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Alice A. Infranco
Rowan University

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**EVOLVING LITERACY PRACTICES IN THE VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL
HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM:
HOW CRITICAL LITERACY FRAMEWORKS ENHANCE LEARNING AND
INCREASE STUDENT READING SUCCESS IN CTE**

By

Alice A. Infranco

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Education
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Master of Arts in Reading Education
at
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December 19, 2022

Thesis Chair: Dr. Marjorie E. Madden, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Language,
Literacy, and Sociocultural Education

Committee Members:

Dr. Kate Kedley, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural
Education

Dr. Xiufang Chen, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Language, Literacy, and
Sociocultural Education

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Dedications

This Thesis is dedicated to my husband, Eric, and my children, Andrew and Katherine. Thank you for being in my life and being my daily reasons for everything. I am honored to be your family, too. I love you more than you know; you are my world. Let each day unfold, because the best is yet to come.

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Finally, I would like to thank my friend, Amy Mayer. Amy is no longer with us, but she shines down on me, my family, and her former students from heaven, and her prayers are the sweetest whispers that I can always rely on to keep me grounded and know that I am loved. Dear, dear, Amy, thank you for teaching us all *to let the day unfold*.

Abstract

Alice A. Infranco

EVOLVING LITERACY PRACTICES IN THE VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM: HOW CRITICAL LITERACY FRAMEWORKS ENHANCE LEARNING AND INCREASE STUDENT READING SUCCESS IN CTE

2022-2023

Dr. Marjorie Madden

Master of Arts in Reading Education

This paper provides a qualitative account of how Critical Literacy instruction fosters reading growth in vocational technical school settings. This study examines how critical literacy enriches learning outcomes within Career and Technical Education (CTE). The findings are that Critical Literacy skills are necessary for all readers because they affect student engagement and participation in learning positively, especially if presented in a way that allows students to have an active role in their learning.

Examples of how to integrate Critical Literacy instruction into CTE classrooms are presented and discussed. These instructional practices go beyond traditional reading comprehension skills. The conclusion is that incorporating Critical Literacy curricula into CTE programs can lead to a better understanding of the diverse world in which students must plan their futures. All readers need Critical Literacy skills to use in all career pathways. Ultimately, these results revealed that Critical Literacy instruction leads to better classroom participation in reading activities than when using traditional reading comprehension alone.

Table of Contents

Abstract	v
List of Tables	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Scope of the Study	1
Purpose of the Study	2
Statement of Research Problem and Question.....	4
Story of the Question	5
Organization of the Thesis	6
Chapter 2: Literature Review	8
Introduction.....	8
Defining Critical Literacy Theory	8
Investigating CTE Literacy Instruction	10
Establishing the Purpose of Critical Literacy in CTE Settings.....	12
Conclusion	13
Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology	14
Introduction.....	14
Context of Study	16
District and School.....	16
Classroom and Students.....	17
Procedure of the Study.....	17
Week One - Discovering Personal Lenses.....	18
Week Two - Examining Texts - Considering and Questioning Perspectives.....	19

Table of Contents (Continued)

Week Three - Comparing Oppositional Texts, Examining Source Credibility ...	20
Week Four - Fake News	22
Week Five - Critical Literacy in Film, “Akeelah and the Bee”	23
Final Survey	24
Conclusion	25
Chapter 4: Data Analysis	26
Introduction.....	26
Increased Engagement – Readers Become Active and Willing Participants.....	26
Discovering and Discussing Diversity Inspires Openness and Acceptance	32
Noticeable Improvement, Overall, in Work Habits and Classroom Conduct.....	40
Survey of Students – Post Critical Literacy Instruction	42
Conclusion	45
Chapter 5: Summary, Limitations, and Implications	46
Summary of Findings.....	46
Limitations of the Study.....	48
Implications for Teachers and Educators.....	48
Conclusion	50
References.....	51
Appendix A: Sample Student Work - Lenses	53
Appendix B: Anchor Chart for Internet Research	56
Appendix C: Concluding Survey – Sample Questions and Answers	57

List of Tables

Table	Page
Table 1. Daniel's Work Sample.....	35
Table 2. Sample Exit Tickets	38
Table 3. Concluding Survey	42

Chapter 1

Introduction

Scope of the Study

Vocational Technical Schooling, also known as CTE-Career and Technical Education, provides meaningful and necessary training and education for high school students pursuing careers as industry professionals. CTE prepares learners to become leaders as skilled and valued members of the workforce. Vocational schools offer immersive education and hands-on experiences in the classroom so students can obtain career skills in a hands-on environment. CTE instructors who teach at vocational schools must have a minimum of four years of experience within the industry they seek to teach, or they must have a Bachelor's Degree in the subject they wish to teach. Some have worked in the field, and some are business owners specializing in the trade subject. For instance, an automotive technology instructor must have at least four years of work experience in the industry.

In comparison, cosmetology instructors must have a Cosmetology License and four years of employment experience. CTE instructors who do not have teaching certifications must complete an alternate route teacher's certification program. All vocational technical high schools in New Jersey follow this model.

Becoming a CTE instructor requires the same certification requirements as any other public school system. In addition to the trade and content knowledge, CTE educators must participate in professional development programs and safe school training workshops. All CTE teachers are writing Student Growth Objectives and Professional

Development Plans, and they are running and attending Professional Learning Communities. Students attending vocational schools are expected to uphold behavioral, attendance, and grading expectations that are comparable to most public schools in the surrounding communities. In addition, some trade classes have uniform requirements based on the trade.

