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Global Thursday Talks How Critical Educators United Locally & Globally during Pandemic.

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Introduction

When the covid-19 lockdowns started in March 2020, that meant isolation from education, research, learning and social life for the members of higher education institutions. They needed to seek for alternative ways to learn together, to meet for discussions and to know about each other's situation. As the pandemic became a global public health problem, this included not only physical health but mental, social and psychological health and balancing them together. University students, academics and educators soon looked for communities to get together for their food for thought. Global Thursday Talks initiative is the fruit of such a pursuit. The first efforts were to reach out the people of the prospective community i.e. educators, scholars and a large number of PhD students in education from Turkey and from the States. The aim was to keep educators and scholars together to discuss controversial issues in education in the times of uncertainty due to covid-19 pandemic. Then the first plan was to organize series of online talks on education with the contribution of worldwide known public intellectuals, critical peda-

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gogues and academics. The first invited speaker was Peter McLaren who accepted to give a speech about the controversial issues of the time.

In this review we narrate how Global Thursday Talks initiative have continued its journey starting from inviting McLaren to contact with Bloomsbury Publications.

From loneliness to a global solidarity

The feeling of loneliness that we experience at the global level during this pandemic, both socially and individually, surrounded us. When face-to-face education abruptly went “online”, or “synchronous interaction” at the end of March 2020, and when we could no longer go to our campuses, Fatma Mızıkacı felt the need to write more frequently and longer e-mails to the colleagues who lived far away. From these correspondences, the content of the correspondence with Peter McLaren began to deepen, as almost always, on the injustices, discrimination and inequalities experienced in the world and in their countries, and on political changes. After that, a need was felt to share such conversation with more colleagues and students in Turkey. This is how the thought came about and Peter McLaren was invited to a talk from such a distance. He accepted without hesitation. And then she talked to Eda Ata about this and they “discovered” how such a meeting would work for our intellectual loneliness. When they started organizing McLaren's speech, there were tremendous uprisings in the US and in the world over the murder of George Floyd by the police. Later, protests, street demonstrations and anti-racist incidents spread all over the world in various ways. As Godlee pointed out this was a “global outpouring of grief and anger at the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis as either a distraction from or in conflict with efforts to contain the virus” (2020). Peter was already writing articles criticizing these events. When asked to give a wide-ranging speech about the pandemic and its implications for inequality, social justice and education, he accepted. We focused on the questions of how we can internationalize McLaren's speech and how we can make use of internet technologies to make it anytime, anywhere for our aim. After researching many different platforms, we decided on the Zoom meeting for inclusion and ease of access. We created posters, content and social media accounts for the announcement. Via the social media accounts on Facebook, Twit-

ter, Instagram and Gmail we circulated McLaren's Speech to our national and international colleagues and students and broadly to educators, NGOs and relevant groups. Thus we fulfilled our first Global Thursday Talks event on June 11, 2020. The event attracted great attention from various individuals, groups and organizations. The event, which lasted more than two hours, with more than 100 participants in total from various countries, was a highly interactive meeting with occasional answers to questions. McLaren emphasized the quest "what kind of world is going to emerge after covid-19 pandemic and George Floyd murder protests?" this discussion was around the totalitarian regimes and their neoliberal policies which have made influences on disadvantages groups in society. McLaren identifies and discussed following issues:

- In 2019 Los Angeles school teachers went on strike for their rights and learning conditions for students.
- 15% of country's population live in conditions of poverty.
- 31.2% of population lacks of critical media literacy. This made Trump's discourse easily accepted by these groups.
- How people were called to go to church to pray for coronavirus and went back with virus contaminated.

These issues of the new liberal era touched by McLaren were watched with great interest by the participants. Then we decided to continue with "reading McLaren event" and shared his recent articles and books with the audience following the talk. Thus each event of Global Thursday Talks was formed with addendum events such as keeping contact with the participants and invited speakers, evaluation of feedback, reading shares. Social media communication provided an extensive outreach for these events.

This encouraged us for further events and we contacted Guy Senese for the following week. The form of the events thus shaped and gave the organizers and participants deeper insights. After each event we developed new ideas, Global Thursday Talks has enlarged its scope to the world. Consequently, we ended up with 12 talks with the following intellectuals and more than 1000 participants within nine months.

