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## **Notes and Impressions on the 12<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Critical Education\***

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The 12th International Conference on Critical Education (XII ICCE), hosted by Ankara University's Institute of Educational Sciences, was held bilingually in Turkish and English in Ankara. The conference was supported by the Faculty of Educational Sciences, various units of the university such as the European Union Research and Application Centre (ATAUM) and the Directorate of Health, Culture, and Sports, as well as supported by The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TÜBİTAK). The 12th International Conference on Critical Education (XII ICCE) was held from July 3 to 6, 2024, bringing together academics, teachers, students, and activists from countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Portugal, Greece, Lebanon, Canada, Morocco, the United Arab Emirates, and Belgium, among others. The sessions of the four days conference took

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place in the classrooms of Ankara University's Faculty of Educational Sciences and the European Union Research and Application Centre (ATAUM).

Looking at the history of the ICCE, the following can be noted: The first ICCE was held in Athens from July 12 to 16, 2011, under the coordination of Prof. Dave Hill from the United Kingdom and Prof. Kostas Skordoulis from Greece. According to the Proceedings Book of the 1<sup>st</sup> International Conference on Critical Education (ICCE), the initial ideas for the ICCE emerged during a meeting between Hill and Skordoulis in London in May 2010. Subsequently, in July 2010, during the "Critical Approaches to Science and Education" workshop held in Greece by critical educators associated with the journal of *KRITIKI: Critical Science and Education*, and attended by Dave Hill as a presenter, the idea emerged to organize a similar meeting on an international scale. The conference, which had previously witnessed high participation from undergraduate and graduate students, as well as scientists and educators from schools and higher education institutions, aimed to educate educators on critical education issues and encourage them in social activism. The Critical Education Conference began after these initial interactions, with participation of academics and educators associated with *KRITIKI*, edited by Kostas Skordoulis, and the *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies (JCEPS)*, edited by Dave Hill. It continued with contributions from academics and educators from Türkiye who served on the editorial boards of or contributed as authors to *Eleştirel Pedagoji* and the *International Journal of Education Policies (IJEP)*. In summary, the first ICCE was held in Athens in 2011, followed by the conference in Athens again and then in cities such as Ankara, London, Wrocław, Thessaloniki, Naples, and Valletta. The 12<sup>th</sup> ICCE was once again held in Türkiye, in Ankara, hosted by Ankara University, with the support and contributions of organizations such as the editorial boards of *JCEPS*, *IJEP* and *KRITIKI*, TÜBİTAK (The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye), and EĞİT-DER (Educators' Association).

The decision to hold the 12<sup>th</sup> ICCE (XII International Conference on Critical Education) in Türkiye was made during the 11<sup>th</sup> ICCE, which took place the previous year in Valletta, Malta, hosted by the University of Malta under the leadership of Prof. Peter Mayo and Prof. Carmel Borg (<https://www.um.edu.mt/events/criticaleducation2023/>). This decision was based on a

proposal by keynote speaker Prof. Hasan Hüseyin Aksoy. Following Aksoy's call to critical educators in Türkiye and other countries, preparations for the XII ICCE in Türkiye began. The conference co-chair positions were held by Prof. Dave Hill, Prof. Kostas Skordoulis, Prof. Hasan Hüseyin Aksoy, and Prof. İkbâl Yetişir. The conference website, prepared by Prof. Tuğba Öztürk, continued to serve as a significant platform for information sharing through updates even after the conference concluded. Additionally, it can be noted that the Institute of Educational Science's posts about the conference made a substantial contribution to reaching the relevant target audience within Türkiye. The first large-scale organizational meeting was held online on August 25, 2023, and meetings continued both online and in-person until July 3, 2024. Before the conference began, in June 2024 and the first two days of July 2024, preparations were moved to the Meeting Hall of the Institute of Educational Sciences. This included reviewing the printed version of the Conference Programme, selecting classrooms for the sessions, creating name tags, certificates of participation, and invitations, sending out the invitations, planning refreshments such as tea, coffee, and cookies during the conference, planning the lunch breaks, and organizing details for the gala dinner on the first day of the conference. These tasks were carried out with the extraordinary support of the staff of the Institute of Educational Sciences, led by Prof. İkbâl Yetişir, the Director of the Institute, and with the active participation of many members of the local organizing committee of the conference.