Purpose of the Study

Vocational trade curricula is built around content standards that are guided by state mandates. Teachers plan their lessons based on these core elements. For an outsider looking in, perhaps there is a false impression that literacy, science, and mathematics instruction do not take place in CTE classrooms and that it only occurs in the academic classroom. However, the surprising fact is that reading, math, and science are extremely serious components of ALL vocational school programs. Core Content Standards for trade areas contain all three components without any hesitation. For instance, Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning-Refrigeration trades require extensive math and science abilities. Students are learning to calculate the number of BTUs needed to heat a specific space, and taking measurements to design ductwork systems requires computation abilities. A second example is that Building Construction Technology and Plumbing trades use basic math skills and a variety of algebraic equations to calculate building materials for each job site. In addition, Medical Assisting professions and Health and Fitness Careers require biology and life science instruction. In the Culinary Arts vocational programs, reading and math are vital components to reading, learning, understanding, and creating recipes, while science is essential to *all* cooking methods.

Literacy, in the form of effective communication skills, is included in all trade area content standards.

The focus of this study is on literacy skills, as, ultimately, all career and technical education programs require a level of reading, writing, and speaking proficiency. Literacy is the core component of learning the language of the trade, the vocabulary of the business, and, most importantly, all forms of communication at the workplace. Furthermore, vocational school programs use textbooks, technical manuals, blueprints, and other types of literature and text; thus, Critical Literacy skill has a place within this setting. But where and how does it fit?

During my Clinical Research, it became clear that the Concept of Critical Literacy is a topic that needs to be explored within vocational education high school settings. Critical Literacy instruction is applied when students read about workplace skills, internet job postings, and workplace professionalism, and students use Critical Literacy to decode workplace expectations and detect biases in the language of texts they read. Also, they will discover and use their critical reading lenses while learning to acknowledge and respect the lenses of others whenever appropriate.

Essential frameworks of Critical Literacy incorporated into the CTE curriculum will ultimately help instructors learn ways to drastically improve student engagement with texts. Reading comprehension can be negatively or positively impacted by the reader's level of interest in the subject matter. Consequently, when students read texts about topics of interest, they will likely be more focused on and invested in their reading. While the purpose for reading is to increase professional knowledge and understanding of trade-specific material, life-long learning and personal growth and development are

drastically improved. The conclusion is that disciplinary reading practices in vocational contexts are complex and therefore require critical readers. (Visén, 2021)

Statement of Research Problem and Question

When I first joined the vocational-technical school teaching environment, I was a teacher of Applied English. Each day consisted of working with students to learn trade vocabulary and professional writing skills, such as writing business letters, resumes, and service tickets. Additionally, students use informational texts to locate specific information and learn about the trades students would be pursuing. For example, cosmetology students learn an extensive amount of scientific vocabulary and language related to the practice of hair, skin, make-up, and everything else related to the field of study. Every day, they are preparing, in some way, for the written exam in this course. As an Applied English Teacher, my responsibilities often involve plenty of vocabulary unit studies where the students and I create word walls and vocabulary visuals. Also, test preparation and study guide reviews encompass our Applied English lesson plans and content standards in all of the vocational classes on my schedule. Applied English instruction also covers job searching, reading and writing responses to job announcements, interviewing skills, and email writing strategies. Above all, literacy in each trade and employment-seeking skills is the crux of Applied English.

CTE Students can write and read proficiently, but they need to be able to do this with a critical lens. Students need to read critically, no matter what they are reading, because *all* reading requires it. Critical literacy frameworks informing this study are intentionally designed to determine how CTE educators can effectively integrate critical literacy instruction into their routine instructional practice. In doing so, the investigator

will work with students through essential skills of Critical Literacy lessons gathering data about instructional strategies and observable effects on learning outcomes. In addition, the selected students will participate in interactive class discussions, reading, and follow-up viewing and writing activities in this study. What does Critical Literacy instruction look like in the vocational-technical setting? How can Critical Literacy skills benefit CTE learners?

Story of the Question

CTE literacy instruction often involves vocabulary study, professional writing workshops, and examining textbooks to research and discuss problem-solving scenarios. Comprehension of texts, such as safety manuals, technical publications, and content area textbooks, must go further in educating students to have a critical stance. It is already clear that when readers use a critical lens, comprehension is affected and increased. Vocational Technical reading requirements span beyond reading comprehension; therefore, the demands for critical reading skills are indisputable.

This study examines the outcomes that occur when Critical Literacy theories are incorporated into lesson planning within a CTE environment. Testing Critical Literacy instruction methodologies that are strategically aligned with the disciplinary content standards informs learners, teachers, and teacher researchers about using these tools effectively. This study examines outcomes from a series of critical lessons taught to a small group of CTE students and how students respond to and benefit from the instruction.

CTE students are embarking on their futures with a focus on specific trade skill learning. Reading skills are still developing and growing during these transactional experiences within CTE classrooms. Critical Literacy frameworks informing this study are intentionally designed to determine how CTE educators can integrate critical literacy instruction into their routine instructional practice effectively. In doing so, the investigator will work with students through essential skills of Critical Literacy lessons gathering data about instructional strategies and observable affects on learning outcomes. In addition, the selected students will participate in interactive class discussions, reading, and follow-up viewing and writing activities in this study.

