

## **Critical Literacies Book Club 2021-2022**

Critical Literacy is a way of thinking and a way of being that challenges texts and life as we know it. The Critical Literacies Book Club was designed to give educators an opportunity to practice a critical stance for thinking and being. This report explains both the design of this book club and how the book club experience impacted participants. The Northeastern Nevada Regional Professional Development Program (NNRPDP) is called upon by members in the region and the state as an intervention measure to impact desired outcomes. Therefore, the NNRPDP State Evaluation Form results address the quality of the book club professional learning. Also, an analysis of an end-of-book club questionnaire corroborated by comprehensive open response reflection statements collected during each book club session provides evidence of this project's success.

### **Initial Data and Planning**

The Nevada Academic Content Standards (NVACS) call for critical ways of thinking and questioning in most, if not all, content areas. For example, readers of these state documents can find this expectation in the following: 1) The Computer Science and Integrated Technology Standards Knowledge Constructor focus area, 2) NVACS for K-12 ELA portrait of a student, 3) NVACS for Social Studies requirements of a student-centered approach to instruction in which critical thinking and inquiry are the focus, 4) NVACS for Science requirements for students to demonstrate their understanding through critical reading, and 5) NVACS for K-12 Mathematics Standards for Mathematical Practice. Further, a post-licensure course in multicultural education has become mandatory for newly licensed educators in Nevada. Examples of multicultural education themes include social justice, consciousness, respectful engagement with diverse people, and identity. A critical literacies lens for thinking and questioning can address these themes. The Critical Literacies Book Club was designed to provide Nevada educators a place to practice their critical ways of thinking and questioning.

The goal of the Critical Literacies Book Club is to provide educators a space to practice positioning themselves, as Paulo Freire (1983) describes, "to read the word and the world from a critical stance." The objectives of the Critical Literacies Book Club include providing participants the opportunity to use critical literacies way of thinking and questioning, engage in courageous conversations, recognize an understanding beyond their own points of view, and, in some way, change their ways of thinking and seeing the world.

To maintain a clear focus in planning a way to support teachers in their own critical ways of thinking, two areas of focus were chosen based on issues identified in recent peer-reviewed academic studies. First, educators are busy and overwhelmed (Boogren, 2018; Krame, 2021),

suggesting little time to reflect on and become aware of various points of view, personal biases, or perspectives of the world that may impact how they conduct themselves in a classroom. Second is the call for increased critical thinking skills when consuming content in our technologically enhanced world. For instance, thinking critically, considering multiple perspectives, and questioning intent have become an asset when navigating an online world where anyone can both create and gain access to any information (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2014). This flood of information leads to possible problems, for example, accessing and trusting content that may be categorized as “fake news” (Gerosa, Gui, Hargittai, & Nguyen, 2021).

This report describes the second time this book club has been offered as a professional learning experience by NNRPDP. During the first year, this book club was offered to and attended by educators in northeastern Nevada (n=8). During this first year, a regional coordinator colleague from the Southern Nevada Regional Professional Development Program (SNRPDP) asked if they could be a participant. They enjoyed and valued the learning experience so much that they suggested a partnership for the following year to bring this learning experience to their region. The two regional coordinators worked together, opening up registration for both regions, with a cap on the number of participants (n=30) as this number felt manageable within the established book club structure.

A digital flyer announcing this learning opportunity, including a link to register, was sent to all teachers in Nevada’s northeast and southern regions. The thirty available spots for the book club (ten for northeastern Nevada educators and twenty for southern Nevada educators) filled quickly, with a waiting list, indicating a high level of interest among the teachers.

Two regional coordinators for the state’s regional professional development program, assigned as RPDP literacy specialists, one from northeastern Nevada and one from Southern Nevada, worked together as the Critical Literacies Book Club facilitators. Of these two literacy professionals, both have graduate degrees (one a PhD., and one a master’s degree); the first is National Board Certified in literacy-related fields. The literacy specialists have participated in work with the literacy standards at the local, state, national, and collegiate levels. The RPDP literacy specialists have presented at local, state, and national conferences and have facilitated numerous courses, workshops, and professional development opportunities related to literacy across the region.

