Greetings from the Chair!

I am sitting in a courtyard at the European HRD Conference, and am appreciating the fact that we indeed have a Critical Theory and Social Justice Perspectives SIG with wonderful members from all over. We had a positive and productive meeting at the AHRD Conference back in Denver, and our efforts are well underway to follow up on the activities and strategic imperatives that we identified in that meeting. I wonder sometimes if critical theory and social justice are not just something that one studies, researches and writes, but rather, they are who one is. Or who one becomes. There are many people in my life who are kindred spirits of this SIG and they are not even HRD scholars or practitioners. The way I see it, any time one person makes an attempt to empathize with the challenges of another, and seeks to help the other (whether it be an individual, group, system or society) to overcome those challenges, they are working for social justice. Any time someone seeks to level an uneven playing field, they are working for social justice. I stumbled onto critical theory through my first scholarship about the intersection of sexual orientation and gender minority issues. However, today my lens has broadened into sustainability, civility, and equity in companies, systems and societies. Personally and individually, I operate from a philosophy that people—and I mean, all people—are sacred.

I hope you enjoy this inaugural Newsletter of the AHRD Critical Special Interest Group.

Robert Mizzi, Ph.D.
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
Post-Doctoral Research Fellow

As a newcomer to the field of human resource development, I rely on my training in critical theory to inform my engagement. Since critical theory imagines a world without oppression, radical (re)conceptualizations of teaching and learning are paramount for human emancipation. HRD stands to benefit from critical theory if it wants to remain a current, responsive and reflective discipline. For instance, when I think about how critical and social justice theories can shape HRD scholarship and practice, I acknowledge the increasingly globalized, multi-cultural workforce and how a 'one size fits all' approach to development no longer works. Critical theory advances dialogue among HRD scholars and practitioners in respectful and insightful ways.

Joshua C. Collins
Ed.D. Student
Florida International University
SIG Communications Director

In order to remain responsive to the emerging needs of an increasingly diverse and global workforce, the development and practice of a more equitable and holistic HRD seems pertinent. As a field that is concerned with the development of people and organizations, HRD may benefit greatly from thinking critically about every process and outcome within its function. Remember that the biggest changes often start with one person.

Vanessa Ann Claus
Ph.D. Student
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I firmly believe that HRD practitioners have the opportunity to encourage change within an array of professions through the critical paradigm. Researchers such as Laura Bierema, Jamie Callahan, Julie Gedro, and Tonette Rocco (to name a few) have all inspired change through their fundamental critiques of the field and common practices. These authors and future scholars must continue to use their voices and experiences to challenge what is “normal.” For the field to progress, critical reflection and theory is essential. Although the viewpoints of researchers might differ in terms of specific social justice topics, debate can stir up changes in systems. While change might be slow, recognition of the essential nature of constant evolution and critical thought can only bring forth more exciting field revelations.

Heather Kissack, Ph.D.

Being keenly aware of social systems, organizational practices, and research paradigms that prevent and discourage non-dominant perspectives (and successes) opens the door to a multitude of viewpoints, experiences, and innovative prospects. As such, critical and social justice theories not only provide incentive for change initiatives, but also provide organizations with pioneering frameworks for conducting business.

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