

Menelik Tafari

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Menelik combined our classes to experience discussions around our perceptions and assumptions of one another in the world. It was organized great, facilitated with clarity, and really got the kids thinking sincerely about what happens to them when they encounter someone who may be different from themselves... I appreciate how we were all (teachers and students) able to reflect on how this experience felt at the end. Students developed good habits of mind towards higher emotional intelligence.

Angi Neff

Humanities Teacher

New Roads School

Menelik was an integral, well-liked and familiar member of our community... as well as a fluent Spanish speaker with years of experience.

Alison Miller

Middle School Director

New Roads School

“Leadership from empathy to action”

Professional Profile

Menelik Tafari is a critical gaming teaching artist, organizer-trainer & -strategist, program developer, and writer. He uses critical gaming & design, culture circles, and organizational development tools to facilitate radical inclusion and engagement for democracy. His expertise includes Simulation/Gaming, Gamification, Soka Education, and Critical Pedagogy.

Key Qualifications

- +Develops Empathy, Ecology, & Advocacy Programs
- +Designs Games for Play, Learning, and Social Change
- +Bilingual English and Spanish

Professional Interests

- +Political Education
- +Public pedagogy
- +Participatory design
- +Public health
- +Peace education

Education, Certifications, and Honors

Masters of Arts Certificate, Serious Game Design & Research (*in progress*)
Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI

Bachelor of Arts, Concentration in Humanities (2012)
Capstone, “Playculture: an experiment in public pedagogy”
Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo, CA

Certificado, Educación Multicultural (Multicultural Education) (2010)
La Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, Valparaíso, Chile

Certificate, Dialogue, Negotiation and Mediation (2007)
TRANSCEND Peace University

Above and Beyond Award (Staff) (2013)
Culver City High School

Service Recognition (2008)
California Legislature

Community Service Recognition (2008)
City of Culver City

“[Menelik’s] intellectual capacity to understand people, culture, leadership structures and power relations... is what I find most amazing about him... Our school celebrates our current model of shared governance and much of this is due to Menelik’s activism and mature approach toward issues. He formed bridges of communication that have paved the way for greater student involvement for future generations...”

Dr. Carlos Valverde
Intercultural Literature Teacher
Culver City High School

“...He influences students to be proactive and to work for positive change. Menelik is mature, sees all perspectives of an issue, and is capable of determining what is in the best interest of all parties, not just what is popular with students. Articulate and comfortable expressing his views in a public forum...”

Dr. Pam Magee
Culver City HS Principal

Selected Programs & Courses

Engagement & Advocacy

Program Director, Critical Gaming Pedagogy Trainer (2017-present)
Radical Democracy Training & Peer-Education Program Development
Tools for Democracy Consultation Group, Los Angeles, CA
Co-Founder, Director of Programs (2011-2015)
Civic Education and Service Learning
ShareChange, Los Angeles, CA

Inclusion & Empathy

Intergroup Dialogue Facilitator (2016-2017)
Advisory Program, Sequoyah High School, Pasadena, CA
Exploring Diversity Coordinator (2013-2016)
Human Development Department, New Roads MS, Santa Monica
Director, Facilitator-trainer, Advisor (2006-2014)
Human Relations Ambassador Project, Culver City USD, Culver City

Games & Gamification

Program Director, SuperHero Games (2015-present)
Playcultures Consultation Group, Los Angeles, CA
Games for Social Justice (2013-2016)
Workshop Program
New Roads School, Santa Monica, CA

Language & History

Spanish 1-3 (2016-2017)
Founding Spanish Teacher, World Languages Department
Sequoyah High School, Pasadena, CA
Human and Civil Rights (2013-2016)
Humanities Department
New Roads School, Santa Monica, CA
Cartoons & Comics for Diversity, Ecology, & Justice (2015-2016)
Humanities Department
New Roads School, Santa Monica, CA

Peer-Education

Co-Teacher (2016-2017)
Robotics, Sequoyah High School, Pasadena, CA
Co-Founder, Program Coordinator (2006-2008, 2012-2013)
Math Prep Academy, Culver City High School, Culver City

"Menelik stands out as one of the most committed and tireless leaders that I have had the occasion to work with...Not only did Menelik design and put on quality custom-made leadership programs for numerous schools and organizations as Special Projects Director, he also did so with grace and a positive attitude.