With the goal to provide educators a space to practice positioning themselves to read the word and the world from a critical stance, the RPDP literacy specialists’ expertise served to establish roles and responsibilities, implementation timelines, resources, and monitoring strategies as outlined in the Critical Literacies Book Club Logic Model table below. For further details of the initial data and planning, see the Professional Learning Plan (PLP) in Appendix U.



**Table 1** *Critical Literacies Book Club Logic Model*

Problem	Educators are expected to teach critical literacy skills. Educators are busy and overwhelmed, limiting their time to practice these skills for themselves.
Subproblem(s)	Educators are unlikely to provide themselves space and time to practice their own critical literacy skills.
Goal	To provide educators a space to practice positioning themselves, as Paulo Freire (1983) describes, to read the word and the world from a critical stance.
Objective(s)	Critical Literacy Book Club participants will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Use a critical literacies way of thinking and questioning.</li><li>● Engage in courageous conversations.</li><li>● Recognize an understanding beyond their own points of view.</li><li>● Change their ways of thinking and seeing the world.</li></ul>
Activities	<p>Each of the five book club cycles will include four thirty-minute sessions sequenced as follows:</p> <p>Monday: Review Key Aspects of Critical Literacy. For example, reading and discussing excerpts from the NCTE publication, “Critical Literacy as a Way of Being and Doing” (2019), and or other information provided by the book club facilitators. This is followed by paired and small group discussion, concluding with an introduction to the picture book the group will focus on for the week.</p> <p>Tuesday: Work “within the book” discussing the contents of the picture book first recounting what happened first, next, and last in the book followed by a conversation about what the book made them think.</p> <p>Wednesday: Work “around the book” learning about the author and illustrator then engaging in discussion about the picture book and how their thinking may have changed about the picture book given their new knowledge about the author and illustrator.</p>

	<p>Thursday: Work “around the book” consuming additional resources of content related to various social justice themes connected to the picture book.</p> <p>All sessions were facilitated virtually through ZOOM.</p>
Process Measures	The process measures check that facilitators met expectations and were perceived as useful as measured by the State Evaluation Form.
Outcome Short Term	Book club participants demonstrate increased awareness of practicing critical literacy skills as measured by an ongoing open response reflection opportunity at the end of each thirty-minute session and a questionnaire at the end of the book club learning experience.

**Method**

**Learning Design**

The NNRPDP is called upon by members in the region and the state as an intervention measure to impact desired outcomes. The effectiveness of the NNRPDP is evidenced in annual reports to stakeholders and outlined in professional learning plans based on research-based practices. The NNRPDP literacy specialists’ learning design of the Critical Literacies Book Club was informed by Nevada’s Standards for Professional Development (2018), Guskey’s Five Levels of Professional Development (2002), the U.S. Department of Education’s guidance document, non-Regulatory 2 Guidance: Using Evidence to Strengthen Education Investments (2016), and effective teacher professional development research. Further, the content of the book club was based on a book club session the first facilitator participated in while attending a national literacy conference. Multiple book club session practice rounds with RPDP colleagues were conducted providing feedback on the design and final plan.

**Seven Elements of Effective Professional Development**

The Critical Literacies Book Club incorporates the seven elements of effective professional development identified in a review of 35 studies conducted by Linda Darling-Hammond, Maria E. Hyler, and Madelyn Gardner, with assistance from Danny Espinoza (2017), from the Learning Policy Institute. Incorporation of the seven Elements of Effective Professional Development follows.

**Content Focus.** Critical literacies are considered the content focus of this learning opportunity.

**Active Learning.** The opportunity for engagement in active learning is provided during paired and small group discussions. Active learning is also supported during each book club session through the completion of the whole group reflection shared doc.

**Collaboration.** The creation of space for sharing ideas and collaboration is reflected in a focus on the frequent use of breakout groups for discussion.

**Models of Effective Practice.** The modeling of effective practice is reflected in a focus on transparency of facilitator planning and the use of talk-alouds to model ways of thinking critically during book club sessions.

**Coaching and Expert Support.** The sharing of expertise and best practices targeting individual needs is reflected in individual support offered outside of the official sessions via emails, and/or virtual meetings.