The research process seeks to illustrate and examine how Critical Literacy frameworks can work in this setting and if it is successful. In addition, the investigator will be able to share findings with peers when developing an updated curriculum and planning that serves students with the 21st Century CTE skills required in today's workforce. Findings and conclusions will be used to guide CTE administration and educators in developing and improving literacy components focused on critical literacy standards in the 21st Century vocational school schools.

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter two provides a review of the literature surrounding the topic of Critical Literacy Pedagogies and their roles in teaching and learning. Research regarding Career and Technical Educational settings and how literacy lessons are commonly delivered in CTE classroom settings are also discussed in chapter two. Chapter three describes the design and context of the study, including my plan for implementing a series of instructional tools and how they can be created and used in the vocational-technical

school classroom. Also included are facts about the class in which the study will be conducted. Chapter four reviews and analyzes the data and research and discusses the study's findings. Chapter five presents the conclusions of this study and implications for teaching and learning, and suggestions for further research regarding the use of critical literacy instructional strategies in the vocational-technical school classroom.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

“Learning is a process where knowledge is presented to us,
then shaped through understanding, discussion, and reflection.”

(Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*)

Introduction

Literacy is a fixture which serves as a core component of learning in every school, content area, and level. Literacy theories and frameworks are created, tested, and reformed to effectuate the best outcomes for learners. There is an enduring need for teachers to reflect on their practice and consider the best ways to advance. Critical literacy frameworks remain in the spotlight of literacy instruction while published research illustrates their importance. Literature was consulted to explicitly define critical literacy, investigate its current application within CTE settings, and establish the purpose of this study.

Defining Critical Literacy Theory

Critical Literacy Theory is a framework rooted in Paulo Freire's work, whose insights and teachings have paved the way for teachers and researchers. In Freire's seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000), critical literacy would have teachers place their interests within the cultural backgrounds of each student; this creates the environment where students become the teachers, informing instruction based on student-centered experiences that relate closely to their needs. “Education must begin with the solution of the student-teacher contradiction by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students.” (Freire, 2000, p. 45). Freire's

discussions of the education system state that contemporary education is narrative, with teachers speaking and children listening, that is causing “narration sickness” (Freire, 200, p. 45).

Thus, first and foremost, Paulo Freire brought critical literacy to light, Freire’s key message being that “Critical Literacy views readers as active participants in the reading process and invites them to move beyond passively accepting the text’s message to question, examine, or dispute the power relations that exist between readers and authors” (Freire, 2000, p.73).

We refer to Freire as the *Father* of critical literacy; however, many researchers, although loyal to his teachings, have pursued his ideas and further developed critical literacy frameworks. For instance, his position is that practicing critical literacy involves readers taking a stance as they interact with a text; what, then, is critical literacy expressly? Ira Shor, a university professor and teacher-researcher, explicitly states, "Critical literacy is language use that questions the social construction of the self. When we are critically literate, we examine our ongoing development, to reveal the subjective positions from which we make sense of the world and act in it" (Shor, p.3). Thus, we can gather that the stance of critical pedagogy asks that educators provide a classroom climate that encourages a thorough examination of the motivations behind everything that is taught and learned. Developing their critical literacy, learners should think critically about what they read and see so they are equipped and prepared to identify inequality or injustice. Critical pedagogy allows for questioning and examination of equality and justice by asking questions about learning, such as: Is what we read just? Was it an example of equality?

Investigating CTE Literacy Instruction

Jacquelin Darwin performed a study on situated literacy (2006), revealing that most CTE instructors she observed used as many texts as academic teachers. However, they often used them in different ways.

They use texts in bits and pieces to solve problems, research, and enhance particular stages of the projects in which they are engaged. They typically read not for the sake of gaining general knowledge but to accomplish particular goals and to gain specific information. (Darvin, 2006, p. 12)

Since Darwin's study examined literacy in a vocational technical setting, it provides a look inside the window of literacy practices in such environments. Her research on "situated literacies" gives insight into instructional methods and encourages more research in this field to be conducted.

The more teachers and researchers of all disciplines learn about literacy and how to tap into the inner workings of the mind, the better prepared they will be to meet the literacy needs of adolescents and adults in school and workplace settings." (Darvin, 2006, p. 17)

Literacy demands of vocational-technical classroom settings have been studied in the past, revealing that technical instructors employ large-group lectures requiring note-taking, written tests and quizzes, and textbook use to a considerable degree. (Evers & Bursuck, 1994) Furthermore, Evers found, "Data reveal that the instructional methods and materials found in technical classes require reading, writing, listening, and test-taking skills similar to those found in general academic classes." (Evers & Bursuck, 1994, p.

141) A recent report from Hilliard (2016) regarding literacy and Career and Technical Education (CTE) recognizes that:

It is a common misconception that literacy instruction should occur only in English class. CTE teachers can teach literacy quite effectively—it is normal in the CTE classroom for students to be presented with a range of authentic texts, such as blueprints, technical manuals, computer programs, profit-loss statements, lab reports, and floor plans. (Hilliard, 2016, para. 2)

Vocational and technical school students use texts differently compared to academic students; vocational educators employ literacy practices in their classrooms that mirror the best-documented strategies of teaching reading in the content areas. (Darvin, 2006) Additionally, research from Visen (2021) revealed that disciplinary reading practices in vocational contexts are complex and require critical readers. Vocational students read to accomplish tasks. Reading types that emerged from this study show the complexity and situatedness of vocational literacy.