Numerous individuals contributed to the work before the conference, and the creation of a WhatsApp group, formed with the participation of the conference organizing committee members, made it possible to critically assess current issues and begin sharing ideas before the conference. Due to time and space limitations, especially in the online meetings, topics such as the content of the conference website, the design of the conference poster, participation conditions, accommodations for participants, participation fees, the creation of the conference title and call for papers, the creation of a promotional video for the conference, and the Paulo Freire Living Statue Performance were evaluated and concluded with a participatory approach.



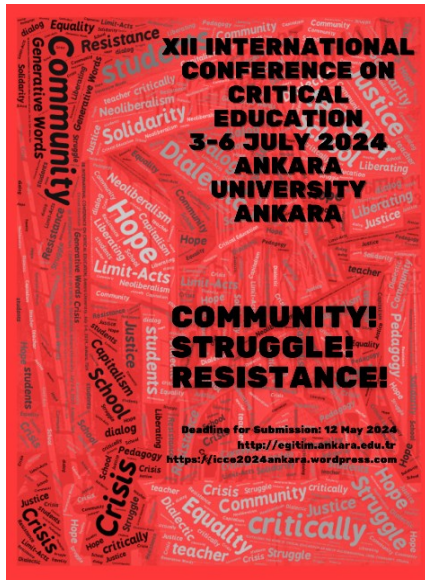
*Photo 1. A moment at the online meeting on October 17, 2023.*

### **Conference Call for Papers and Announcement Work**

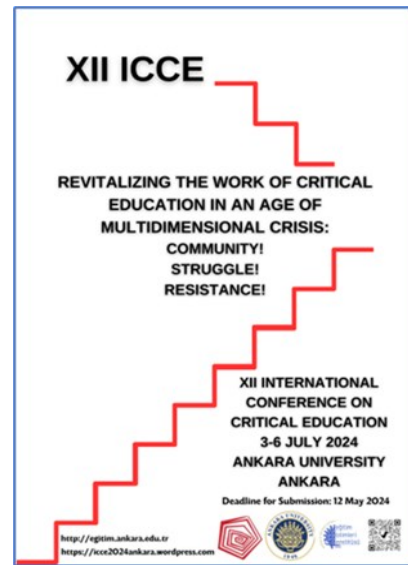
In the meetings, the dates of the XII International Conference on Critical Education (XII ICCE), the conference title, and details regarding the call for papers were discussed, and decisions were made regarding participation fees (of course, no fees would be charged for unemployed individuals, students, or those attending as listeners). After a decision made jointly by students, teachers, and academics, the call for papers title of the conference was decided to be “Revitalizing the Work of Critical Education in an Age of Multidimensional Crisis: Community, Struggle and Resistance” emphasizing the reality that we live in an age of crises and the need for the widespread practice of critical education to overcome these crises, with critical educators taking active roles. The conference title was adapted into Turkish as “Krizler Çağında Eleştirel Eğitim Çalışmalarını Güçlendirmek.” After determining the conference title, a conference call for papers was prepared and approved following discussions led by Dr. Yasemin Tezgiden Cakcak and Emeritus Professor Guy Senese, with wide participation. The call for papers emphasizes the importance of critical education and the struggles of critical educators in addressing crises and fighting against them. Since some explanations regarding the history of the conference and the call for papers have already been made in the previous issue of *Tebeşir* bulletin, only a brief repetition will be provided here. The full text of the call for papers, part of which is quoted below, can be accessed at the following link: <https://icce2024ankara.wordpress.com/>

Living in an age of economic, social, political, personal, and ecological crises, educators and school communities face serious physical and mental risks, tensions and other challenges. Under the effect of rising authoritarianism, conservatism, commodification, inequality, pseudoscience, fatalism, war, migration, unemployment, poverty, racism, misogyny, discrimination, displacement, abuse and xenophobia, educators and students feel more and more insecure, hopeless, powerless, and become isolated from the community. There has been an increase in neo-liberal, neo-conservative, anti-democratic and authoritarian pressures on education, becoming the most significant and current obstacles to development, emancipation and humanization of both educators and students. (...) Multiple intertwined crises require a response and community effort that interrupts paralysis, isolation. For these reasons, against all these attacks and the current of isolation, atomization, objectivation, and fragmentation, we would like to convene in the XII. International Conference on Critical Education in Ankara, Turkey, as the space of people where the powers and ideas can be developed, our solidarity and sense of community are refreshed, and we reconstruct new ways of resistance, struggle, and transformation (quoted from the XII ICCE Call for Paper)

