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CONTEXT AND CONTEXTUALIZING STUDENT DEVELOPMENT USING CRITICAL THEORY

Antonio Duran and Susan R. Jones

Context is a term that is integral to the lexicon of student development, because the process of development always takes place in a larger context. However, although context is presumed to be central to student development, the term is often used interchangeably with others such as *climate*, *culture*, *systems*, and the *social* in *psychosocial*. This definitional slippage is taken up in the introduction to this part of the book, but it is important to note again, because the ways in which *context* is defined and put to use in the scholarship on student development affect how it is understood. In this chapter, we examine context when critical theory (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011) is applied. What this means is that in much scholarship on student development, the individual is the primary unit of analysis, and researchers depend on individuals to make meaning of context. When critical theory is used, scholars must not only address context but also, more important, presume it as a significant influence on development, regardless of whether the individual sees it as such. Furthermore, context, when applying critical theory, is always tied to larger structures of inequality and an analysis of power. In this critical framing of context, we draw on the work of Collins and Bilge (2016), who wrote about the importance of *contextualizing* as the “impetus to think about social inequality, relationality, and power relations in a social context,” and that this means “being aware that particular historical, intellectual, and political contexts shape what we think and do” (p. 28). This conceptualization of context

then suggests the importance of contextualizing student development by employing structural analyses.

To investigate critical perspectives on context, we first situate ourselves in this work by providing an autobiographical rendering (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014) to the prompt “where I am from” as a basis for understanding our perspectives that follow; in this rendering, we also make it a point to acknowledge the spaces where we are today (“where we are now”). We then present Antonio Duran’s contextual narrative as a way into our dialogic engagement with the questions and considerations that emerge when examining context in student development. In the end, we hope to provide new insights on the influence of *context* and the importance of *contextualizing* to understandings of student development. After all, as poignantly suggested by Collins and Bilge (2016), “Once people are changed on the individual level, they are likely to remain so. Focusing on self, on its wholeness, provides a major impetus for individual and collective empowerment” (p. 135). We extend their claim to think about how transformative potential is activated by recognizing the relationship between individuals and the larger structural, cultural, political, and historical contexts in which they move.

“Where I Am From” and “Where I Am Now”: Reflections on Our Positionality

Drawing on the concept of *context*, we found it important to begin this chapter by contextualizing our own positionality and introducing how we have come to be in community with one another. We, Antonio Duran and Susan R. Jones, first connected as Antonio was selecting a program for his doctoral studies. We both recall exactly where we were when Antonio was finalizing his decision: Antonio was calling Susan while he was at a NASPA Annual Conference, and Susan was in the parking lot at the veterinarian’s office. As we are two scholars who are passionate about the study of student development, specifically in relation to marginalized populations, our relationship continues to develop as we both value and benefit from the perspective that each other offers. To further highlight the unique standpoints that we bring to this scholarly exploration, the following section showcases the experiences that have led us to our current places in life. We indicate these journeys through “where I am from” statements, those that indicate past formative events, before then describing our current contexts and identities, “where I am now.”

Antonio Duran

Where I am from: I am from hot Phoenix days where your skin sizzled once you met the sun’s rays. I am from neighborhoods of government housing, surrounded by Black and Brown bodies that welcomed us. I am from early Sunday mornings waking up to loud Spanish music, knowing this was my mom’s cue that it was time for us to clean. I am from parties with relatives—*tias, tios, primos, familia*—that lasted until the early mornings, followed by the *recalentado* the next day. I am from summers in Juarez, Chihuahua, crossing border walls and being able to return simply by saying “American citizen.”

I am from the messages that others told me when I was younger: “Boys aren’t supposed to move their hips like that,” “You should be playing sports with your cousins,” and “You will be the one to take us out of poverty.” I am from the books that I escaped into to forget about my difference. I am from *Little Women*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *Harry Potter*. I am from a family that told me that education was a means of survival despite being known as the nerd of the familia.

