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## Editor's Note Draft: Freire, Critical Pedagogy, Culture Circles

In celebration of our 20th Anniversary as a journal, the InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies editorial team opted to put forth a call on the work of Paulo Freire, critical pedagogy, and culture circles. It's hard not to continue to see why critical pedagogy, a praxis of nurturing critical consciousness toward humanization and society towards justice, continues to be an essential aspect of education in P-20 settings in a healthy democracy. This issue was an opportunity to showcase contemporary work and research inspired by the legacy of Paulo Freire. Humanizing education is a collective practice in partnership with students and communities, redresses structures that maintain social inequalities and hierarchies of human life, and repairs the harm they have inflicted (Freire, 1970; Paris & Alim, 2017). The call to humanize education is especially urgent given our ongoing crises in education: unceasing youth gun violence and school shootings (Schildkraut & Muschert, 2019); the defunding divestment of public instruction and closures of public schools (George, 2024); the varied emergences COVID-19 variants and other looming pandemics (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021); corresponding deterioration of working conditions and livable wages for those working for our nation's education systems (Schmitt & deCourcy, 2022; Souto-Manning & Melvin, 2021); book bans and bans misconstruing interpretations of Critical Race Theory, and acceptance and kindness towards LGBTQIA students, teachers, and their families (Morgan, 2022); proposed and implemented legislation to dehumanize queer, trans, nonbinary, and intersex children and parents (Goldberg & Abreu, 2024); and ongoing racialized hate and terror harming Black, Asian, and other nonwhite students, teachers, and their families, among others (Gillborn, 2006; Gover et al., 2020 ; Tuchinda, 2023; Wun, 2014). The urgency of critical pedagogy remains as relevant as ever.

The following works exemplify the learners engaging creatively to read and write the world in order to transform it (Freire & Macedo, 1987/2005). Authors drew from Paulo Freire, Augusto Boal (Boal et al., 1979/2019), and other critical educational theorists and artists, as well as work from scholars in the field of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994/2014), culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2014, 2021), community responsive pedagogy (Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021), and research on the facilitation of culture circles (Souto-Manning, 2010) and intergroup dialogue (Gurin et al., 2013). The seven entries for this issue span linguistic analysis, online instruction , critical gaming, critical design , and machine learning. Each author highlights examples where educators and researchers integrated critical pedagogy with sōka pedagogy (Makiguchi, 1936/2015; Mokuria & Wandix-White, 2020; Goulah, 2015), culture circles (Freire, 1970; Souto-Manning, 2010) and intergroup dialogue (Gurin et al., 2013), participatory design frameworks (Bang et al., 2015; Bang & Vossoughi, 2016; Björgvinsson et al., 2010; Clark et al., 2022; Powers & Tiffany, 2006), and critical Indigenous methodologies (Rodriguez, 2020). These articles and design reports build upon the work of Freire (1970, 1996, 2000), Apple (1982/2013, 1993/2000, 2013, 2018; Sanjakdar & Apple, 2024)), hooks (2003, 2004, 2009, 2014), Makiguchi (Makiguchi, 1936/2015; Mokuria & Wandix-White, 2020; Goulah, 2015), and author Luis J. Rodriguez (2020), among others.

In the first article of this issue, "How might Apple, Freire, and hooks redesign the modern school as a site for social transformation?," Hoopes imagines how we might redesign schools such that they become sites of social transformation. The author envisions schools and classrooms as the site to cultivate an ethical, empowered global citizenry, capable of tackling the myriad problems

we face on a global scale, including: racism and discrimination, physical and emotional bullying, hunger and food insecurity, technology addiction, sexual harassment, teen suicide, intergroup conflicts and gang violence, drug use, mindless consumption, and ecological destruction (Dill, 2013; Elliot et al., 2012). The author presents an interpretation of the work of Paulo Freire, Michael Apple, and bell hooks, through the framework of a critical Global Citizenship Education (GCE) (Myers, 2016; Pashby et al., 2020). This piece explores the redesign of modern schooling as a site for social transformation.

