


Critical Pedagogy and the Covid-19 Pandemic: Keeping Communities Together in Times of Crisis, edited by Eda Ata and Fatma Mizikaci

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Book Review: *Critical Pedagogy and the Covid-19 Pandemic: Keeping Communities Together in Times of Crisis*

Ata, Eda and Fatma Mizikaci, eds. *Critical Pedagogy and the Covid-19 Pandemic: Keeping communities together in times of crisis*. London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2022, 275pp, \$37.50.

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In their book, *Critical Pedagogy and the Covid-19 Pandemic: Keeping Communities Together in Times of Crisis*, Ankara University professors, Fatma Mizikaci and Eda Ata depict their work mending connections in the global critical pedagogy community severed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Students and teachers around the world were forced out of their classrooms in hopes of skirting the virus and as a result, many suffered from the “pressure of loneliness, joblessness and non-connectedness” (1). In response to this severance, Mizikaci and Ata initiated a weekly online talk series called “The Global Thursday Talks,” where transnational scholars of critical pedagogy and academics could analyze and discuss the changing landscape of education in the broader context of the pandemic. Mizikaci and Ata’s book is structured to reflect the organization of the talk series in three parts, “the chapters are mainly based on the interaction and solidarity in the space created through the Global Thursday Talks” (5). Parts I and II contain interviews and chapters written by the invited speakers of the talk series, and Part III is composed of personal reflections from Turkish participants engaged in critical pedagogy. Each contributor speaks about their deep connection to Brazilian educator and philosopher, Paulo Freire, widely known as the founder of critical pedagogy, to whom the book is dedicated.

The first three chapters of Part I include interviews with renowned Freirean academics, Henry A. Giroux, Peter McLaren, and Michael W. Apple. They discuss the importance of critical pedagogy when challenging neoliberal education models in

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the context of the pandemic. Teaching and learning, they argue, have been reduced to mere transmissions of knowledge promoting corporate skills for employability rather than self-discovery. In Chapter 4, Peter Mayo continues the discussion and describes universities as privileged spaces that encourage a “bourgeois ethos” (73). The transition to online classrooms, he argues, threatens teachers’ and learners’ capacity for critical analysis. Mayo concludes on a hopeful note that online classrooms will become spaces for impactful blended learning. Antonia Darder responds in Chapter 5 explaining that hegemonic schooling is founded on a politics of estrangement... alienating students from their bodies (84). If the act of knowing is an embodied experience, the pandemic, Darder argues, “disembodies and virtualizes the pedagogy of teaching” (82). Similarly, in Chapter 6, Wayne Ross argues that learning and teaching are experienced through subjective and personal transformation. The positive outcome of online teaching for Ross is the opportunity for students and teachers to become digital activists (98). Ira Shor concludes with Chapter 7 by sharing personal memories of Freire and suggests ways that online communities can become spaces for teachers and students to engage in critical discussion that will result in lasting revolutionary change.

In Part II, Guy Senese commences the dialogue by discussing the importance of solidarity groups in maintaining hope for teachers and students isolated by online learning. Senese offers an in-depth analysis of the sociopolitical impacts of Covid-19 that has resulted in increased anti-Black racism and discrimination against migrant workers throughout the United States. He finishes by sharing his experiences while teaching at Ankara University where he discovered spaces of empathy and unity. In Chapter 9, Liv Mjedle adds to Senese’s argument and claims that to achieve knowledge, one must learn by doing (163). This process is hindered when the “working class is alienated from the search for knowledge, as though it were not connected to the materiality of their everyday lives” (153). To challenge this separation, Mjedle, like Giroux in Chapter I, encourages one to engage in Freire’s pedagogy of questioning, appropriate for face-to-face or online interactions. In Chapter 10, Arnd-Michael Nohl defines the difference between *Bildung* (directive) and *Erziehung* (non-directive) to show that Germany’s historic approach to educational processes has been *Bildung* (directive). He critically reflects on the effects of mass education on Germans during the pandemic and how it may tempt politicians to become authoritarian (175). Critical educators, Fevziye Sayilan and Zeynep Alica end Part II with an account of their daily experiences in the rapidly changing educational environment in Turkey. They discuss how the hyper-commercialization and marketization of online learning shaped the mass Islamification of education throughout the country securing the authoritarian State. Saytlan and Alica speak about the importance of solidarity networks in times of crisis and render the Global Thursday Talks a cure for the loss of connection

experienced during the pandemic.

Part III is composed of seven chapters with critical responses from Turkish participants of the Global Thursday Talks starting with the co-creator of the talk series, Professor Eda Ata. In Chapter 12, Ata recollects her experiences at the Global Thursday Talks, describing it as “a sanctuary for our international and national community...for a form of being we longed for and have been non-violently fighting for *hope*” (202). Chapter 13 interviewees, Zeynep Alica and Yasemin Tezgiden-Cakcak, explain that the talk series was a transformative mobilizing action that paved the way for further critical reflection and action (208) for educators and learners. Murat Ata responds in Chapter 14 with his experience as a language instructor trying to build a community during the pandemic. Ata found himself questioning how the pedagogy he follows is being informed by the changing social structures and psychological development of learners and educators around the world (219). In Chapter 15, Ali Tansu Balci discusses the relevance of informal learning and how it could influence potential social transformation for deeper political learning in the context of critical education in the pandemic (230). Chapters 16, 17 and 18 by Kemal Inal, Gamze Gonca Özyurt and Nurcan Saltoğlu Özleyen respectively, continue the discussion by presenting different ways digital spaces can be used to cultivate and conserve critical pedagogy in times of crisis.

The last chapter is by Mizikaci and Ata, who recollect on the formation of the Global Thursday Talks and the coinciding creation of this exceptionally informative book. For critical pedagogues to move forward successfully in the newly forged educational landscape, they argue, the post-pandemic era must be defined by the inclusion of larger communities and a broader range of topics in many contexts (267). Mizikaci and Ata call this new period, “the era of hear and act,” and in Freirean spirit end their book by asking readers to consider what they hear, how they hear and how they act. This book is for teachers, learners, critical academics, and those looking for a comprehensive understanding of critical pedagogy in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. It presents readers with different ways they can meaningfully engage in alternative pedagogies involving action-based knowledge production that can be applied in digital communities and online classrooms. Finally, this book is chock-full of hopeful messages and calls for solidarity in times of crisis leaving the reader feeling inspired to move forward in the post-pandemic era with a more critically informed conscience.