Where I am now: I am a friend, a brother, a partner, and a student. I am someone who struggles labeling himself as a scholar, yet I have entered the academy to show students that they matter. I am critical of the structures of power and domination in society and in our schools. I am an individual who approaches his work with love and care, seeing research and teaching as an emotional and spiritual experience. I am appreciative for the mentors, friends, and familia who have gotten me to where I am today. I would not be here without them.

Susan Robb Jones

Where I am from: I am from New Jersey, Chicago, and Cleveland—nice houses in the suburbs where most everyone in my neighborhood looked like me. I am from great schools and dinner table conversations about presidents, leaders, and taking a stand. I am from tractor rides at the farm and kick the can at the lake; places where I got to spend time with my grandparents and learn the story of my family. I am from rules: Don’t chew with your mouth full; do unto others; *hey* is for horses; respect your elders; some things we just don’t talk about; honesty is always the best policy; and secrets about sexuality, substance abuse, and illness. I am from feeling different.

I am from JFK, RFK, MLK Jr., the Vietnam War, where have all the flowers gone, we shall overcome, and hell no we won’t go. I am from the books and music I buried myself in and that nurtured my sense of self and stirrings of social justice. I am from Peter, Paul, and Mary; Crosby, Stills,

Nash, and Young; the Beatles; Simon and Garfunkel; Judy Collins. I am from *A Separate Peace*, *Catcher in the Rye*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Black Like Me*.

Where I am now: I try to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly. I am a spouse, sister, daughter, and aunt and grateful for the communities to which I belong. I educate because education can make the world a better place. I am committed to using what I know, and realizing when I don't know, to understand the vexing issues facing higher education and college students. I am delving deeply into how I am implicated and what I can do about it. I am generative and support the theorizing of new scholars who stand a chance to advance equity and inclusion. I am with bell hooks (2007) that the "practice of love is the most powerful antidote to the politics of domination" (p. 40), that education is a practice of freedom, and learning is a place where paradise can be created.

Journeys Through Different Spaces: Antonio's Narrative

Like many other individuals, I often say that college helped shape who I am. As someone who now studies collegiate environments, I have started to figure out why. The spaces that I have occupied have molded me into the person I am today. (A. Duran)

Precollege Experiences

To truly understand the crucial role that higher education played in my development, I find it important to begin by highlighting my experiences prior to my arrival at my undergraduate institution. Growing up in Phoenix, Arizona, I often interacted with people who were like me. I lived in a neighborhood that housed predominantly Latinx and Black families. Most of these families emigrated from countries near and far, hoping to provide a better life for their children or family members back home. My own parents emigrated from Mexico about seven years before my birth. They quickly settled into this new space, this new normal.

My first experiences in an educational system were shared with people who were racial and ethnic minorities and from lower class backgrounds, like those in my neighborhood. The district of my primary and elementary school was and continues to be considered one of the most at-risk districts in the state of Arizona. However, my young mind did not think about the label of "at-risk district" when I was in these schools. I was simply happy to be there, absorbing every bit of knowledge that I could. As my mom would always state, I was much more content reading a book than playing sports

like the rest of my family. My primary and elementary schools cultivated this educational thirst. I was in the gifted and talented program, participated in our National Junior Honor Society and student council, and even showed off my school spirit in my brief stint as our mascot, the Wilson Wildcat. Beyond my involvement, people knew me as an individual who was always jovial, beaming a large smile wherever I went.

When the time came to transition into a high school environment, I had my eyes set on Brophy College Preparatory, a prestigious Jesuit private institution in Phoenix. As a result of a partnership between Brophy and my elementary school, students whom they accepted into this high school automatically received a full-tuition scholarship. I was thus excited when I passed the necessary entrance exam for admission and soon enrolled in this institution. Still, I never anticipated the amount of dissonance I would encounter at Brophy.