After the publication of the call for papers, posters and a call video related to the XII ICCE's promotion and announcement were prepared during the conference process. The call video and other visual texts, created with the contributions of some faculty members and a student from the Faculty of Communication at Ankara University, were shared on the conference's website and on the XII ICCE social media accounts created by Dr. Rozarin Yaşa ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_qbn6H9xky4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_qbn6H9xky4)). Interviews about the conference's history and context were published in 33th issue of the *Tebeşir* bulletin (<https://mektepligazete.com/bultenler>) and in 122 issue of the *SOLFASOL* newspaper (<https://solfasol.tv/akademi-krizler-caginda-egitimi-yeniden-dusunmek-icin-toplaniyor/>). With these efforts, it is assumed that all planned announcements regarding the conference were completed. Approximately 200 paper submissions were made, and a little over 150 of them received positive evaluations and were accepted for presentation. Various posters in Turkish and English were prepared and shared for the conference, two of which can be seen in Pictures 1 and 2.



*Picture 1. Poster of the XII ICCE*



*Picture 2. Poster of the XII ICCE*

### **Conference Paper Topics and Key Points**

At this part of the paper, descriptive notes have been shared to reflect our general impression of the conference's content, which included a large number of invited speakers, students, teachers, academics, and writers from the field of critical education. The following invited speakers participated in the XII ICCE: Alpesh Maisuria, Kostas Skordoulis, Gianna Katsiampoura, Guy Senese, Zoe G. Senese, Pelin Taşkın, Ünal Özmen, Yasemin Tezgiden Cakcak, and Zeynep Alica. Unfortunately, Dave Hill, who had been an invited speaker and a member of the international organizing committee, could not attend the conference due to a health issue he experienced prior to the event. The invited speakers presented their speeches in English, or translated consecutively into Turkish. Yasemin Tezgiden Cakcak and Pelin Taşkın, who presented in English, also shared the Turkish versions of their presentations simultaneously with a second projection.

Throughout the four-day conference, a total of 130 presentations were made, consisting of 75 in English and 55 in Turkish. Additionally, 8 invited speakers presented their speeches. It is worth noting that the number of participants was even higher, considering that many presentations were co-authored and that registered audience members also attended. Of course, it is not possible to address or write about all the presentation titles and topics within the scope of this paper. However,

the abstract submissions and the conference program can be accessed at the following link: <https://icce2024ankara.wordpress.com/conference-program/>

The main topics that stood out in the presentations can be summarized as follows: Paulo Freire and his contributions to the field of critical education, the political nature of education, the impact of neoliberal, neoconservative, and authoritarian policies on education, gender and feminist pedagogy, ecopedagogy, the Palestinian occupation and education under occupation in Palestine, critical theatre, critical and anticolonial language studies, criticism of the Türkiye Century Education Model (Türkiye Yüzyılı Maarif Modeli), examples of critical education experiences from around the world and Türkiye, the critical analysis of the effects of digital developments on education, critical education as a practice of resistance in colonial and postcolonial education processes, the struggle of communities and ethnic identities to exist through critical education against dominant educational processes, academic autonomy, public and scientific education, migrants and education, adult education, popular education, children's rights, democratic education, participation, discrimination in education, critical classroom management, critical educational philosophy, and critical art (cinema, museums, music etc.). At XII ICCE, the strong presence of critical theatre and arts studies, critical ecopedagogy, anticolonial education and language studies, critical technology, and critical education economics demonstrated that the fields of critical education studies, both in Türkiye and around the world, have expanded and strengthened. It also showed that through critical education studies, there are possibilities for creating counter-hegemony in these fields, and a new interdisciplinary discipline is emerging. Throughout the conference, there was a constant reminder of the Palestinian occupation, and solidarity messages for the Palestinian people were sent. Critical educators from the UK, the USA, Lebanon, and Greece drew attention to the occupation by wearing the "keffiyeh," a traditional Palestinian scarf, and reminded everyone that Palestine is one of the agenda items of critical educators. In this context, the words of Kostas Skordoulis, who participated from Greece, were particularly noteworthy: "The Palestinian flag is no longer just the flag of the Palestinians; the Palestinian flag is now the international flag of all the oppressed." His words received support from the participants. Some moments from the conference can be seen at *Photo 2 to 5*.



*Photos 2-3-4-5. Moments from the XII ICCE.*

At the XII ICCE, presenters emphasized the need to strengthen democratic, scientific, secular, and public critical education efforts against all hegemonic policies and educational practices that are neoliberal, colonial and postcolonial, neoconservative, authoritarian, religious, xenophobic, pseudo-scientific, pro-war and pro-occupation, sexist, ecologically destructive, technology-fetishizing, and dehumanizing. The importance of hope, solidarity, struggle, praxis, and international movements was highlighted. It was noted that in this era of crises, fostering collaboration, dialogue, participation, subjectification, and collective production and discussion can reinforce critical education efforts and offer a way to counter the prevailing challenges.