**Feedback and Reflection.** The facilitation of reflection and solicitation of feedback is reflected in agendaized time for individual and collaborative reflection, end-of-session informal discussions, and end-of-course evaluations.

**Sustained Duration.** Adequate time to learn, practice, implement, and reflect is evidenced in the ongoing and sustained book club sessions over five months, offered twice each academic year.

## **Course Delivery**

Given the vast geographical distances between school districts in the northeastern and southern regions of Nevada, a virtual platform, ZOOM, for synchronous class attendance was used. The book club sessions were taught in five-month sections, one picture book per month, from September 2021 to February 2022 for the first book stack, and from January 2022 to May 2022 for the second book stack. Each book stack contained five texts, for a total of ten texts covered across both sessions. Monthly book club sessions occurred for four consecutive days each month. Activities for each of the four days are described in the next section.

### ***Book Club Overview and Session Descriptions***

The book club structure was modeled after a learning experience one of the facilitators attended during a week-long literacy conference. During the conference, each book club session was thirty minutes long, one session per day over four consecutive days. Aware that educators are very busy, it was determined to maintain this same thirty-minute time structure. Each agenda was designed to be consistent and predictable, allowing participants to focus on the content rather than the book club structure.

Every session started with a reminder of the book club goals and objectives, followed by an invitation for participants to type in the Zoom chat a Courageous Conversation (Singleton, 2014) agreement they would intentionally practice during the meeting. The four Courageous Conversation agreements (Singleton, 2014) are to 1) stay engaged, 2) speak your truth, 3) be ready to sit inside discomfort, and 3) accept and expect non-closure. Once participants set their focus intention, the facilitator provided a mini-lesson or very brief opening statement before sending participants into round one discussions. This first round of discussion was conducted in pairs allowing each participant ample time to share their thinking. After round one, participants returned to the whole group. They reflected on the following prompts: a) "What made our conversation go well?" b) "What could you give yourself feedback for?" and c) "Did you hold to your self-selected agreement focus?". As participants silently give themselves feedback and considered what they would say during round two discussions, the facilitator created small group break-out rooms and quickly sent participants into groups of four. Round three discussion was the whole group. Because there was no time to hear from all thirty participants, all participants synchronously typed their thoughts and responded to colleagues in a shared Google Document. The session ended with a reminder of what would be discussed the next day.

The same structure was followed for each session: an introduction followed by three rounds of discussion: round one in pairs, round two in a small group, and round three as a whole group, ending the session with a quick closure. The only element of the structure that changed was the topic of discussion. Day one was an introductory day with a social justice theme or critical literacy lens. Day two was a discussion of the picture book. Day three was a discussion of the author and illustrator of the book and Day four was a discussion of social issues in the world that in some way could be connected to the book. This four-day cycle was repeated each month with a different book.

To provide support for productive discussions, a digital book club handout was provided to each participant. This handout included reminders of language to practice and questions to consider. For example, Identity work interpretation lenses:

- Mirrors, Windows, (Emily Styles, 1988) and Sliding Glass Doors (Rudine Sims Bishop, 1990)
- “We bring the book of ourselves to the text in front of us.”
- How does our personal identity influence what we are getting ready to read?
- Who do I sympathize with? Why?
- How do we see new parts of ourselves when reading a new story?

Questions to consider when thinking/reading:

- Who has power? Who doesn't?
- When does power shift in the text?
- Who is marginalized?
- Who is demonized?
- Who is stereotyped?
- Who is missing or who is left out?
- Who is able to change their circumstances, and who is not?
- What is beautiful, what is problematic? A well-written text usually has both.

### **Participants and Procedure**

The fall book club cycle using book stack one launched in September with 30 members representing two of the six districts in the Northeastern Nevada region: Elko (8 teachers), and White Pine (2 teachers), with the rest joining from southern Nevada, Clark County (20 teachers). Classroom experience ranged from over 20 years to less than three years. Over the first five-month book club experience, three participants discontinued participation, thus n=27 for the fall book club.

The spring book club cycle using book stack two launched in January with 30 members representing two of the six districts in the Northeastern Nevada region: Elko (9 teachers), and Lander (1 teacher), with the rest joining from southern Nevada, Clark County (20 teachers). Similar to the fall book club, classroom experience ranged from over 20 years to less than three years. During this five-month book club experience, 5 participants discontinued participation, thus n=25 for the spring book club.