For the first time in my life, I found myself surrounded by individuals who came from a different world. Gone were the diverse languages that I had been used to hearing in my previous schooling. The student demographic at Brophy was dramatically different. The majority of individuals with whom I shared a classroom space were white, and as a result of the high cost of tuition, they were also mostly wealthy. My first year at Brophy represented a pivotal time in my life when I recognized that I was different. This realization was solidified by moments like the instance when a classmate of mine told me, "You know you're in the bad part of town when all of the signs are in Spanish," after visiting my house. I never brought anyone home after that.

When I found myself surrounded by a largely homogenous student body, I retreated in many ways. I came to hate my own background, constantly rejecting the great sacrifices that my parents made on a daily basis. I ran to my mom's truck in the hopes that no one would see the *Arizona Republic* newspapers in the back and discover that my mom was a newspaper deliverer. I tried to hide the fact that I bought the polos I wore, and that were required for our dress code, from our neighborhood Goodwill store. I also stopped speaking Spanish, fearing that this would alienate me from my peers even more. On top of coming to hate my racial and class background, my general affect also transformed. I became angry and introverted.

These precollege experiences proved to be an important foundation for understanding my development in higher education. I acknowledge that attending Brophy College Preparatory accomplished the goal declared in its name—it got me to my next step despite the emotional and personal turmoil that I underwent. When the time came to apply for college, I was subconsciously searching for something extremely unlike what I had encountered in high school. For that reason, it is unsurprising that I chose a school and city

drastically different from those of my high school years. In May 2010, I sent my acceptance and deposit to New York University (NYU), located in the heart of Greenwich Village in Manhattan.

College Experiences

NYU was what I wanted, and, more important, it was exactly what I needed. Lacking the financial means to visit schools, I accepted NYU's admission offer without even seeing the campus. I still remember the first time I rode in a taxi on my way to orientation and sat in the front seat, a move that most likely showed my taxi driver that I was clearly not from New York City. Still, when I arrived to the orientation residence hall, I recall looking up at the buildings on the corner of 12th Street and 4th Avenue. At that moment, I knew that I was where I was meant to be.

As I walked the busy streets, I could look around and feel like I was back in my childhood neighborhood, hearing various languages being spoken. It was also at NYU that I started to reconcile various tensions that arose at Brophy. For example, during my first year, I received an invitation to a first-year workshop known as *Intersections*, a diversity program for first-year students. In addition to completing various dialogue-based activities, we also saw *Avenue Q*. This program challenged me to reflect on my identities, discovering the power that each of them held. I underwent this personal journey alongside students who were from across the university, country, and world. The weekend I spent with these individuals also represented one of the first times that I came out as queer to my peers.

I began to discover my sexuality when I was also coming to recognize the origins of my anger in high school. As I took courses with people from places such as North Carolina or Abu Dhabi, I learned that every one of us had a unique story. The classrooms were not as homogenous as the ones that I had come to know and to reject. Moreover, the experiences I had outside of the classroom challenged me to reconcile the feelings of embarrassment I once held. I had the opportunity to attend NYU thanks to a full-tuition scholarship awarded to three to four first-generation college students every year. As time progressed and a mentor of mine encouraged me to think about my passions, I increasingly felt the positive influence that this scholars program had on my development. We were superseding the expectations of our families and our communities. And we were doing so in one of the best cities in the world.

My time at NYU was formative for a number of different reasons. First of all, it taught me that it was important to be around people who hold similar identities as I do. I loved the city environment because I could learn more

about my own culture while also exploring others. I came to know my sexuality by visiting historic landmarks such as Stonewall or stopping by NYU's LGBTQ Center. Second, I learned how to use my voice in order to center the experiences of the marginalized. Going to college in New York City was like nothing that I had ever experienced before. I regained the jovial nature that I once had, having lost it in high school after succumbing to feelings of inadequacy in a predominantly white space. I was happy again.

