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Souto-Manning, Mariana. (2010) *Freire, Teaching, and Learning: Culture Circles Across Contexts*. New York. Peter Lang.

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Reviewed by Robin A. Parent
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Mariana Souto-Manning has opened up and expanded the use of culture circles across paradigms in her new book, *Freire, Teaching, and Learning: Culture Circles Across Contexts*. Her work with freirian culture circles demonstrates their usefulness in promoting critical thought and transformation in diverse and dynamic learning environments. Souto-Manning has organized her book into three sections that take the reader through a historical backing of critical pedagogy and culture circles and into five applications of culture circles to finish with a practical conclusion.

The construction of the book makes the process of culture circles easy and applicable to those with little background knowledge of the method as well as those who are seasoned critical pedagogues. Souto-Manning begins this journey as she introduces the reader to Paulo Freire and

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his philosophies as she would a dear friend. By building upon the framework of Freire's use of critical pedagogy and culture circles in the adult literacy learning environment of Brazil, Souto-Manning constructs a solid foundation for her own research, which she identifies, "as proposed by Freire, I sought to recreate his pedagogy (Freire, 1998) in a new context" (p. 1).

These contexts that Souto-Manning has pursued through her research have, "crossed linguistic, cultural, contextual and socioeconomic borders" (p. 1). She has utilized the culture circle concept in five different paradigms. In this process she outlines her experiences with culture circles used in an American first grade classroom, a Brazilian adult education program, a pre-service teacher education atmosphere, a teacher in-service, and even a Boalian theater education group. The diversity of these five paradigms highlights the flexibility of culture circles.

At first it seems unlikely that the same emancipating methodology could work to transform spaces for such different participants, especially first graders. Each case study in the text is organized in the same way showing generative themes developed by the participants, problematizing the themes and working in conjunction with the teacher/facilitator to engage and transform the issues. The versatility of the culture circle become apparent as spaces filled with problems are transformed into constructed spaces of possibilities.

The first chapter in section two is the case study with the first grade classroom. In this chapter Souto-Manning, "highlight[s] how first-grade students problematized the racially and socioeconomically segregated nature of pull-out educational programs in American schools" (p. 49). After providing background context she moves into the generative themes that come directly from the dialogs students were having concerning the segregating qualities of pull-out programs within schools. These dialogs took place within the classroom in a group space facilitated by Souto-Manning, their teacher, and also in non structured peer conversations where the students engaged in dialog outside of the whole group situation. During the collection of dialogs from students Souto-Manning noted that, "had I decided not to create this place for problem posing and

dialogue, these conversations would have remained in the periphery of the classroom” (p. 53).

Souto-Manning shows the continued engagement of the students in the problematizing process through snippets of transcripts gathered by recording devices scattered throughout the class room. The student dialogs showcase a continued frustration to subject matter they are working out amongst themselves. Facilitating the next step, Souto-Manning works to create a safe and nurturing space for her students to continue engaging in these ideas. In doing so she stresses that she, “wanted to be careful not to impose [her] own views on [her] students. [She] wanted to enter this dialogue and learn from them and with them in an authentic way” (p. 55). To conduct and facilitate this space and encourage the culture circle to become a transformative learning space for the children she used reading and history materials that aligned with the core standards to broach the subject matter and provide context for the problem posing the students were talking about. They did dig deep into the reading and worked hard to relate materials to the current events that triggered the dialogs in the first place. Through this critical place students were learning and engaging and most importantly had ownership in their learning process.

Throughout the section on the different contexts of culture circles Souto-Manning sets up the chapters as case studies that provide the reader with a clear idea as to her research question, construction of study, participants, and analysis. During this process she pays particular attention to the deconstruction of power between participants and teacher/facilitator to open up a space for dialog to begin and continue to grow into a transformative space/place for learning. The use of appropriate language, facilitation of dialogs, and the creation of safe critical spaces carry through each case and again highlight the flexibility of the culture circle.

The final chapter, which makes up the third section of the text, centers on the practical use of culture circles in education. In true authentic dialogic fashion Souto-Manning facilitates a space within her text where the voices of her participants shine through to reflect upon their own experiences in the culture circles, thus providing a powerful multi-perspective conclusion built upon shared

experiences. In the closing paragraph Dr. Souto-Manning extends an invitation to engage in, across contexts, “critical, hopeful, and libratory pedagogy” (p. 190) through culture circles.

About the Reviewer

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