### **Measurement**

Two of Guskey's Five Levels of Professional Development (Guskey, 2002) were measured in this project: level one, participants' reactions, and level two, participants' learning. These measures are also listed in the logic model as “process measures” and “outcomes short term,” respectively.

### ***Level One, Participants' Reactions***

Evidence of course quality was documented using the participants' mean Likert scale ratings, ranging from not at all (one) to a great extent (five), of the following State Evaluation statements:

- The training matched my needs.
- The training provided opportunities for interactions and reflections.
- The presenter's experience and expertise enhanced the quality of the training.
- The presenter efficiently managed the time and pacing of the training.
- The presenter modeled effective teaching strategies.

### ***Level Two, Participants Learning***

The learning goal of the Critical Literacies Book Club is to provide educators a space to practice positioning themselves to read the word and the world from a critical stance. Four objectives were identified to measure the success of this goal. Participants will be able to 1) use critical literacies way of thinking and questioning, 2) engage in courageous conversations, 3) recognize an understanding beyond their own points of view, and 4) in some way, change their ways of thinking and seeing the world. To measure the extent to which the objectives were met, information regarding each objective was collected during the last session of the book club cycle. Reflection statements from each round of three discussions were used to corroborate this evidence. Participants from both the fall and spring book club cycles, fall (n =16) and spring (n = 23), completed the open response questionnaire (Appendix K). These open response questions are listed below.

- During this book club experience, did you have an opportunity to practice a critical literacy way of thinking and questioning?
- During this book club experience, did you have an opportunity to practice courageous conversations?
- During this book club experience, did you have an opportunity to grow an understanding beyond your own points of view?
- Please give some examples of how your thinking changed because of this book club experience. If your thinking did not change, please reflect on why that might be.

## Results

### RPDP Evaluation Survey

The process measures check that facilitators met participant expectations and were perceived as useful. The five evaluation questions and mean scores for each are shown in Table two.

**Table 2** *State Evaluation Survey Questions and Mean Scores*

Survey Question	Mean Score
The training matched my needs.	4.6
The training provided opportunities for interactions and reflections.	5.0
The presenter's experience and expertise enhanced the quality of the training.	4.7
The presenter efficiently managed the time and pacing of the training.	4.9
The presenter modeled effective teaching strategies.	4.7

These data suggest participants favored this learning experience as it was structured and facilitated. The questions scoring 5 and 4.9 are particularly noteworthy. All who responded to the evaluation agreed that the Critical Literacies Book Club provided opportunities for interactions and reflections. Nearly all agreed that the presenter efficiently managed the time and pacing of the training. The goal of this learning experience was to provide time for participants to practice critical literacy ways of thinking and questioning. Achieving this goal within a thirty-minute session requires well-managed time for discussion and reflection.

The state evaluation form given by the Northeastern region included an open-ended reflection question to understand better how participants received the learning experience.

The example responses below further indicate a high level of satisfaction with the Critical Literacies Book Club:

I loved this class. I cannot say enough how much this changed my perspective and how excited I am to keep building on being a sliding glass door.

This was a great experience! I loved the discussions and padlet information. I would love to do this again in the future!

This will affect student learning by helping them make deeper connections and be provided valuable time to have conversations, share stories, and reflect.

It will help students to see the world through mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. The students will see themselves in certain books and gain a deeper understanding of others.

### **Learning Goal**

The goal of the Critical Literacies Book Club was to provide educators a space to practice positioning themselves to read the word and the world from a critical stance. Evidence of goal achievement was provided through four book club objectives. An end-of-book club questionnaire measured objectives. The questionnaire asked participants to self-report their amount of experience engaging in a particular way of thinking and questioning using a four-point scale of yes (4), most of the time (3), a few times (2), and no (1). To corroborate these data participant reflection statements were collected during each book club session. Outcomes for each objective are presented next.

#### ***Objective One: Participants will be able to use critical literacies way of thinking and questioning***

All respondents reported using critical literacies ways of thinking and questioning to some degree, with 74% reporting “yes” and the remaining respondents admitting this work was not something they experienced all of the time but did engage in either most of the time or a few times.