Selena Williams
Trainer/Board Member
California Association of
Student Councils

"...Menelik's gift was to include and encourage all to come forward with their opinions, and truly create a comfortable environment where even the most shy would feel welcome to participate... Menelik is that rare individual who will take the stage and in doing so, elevate the entire debate by shedding light on the other side of the coin..."

Steve M. Williams
Program Advisor
CA Youth and Government

Published Research

Tafari, Menelik, and Carlos Valverde. "**Soka Education Goes Civic: Creating a Value-creative, Engaged Culture.**" *Soka Education Conference 9* (2013): 56-70. *Daisaku and Kaneda Ikeda Library*. Soka Education Student Research Project, Soka University of America, 16 Feb. 2013. Web. 20 Dec. 2015. <http://ikedalibrary.soka.edu/Soka_Edu_Conf_2013.pdf>.

This paper, Co-authored by Dr. Valverde, discusses the theories, training, and research that inform programs for intercultural competence and community engagement and advocacy.

Tafari, Menelik. "**Critical Play: A Tool for Communal Inquiry and Agency.**" *Soka Education Conference 8* (2012): 7-26. *Daisaku and Kaneda Ikeda Library*. Soka Education Student Research Project, Soka University of America, 20 Feb. 2012. Web. 20 Dec. 2015. <http://ikedalibrary.soka.edu/Soka_Edu_Conf_2012.pdf>.

This paper presents a lens for ethnographic analysis of play enacted during serious games and simulations. The experiment was designed to investigate the efficacy of using games to problematize and engage cultural action of participants. The research findings were presented as an unpublished thesis entitled, "Playculture: an experiment in public pedagogy."

Tafari, Menelik. "**El Hombre, Juegos and Pedagogies of Experience.**" *Soka Education Conference 7* (2011): 6-19. *Daisaku and Kaneda Ikeda Library*. Soka Education Student Research Project, Soka University of America, 16 Feb. 2011. Web. 20 Dec. 2015. <http://ikedalibrary.soka.edu/Soka_Edu_Conf_2011.pdf>.

This paper presents an ethnographic study and pedagogical analysis on an undergraduate course at La Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, Chile, which utilizes physical education games, board games, card games, and theatre games for interpersonal and intercultural engagement.

Other Research

"Escapar Tenochtitlan: using gamification and game-based learning for second language instruction," Unpublished Manuscript, Dr. Carrie Heeter, Serious Game Design and Research, Michigan State University, June 17, 2016

"Race in America: ethnographic and archival methods," Learning Cluster, Dr. James Spady, Georgia Historical Society, Soka University of America, January 3-February 5, 2011

"Rehumanizing Education: an autoethnography on educational rituals and acculturation" Independent Study, Dr. James Spady, Soka University of America, February 10-March 5, 2010

"Education and Culture," Learning Cluster, Dr. James Spady, National Archives, Soka University of America, January 2-February 3, 2010

“Menelik has distinguished himself as capable, intelligent and mature. Always the first one to volunteer, always to go the extra mile, Menelik fully immerses himself into his pursuits and his efforts are always praiseworthy. He is a natural leader – articulate, graceful and compelling.”

Catherine An
Program Director
California Center for Civic Participation

One of Menelik’s strongest attributes is his thirst for knowledge. He goes beyond required work to explore topics in greater depth. Through his involvement in CASC, he acquired significant experience in conducting structured activities and has become deeply interested in the theory and practice of experiential education. He also has a passion for research and works well in individualized study.

Dr. June Thompson
Executive Director
California Association of Student Council

Performances & Presentations

“Critical Games & Critical Pedagogy,” Guest Lecturer, HUM: 412: Cultures of Learning, Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo, CA, Oct. 5, Nov. 7, 2017.

“Rhythm Is My Business.” MacLennan, Stew. Levi Strauss & Co. Featured Artist. 12 June 2016. Web. 12 Mar. 2017.