In the second article, “On the travesty of whitewashing Antiracism,” Tafari uses linguistic and discourse analysis to offer a scathing critique of Ibram X. Kendi’s 2019 book, “How to be an Antiracist.” Tafari claims that Kendi abandons his taxonomy of racisms and antiracisms, for historically inaccurate narratives and poorly supported autobiographical vignettes. The author argues that Kendi leaves racialized ‘whiteness’ unquestioned and omitted from critical analysis, while ‘race,’ ‘racialization,’ ‘racisms,’ and ‘antiracisms,’ are allowed to remain shrouded in mystification. The most biting analysis comes in Tafari’s claim that in Kendi’s taxonomy, he discards caste, colorism, misogynoir, and transmisogynoir, as well as their corresponding intersectional histories, frameworks, and theories, for his own morphologically procedural, and hyphenated terms: race-genders, race-classes, and race-sexualities, among others.

In the article “Empowering Online Teaching: A System Review of Online Instructors’ Professional Development in Higher Education,” Ai addresses that while the growth of online post-secondary education over the past fifteen years has increased accessibility and flexibility (Xu & Xu, 2019), concerns about the quality of instruction and learning outcomes remain. Ai’s analysis begins with a historical exploration of online education within U.S. higher education, followed by an examination of the challenges and determinants influencing online learning outcomes. The author then explores the specific content and methods employed in professional development (PD) programs for online educators, providing a detailed examination of the PD training available to online instructors, the rapid expansion of online education (accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic), and heightened scrutiny of teaching and learning quality in virtual environments. Ai notes that the impact has included an increase in professional development (PD) programs offered to enhance the pedagogical skills required for effective online teaching (Bulman & Fairlie, 2022; Kang & Im, 2013). The importance of adopting critical pedagogical approaches and practices that empower both students and educators to challenge oppressive structures and promote educational equity, are heavily stressed by the author. Critical pedagogical approaches would also underscore the role of instructors as facilitators of learning, encouraging active dialogue and collaborative knowledge construction. Ai argues that it is crucial to humanize online education by aligning it with the principles of critical pedagogy to create more inclusive and empathetic virtual classrooms. The paper suggests that PD programs must incorporate these humanizing principles to promote a more equitable and reflective educational system, for those who primarily or exclusively have access to online instruction.

Culture Circles are often ignored for a more theoretical discussion about curricular content, including critical analyses of power in lessons, and organizing around the politics of education. For this issue, we set out to specifically invite more intellectual analysis and interpretation of culture circles. “Indigenous in Me: Reclaiming Chicane Indigenous Identities in the San Fernando Valley,” the fourth article in this issue, Zamora considers *nemachtili* through a virtual

learning space that centers Chicane Indigenous knowledge systems in the northeast San Fernando Valley. The term, which translates in English to “the spirit of learning” from Nahuatl, the most popular Indigenous language of Mexico, was first applied to the public education realm by author Luis J. Rodriguez (2020), and used an approach to impassion learning, despite the ego-death of conventional schooling models. *Nemachtli* encompasses a Freirean and critical Indigenous methodology articulated in the online learning space being analyzed and discussed by Zamora. The author argues that *nemachtli* sustains a critical Indigenous approach nested in a Freirean framework (Freire, 2000). Zamora makes note of this particularly transformative program due to its community-generated genesis. While most educational programs are either co-curricular or after-school programs coordinated as part of nonprofit organizations, this virtual learning space was developed through a non-profit bookstore and cultural center on Indigenous identity, that services a primarily Chicane region. The author describes the impact of learning through this online learning space that provided a culture circle for the local Chicane community.

The fifth and sixth sections of the issue are design reports of culture circle-based, human development, co-curricular programs for middle and high school students. The first report showcases the design and implementation of two programs: the Games for Social Justice (G4J, Games4Justice) Workshop, which served middle school students; and the paired, Intergroup Dialogue and Social Innovation Programs, which served high schoolers. These programs were each part of the teacher-designer and both school’s multi-decade tradition of student organizing, and critical and relational pedagogies. In the first design report, Tafari describes the course as an integration of *sōka* pedagogy (Makiguchi, 1936/2015; Mokuria & Wandix-White, 2020; Goulah, 2015), culture circles (Freire, 1970; Souto-Manning, 2010) and intergroup dialogue (Gurin et al., 2013), participatory design frameworks (Bang et al., 2015; Bang & Vossoughi, 2016; Björqvinnsson et al., 2010; Clark et al., 2022; Powers & Tiffany, 2006). The second design report expounds upon four games co-designed with students through these programs. Multiple game-based experiences were designed through these culture circles with students, including: *Pirate Oasis*, *#SaveOurGirls*, and *XploreLA*. *Pirate Oasis* is a six-week multimodal ((McGonigal, 2003, 2011), Alternate Reality Game (ARG) (Fujimoto, 2010, 2015; McGonigal, 2003, 2011), that gamifies ecological stewardship through team-building challenges, book code puzzles, and gamification (Burke, 2016; Sheldon, 2012). *#SaveOurGirls* is a 3-hour workshop and Forum Game, pioneering an integration of Forum Theatre (Boal, 1995, 2007; Souto-Manning, 2010) and Simulations & Gaming, to combat human trafficking. *XploreLA* is a location-based, geocaching (*Pokémon GO*, 2016), two-dimensional fighting game (*Street Fighter*, 1987), designed by youth to mobilize their peers to local parks and other green- and play-spaces in park-poor communities in Los Angeles. These design reports begin to scratch the surface of the possible applications for culture circles in P20 contexts.