Postcollege Experiences

After graduating from NYU, I decided to pursue a career in higher education. It was my dream that I could help other students come to understand their identities. Now, as an aspiring faculty member in the academy, I have to stop myself from retreating into the sentiments of not being good enough. Part of my driving force involves knowing that my presence in higher education can be important in changing the environment and culture. By striving for a position in the academy, I hope to create pathways for future scholars and practitioners.

Use of Critical Theory

This chapter uses the tradition of critical theory to provide a new perspective on context as it relates to student development. Throughout this chapter, we mention frameworks that fall under the umbrella of critical theory, including critical race theory and intersectionality, which advance power-based definitions of *context*. As explored in the preface, critical theory challenges educators to consider how society is structured around historical and contemporary legacies of inequality (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). Specifically, the task of the critical researcher involves identifying the ways that systems of power simultaneously privilege certain groups and oppress others. Finally, critical theory strives not only to increase understanding of these structures of domination but also to contribute to their dismantling through social action.

Critical Questions About Context

Using Antonio's narrative as a guide, this next section explores how the concept of context differs with critical theory in mind. To bring a critical lens to this construct, we engaged in a dialogic conversation, challenging one another to move beyond constructivist understandings of context and its influences on student development theory. We thus chose to structure this

portion of our chapter around four orienting questions that emerged from our dialogue, each challenging individuals to foreground systems of power when analyzing context. To follow Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) notion of thinking with theory, we include excerpts from our dialogue in the following section to highlight how our thinking varied and coalesced when understanding the construct of context. Importantly, we also include thoughts for scholars and practitioners who hope to employ this construct from a critical perspective.

Who Gets Privileged in Current Assumptions of Context?

I think in my first forays into student development theory, something that I increasingly struggled with is the notion of the collegiate context feeling like a container . . . whereas critical theories would conceptualize what it is that the student is encountering not only within these kinds of college gates but within society. (A. Duran)

In this quote, Antonio articulates the belief that theory and higher education research frequently fails to consider how experiences that occur outside of colleges and universities influence the development of students. In reality, from Antonio's story, it is clear to see how individuals undergo formative events in their life prior to arriving at college and outside of the college gates while they are enrolled in postsecondary institutions. Therefore, when student development theorists use the term *context*, they may be focusing solely on events occurring on campus that spur collegians to think about themselves differently. Using this narrow view of context misses an important link to understanding how students' past experiences affect their sense of self, as well as how sociohistorical influences laden with power do the same.

For example, ecological theorists have attempted to draw a connection between individuals and their environments over a given period of time. One of the most notable ecological theorists is Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1993) who suggested that individuals exist within four main ecological systems: the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-. The macrosystem in Bronfenbrenner's (1993) model encapsulates the "overarching patterns of micro-, meso-, and exosystem characteristics of a given culture, subculture, or other extended social structure" (p. 25), which can include greater attention to issues of power and oppression. However, scholars such as Renn (2003) contended that macrosystems are "largely missing from traditional student development research" (p. 389). A lack of attention to macroforces of domination severely limits our understanding of student development theory. Specifically, Susan

calls attention to this troubling reality in the following portion of our dialogic conversation:

Who gets privileged in our assumption of context? It's those with more power, those from dominant groups that are privileged by that definition of context because they're benefiting from these larger structures. (S. R. Jones)

If practitioners and researchers only center collegiate contexts, they continue practices that serve majority populations of students. In fact, higher education scholars have routinely drawn attention to the fact that colleges originated for privileged individuals who identified as white men and came from affluent backgrounds (Museus, Ledesma, & Parker, 2015). However, this assumption of context does not fit for many of our students. Antonio's narrative itself functions as an example of how students can be dealing with simultaneous experiences of racism, heterosexism, and other structures of domination. Thus, conceptualizing context from a critical perspective asks us to challenge a collegiate-only container and to understand students' life histories with an explicit focus on how power systems may be affecting students' development (Abes, 2016; Jones & Stewart, 2016). For scholars and practitioners who hope to resist the privileging of certain dominant groups, it is imperative that we expand our view of environments to include local communities, home cultures, and sociohistorical times.