Career and Technical Education exposes students to rich and relevant content (Hyslop, 2014). Instructors use curricula that employ trade publications and varied literacy strategies, including Word Walls, Graphic Organizers, summarizing, public speaking, journaling, and vocabulary acquisition (Hyslop, 2014). Even further conclusive research shows that disciplinary reading practices in vocational contexts require critical readers because they are complex. Visen’s research found that “Vocational students read to accomplish tasks.” (Visen, 2021, p. 62). Therefore, reading types that emerged from Visen’s study show the complexity and situatedness of vocational literacy (Visen, 2021).

Ultimately, vocational school students choose fields where they may someday pursue a career; this suggests that they may be more interested in the subject matter, including reading and writing activities. According to research by Junks et al. (2019), “Students learn best when what they are learning has importance in their lives; as such, using the topics, issues, and questions they raise should be central in creating an inclusive critical curriculum. (Vasquez et al., 2019, p. 306). Vasquez, Janks, and Comber’s research (2019) provides a thorough and informative definition and criteria for critical literacy and its purpose.

Critical literacy practices can be transformative. They can contribute to changing inequitable ways of being and problematic social practices. This means students who engage in critical literacy from a young age are prepared 1) to make informed decisions regarding issues such as power and control, 2) to engage in the practice of democratic citizenship, and 3) to develop an ability to think and act ethically. As such, they would be better able to contribute to making the world a more equitable and socially just place. (Vasquez et al., 2019, p. 306)

Establishing the Purpose of Critical Literacy in CTE Settings

Researching critical literacy instruction in the vocational school setting provides meaningful insight into how it can effectively fit into CTE classrooms. Furthermore, Jaqueline Darvin (2006) found, "The purposes for reading are not simply to enable students to pass exams but rather for teams or groups of teachers *and* students to work together to gather information, construct meaning, and apply their knowledge to solve particular problems." (Darvin, 2006, p. 17) Also, Darvin’s research (2006) concluded, "Studying situated literacy in settings such as vocational schools can give reading

researchers and educators better tools with which to recognize literacy strengths in tradespeople, thus expanding their views of intelligence." (Darvin, 2006, p. 17) As a Language Arts Literacy Teacher, Applied English Instructor, and Reading Support Instructor within the vocational high school setting, my experiences encompass more than 12 years of working with adolescent students on literacy growth and skill. In addition, the literacy demands of vocational programs where I teach involve vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, writing, speaking, and listening skills, and so much more. In addition, critical Literacy must be factored into these settings so students can benefit from its proven positive outcomes.

Conclusion

After reviewing the literature based on research surrounding critical literacy practice and the literacy needs of vocational school students, a critical literacy stance can be introduced to the CTE setting to support student learning and overall improvement of literacy skills (Janks et al., 2019). The literature suggests that critical literacy asks students to interact closely with texts; researching its place within a vocational-technical school setting may expand its use and ensure further attention to critical literacy and its possibilities. (Friere, 2000). The purpose of this study is established by defining critical literacy and investigating how it could best be incorporated into the CTE setting. There is little research in this area, and this study aims to provide further analysis on this topic.

This unique study will explore the possibilities and outcomes of using critical literacy frameworks and topics within one class during their CTE instructional time. The next chapter of this thesis will outline the research design and methodology.

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

Research has the power to inform, and the importance of designing a meaningful study revolves around its methodology. It is also a “process of discovering essential questions, gathering data, and analyzing it to answer those questions.”

(Shagoury and Power, 2012, p. 2). Teacher research endures as its roots can be traced back to the mid-1700s (Shagoury & Powers, 2012). The value and significance of teacher research are immeasurable. Shagoury and Powers expertly depict teacher researchers as careful gardeners who “have their own preferences for their plot of earth” (2012, p. 9). Following in the footsteps of Lawrence Stenhouse, whom Shagoury and Powers credit with initiating an international teacher research movement, “All careful gardeners begin from the same place,” and “Every teacher has wonderings worth pursuing” (2012, p. 9).

Teachers who are committed to the quality of their instruction take their careers and professionalism seriously; they are open to investigating current education issues and dedicate themselves to developing and improving their practice. Education practices and teaching methods are constantly evolving, advancing, and providing unlimited opportunities for inquiry, research, analysis, and transformation. Thus, a qualitative approach to teacher research informs educators and school administrators by sharing their understandings of the practice of teaching and discussing their diverse experiences in classrooms and communities. (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2012). Furthermore, as educational policies change, the qualitative teacher-research framework constructs narratives that, for practical purposes, support “schools as sites of change” as “teachers

study their own schools” (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2012, p. 27). Teacher research guides education professionals and students in a whole-hearted effort to create the best environment for our classroom communities. Above all, both qualitative research and practitioner inquiry aim to recognize education issues, formulate meaningful questions, explore environments, and discuss conclusions.

This research aims to study how CTE Teachers can integrate Critical Literacy into CTE (Career and Technical Education) classrooms. Its purpose is to provide foundations of Critical Literacy instruction through a carefully planned critical literacy framework. The goal is to push students to read more deeply and to question texts. The research studies and discusses the data acquired through critical literacy instruction and its outcomes.