Another notable aspect of the conference was the Paulo Freire Living Statue Performance, which welcomed participants (*Photos 6 and 7*). This performance, conducted by a retired teacher who is also a performance artist, took place on the opening day of the conference. It surprised and delighted participants, evoking smiles and reflections as they remembered Paulo Freire, one of the most prominent figures in critical pedagogy.



*Photos 6. and 7. Participants with the Paulo Freire Living Statue.*

### **Examples from Presentations**

Although it is not feasible to comprehensively discuss all 138 presentations, including those by the keynote speakers, presented at the XII ICCE, some presentations are highlighted to illustrate the diversity of topics covered.

One of the invited speakers from Türkiye, Yasemin Tezgiden Cakcak, presented her paper titled “*Critical Ontology of a Critical Educator*”. Drawing on examples from her studies with students at the Middle East Technical University (ODTÜ), where she is a lecturer, Cakcak shared her journey in critical education and the development of critical education practices in Türkiye. She emphasized the importance of employing critical education as a method and technique in her teaching and provided examples from her own practices. Cakcak showcased critical education materials and alternative curriculum examples that she developed collaboratively with her students, even sharing some of these materials with the participants during her presentation.

Reflecting on her experiences with the *Eleştirel Pedagoji* journal process, she underscored that critical educators aim to collectively work toward creating more democratic, fair, and equitable schools and societies, as well as peaceful and sustainable worlds, through critical dialogue.

Aristeidis Sgatzos, from the University of the Aegean in Greece, presented a paper titled “*Cultivating Food, Knowledge, Solidarity - Towards a School Garden in the Era of Climate Crisis*”. In his presentation, Sgatzos emphasized the connections between critical pedagogy and ecopedagogy, highlighting how the anthropocene era has led to ecological crises. He emphasised the importance of implementing ecology-centred critical education projects in schools, involving students in hands-on activities to address these crises. Sgatzos described his work as an ethnographic study and shared the process of creating a school garden in Lesvos (Midilli) with the participation of migrant students, utilizing sustainable farming techniques. He explained how such initiatives transform students' perspectives on nature, steering them away from the consumption-driven habits promoted by capitalism. Furthermore, he noted that these projects disrupt the dominant ideology's dichotomy between indoor/outdoor spaces and classroom/recess activities. The garden project, according to Sgatzos, fostered students' adoption of ethical principles such as care for nature, care for others, and the sharing of surplus resources.

Participants from the United States, Ana L. Cruz and Joachim Dorsch, presented their study titled “*Higher Education as a ‘Guided Pathway:’ An Analytical Perspective through Critical Pedagogy.*” They discussed the challenges faced by community colleges in the U.S., which offer low-cost opportunities for students to pursue the first two years of post-secondary education. These institutions often serve underrepresented segments of society, including Native American, Hispanic, Black, and Asian/Pacific Islander students. However, Cruz and Dorsch highlighted the low completion rates within these colleges. They criticized the standardized curricula and the elimination of certain elective courses, noting that the removed courses were those that foster critical thinking, creativity, interdisciplinarity, and provided a more meaningful and holistic education. According to them, the “*Guided Pathway*” initiative is a neoliberal project designed to prepare marginalized minority communities to fit into the current neoliberal economic system and corporate

demands. They emphasized the importance of strengthening critical education practices and Freirean approaches within community colleges to resist neoliberal and postcolonial policies.

Elsy Wakil, a participant from Lebanon, presented her work titled “*Adult Education in Conflict and Emergencies: Strategies for Resilience and Social Justice.*” In her presentation, she highlighted the occupation in Gaza, focusing on the relentless efforts of teachers to continue education amidst the ruins of war and the tragic deaths of school-aged children. Elsy Wakil examined the intersections of education with conflict and emergencies, emphasizing the role of education in fostering resistance, equality, and social justice. She argued that in present-day Gaza, under occupation, education has become a tool for survival, envisioning an alternative future, and sustaining hope. Wakil highlighted that even in the context of conflicts and crises, education maintains its transformative power.