How Does Context Affect Developmental Dimensions Differently?

In Antonio's narrative, he details how his transition to a predominantly white high school was a major transition in his life. Being surrounded by people who came from dissimilar backgrounds led Antonio to retreat in various ways. However, Antonio also credits this experience as one that pushed his ways of thinking and afforded him the opportunity to eventually enroll at New York University. As a result, though his high school environment may have served as a catalyst for cognitive growth, it had negative repercussions on his understanding of self and relationships with others. The complexities in this experience cause us to question how educational contexts may in fact influence developmental dimensions differently, especially for students from historically marginalized backgrounds.

Students with oppressed identities often navigate institutions of higher learning and social structures that were not created with them in mind. For this reason, we see it necessary to explore how these environments affect individuals as it pertains to their cognitive (knowledge construction), interpersonal (relationships), and intrapersonal (understanding of self) domains of development

(Kegan, 1994). Antonio thinks through this point in his narrative by stating, "I wonder if students might be shaped in ways that they can think at higher levels of cognitive complexity, but are they experiencing damaging dissonance in the way that they are seeing themselves?" Though institutions often stress the importance of compositional diversity on campuses (Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2012), colleges frequently fail to create climates that are healthy for collegians with marginalized identities (Chun & Evans, 2016). Thus, a strong focus on cognitive growth may be exposing these students to destructive contexts that adversely affect their interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of development. The work of scholars such as Torres (2009), Hernández (2016), and Abes and Hernández (2016) interrogated the taken-for-granted assumptions in what constitutes *development*. Specific to the role of context, Jones and Abes (2013) examined the relationship among meaning-making, identity, and context, suggesting that

certain contextual influences are more challenging to filter than others, regardless of a person's meaning-making capacity. . . . This realization speaks to how meaning making alone does not shape identity perceptions; it must be coupled with the specific nature of the context. (p. 118)

Consequently, we echo the work of hooks (1994), who warned against educational systems that ask students to enter as "disembodied spirit" (p. 193). When we think about our learning environments without consideration of power and identity, we once again privilege students for whom these contexts were originally created. In the dialogic conversation, Antonio shares, "What does this mean for students as they are developing, growing if they are the ones who constantly have to ask this question for themselves: Was this space meant for me?" Susan articulates that institutions expose individuals from historically marginalized backgrounds to developmental costs, especially in their interpersonal and intrapersonal domains. From this, it is evident that a critical lens requires professionals to question how students' developmental domains are influenced differently by educational and social contexts. In particular, practitioners and scholars must ask themselves how campus programming, classroom environments, and forces outside of the institution may cause students to become disembodied spirits.

How Do You Measure Context?

The questions detailed thus far prompt us to advance our next point of inquiry, a methodological quandary that results from using a critical view on context. Analyzing power structures in students' lives means that the

researcher might uncover contextual influences that individuals sharing the stories themselves do not realize. Antonio's narrative serves as a prime example of this reality. Having had years to reflect on his collegiate experience in addition to receiving input from Susan, Antonio could access the impacts of context previously unseen. Thus, methodological complexities exist when understanding context from a critical paradigm.

To begin, we argue that scholars and practitioners must ask more direct questions as they attempt to ascertain the role that contexts play in a student's life, especially as it relates to ideas of power. Susan suggests this as she thinks back on higher education research that explores constructs such as race and racism. As she notes in our dialogic conversation, "Well, one could suggest that the participants didn't see race or that researchers didn't think that they saw race or concluded that they didn't see race because they were never asked about it." Though it appears to be a simple solution, researchers must ask more direct questions of their participants that center the different contexts with which they interact on a daily basis. Moreover, as Nuñez (2014) underscored in her discussion on intersectionality in higher education, researchers must be more explicit about how they define *power*. In student development research specifically, theorists should ask questions about individuals' contexts that align with understandings of power (see Collins, 2009, for an example of domains of power). Nevertheless, asking about context is only the first step in measuring this construct and its relation to student development.

Next, scholars must also wrestle with the challenge of analyzing systems of power from the perspective of an individual inherently entrenched in this structure. For example, using critical race theory (CRT) to understand development, one would subscribe to the belief that racism is engrained in all collegiate contexts, as well as society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). This tenet of CRT has led individuals to use air as an analogy for the pervasive existence of racism: "It is in the air we breathe, and we all need to breathe" (Miller & Garran, 2017). Similar to how racism is like air—all around us and difficult to identify—students may also struggle to discuss how their contexts influence them. Individuals can take for granted contextual influences, including systems of power, failing to understand the role that these systems play in their development. The task of critical researchers then becomes analyzing narratives, understanding that they may be uncovering realities that differ from the participants' perspective. Consequently, member-checking, a common method used to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research, may not make sense when employing critical perspectives (Talburt, 2004).

It is important to note that using context in a study design requires an ethic of care on behalf of the researcher.

We need to understand that even when we get answers from our participants or from our students, there might be levels or other experiences at play that might not allow them to make as direct connections between the ways that their different contexts are affecting themselves. (A. Duran)

And I think we need to point out that there are ethical dimensions to all research. I guess it goes back to researchers constantly making decisions and weighing the benefits and limitations of the challenges, difficulties, of every decision. (S. R. Jones)

A critical scholar is alert to the ethical dimensions of analyzing the stories of others and what the research process itself may mean for an individual's development. Using critical perspectives requires scholars to implicate themselves in power systems, especially those that result from a research relationship (Denzin, 2010). Hence, when centering context, higher education professionals must consider the methodological and ethical complexities that result from investigating power-based understandings of this construct.

Who Can Shape Context? How Does This Happen?

The last section of Antonio's narrative describes how his collegiate experiences have led him to pursue a faculty career, hoping to positively influence students from similar backgrounds. In this statement, Antonio also communicates the ultimate goal of possessing the ability to shape contexts positively for those from marginalized populations. This ambition challenges us to question a static understanding of context, a construct that is immutable to the actions of individuals. Instead, we use this portion of the chapter as an opportunity to explore the possibilities of shaping context, embracing critical thought around resistance.

I think about, especially with a lot of critical thought and critical practice, this notion of coalition-building. I think in order to really conceptualize the changing of context as influenced by hegemonic norms, as influenced by all of these -isms, then it would require coalitions across different identities, different individuals to do this. (A. Duran)

This quote provides one insight on this question of shaping contexts: the belief that groups across identities can come together to effectively change policies and structures at an institution. This line of thinking closely aligns with the scholarship on critical mass and how larger numbers of underserved populations on campuses can lead to positive change efforts (Museus, Jayakumar, & Robinson, 2012). By bringing together numerous groups and collectively advocating for equitable representation and resources, faculty,

staff, and students positively affect the institutional context, as well as the policy arena. Importantly, individuals with privileged identities must also participate in these coalitions in order to mobilize change because of the emotional costs that marginalized populations encounter when exercising their agency.

On a more micro level, Susan offers Tatum's (1997) notion of spheres of influence as another way that individuals can shape their context: "We might not be able to change the world, but we have spheres of influence that we can influence" (S.R. Jones). This concept is particularly powerful in affirming the possibility of people from marginalized backgrounds enacting their own agency in their proximal environments. While enacting larger structural change may require the actions of others, individuals can make intentional efforts to affect the micro contexts in which they reside. Yet, as the perspectives offered in chapter 12 describe, competing forces always exist in society that make it exhausting to constantly be exercising one's agency without assistance from others. In the end, both spheres of influence and coalition-building are needed to truly advance a critical approach to understanding contexts in higher education, a theme that emerged in our dialogic conversation in debriefing Antonio's narrative. Discussing this point, Antonio states,

It's both—and. We can't be complacent with creating smaller spaces on campus where people can feel their identities affirmed. And these might be the small moves and victories that will take us to shape contexts in a macro sense when it comes from an institutional perspective. (A. Duran)

Thus, Susan and Antonio both indicate that context is not only not a static entity but also *can* and should be reshaped to generate more equitable systems of education for underserved populations.