Data from classroom instruction will be analyzed to look for patterns and emerging beliefs about critical literacy and teaching experiences. Qualitative data includes classroom artifacts (writing work), my personal teacher-research journal, and field notes. Materials for the study consisted of critical literacy lesson plans, a wide selection of texts examined by students, teacher-guided discussions, and teacher-created workshops.

The Critical Literacy frameworks presented and discussed by Janks et al. (2019) guided the lesson-planning process. The lessons and class discussions encompass teaching students to examine texts closely and with a critical eye. They invite students to bring in samples or describe things that are important to them in a culturally meaningful way. Also, specific lessons require working through topics concerning students by

reading and examining texts on current events and texts written from particular perspectives.

Context of Study

District and School

The Brick Center Ocean County Vocational Technical School is one of the five Career and Technical Education schools located throughout Ocean County, New Jersey. Ocean County is located on the eastern coast of central New Jersey. There are a total of 294,429 people residing in Ocean County, according to the 2020 Census Report. Of these 294,429, 81.7% are family households, with 24.7% being families with children under the age of 18. 52.6% of family households are led by married couples. 14.6% of these households are male-led households with no spouse present, while 27.2% are female-led households with no spouse present. The average family size in Ocean County is 3.34.

The 2020 Census reports that the racial makeup of Ocean County was 83.7% white or Caucasian, 9.8% Hispanic and Latino, 3.8% black or African American, 2% Asian, and 1.5% two or more races. The population by age consists of 24.7% under the age of 18, and the median age for residents of Ocean County is 41.5.

The median income of Ocean County residents, as per the 2020 Census, was \$75,719 per household, and the median family income was \$92,401. At this time, 12.2% of families in Ocean County were considered to be living in poverty, with 15.3% of said families with children under the age of 18.

The Brick Center location contains the highest enrollment of students and the broadest range of technical education programs. For the 2022-2023 School Year, the

Brick Center serves over 715 students at this time, with approximately 330 students attending the morning session and roughly 390 students in the second session. The teacher-to-student ratio is 13:1 for each separate session.

Classroom and Students

Mrs. Gliddon's Fashion Merchandising and Design classes contain a combined total of 46 students. The morning session of the class consists of 23 students. Of these 23 students, 14 are in 11th grade, 7 are in 12th grade, and 2 are high school graduates who have returned as Post-Secondary students. Of the morning student group, 2 students are male, and 21 are female.

Procedure of the Study

I am positioned within a classroom where I can conduct this research with a group of students with whom I have established a strong rapport that is professional, friendly, respectful, and welcoming. Most students are adolescent high-school juniors and seniors aged 16 to 18, with a few graduating and returning as post-secondary students. As students move from adolescence into adulthood, considering their career options and selecting those pathways are some of the first significant decisions they will make. As CTE teachers are at the frontline of preparing youth and adults to succeed in today's middle-skill jobs, CTE instructors must meet the needs of the adolescent, career-seeking diverse population. (Bezard, 2016) The study is structured around these needs, focusing on Critical Literacy and its potential in CTE to enhance reading comprehension, deepen learning, and present opportunities for learners to develop a critical stance towards texts, both print and digital, through a series of literacy lessons.

Week One - Discovering Personal Lenses

The first week began with an introduction to the idea of lenses. We used a teaching tool I decided to call “Lenses on Reading.” First, I read a short excerpt of a teacher’s opinion about his experience working from home during the Covid-19 school closure. After I read the text, we held a class discussion to analyze and respond to the excerpt. Students were encouraged to share their points of view and question the author’s perspective. Next, I progressed to a planned set of questions about individual perspectives and how they might be shaped or formed. Finally, I used the following guiding questions:

- How does who you are *shape* your perspective?
- How can someone increase understanding of the perspectives of others?
- Why is this important?
- What does it mean to take a position or stance?

Students were given the option to jot down their thoughts on the worksheet we were using or to participate in class discussions.

Toward the end of the lesson, all students created a table of unique colors and symbols that reflected their views of the world. Column one asked for a color or symbol, while column two required a short explanation about its meaning and representation. Students were asked to consider their backgrounds and think about things that shape their opinions. In the closing activity, students designed their personal lenses using colored pencils and a template of eyeglasses. The final product involved students creating a pair of glasses containing all their chosen designs from their table of colors and symbols. I provided a personal example for students needing a starting point and sample. Students

were excited to see my expressions and happy to express their individuality through this art activity. Throughout this activity, I monitored students' understanding and took notes about their behaviors, moods, and enthusiasm for the assignment.

Week Two - Examining Texts - Considering and Questioning Perspectives

The first lesson activated students' perspectives and captured the concept that everyone has unique perceptions and experiences. We exchanged views on how our individuality guides our responses to the world and contributes to our decision-making. To open the lesson, students responded to a "Silent Discussion" prompt in their Google Classroom. The prompt asked students to share their personal opinion of a short excerpt that was read aloud to them. There was no verbal interaction for this part of the lesson.

Following the Silent Discussion prompt, I introduced the term "social construct." using a Google Slides presentation. Students read and learned its definition, then collectively contributed to creating a list of common and valuable social constructs that exist in our lives. Following this short and explicit learning objective, We returned to the full-length source of the preliminary excerpt, a recently published editorial in Forbes magazine titled "Life Isn't Fair. Deal With It" by writer Mike Myatt. I led a read-aloud (consisting of myself as a reader and some student volunteers) of the text, and we questioned it as we progressed through to its end. Specific discussion points were led by my questioning, while students also took opportunities to ask and address any concerns they had. The objective was to determine the author's perspective and search the text for key points and phrases that revealed his stance.

