



Can popular culture speak to issues of equity in educational spaces?

We realize the importance of our voices only when we are silenced.

– Malala Yousafzai

#MeToo	<i>Undulating in murky waters. Treading. Looking for footing, for guidance, for air.</i>
#inclusion	<i>Holding space for inspiration.</i>
#frontlineworkers	
#fear	It's July 2020. Globally, we're facing a pandemic, and systemic racial and gender-based violence. <i>Holding space for action.</i>
#COVID	
#hope	
#BlackLivesMatter	The <i>privilege</i> of skin tone.
#change	Of language.
#SayHerName	Of country of <i>origin</i> .
#together	Unsubstantiated differences separating and <i>allowing</i> some to succeed easily while others suffer. <i>Holding space for hope.</i>
#onlinelearning	
#representation	
#equity	<i>Undulating in murky waters. Treading. Looking for footing, for guidance, for air.</i>
#together	<i>Holding space for change.</i>

holding space (CohenMiller, 2020)

We've started this editorial with a quote by Malala Yousafzai, the Nobel Peace prize winner, who was shot by the Taliban in Pakistan for encouraging girls to get an education. She was 15 years old at the time. Her educational work, like that of others working as activists, can be seen through the lenses of popular culture and social media (Berents, 2016). While geographically distant for many of our readers, her quote loudly echoes injustices faced worldwide.

These are touched upon in the poem above, as well as by the hashtags reverberating internationally of #MeToo, of #BlackLivesMatter, of #SayHerName, all amidst #COVID and #onlinelearning. The work speaks to the privilege experienced daily that affects all aspects of our lives, allowing some to thrive while others fight against inequality and violence that must be faced. In the classroom, educators seek to find inclusive ways to engage the diversity of students enrolled, striving to adopt new methods, tools, and pedagogies in the rapid transition to online environments.

Soon after the pandemic started, the US became immersed in a highly profound set of racial violence that set off protests and the advocacy to change the nature of law enforcement and the ways our communities work. Black communities and individuals were suddenly facing not only COVID-19 but also heightened violence, pressure, and valid fears. In “holding space” (CohenMiller, 2020), we can be reminded of bell hooks’ (2003) work and a focus on hope:

It is my deep belief that in talking about the past, in understanding the things that have happened to us we can heal and go forward. Some people believe that it is best to put the past behind you, to never speak about the events that have happened that have hurt or wounded us, and this is their way of coping — but coping is not healing. By confronting the past without shame we are free of its hold on us. (p. 119)

Thus, in moving towards hope, our vision for this special issue of *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy* is reflected in the cover image of multicolored origami birds extending their wings and flying piecemeal higher into the sky. The birds are a metaphor for the variegated nature of the important issues of our time externally, and internally—a way to view the multifaceted nature of our pedagogical practices and our efforts to expand and move our awareness and abilities while working towards a more socially-just society.

So, what does this mean for this issue of *Dialogue*? Can popular culture speak to issues of equity in educational spaces? Over the years, *Dialogue* has highlighted work that critically examines popular culture and education with a focus on social justice (see Antuna et al., 2018; Church, 2019; Cragin, 2018; Harmon & Henkin, 2016; Propper, 2017; Rank, 2019; Spencer, 2018; Tinajero, 2020). In this special issue, *Engaged Popular Culture and Pedagogy: Awareness, Understanding and Social Justice*, 12 authors have taken the call and shared their insights, providing practical steps through the use of popular culture to improve teaching and learning in informal and formal spaces.

These articles address how popular culture can be used to understand and to teach about the contemporary world as well as highlight practical, innovative, and theoretical ways to reinterpret and create a better conceptualization of political, environmental and social climates. So, we say yes. Popular culture can indeed address issues of equity in educational spaces. Working hand-in-hand with SWPACA, we are committed to advancing social and racial justice taking active steps to foreground the voices of those historically marginalized, in particular Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

As such, we have invited Travis Boyce, the African American / Black Studies area chair for the Southwest Popular / American Culture Association Society, to write a Guest Editorial for this issue. In it, he discusses how popular culture provides a medium to critique and understand our past as well as our present realities. Boyce likens the 1921 Tulsa Race riot (as seen in HBO’s *Watchmen*) to the present socio-political moment where the public death of George Floyd has sparked a worldwide movement that seeks to dismantle anti-Black racism and White supremacy. We are grateful for his keen insights which lay the foundation for the articles in this issue. Moreover, the authors in this issue demonstrate how they have sought new ways to speak to issues of gender bias, of racial stereotyping, and to broaden our ways of knowing and thinking. While they initially wrote their texts prior to the massive events erupting in the last few months, we have extended an invitation to incorporate these pressing issues.

In the first of the full-length articles, *Triple Threat or Triple Opportunity: When a Pop Culture Course Goes Online at a Community College*, Lance Eaton and Alex Rockey critically position their experiences developing a face-to-face course for online-only delivery to illustrate how digital learning presents unique possibilities for inclusive student engagement and learning. By embracing asynchronous workflow, multimodal communication, and different interactivities inherent in online pedagogy, the authors focus on constructivist approaches to “create opportunities for students to interact with content to create their own

knowledge.” This kind of flexibility, challenging to manage in face-to-face classroom ecologies, “can empower students who may have felt marginalized or out-of-place in more traditional learning environments as it emphasizes the importance of their experiences to their learning.” Pertinent to current pedagogical necessities, Eaton and Rockey ground theory with practical advice for embracing a constructivist approach to online course development.