Conclusion

In analyzing Antonio's narrative and the issue of context, Susan asks, "What do you do with the individual in these critical perspectives? Is it possible to talk about student development while examining context simultaneously?" These ruminations showcase the issues that emerge when attempting to identify power structures and their influence on college student development. Though these contexts are difficult to potentially measure, it is important that researchers name the contexts in which their students reside beyond the collegiate container, investigate how these environments can affect developmental dimensions differently, and be explicit in their attempt to ascertain context. Notable examples of these types of explorations have emerged (e.g.,

Chun & Evans, 2016; Pizzolato, Nguyen, Johnston, & Wang, 2012; Renn & Arnold, 2003; Stewart, 2015); still, researchers and practitioners must continue to be intentional in their use of criticality when thinking about context. For this reason, in answering Susan's previous questions, Antonio once again asks individuals to embrace a both—and in analyzing identity from a power-based analysis.

It would need to become a both—and. It would need to become (a) what structures of domination and what power systems affect the ways that our students interact with college and what composes their life? and (b) what effect does this have then on the ways that they understand themselves? Finally, this approach must also presume that students can change context through coalition-building. (A. Duran)

Broadening the focus of context thus allows educators to contextualize the development of students as they navigate inequitable and oppressive structures on college campuses. By framing context using critical theory, higher education researchers and practitioners are better equipped to work with students in the process of creating social change and action.

Discussion Questions

1. How does your present understanding about context influence your practice? How would your approach change with a reconceptualized view of context?
2. How does your current collegiate context privilege and oppress certain student populations? Be specific. How do you see larger societal contexts influencing the development of students?
3. Using the analogy of theoretical waves as discussed in chapter 1, how has the role of context in student development theory shifted across the three waves?
4. Identify two or three strategies that you can use to build coalitions with the purpose of shaping equitable contexts in your department and/or campus.

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PART THREE

IMPLICATIONS FOR A CRITICAL STUDENT AFFAIRS PRACTICE

In 1977, Clyde Parker identified the *dilemma*, *paradox*, and *problem* of translating theory to practice. The dilemma: *Good research and theory building require the abstraction of a few elements from the whole of human experience. Practice requires concrete and specific behavior in complex situations.* The paradox: *Theory dealing with abstractions from the general case cannot be applied in concrete and specific situations. Concrete and specific action flows from the personal theories of the actor.* The problem: *Learning how to transform formal theory into personal theories of action.* The third part of this book seeks to resolve Parker’s dilemma, paradox, and problem of applying theories of student development to student affairs practice.

As written in the preface and the introduction to Part One, we assert that critical theories involve critique of “life as it is—within the practices, traditions, values, and beliefs of a particular society” (Jessop, 2014, p. 194). Furthermore, drawing on Martínez-Alemán (2015) we suggest that such frameworks aim to produce social and political action leading to societally relevant practical solutions and transformation. In light of this, we believe it is necessary to engage the practical implications and applications of the critical and poststructural theories (Part One) and critically reenvisioned constructs (Part Two) discussed in this text. As D-L often tells his student development theory classes, “Practice without theory is dangerous. Theory without practice is presumptuous” (D-L Stewart, personal communication, 2008).

The contributors in this part reenvision three core guiding tenets of student affairs practice: involvement and engagement, principles of good practice, and high-impact practices. Anchored in existing perspectives on student affairs practice and scholarship, these chapters transform formal theory into personal theories of action to instigate concrete and specific actions for