**Table 3** *Participants Self-Report Critical Literacies Ways of Thinking and Questioning*

Survey Selection		(n)	Percent
Yes		29	74.4%
Most of the time		5	12.8%
A few times		5	12.8%
No		0	0%

A follow-up question was given: Please provide examples of new ways of thinking and questioning or talk about why this book club did not help you think or question in new ways. All respondents provided examples of new ways of thinking. Emerging themes included being self-reflective, appreciating all perspectives, and becoming more aware of literary analysis elements related to themes of social justice and culture. The table below provides representative examples for each of the three themes.

**Table 4** *Participant Examples for Critical Literacies ways of Thinking and Questioning*

Self-Reflective	<p>I enjoyed the self-reflection and thinking about my own thoughts and bias. I have a better understanding of my own metacognition.</p> <p>I began to reflect on what I was thinking and what others are thinking and saying. For example, I was thinking about the jobs that people lost in the pipeline and then also thinking about what the others were losing. It makes you think about things from others' perspectives.</p>
Appreciation for all perspectives	<p>It opened my eyes to what is right in front of me. I live in La-La-Land apparently. When I hear of racists I always think, "That's not here, that's on the other side of the country." Not true, apparently. I never thought those types of people would be teachers, but I was definitely wrong.</p> <p>I appreciated seeing other people's eyes open to other points of view. I am well versed in critical thinking because of my wife. This</p>

	gave me more perspective on the way other people apply their thinking and how hard they hold onto their previous framework.
Literary Analysis	<p>I think that this book club really helped me to view books in a different way. I mostly read them because I like the story it tells. Now looking at books in a more critical way I can connect in different ways.</p> <p>I will no longer take a book at face value. I want to start checking more into any questions I have.</p>

**Objective Two: Participants will Engage in Courageous Conversations.**

All but one respondent reported using courageous conversations to some degree, with 59% reporting “yes” and the remaining respondents, minus one, admitting this work was not something they experienced all of the time but did engage in most of the time or some of the time.

**Table 5** *Participants Self-Report Engaging in Courageous Conversations*

Survey Selection	(n)	Percent
Yes	23	59%
Most of the time	7	18%
A few times	8	21%
No	1	02%

The questionnaire included this follow-up question: Please say a bit about your selected response. For example, give a few examples of how you practiced courageous conversations or talk about why this book club did not help you practice courageous conversations. All but one respondent provided examples of engaging in courageous conversations. Rather than reflecting on their own use of courageous conversations during the book club, one respondent assumed the question asked if they used these conversations in their classroom. The participant reported not yet having a chance. When analyzing the given examples, emerging themes included being brave enough to speak their truth, being open to justify their thinking, opportunities for

collaborative learning, and discomfort in sharing their views. The table below provides representative examples for each of the four themes.

**Table 6** *Participant Examples for Engaging in Courageous Conversations*

<p>Feeling brave enough to speak my truth</p>	<p>I shared these topics and conversations with my friends at school and my own family. It was interesting to see where these conversations often lead us. I think using picture books is a great way to get us comfortable with sitting in discomfort and practice having these hard conversations society so desperately needs to have.</p> <p>I was very nervous about stating my complete viewpoint.</p>
<p>Open to justify my own thinking</p>	<p>I had to reevaluate what I thought about certain topics and share my ideas.</p> <p>Most of the time I had no problem listening to and accepting other people's points of view. However, there were a couple of times that I held onto my own point of view as a truth for me.</p>
<p>Collaborative Learning</p>	<p>I tried to open myself up to my group members and say how I really felt even though at times I wasn't sure if it was the "right" way to feel or think. I appreciated others doing the same because a lot of the time they had the same questions and feelings. It was nice to be with our groups and have those opportunities to share and learn from each other and our different views and experiences.</p> <p>Most definitely! Being able to meet with one person felt pretty safe and next opening up to a group of 4 added to the conversation or gave us different perspectives.</p>
<p>Discomfort in Sharing Views</p>	<p>As stated previously, at times I would hold back on my opinions as I wouldn't want someone to take my opinions and experiences out of context.</p>

	I did not always practice courageous conversations because I felt intimidated to share such personal thoughts with a partner without being given time to work these ideas out in a group. That would make me limit my discussions or ideas I was willing to share out loud.
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**Objective Three: Participants Recognize an Understanding Beyond their own Points of View**

All respondents reported recognizing an understanding beyond their own point of view, with 95% reporting “yes” and the remaining two respondents admitting this work was not something they experienced all of the time but that they did engage in the work of this objective most of the time.

**Table 7** Participants Self-Report About Recognizing an Understanding Beyond Their Points of View

Survey Selection	(n)	Percent
Yes	37	95%
Most of the time	2	05%
A few times	0	0
No	0	0

The questionnaire included this follow-up question: Please give some examples of how your thinking changed because of this book club experience. If your thinking did not change, please reflect on why that might be. All respondents provided examples of how their thinking changed. These examples provide evidence for the last objective as detailed below.

**Objective Four: Participants, in some way, “Change their ways of Thinking and Seeing the World”**

When analyzing examples from the associated follow-up question, emerging themes included changes in classroom practice and changes in levels of awareness with a focus on personal change. The table below provides representative examples for each of the two themes.

**Table 8** *Participant Examples for Changes in Thinking and Seeing the World*

Changes in the classroom	<p>I am going to make sure that I am adding more diverse books into my classroom library and that I am teaching every level of diversity I can.</p> <p>Since taking this class, I have been reading books with those essential questions posed at the beginning of class - who are being stereotyped, marginalized, absent, etc. This has helped me look at books with lenses I had never used before.</p>
Self-awareness and wanting to make personal change	<p>I am much better at looking at situations from a different perspective or viewpoint. Instead of only focusing on my understanding or beliefs of something, I am more open to hearing the beliefs of others and I find myself seeking them out now.</p> <p>I consider myself to be pretty open-minded and accepting. This class really gave me new insight into my personal thinking. I feel I have a newfound ability to look at each side of the story and see things from multiple perspectives.</p>

The overall goal for this professional learning experience was to provide educators a space to practice positioning themselves to read the word and the world from a critical stance. Comments emerged expressing appreciation for space and time to practice this way of thinking and questioning, and the importance of feeling safe within this space. The following examples capture this:

I was able to share my opinions about things without feeling like I would be attacked for those opinions. So many times, I think we keep quiet about things that are important to us because we're afraid of being ridiculed or hurting someone. It was a good feeling to know that I was in a safe space.

It was a very positive and safe environment. The instructors set a very positive tone for this group. People felt safe sharing their points of view and listening to others which sometimes reframed their thinking.

## Discussion

The Nevada Academic Content Standards (NVACS) call for critical ways of thinking (or critical literacies) in most, if not all, content areas. The Critical Literacies Book Club was designed to provide Nevada educators a place to practice their critical literacy skills. Given this focused time to pause, reflect, and practice a critical way of thinking, an expectation is for book club participants to change their ways of thinking in some way. It is considered a bonus if this work transfers to the participant's role in education, but such measures were not formally part of this project. Therefore, the goal of the Critical Literacies Book Club was to provide educators a space to practice positioning themselves to read the word and the world from a critical stance. This report described the book club design and how the experience impacted participants. Data were collected using the required state evaluation form and an end-of-book-club questionnaire in corroboration with participant reflection statements written during each book club session. Both measures provide evidence suggesting goals and objectives were achieved.

The state evaluation mean Likert scale ratings ranged from 4.5 to 5.0, indicating the Critical Literacies Book Club met participants' expectations and was perceived as high-quality professional learning. The short and fast-paced thirty-minute sessions and the sometimes difficult, oft-avoided social justice themes discussed during each session appear to be ideal. It may be beneficial to conduct a follow-up study exploring this conjecture. Themes found for three of the four learning objectives and self-report data for all four objectives further suggest the success of this project. Each objective was achieved, including some participants providing examples of classroom connections.