The next article similarly addresses urgent pedagogical concerns that are relevant at this time of radical change. Laurie Fuller’s *Cultivating Anti-Racist Feminist Pedagogy Queerly* is a call to transform the college classroom community. The author utilizes principles put forth by black feminist activist and science fiction scholar adrienne maree brown in her book, *Emergent Strategy*, to lay a critical framework for restructuring learning environments in ways that position social justice in the foreground. As Fuller explains, “emergent strategy principles can be integrated into classroom teaching and educational practices to create more meaningful learning, engagement, and measurable success: Trust the people, what you pay attention to grows, less prep more presence, never a failure always a lesson, and change is constant.” Change is an important keyword in Fuller’s work, in which “queer is an action.” In *queering*, uncritically accepted norms are challenged and remade. By embracing the energies of intentional change, educators and students can “imagine liberation” in tandem, connect more meaningfully in the classroom, and thus better advocate for a just future.

The third article examines how productions of racial embodiment in visual narrative media can reveal cultural tensions and upend notions of a post-racial American ideal. In *Afrosurrealism, Aristotle, and Racial Presence in Netflix’s Luke Cage*, Angela D. Mack uses the lens of Afrosurrealism to situate her rhetorical analysis of the Marvel series and identify “a diasporic reading of race with Harlem as its bridge to the ‘realms’ of New York City and beyond.” The author asserts that Luke Cage and his world vitally communicate the role race plays in the construction of place in America. *Netflix’s Luke Cage* shows audiences “the significance of representation and how working through issues of race for African Americans and people of color impacts everyone.”

The two final articles offer insights into pedagogical methods that leverage technology and popular culture to help students engage with critical issues including representation, power, and environmental justice. In *Sexual Harassment Effects on Bodies of Work: Engaging Students Through the Application of Historical Context and Communication Theory to Pop Culture and Social Media*, Bryan Vizzini and Kristina Drumheller provide a case study in the development and execution of a course that combines student analyses of current events with historical readings. The authors discover that asking students to consider contemporary cultural movements as they unfold facilitates their practical understanding of advanced concepts like Foucault’s challenges of power and Burke’s terministic screens. Vizzini and Drumheller argue that “variations on the theme of this course allow historical and modern popular culture to collide, demonstrating the significance of both in a fractured society.” The experiences outlined in this essay can help educators empower their students to recognize how theory pertains to lived experience as paradigms continue to shift.

Finally, Elspeth Iralu and Caitlin Grann discuss the use of mixtape-inspired assignments in an online course focused on environmental and social justice. In *Hell You Talmhout: Mixtapes as method for online environmental justice pedagogy*, the authors connect the radical activist movements essential to the foundation of environmental justice to the anti-racist and anti-capitalist origins of the mixtape. In the social science classroom, “mixtapes serve as an analogy for the dialectic process of generating knowledge from within and outside of disciplinary traditions and norms.” Students identified how issues of race, class, and social and environmental justice intersect by creating multimedia compilations informed by the rhetoric represented in their mixtapes. The authors note that online course delivery can better reveal the connections between critical theory and popular culture as “students move between tabs on the computer screen” from scholarly text to music video upload.

In addition to the full-length articles, this issue also includes a special series of four short articles and a book review. The special series highlights the work of Bridget Goodman, who explores the pandemic through the lens of pedagogy in times of crisis, its effect on students, and the relationship it has to popular culture. Lastly, Holly Chung reviews Anna Tso's *Hong Kong Stories* exploration of the connection to one's mother, culture, and identity.

Overall, the power of popular culture is clear. According to Pew Research (Pew Research, 2018), those who live in the US spend the vast majority of their waking hours looking at screens, averaging 11 hours per day consuming media of some form (Nielsen, 2018). And while some may be passive recipients, the authors of this issue push their readers to actively engage with ideas to change discourse. These articles come together at the intersection between popular cultural texts, broadly conceptualized, and providing an understanding and solutions to issues in contemporary society.

The set of authors for this issue have engaged with challenging topics and broad concepts to harness the power of popular culture. They have attempted to identify what is missing in the conversation—in the *dialogue* about popular culture and pedagogy and invited us to make a difference.

As a whole, this issue came together through great efforts and work of a full team who found the time and space to work despite a global health crisis and major unrest. We would like to thank the following people: Book Review Editor, Karina Vado; Educational Editor, Kelli Bippert; Copy Editors, Miriam Sciala and Robert Gordyn; Creative Designer, Douglas CohenMiller; and our authors and peer reviewers. A special thank you goes to Miriam for her insights and feedback on this editorial.

We are pleased to share these texts that speak to our inherent ability to grow as individuals, as educators, and as communities. We look forward to hearing your thoughts and to moving forward together toward a more just and equitable society through *Engaged Popular Culture and Pedagogy* to bring about *Awareness, Understanding and Social Justice*.

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