The closing activity was a Critical Reader's Response. Students were asked to consider an opposing point of view to the author. I used the following prompt:

- The author believes that the concept of "fairness" is not a helpful term and that it makes people feel entitled to good outcomes.
- Make an argument for the opposite—how would you convince someone that the concept of "fairness" is an important one?

Week 3 - Comparing Oppositional Texts and Examining Source Credibility

For the third week, students were presented with the idea of Oppositional Views. They were taught that the meaning of this concept is a viewpoint that is the opposite of your own, as a disagreement of someone's opinion; we also discussed possibilities where oppositional views might conflict with societal norms using the topic of the anti-vaccination movement. After a short discussion, I explained the difference between credible and non-credible news sources. We examined government websites such as NASA, CDC, and FEMA; social media websites, such as Twitter, FaceBook, Instagram, Tik Tok, and "Wikipedia" resources; major news reporting websites, such as USA Today and The New York Times; and websites that provide information about diseases, disorders, and conditions, such as WebMD, LIVESTRONG, and Mayo Clinic. We concluded that government sites and news sites are considered reliable because anyone who publishes inaccurate information can lose a job they worked for years to achieve. Finally, we established that social media is not credible; even though not everything on social media is false, it is still not considered credible or reliable for research purposes.

After determining the differences between reliable and unreliable websites, students completed a research activity. The objective was to choose a topic with two opposing viewpoints. Examples were provided, and students were allowed to add their

own topics. We created a brainstormed list on the whiteboard that contained the following topics from which they could choose:

1. Gun Control
2. Legalization of Marijuana
3. School Uniform Debates
4. Declawing Cats
5. Global Warming
6. Homosexuality in the Biblical
7. Vaccinations and Public Health
8. Wearing Spurs While Riding a Horse
9. Pit Bull Ownership in the United States

After we created the list, students then were prompted to use the internet to search for credible sources about their chosen topic. They were given the option to work in pairs or to work alone. Students were permitted to use their notes from the discussion about credibility on the internet. Students had to locate two articles from different sources and gather the following information about the article:

1. The Article's title and Author's name
2. Website and publication date
3. Is this a credible scientific article? Yes or No
4. Explain how you know that the article is credible.
5. State the main idea of the article.
6. List two pieces of evidence/detail from the article to support the main idea.

Throughout the assignment, I provided support whenever needed. Students were able to find ample information about their topics, and I observed them and answered their questions as they evaluated website content for credibility.

Week 4 - Fake News

Fake News is beginning to fade from the spotlight, but the repercussions of Fake News are still lingering and will be for some time. Explicit teaching of the concept of Fake News is closely linked to Critical Literacy lessons. For this presentation, I first gave students a concrete explanation of its meaning: What is Fake News Exactly? Fake News is a recent term for an old phenomenon: MISINFORMATION.” I continued to explain in my presentation that “People may publish misinformation for a variety of reasons, including political gain, advertising revenue, as a joke or prank, or within commentaries of subjective opinions.”

I showed a statement on a slide explaining: These published articles are designed to look like news, spread virally, and draw on people’s strong emotions. Additionally, students were informed that social media platforms had become the main spreaders of misinformation, disinformation, and disreputable information sources. We continued the conversation about fake news by examining a website that anyone can use to create a photo containing a headline and a byline that resembles real news.

Next, we analyzed a Twitter post that was designed to spread fear and hate. The headline read, “Muslim woman pays no mind to the terror attack, casually walks by a dying man while checking phone. #PrayForLondon #Westminster #BanIslam. The post was designed to look real and appeared to be made by a Twitter user named “Texas Lone Star; however, the actual posting was investigated and found to be created by a Russian

'bot' that was using an overtly American Twitter handle. The illusion was clear that the creator intended to make Texans look racist while using a passionate and trending incident. I explained to students that the inflammatory language of the tweet contained specific words that revealed its intent: a *Muslim woman casually* walks by. The targeted group was Islam and Texans.

The Key Takeaway was explained: Critical Literacy can be transformative. The Slideshow closed with the following: By using this skill, you can make informed decisions regarding issues such as power and control and develop an ability to think and act morally and ethically. The final slide contained a quote from Nelson Mandela: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

For the closure activity, students responded to a series of questions about the Twitter post from "Lone Star."

- How does the text portray women?
- Does the text make any assumptions about individuals, groups, or places?
- Whose point of view is heard? Whose is missing?
- What is your opinion about using Social Media as a source of gathering news information?

Week 5 - Critical Literacy in Film, "Akeelah and the Bee"

Films are often helpful in teaching about themes and ideologies. As I pondered how movies could contribute to the Critical Literacy topic of my research, I found an article that suggested three titles: "Renaissance Man," "The Great Debaters," and "Akeelah and the Bee." After viewing these three films, it was clear to me that Akeelah and the Bee would best fit in with our learning.

We decided to show the film accompanied by a viewing guide that would serve as a reflection tool for students to use in sharing their positions. The following questions were presented to the class before we started the film:

1. Compare your school to Akeelah's School. What do students wear, and how do they behave?
2. Why do you think Akeelah does not want to participate in the spelling bee? Would you feel the same if you were in her shoes?
3. Why is everyone in Akeelah's neighborhood interested in helping her study? Why does she have so many coaches?
4. Explain the reason that Dr. Larabee did not want to coach Akeelah anymore.
5. In your own words, summarize the quote on Dr. Larabee's wall. What does it mean to you?

Final Survey

At the conclusion of the study, I wanted to ask students to provide their honest opinions about the series of critical literacy lessons we had completed over the five weeks of my study. The survey consisted of six questions in total; questions one through five were required, while the sixth question was optional. I used a Google Form to obtain this data, and each student completed the questionnaire by accessing the internet, proceeding to a provided link to the Google Form, then completing and submitting their responses.

The following questions were asked in the survey:

1. Was there anything you liked about ANY of the critical lenses/critical literacy activities we have completed? Please explain.

2. Was there anything that you disliked about ANY of the critical lenses/critical literacy activities? Please explain.
3. Critical Literacy means learning to decode or detect any embedded hidden meanings, such as discrimination or bias, within all types of texts. Also, critical literacy involves the reader being able to examine these messages and question them. Do you recall learning about Critical Literacy prior to this school year? (Select Maybe if you are not sure.)
4. The heart of Critical Literacy is looking closely at texts of ALL kinds. What is your conclusion about critical literacy? (For example: is it important, or unimportant? Why?)
5. Do you feel prepared to be able to closely read a text and determine its author's purpose?
6. Optional: What would help to make your school-based reading activities more relevant to you? (This can refer to your sending high school, OCVTS, or both schools.)

Results of the survey will be studied and analyzed in chapter four.

Conclusion

Chapter Four of this thesis discusses my findings and recurring themes discovered through my research based on my teacher-research journal, student work and artifacts, and data from a student survey. Chapter Five will then present conclusions and implications from the study, as well as suggestions for further research topics.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

Introduction

Chapter four discusses the findings of my study. Based on the guiding questions, “What does Critical Literacy instruction look like in the vocational-technical setting? and “How can Critical Literacy frameworks benefit CTE learners?” I have gathered and sorted my data sources: teacher-research journals, detailed lesson plans and objectives, and student work, including opinions, student commentaries, written work, discussion responses, projects, and reader’s response journals.

Analysis of data suggests three recurring themes of my research. These include, but are not limited to 1) high interest and engagement in learning about the topic and willingness to participate in class discussions, 2) discovering and discussing diversity inspires openness and acceptance, and 3) noticeable improvement, overall, in work habits and classroom conduct.

Effectively, the level of maturity that I witnessed among the groups of students was impressive and noteworthy. Students made valuable connections to the lesson content and the variety of objectives we experienced. In addition, each student showed intellectual curiosity about study topics, and my findings suggest that critical literacy instruction had a meaningful impact on their learning.

Increased Engagement - Readers Become Active and Willing Participants

When I introduced my Critical Literacy research plan to my colleague, Mrs. Gliddon, she embraced the notion and immediately agreed that this would work well within her classes. Mrs. Gliddon teaches Fashion Design and Merchandising, and we

often coordinate literacy lessons, student writing workshops, and Fashion Merchandising vocabulary studies together. Since I have a healthy rapport with Mrs. Gliddon and her students, I could present a Critical Literacy unit of instruction to her students without hesitation. When I first announced the upcoming work to her classes, I felt welcomed but noticed that students seemed curious about the topic and forthcoming workload. I assured students that I would be supportive and provide assistance whenever needed. Finally, after students returned signed waivers, I scheduled the instruction with Mrs. Gliddon, and we began the learning unit. In discussing student commentary and student work, pseudonyms are used in place of students' names to protect their identities.

When I first began my instruction, I reminded students that reading skills are one of the necessities in life and job searching. Mrs. Gliddon's classes have varied reading levels, with eight students having an Individualized Education plan concerning reading comprehension. After progressing through these essential points, I moved the conversation to personal identities and cultural backgrounds. I did not want to rush into the explicit teaching of the critical literacy concept right away, so we worked through the warm-up materials, our "personal reading lenses," at that time.

The first lesson was establishing personal identity and transferring colors and symbolic representations to an artful project. After they completed a table of colors and symbols with a short explanation of each item, they used their colors and symbols to create their "lenses" on reading. Their work was impressive and expressive. Students shared pictures and colors in unique ways to express their cultures, backgrounds, and personalities. These were displayed on the hallway bulletin board so students could celebrate and reflect on their accomplishments. Each day, they look them over while they

await their teacher's arrival to class. Students enjoy using art to express themselves, and this activity was well-received by all. In addition, it served as an opening exercise to prepare for the next few weeks of critical literacy instruction.

The second lesson encompassed the key message: Critical Literacy is a stance, a mental posture, and an intellectual attitude. To provide clarity, I asked students to try and decode what that message means. Kelsey raised her hand and said, "I am not too sure, but is critical literacy the same thing as critical thinking? Like, thinking deeper about themes and stuff?"

I thanked Kelsey for her response and said, "Yes. Let's dig deeper, though. What is a stance?"

About five hands were raised, and I selected Alison. She said, "A stance is an opinion about something, right? Like when I take a stance against cruelty to animals."

"Exactly," I responded.

