

Introduction

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The *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* (IJCP) is a forum that was strategically created to serve as a venue for critical scholar-activists to organize, collaborate, work in solidarity, and become a support network for one another when we put ourselves on the line for justice and equity. Our coming together through a venue such as the IJCP is crucial: With blatant cuts to K-16 education in the United States, we are experiencing a direct assault on the working class and the educational access students from these communities will have in the future. All of us have worked tirelessly to challenge and counter racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and the many other -isms that influence and permeate our society and thus, our educational system. However, it is in these times of struggle when our communities are the targets of constant right-wing attacks that our hope and resiliency are challenged and it becomes difficult to visualize revolutionary change, beyond just reformation.

Grounded in a context of struggle and transformation, we are honored to have guest edited this special issue of the IJCP entitled *Critical Educators at Work: Perils and Promise*. This special issue emerged because members of the Critical Educators for Social Justice (CESJ) Special Interest Group (SIG) within the American Educational Research Association (AERA) were confronting personal struggles with respect to their social justice work at their respective campuses and communities. The reasons for these struggles varied: Some felt isolated

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because they were the lone voice on their respective campuses. For others, the harsh repercussions of being a scholar-activist had manifested as negative tenure reviews, unfavorable course evaluations, and departmental backlash. As a means of neutralizing their sentiments of helplessness and despair, CESJ members found it imperative to share with each other how they are continuing the work for social change in these conservative times (for more on the emergence and development of this project please refer to the article by Pat Hinchey and Karen Gourd in this issue).

This issue of the IJCP addresses critical educators' endeavors for educational justice and their efforts to navigate the many challenges they face in their work.

The articles in this issue address three overarching themes:

1. **The creation of a critical reflective discourse for reformation/transformation.** The articles by Ilhan Kucukaydin, Glenda Moss & Cheu-jei Lee, and John Rafferty remind us of the importance of questioning and reflecting upon that which is considered "the norm." This is the critical first step in effecting concrete changes that promote equity and discourage blind obedience.
2. **The creation of spaces that foster student, parent, community, and teacher self-empowerment.** The articles by Elizabeth Bishop; Oscar Jiménez-Castellanos, Cristina Alfaro & Elsa Billings; and Laura DuMond Kerr illustrate how important it is to strategically develop spaces and opportunities for students, parents, communities, and teachers to engage in dialogue, reflection, and understanding, in order to obtain transformation and 2) insight that one's experiences (funds of knowledge) soundly grounds the work they see themselves engaged in as political activists and leaders.
3. **The work of scholar activists against the conservative current.** Articles written by Omiunota Nelly Ukpokodu; Susan J. Katz & Diana F. Ryan; and Pat Hinchey & Karen Gourd provide compelling accounts of scholar activists' personal journeys and the ways in which they replenish their commitment to the cause.

We conclude this introduction to the theme issue by thanking the folks at the Paulo and Nita Freire International Project for Critical Pedagogy. We thank them not only for their technical assistance in making this special theme issue possible, but also for their efforts in creating a publication that serves as a forum for like-minded critical educators to share their work and their struggles as they combat inequity and injustice in our society. We also wish to thank all the authors who submitted their work to this journal; their stories of struggles and successes illuminate the possibility of hope in these trying times. And finally, we acknowledge all the folks from the Critical Educators for Social Justice (CESJ) SIG of

AERA. The knowledge that every year we will have an opportunity to reacquaint ourselves with each other, share our stories of success *and* sadness, and meet new allies rejuvenates us and makes our work all that much more meaningful.