“I AM,” African American Heritage Events, Cathedral Chapel School Program, Los Angeles, CA, February 26, 2016

“Relational Civics- A relational approach to civic engagement,” The Relational Turn 3.0 Conference, The Esalen Institute, March 15-20, 2015

“Life Raft: Applying ethnohistory for intercultural encounters,” 8th Annual Soka Education Conference, Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo, CA, February 18-19, 2012

“Expanding Opportunities for Youth Advocacy,” The Student Advisory Board on Legislation in Education facilitated by The California Association of Student Councils, California State Senate and Assembly Joint Committee on Education, Aliso Viejo, CA, February 21-23, 2011

Panelist, “Civil Rights & Student Activism,” City Hall, City of Culver City, January 16, 2011

“Youth Organizing through Peer-Education,” 6th Annual Soka Education Conference 2010, Education for Social Justice, Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo, CA, February 13-14, 2010

“Experiential Learning,” Soka Education Conference 2009, Democracy and Education, Soka University of America, February 7-8, 2009

Community Organizations

Academic Committee Chair (2016-19)
Soka University of America, Alumni Assoc.
Aliso Viejo, California

Member
Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research

Vice Chair (2005-2007)
Site Improvement Council
Culver City High School

Member, Workshop Presenter, Facilitator
Hip Hop Congress

Advisor (2012-present)
Student Advisory Boards on Education
Legislation
CA of Student Councils

Delegation Advisor (2017-present)
Culver-Palms Family YMCA
California Youth & Government

Board Member (2007-2008)
Nat. Foundation Board of Trustees
Jack and Jill of America, Inc.

Previous Experience

Peer Education Programs

- Developed a Grant-writing Tutor position to coach undergraduates and assist local non-profit organizations for [Soka University of America](#)
- Over ten years of experience as a Math Tutor, including work as an Instructional Assistant at [Kumon Learning Center](#) in Culver City, and the Coordinator for the “Math Prep Academy” at [Culver City High School](#)
- Developed and trained high school students to conduct policy analysis on national and international proposals for the “National Issues Commission” of the [California Youth and Government](#)

Relational Engagement Programs

- Developed the “Relational Engagement Fellowship” to train staff for [ShareChange](#)
- Facilitated and participated in the development team for “GetEmpathy!”, a joint program of the Los Angeles LGBT Center and [The Relational Center](#)
- Developed professional development training programs for the “Human Relations Ambassadors Project” for [Culver City Unified School District](#)
- Organized multiple “A Peace of Music” concerts to fundraise for peace and international development work
- Brought “A Legacy of Building Peace,” a mobile exhibit on the lives and work of Gandhi, Martin, King, and Ikeda, founded by [Morehouse College](#)
- Successfully brought Noble Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú to speak at [Culver City High School](#)
- Developed and facilitated human relations and conflict resolution in-service programs for eighth graders at [Culver City Middle School](#)

Community Engagement Programs

- Developed the “Civic Engagement Fellowship” to train staff for [ShareChange](#)
- Worked in the Leadership Committee to organize “Millions March Los Angeles”
- Directly trained and guided over two-thousand students and Student Council/Student Activities/Leadership Advisors to implement leadership development programs at their schools for [CASC](#). Indirectly trained over ten thousand students and faculty.
- Developed an undergraduate course on critical pedagogy and community-building called “Philosophy of Encounters” for [Soka University of America](#)
- Organized multiple student lobbying efforts for students to directly advocate for policy changes through the State Board of Education and the [California Senate and Assembly Joint Committee on Education](#)
- Organized a Students Rights Campaigns that advocated for the passing of a “Students’ Bill of Rights and Responsibilities” that was adopted by the school district, school policy, and student government in the [Culver City Unified School District](#)
- Directed program for Kern County Partners [Friday Night Live](#) and [Leaders in Life](#)
- Advised the Youth Advisory Council to the [Mayor of Culver City](#)
- Participated as a panelist on “Civil Rights and Student Activism” for the [City of Culver City](#) during a Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration