

CRITICAL LITERACY AND
ENGAGEMENT IN SECONDARY SPECIAL EDUCATION

by

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Critical Literacy in Special Education:

A Year-Long Professional Development Plan for Secondary Special Educators

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INTRODUCTION

In a changing, digital world, it has become increasingly important for students and teachers to understand the act of reading critically, rather than passively, to question the text, who is being represented and marginalized, how the author is positioning the topic and the reader, and to use these insights to seek truth and justice. It is my belief that critical literacy can be an equalizing, accessible and empowering tool for secondary special education students who have often lacked opportunities for deeper reading and thinking (Chiapella, 2015; Mc Leish, 2011; Washburn-Moses, 2005). A dialogically-focused pedagogical approach, critical literacy seeks to give students a voice in understanding and questioning the words and messages they encounter as well as the world in which they live.

The following project is a year-long professional development plan for secondary special education teachers seeking to help answer the research question *What is the effect of critical literacy practices on student engagement in secondary special education classes?*. Because of the nature of their responsibilities in terms of due-process paperwork, out-of-field teaching, and too few hours to teach too many skills in too many areas, special education teachers' unique needs are rarely adequately, nor specifically, considered during professional development planning (Washburn-Moses, 2005). This project seeks to honor the expertise of secondary special educators while giving them a new paradigm for literacy education as well as ready-to-use strategies and tools.

A cohort approach was chosen given research suggesting that this type of sustained interaction with learning, as well as collegial support, has the best chance of helping teachers incorporate new learnings into their teaching (Brownell et al., 2014; Leko & Mundy, 2012). All materials for facilitating the plan have either been provided here or referenced in detail to ensure the articles can be found and used.

Designed for special educators who teach self-contained literacy at the secondary level, the following professional development plan could be adapted for educators at any grade level and with students who do and do not have disabilities. Components include examples of critical literacy activities from elementary, middle and secondary grades. Additionally, the goal of this year-long professional development plan is not to create experts, but rather to give teachers the tools and support to begin exploring critical literacy with their students in their classrooms. The materials referenced include handouts, sample lessons, feedback and collaborative protocols, ready to use slide presentation, articles and other training materials. While research suggests that professional development that provides fewer than 14 hours of interaction with a topic does not have a measurable impact on student learning (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007, p. 12), specific sessions or materials could be used as stand-alone professional development experiences.

Each session is outlined including intended duration, participants, topics, learning goals, agenda items and materials. All materials referenced have been included in the form of links embedded in the materials section of each session, with the exception of copyrighted material that can be found by referencing the title and author in an online search. By clicking on the links in the document, a user will be able to access the referenced materials including slide presentations, reflection forms, handouts and readings. The intent of this design is to make the project accessible to any who would wish use it, either in its entirety or select portions.

SESSION 1: INTRODUCING CRITICAL LITERACY

When	Who	Time Required
Workshop Week	High School Special Educators	2 Hours

Learning Targets

1. *Explain the primary components of critical literacy pedagogy*
2. *Explain the history and direction of critical literacy*
3. *Explain why critical literacy is important in special education*

Agenda

1. Slides 1-6 "What is Critical Literacy?"
2. Break
3. Slides 7-15 "What is Critical Literacy?"

Materials

- [Google Slides: "What is Critical Literacy?"](#)
- Article: Christensen, L. (2017). Critical literacy and our students' lives. *Voices from the Middle*, 24(3), 16-19.

SESSION 2: ESTABLISHING NORMS AND GOALS

When	Who	Time Required
September	Cohort Participants	1 Hour

Learning Targets

1. *Agree on norms & goals*
2. *Complete self-reflection survey*
3. *Explain critical literacy basics as presented in Positioning Lesson*

Agenda

1. High/Low opening activity: Getting to know our cohort
2. Review Learning Targets
3. Time for self-reflection survey if not previously completed
4. Discuss and establish group norms and goals
5. Padlet: generate list of strengths and challenges related to teaching literacy
6. Use Positioning Lesson to introduce critical literacy in the classroom

Materials

- [Norms Sheet](#)
- Padlet prompts: What I like about teaching literacy/What is challenging about teaching literacy. <https://padlet.com/>
- [Google Slides: "Positioning Lesson"](#)
- [Survey](#) (email prior to session)

SESSION 3: CRITICAL LITERACY IN ACTION

When	Who	Time Required
October: Session 1	Cohort Participants	1 Hour

Learning Targets

1. *Picture critical literacy in action*
2. *Define engagement in literacy education*

Agenda

1. Review Learning Targets
 2. Discuss what engagement/disengagement looks like in our classrooms
 - a. Large group share what engagement looks like, disengagement looks like.
 - b. Small group discuss what activities have led to more engagement.
 3. Critical Literacy Lesson: Watch YouTube reading of picture book, [Souperchicken](#). Discuss in groups the primary message. Consider another viewpoint
- OR**
4. Critical Literacy Exploration: Read excerpts from Mc Leish dissertation

Materials

- Large chart paper OR Smartboard to note engagement and disengagement behaviors. Save to revisit engagement in future sessions.
- Youtube Video: "[Souperchicken](#)" by: Mary Jane Auch
- Mc Leish, K. (2011). *Experiences in critical literacy: Students deemed "at risk" in Canadian schools*. (Doctoral Dissertation).

SESSION 4: *DISRUPTING THE COMMONPLACE: PROBLEM POSING STRATEGY INTRODUCTION*

When	Who	Time Required
October: Session 2	Cohort Participants	1 Hours

Learning Targets

1. *Articulate how others have used critical literacy to engage learners*
2. *Explain basics of Problem Posing strategy*

Agenda

1. Review Learning Targets
2. Understanding where we are starting as critical literacy newcomers: Small groups jigsaw Shanklin article
3. Introduce Problem Posing Strategy: Revisit “Salvador Late or Early” by Sandra Cisneros
 - a. Read story
 - b. Small groups: Answer Problem Posing Questions
 - c. Large group share: How did your view of the text evolve with questions?

Materials

- Article: Shanklin, N. (2009). Using critical literacy to engage learners: What new teachers can do. *Voices from the Middle*, 17(2). 44-46.
- [“Salvador Late or Early” by Sandra Cisneros](#)
- Laminated copy of [Problem-Posing short list](#) for each participant
- Full copy of McLaughlin & DeVogd list p. 64-65

SESSION 5: *PROBLEM POSING STRATEGY*

When	Who	Time Required
November	Cohorts Participants	1 Hour

Learning Targets

1. *Further develop understanding of Problem Posing Strategy*
2. *Brainstorm applications for upcoming units*

Agenda

1. Review Learning Targets
2. Divide into groups and read Problem Posing Strategy lesson
3. Large group: discuss how the questions guide the discussion
4. Small groups: brainstorm upcoming lessons that could accommodate this strategy
5. Take time to sign up for 1:1 planning or observation session

Materials

- Copies of Lessons: McLaughlin & DeVogd p. 82-85, 73-76
- Lesson: Teaching Tolerance
<https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/teaching-strategies/close-and-critical-reading/challenge-the-text>
- [Google form for 1:1 sign up](#)

SESSION 6: *PROBLEM POSING STRATEGY #2*

When	Who	Time Required
December	Cohort Participants	1 Hour

Learning Targets

1. *Reflect on experiences with Problem Posing strategy*

Agenda

1. Review Learning Targets
2. Small groups: discuss highs and lows of Problem Posing Strategy use
3. Padlet: answer reflection questions about Problem Posing Strategy
4. Process themes as a large group
5. Small groups: brainstorm adjustments
6. Large groups: Share suggestions

Materials

- Padlet questions: Highs of using PPS/ Lows of using PPS. <https://padlet.com/>

SESSION 7: INTRODUCING MULTIPLE VIEWPOINTS, MIDYEAR SURVEY

When	Who	Time Required
January	Cohort Participants	2 Hours

Learning Targets

1. *List components of the Multiple Viewpoints strategy*
2. *Complete the Mid-year reflection*

Agenda

1. Review Learning Targets
2. Group share High/Low about Winter Break
3. Teach example Multiple Viewpoints lesson using lesson plan from McLaughlin & DeVogd, p. 133 with text “The Music Lesson” By Sarah Stucki (Janks p. 49)
4. Jigsaw of sample lessons: share with large group
5. Provide time for survey completion

Materials

- Sample lessons McLaughlin & DeVogd p. 135-142 and <https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/teaching-strategies/community-inquiry/what-would-they-say>
- Model lesson from McLaughlin & DeVogd p. 133
- Text: “The Music Lesson” from *Doing Critical Literacy* by Hilary Janks, p. 49
- [Survey Link](#)

SESSION 8: *MULTIPLE VIEWPOINTS STRATEGY*

When	Who	Time Required
February: Session 1	Cohort Participants	1 Hour

Learning Targets

1. *Review self-reflection data*
2. *Describe how multimedia and mind maps can be used to teach Multiple Viewpoints Strategy*

Agenda

1. Review Learning Targets
2. Address any areas that need to be revisited given survey data
3. Revisit Positioning Lesson: *How can Multimedia Resources be Used to Explore Multiple Viewpoints*
4. Small Groups: discuss using alternative mind maps or alternative texts in upcoming lessons

Materials

- McLaughlin & DeVogd p. 80
- [Google Slides: "Positioning Lesson"](#)

SESSION 9: *MULTIPLE VIEWPOINTS STRATEGY #2*

When	Who	Time Required
February: Session 2	Cohort Participants	1 Hour

Learning Targets

1. *Increase understanding of Multiple Viewpoints Strategy*
2. *Prepare to teach using Multiple Viewpoints Strategy*

Agenda

1. Review Learning Targets
2. All participants share their plan for applying Multiple Viewpoints Strategy
3. All participants complete Lesson Preparedness Self-Evaluation
4. Volunteer(s) lead lesson

Materials

- [Sign up for observation or 1:1 session](#)
- [Peer feedback form](#)
- [Self-Evaluation Tool](#)

SESSION 10: *MULTIPLE VIEWPOINTS #3*

When	Who	Time Required
March	Cohort Participants	1 Hour

Learning Targets

1. *Reflect on use of Multiple Viewpoints Strategy*

Agenda

1. Review Learning Targets
2. Small groups: discuss highs and lows of Multiple Viewpoints Strategy
3. Large Group: discuss themes
4. Use Tuning Protocol or Collaborative Assessment Conference to reflect more deeply on one volunteer's experience

Materials

- [Tuning Protocol form](#)
- [Collaborative Assessment Conference form](#)

SESSION 11: REFLECTING ON CRITICAL LITERACY IN YOUR CLASSROOM

When	Who	Time Required
April	Cohort Participants	1 Hour

Learning Targets

1. *Reflect on the effects of critical literacy instruction in your classrooms*

Agenda

1. Review Learning Targets
2. Review impact critical literacy instruction has had on engagement using brainstorm from the fall
3. Jigsaw Lewison et al. and Christensen p. 17-19 vignettes in small groups
4. Large group: share challenges, successes, engagement. How do experiences expressed in vignettes connect to your experience?
5. Write own vignette about lessons learned

Materials

- Article: Lewison, M., Seely Flint, A., Van Sluys, K., (2002). Taking on critical literacy: The journey of newcomers and novices. *Language Arts*, 79(5). 382-392.
- Article: Christensen, L. (2017). Critical literacy and our students' lives. *Voices from the Middle*, 24(3), 16-19.
- Chart paper or Smartboard

SESSION 12: WRAPPING UP AND MOVING FORWARD

When	Who	Time Required
May	Cohort Participants	1 Hour

Learning Targets

1. *Review the four dimensions of critical literacy*
2. *Reflect on use of critical literacy in personal and professional lives*

Agenda

1. Review Learning Targets
2. Padlet reflection on critical literacy in personal and professional reading
3. Voluntary share of personal vignettes
4. Review 4 dimensions of critical literacy
5. Time for final self-reflection survey

Materials

- Padlet Prompts: How has critical literacy affected how you read? and What are your goals for moving forward with critical literacy? <https://padlet.com/>
- [Critical Literacy Dimensions Bookmark](#)
- [Self-Reflection Survey Link](#)

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