanical worldview is based on the assumption that there are no non-material entities in the world rendering all that is real is measurable. Because the mechanical philosophy behind this paradigm was disproved by Newton in the seventeenth century with his action at a distance discovery, which acknowledges that the force or cause of life is a non-material, immeasurable property, which is commonly referred to as free will/spirit/soul/consciousness, and therefore largely unknowable and mysterious, education, as a field of study or discipline, is grounded on antiquated ideas the scientific community long ago abandoned.
From the perspective of empire, however, there are no alternatives—in other words, the bosses, as it were, cannot admit to the true nature of reality. That is, a universe governed not by order and predictability, but one with an unchangeable and untamable spirit is not acceptable, even if science suggests it to be so. Consequently, the empire must ignore science and work in the less than admirable domain of indoctrination and propaganda and pretend people are robots and the earth is a bottomless shopping mall, and the world will live happily ever after as long as we do not challenge or question the man behind the curtain. In this context Joe’s critical pedagogy is absolutely transformative because it is firmly grounded in knowledge regarding the immeasurable free will that makes possible the human agency and consciousness that has created and recreated critical pedagogy.

“Knowledge Wars,” therefore, transgresses the dominant paradigm because it refuses to accept the existence of a lifeless world that can be manipulated by naturally superior individuals (or races) with unwavering certainty. That robotic world does not and has not ever existed. However, capitalist schooling, as Kincheloe demonstrates, assumes students are empty vessels waiting to be filled with content, the truthfulness dependent upon the particular needs of business and the perpetuation of the basic structures of power. Rejecting the passivity of the mechanical paradigm, educators and students are free to unmask the biases built into what the ruling elite validate as legitimate data, again, a process based not on facts or the truth, but on political and economic interests. Kincheloe names the theory underlying contemporary education as “crypto-positivistic” because it is an unstated bias presented as a non-perspective or just the way it is.

Why, we may ask, would educational policy makers, many of whom are glorified workers themselves, serve the interests of empire and engage their practice from outdated theories? The answer is simple enough. Most policy makers, it is safe to assume, have internalized the dominant paradigm so extensively, they believe the natural order of the world is hierarchical and the role of education is to save the ignorant masses from their own inferiority through a process of social control, that is, behaviorism. Consequently, policy makers, and the rest of us socialized within the same system, tend not to be aware, without rigorous self-reflection, that we see and act upon the world through an internalized, unconscious philosophy.

Because capitalist education is based more on indoctrination and control than on the legitimate quest for factual knowledge and the alleviation of human suffering, the terrain of education has historically represented a contested field, or knowledge wars. That is, Joe’s critical pedagogy, or form of education designed to fight oppression and strengthen the democratic imperative, like critical pedagogy in general, is interested in increasing student critical consciousness through the development of analytical tools for reading the world and challenging unjust relationships such as white supremacist race relations and the capitalist relations of economic and social reproduction for something similar to what we might call, for lack of a term more pregnant with descriptive imagery, a socialist future.

Again, however, unlike many critical pedagogues, Joe Kincheloe’s place of departure or primary target is not fighting the dictators of capital outright, but challenging the architects of capital’s system of education—both foci, we should note,