Participants' responses suggest that the first objective, using critical literacies ways of thinking and questioning, was met as 74% agreed that they use this way of thinking all of the time. This positive response may be in connection with the use of the book club handout. During all sessions, participants were given access to the digital handout and frequently reminded to use the language of the handout. It is not clear whether or not participants used this way of thinking beyond the book club other than by one participant reflecting on sharing information with her family and a few other respondents reflecting on sharing book club language in the classroom. To improve the next round of book club sessions it may be advantageous to ask participants to reflect on how the handout language and ways of thinking have been used outside of book club.

Similarly, the second objective, using courageous conversations, was met with 59% reporting they used this way of talking all of the time. Again, this was an expectation during each book club and participants set personal goals to maintain a courageous conversation

focus. The remaining respondents other than one also reported using courageous conversations at some point. This makes sense as the work of courageous conversations is not easy. The single respondent reporting “no” to this question followed up her response admitting she did not use courageous conversations in her classroom. Helping participants understand this book club learning was not necessarily something they should take back to their classroom, rather the learning was for them as adult educators were problematic at times. This problem is not surprising as teachers are usually expected to take their learning back to their classrooms. Also, given this book club used picture books as one of the primary discussion sources suggests it is meant to be brought back to the classroom. To distinguish what is learning for the educator versus what is learning to be repeated with children in the classroom is a fine line. To improve this learning experience the facilitators will renew their efforts to clarify this distinction.

The third objective, recognizing an understanding beyond their own point of view, was met with 95% reporting they experienced this understanding all of the time with two responding with some and most of the time. Considering points of view beyond one’s own perspective was one of the most successful of the four objectives. At first, it was thought this may be because no presentation of action is required. Although building awareness is a mental action, it does not require the added effort of sharing anything with a larger audience. One does not have to explain themselves or feel uncomfortable speaking a truth, rather, they can maintain feeling safe within their own thoughts and reflections in preparation for future action.

The fourth objective, Participants, in some way, change their ways of thinking and seeing the world, was successful with all participants providing some examples of how their thinking has changed. These reflections of change were directly connected to their increased awareness of other points of view and or actions in the world and in the classroom. Given the data collected, the degree of change and level of actions beyond mental actions is unclear. What is clear, is the positive response from all book club participants. In some way, each individual grew as a critical thinker.

### **Conclusion**

When educators are expected to teach their students critical thinking skills, it makes sense that they would appreciate and benefit from a structured learning opportunity to develop these habits of mind. Developing these habits of mind takes time, practice, and support. As this report suggests, the Critical Literacies Book Club is one means of providing a structured learning opportunity that assists educators in developing the necessary habits of mind for embodying critical thinking skills, personally and professionally. Furthermore, the Critical Literacies Book Club structure and design provide an opportunity to achieve this goal in

a reasonable amount of time, thus making it more realistic for overwhelmed educators to engage in and benefit from the professional learning.

Beyond state-mandated standards, this unique professional learning experience is important, especially now, in what seems to be a moment of tumultuous anger in North America and around the globe. To gain ratings, cable news magnifies this anger, encouraging individuals to only see and value a single perspective. Social media video clips highlight emotional parents calling for library book bans and censorship of some textbook content. Teachers have been threatened with job loss based on what they may say in the classroom or who they might love in their personal life. Learning to pause, reflect, and consider other perspectives is only the beginning of what might help solve this us-against-them mentality.

Analysis of participants' responses about their experiences and learning in the Critical Literacies Book Club validated that practicing courageous conversations is valuable but can sometimes be uncomfortable. During book club conversations participants admitted such conversations are often avoided, when possible, but, most of the time, met with gratitude when it is clear that other educators are also committed to thinking and teaching critically. The variety of experiences and learning is to be expected when the content is something usually avoided otherwise. This avoidance seems to be a defense mechanism. Some participants admitted to avoiding discomfort, a discomfort they may project onto themselves as they worry about hurting feelings or causing trouble. Ideally, learning about Courageous Conversations and how to effectively engage in these conversations should help with these worrisome feelings.

The Critical Literacies Book Club structure and design helped participants to recognize an understanding beyond their initial point of view as they became aware of what was once "invisible" made "visible" by other participants during the sessions. Ultimately, participants reported the Critical Literacies Book Club changed their way of thinking and seeing the world because the professional learning was structured to provide opportunities for practice, conducted in a feasible amount of time, and included support from facilitators focused on consideration of various points of view.

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