Hasan Hüseyin Aksoy, in his presentation titled “*Eleştirel Eğitim Yaklaşımında Eğitimin Politik Niteliği/ The Political Nature of Education in the Critical Education Approach*” emphasized, drawing on the foundational work of Paulo Freire, that education is inherently political and cannot be neutral. He highlighted that the claim of neutrality in education or the notion that education and politics should be kept separate is itself a political stance. In this context, Aksoy underscored how critical education studies reveal the political nature of education. He pointed out that critical education, influenced by disciplines and frameworks such as Marxism, the Frankfurt School, Feminist Theory, women's studies, ecology studies, cultural studies, Queer Theory, Critical Race Theory, labor studies, political economy, and social movements, is progressing toward becoming a distinct discipline. Aksoy also highlighted the significance of Paulo Freire's work for critical education and discussed the transformative impact of critical education studies on traditional educational models.

Alongside these, Tolga Ulusoy's work on the commodification processes in art education following capitalist and neoliberal assaults, Muharrem Demirdi's study connecting Bertolt Brecht's learning plays (*Lehrstücke*) and critical pedagogy, specifically linking Brecht's and Paulo Freire's works, Aidan Jolly's presentation involving the listeners and illustrating how financial capital in the UK grew through

property ownership, Ndindi Kitonga's discussion of their work incorporating critical theater in a community school attended by minorities in the United States, Hüseyin Ozan Uyumlu's critical perspective on *Türkiye Yüzyılı Maarif Modeli* and his critique of the model as being anti-modernization, anti-secular, and anti-scientific, Tuğba Öztürk's presentation on her personal experiences in critical biographical studies, Yeşer Torun's work within the context of feminist pedagogy, Fabiano Coelho's work addressing ecological issues and proposing the term *capitalocene* as an alternative to the widely used *anthropocene*, arguing that capitalism is the primary responsible force behind ecological destruction, Rozerin Yaşa's work on academic autonomy, Eirini-Zoi Kontostavlou and Gianna Katsiampoura's presentation to strengthen critical digital literacy studies as an alternative to traditional digital literacy, Yeliz Doğan and Naciye Aksoy's presentation expanding the field of critical education by incorporating mathematics, and using critical mathematics education to foster a sense of social justice among students, Robert Zecker's work on the Communist Labor Schools in the United States between 1923 and 1954, Njoki Wane's study of anticolonial educational practices in Canada, Ahmed Kabel's critical examination of the Palestinian issue within a colonial context, emphasizing the need to strengthen decolonial work as a critical educational practice, Kanwal Syed's analysis of postcolonial effects in global art history research and dominant Western-centred art understandings, using decolonizing tools of Gayatri Spivak, and Ünal Özmen's in-depth and critical analysis of neoliberal and neoconservative practices in religious education in both the global and Turkish contexts can all be considered as key data for drawing inferences about the conference presentations. The youngest member of the XII ICCE was Armina Dilruba Durmuş, a high school student who had just moved to the 11th grade, and her presentation on “eco-critical pedagogy and eco-story writing studies in schools” was particularly striking and promising in terms of the development opportunities and potential of critical education. Due to the limitations of this article, dozens of presentations that were followed by teachers, academics, students, and activists have not been included, but the talks were strengthened by questions and comments from the audience. It should be noted that the full abstracts of the presentations can be accessed in the *Abstracts Book of XII International Conference on Critical Education. Revitalizing the Work of Critical Education in an Age of Multidimensional Crisis: Community, Struggle and*

*Resistance* at <https://icce2024ankara.wordpress.com/conference-program/>.

Additionally, we can share that work has begun on the Turkish and English “Proceedings Book”. On the fourth and final day of the conference, following the presentations, the event continued with discussion and suggestion session. The XII ICCE ended with the hope and desire of being together again at the 13<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Critical Education (XIII ICCE) next year. Meanwhile, we would like to announce that the next International Conference on Critical Education (XIII ICCE) will be held in Thessaloniki, Greece, from July 1-5, 2025, under the title “Critical Education in Times of War.”

The works of the XII ICCE, built and continued through dialogue, participation, hope, and solidarity, continues in another form and stage, with each participant contributing to the extent of their abilities. The website and social media accounts established for the conference, as well as the WhatsApp group, continue to facilitate communication, and the connections made during the conference are ongoing, with exchanges regarding institutional and individual new activities. The goal of increasing solidarity opportunities remains a key topic.

Summarizing this conference, which holds a different place compared to traditional academic meetings, and systematically determining its outcomes presents various challenges. The descriptions we have attempted here also contain certain limitations and gaps. However, we would like to remind you that the list of national and international organizing committee members who contributed to the conference, as well as all information and documents related to the processes, are available on the conference website. A memorial shot of the participants of the conference were shared at *Photo 8*. We look forward to seeing you at XIII ICCE in Thessaloniki.



*Photo 8. Last day, A Farewell Photo.*

### **About the Authors**

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