11 June 2020: Peter McLaren
18 June 2020: Guy Senese
25 June 2020: Peter Mayo
09 July 2020: Michael Apple
16 July 2020: Arnd-Michael Nohl
23 July 2020: Fevziye Sayılan
30 July 2020: Antonia Darder
06 August 2020: Guy Senese and Michael Apple
13 August 2020: Henry Giroux
12 November 2020: Ira Shor
26 November 2020: Liv Mjelde
10 December 2020: E. Wayne Ross

As a matter of fact, the context has expanded considerably by adding new uncertainties to the uncertainties from this process that started in June 2020, and we are updating our aim to keep up with this transformation. To be able to reach more people we started to post the recordings of the talks at our YouTube channel. There, people are able to watch the previous Global Thursday Talks recordings.

The topics discussed

Many topics were discussed within the framework of critical pedagogy at large. The prominent topics are social justice, inequalities in education, education problems related to the pandemic, racism in the axis of George Floyd's murder, critical theory and class, public education, women's rights, body - politics and education, schooling, migration - pandemic and education, homeschooling, participation and non-participation in distance education and the social gaps it creates, social movements, the isolation and changing roles of teachers in the pandemic, the effects of neo-conservatism and neoliberalism on education, public advocacy, cultural studies, teacher organizations, resistance, political stance, vocational vs general education, curriculum and instruction in relation to pandemic, empowering education and the agenda of critical pedagogy. These issues have been well em-

phasized in relation with disparities, inequalities and injustice which are felt in deep but remain invisible in the times of covid-19 (Steinberg, 2020).

Solidarity around a digital community

Since we started these activities in June 2020, we realized that both ourselves and those around us fell into a great intellectual loneliness. We have understood how important it is to come together even in virtual environments and what kind of power it can create in order not to turn into despair due to the increasing uncertainty due to the pandemic. The source of this strength was the feeling of resistance and solidarity arising from being together. This led us to an ethics of intellectual solidarity, an understanding that our contributions provide one another the tools of knowledge; that brings solidarity as means to meet intellectual needs (Magill & Rodriguez, 2021). At the same time, we felt the responsibility to continue these digital meetings and expand the space we opened up, and we feel that we have set a model for other platforms and entities, and this encourages us to continue and different collaborations (Perng, 2020).

Forms of praxis

We are assured that Global Thursday Talks is a kind of praxis of its own with Bauman's definition "culture as praxis" (Bauman, 1999, p.ix) as it created and formed its own existence. These meetings have been an example of praxis via creating digital communities for solidarity. The participants of this digital community have reflected tremendously and they have mobilized the meetings. Due to the increasing interest in and expectation from the events, the idea of an edited book was created that will allow the speeches and discussions to be expressed in different ways and thus these valuable ideas to reach more people. The only feature of this book is that it is a printed book in which both speakers and participants convey their experiences and nurture dialogue. Global Thursday Talks will continue. We are considering new goals to reach more participants. What would make such a book unique is that, in this book readers will not only explore an extraordinary time through the lens of critical educators worldwide, but they will also have the opportunity to explore the praxis and reflection aspect of the events as a whole and on an individual basis as well. Thus, Global Thursday Talks will continue keeping communities together in the times of crisis: critical pedagogies

and covid-19 pandemic and in the future. And we will extend dialogue beyond covid-19 crisis, George Floyd murder and racism, neoliberalism, neo-conservatism, rightist ideology, capitalism, feminism, teaching flesh/body and pedagogy, new cultural and social agendas of totalitarian regimes and their influence of education, schooling, teachers and society.

Conclusion

Global Thursday Talks have been initiated in Turkey and had global impact and interest. The series of talks included general and timeless concepts on education such as public education, empowering education, women's rights, teachers' roles and also some up-to-date topics such as George Floyd protests, violence against women in Turkey and US elections. As an ongoing virtual learning and empowering place where scholars and educators can come together, Global Thursday Talks could build a community during pandemic, especially in the most severe times. The organizers, speakers and participants have formed a union so strong that they are also planning to share what they have witnessed with the future educators by organizing more events and turning what has been shared into a collective book project, thus achieving a safe and meaningful space for all to access, grow and walk together. Global Thursday Talks has reached an aim in an age that exaggeration, falsehood, lies and gossip are the characteristic of post-truth. In such an era knowledge requires conditions of belief, truth and justification, while information requires none of these and misinformation and disinformation are fundamental categories of such information (Peters, McLaren & Jandrić, 2020, p.2; Mayo, 2020).

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