In “Machine Credibility: How News Readers Evaluate AI-Generated Content”, the seventh installment in this issue, Wasdahl examines the evolving landscape of journalism in the context of AI-generated news, a rapidly growing phenomenon driven by advancements in large language models. Wasdahl's research delves into how readers perceive AI-authored content, particularly focusing on the evaluative criteria used to judge the credibility, quality, and overall engagement of such content. The study's use of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) reveals new dimensions of

reader perception, such as "Alienation" and "Engagement," which highlight the complexities introduced by non-human authorship. This research underscores the growing importance of understanding how AI reshapes news consumption and trust, with significant implications for media literacy and journalistic standards.

This issue represents robust inquiry and scholarly pursuits of contemporary educators and researchers. As editors, we hope that this entry expands the discourse about Paulo Freire's legacy, and offer insights into ways educators and researchers have and may continue implementing and integrating critical pedagogy to see classrooms, programs, and communities pursue critical consciousness, and the untested feasibilities of alternative futures birthed from freedom dreams. Critical pedagogy and culture circles are tools to improve the quality of our quality of life and education. We hope this publication inspires more educators to wield and apply it.

In light of the context of this publication, including brutal institutional and carceral responses to Palestinian solidarity work on campus, the condoning of violent attacks by extremists targeting our students, colleagues, authors, editors, and our readers, our editorial team has issued a statement included as a separate note, that has been endorsed by our Journal Advisory Board, spanning members from each program and department in the School of Education and Information Studies. Our stance echoes the calls made by our undergraduate students, graduate students, our union, and various student groups who have led the movement on campus for Palestinian liberation. With our heads in the clouds, praying for a better world, our hands working to create it, and our feet planted firmly in the ground before us, we welcome what comes next. May we create a just world we can share together. This hope is also part of Paulo Freire's legacy.

As editors, we recognize that our journal's success is contingent on the critical engagement of our peer reviewers, the participation of our Journal Advisory Board, the wisdom of our advisors, ongoing investment from our administrators, including the Chairs, and the Dean of the School of Education and Information Studies. Special thanks to our peer reviewers who were the first to participate in our open peer review process, and the authors who trusted us to ensure that their scholarship was protected and cultivated through various feedback processes: reviewers Jamon Pulliam and Marcelo Almora Rios for their feedback on "How might Apple, Freire, and hooks redesign the modern school as a site for social transformation?"; reviewers David Lewis and Karla Aguilar Marquez, for their feedback on "On the Travesty of whitewashing of AntiRacist Education"; reviewers Michelle Velasco, David Lewis, and Juan Pedro, for their feedback on "Empowering Online Teaching: A System Review of Online Instructors' Professional Development in Higher Education"; reviewers Karla Aguilar Marquez and AnnaLise Hoopes, for their comments on "Indigenous in Me: Nemachtili in Freirean and Critical Indigenous Methodologies"; reviewers Kayla Layaoen and Corinne Smith, and Assistant Editor Kai Nham, for their feedback on "Games4Justice: Course Design"; reviewers Annie Bae and Cassi Colangelo, and Assistant Editor Lauren Fischbacher, for their feedback on "Games4Justice: Game Reports"; and reviewers Jamon Pulliam and Tianji Jiang, for their contributions to "Machine Credibility: How News Readers Evaluate AI-Generated Content". Thank you for your engagement, your participation, your wisdom, your investment, and your trust in our scholarship.

We would also like to recognize Lauren Fischbacher and Kai Nham for their work as former editorial team members; their contributions to our journal ensured this publication's completion.

Menelik Tafari, Lead Editor  
Isabelle Davis, Lead Editor  
Shuhan Ai, Associate Editor

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