The conversations continued until I felt confident that it was time to share an explicit definition of Critical Literacy and discuss its function in their lives and education. On the front whiteboard screen, I showed a picture from the cover slide of my opening presentation. It contained the title "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors. From Critical Thinking to Critical Literacy." The pictures showed a tiger reflecting in a mirror and a building containing eight windows depicting a diverse collection of cultural background representations in each one. The discussion of the pictures led to a learning objective of knowing your own perspective while knowing there are always other perspectives and more than one version of these perspectives.

Next, I displayed a slide with the key message, a quote written by Paulo Friere:

Critical Literacy views readers as active participants in the reading process and invites them to move beyond passively accepting the text's message to question, examine, or dispute the power relations that exist between readers and authors. It focuses on issues of power and promotes reflection, transformation, and action.” (Freire, 1970)

Although I noticed the students looked slightly overwhelmed by this slide, I assured them that we would be working through this concept one step at a time. Then we read our first text, “Life Isn’t Fair. Deal with It,” an editorial published in Forbes Magazine in 2011. I began the read-aloud and then selected a student reader to continue as we progressed through the piece. After each paragraph, each student reader picked the next student who would read. I watched as students took notes in their margins, and there were times when I questioned them about a specific statement if I felt it was appropriate for our objective. For instance, when the author states, “We clearly have no choice about how we come into this world, we have little choice early in life, but as we grow older, choices abound,” students were asked to share their opinions about that statement. Most students stated that they agreed but that when we grow older, there aren't always so many choices. For example, Riley stated, “I agreed with the first part of the text when it said that we have no choice about how we come into this world. I also agreed when it said that we have little choice when we’re young. But I completely disagree with the second half. I believe that the experiences we go through in life define who we are as people. We go through rose bushes of situations and walks in the park. And when we have occurrences happen, it changes you as a person.” Other students also disagreed that “choices abound.”

I prompted students to look for specific words and play detective to try and figure out what the author might be trying to convey. For example, I asked the students, “Is he trying to sway anyone in any way that you can see? From a critical stance, what is the writer's view of the word, and what values does this text present?”

We continued reading, and one student, Bailey, became visibly frustrated, so I stopped to ask if there were any questions or comments about the reading at that time. Bailey’s hand went up immediately, and he pointed out a line from the lesson, “Mandates don’t create fairness, but people’s desire and determination can work around or overcome most life challenges.” Before we continued, I confirmed that all students knew the meaning of mandates and why the author had suddenly dropped in on this idea.

Bailey continued, “This author seems to think that governments should not be providing assistance to its people. I think that is also why the opening paragraph mentioned President Obama’s speech about everyone deserving a fair shake, and that 99% of people believe life is unfair, while 1% believe it’s not fair enough!”

Bailey felt proud of his realization, and I told him his detection was impressive. This was an exciting moment for me, the student, and the class. Other students were also engaged in this discussion and had their hands raised to contribute to the conversation.

At the lesson's closing, I ensured that all voices were heard and that the students knew how proud I was. Then, the closure of the activity was displayed on the screen as my closing slide stating: “The author believes that the concept of "fairness" is not a useful term and that it makes people feel entitled to good outcomes. Make an argument for the opposite—how would you convince someone that the concept of "fairness" is an important one?”

I watched as the students wrote with high energy and determination. They and I eventually gathered our notes and papers. My journal reflections concluded that the students were motivated to participate in topics such as the one from this reading activity. One student, Amanda, responded, “The concept of fairness is an important one because some people are naturally born into situations they cannot escape or overcome. Due to financial situations, some people cannot ever seek help to overcome these things or to ever make it out of these situations. Almost everything in life is unfair in some way to someone because of how they may perceive things. Every situation is unique to a person. It is important to treat everyone equally and to do our best to show this importance through fairness.” Another noteworthy response from a student named Janeah truly encapsulated our learning objective; she expressed:

“Many strive to reach goals that lead to equality and die trying to obtain it. If you’ve seen what’s happening in Iran these days with Mahsha Amini, you would understand how cruel the world is. There are many cases where people are brutally murdered for doing something the “wrong way.” Many were killed who were standing up for what’s right. Fairness is important because we need to be able to at least choose how to present ourselves. Anyone could have their own opinion, but that does not mean they should be rude about it. We should learn to understand others' viewpoints and reach a settlement where everyone is happy, a “fair” settlement.”

There was one response that stood out to me most and contained an extremely profound statement: “You have to put some fairness in yourself before you want to convince others to.” The full response can be found in the Appendix. I was glad to see

them increase their participation and engagement. As I read through their work, I was impressed with their awareness level and ability to share opinions eloquently. In fact, as I was gathering my plans to leave the classroom and head to my next class, I overheard two students talking about how they wished that English class was always like this one and that they felt like they “actually paid attention more than usual.” These findings suggest that interest in the subject matter leads to student engagement.

Discovering and Discussing Diversity Inspires Openness and Acceptance

The third week of instruction required learners to investigate topics that informed students about controversial topics and exposed them to different sides of some of these issues. Students read through a variety of current themes and were encouraged to take a stance on controversial topics. I knew there could be disagreements among the groups. Still, I reminded the classes periodically that we all have unique lenses that we would like honored and respected while, in turn, we celebrate and respect the lenses of those around us. This eliminated any need for further discussion about disrespectful comments, as there were none to speak of.

During the introduction to credible sources of content, we discussed controversial topics. I presented a slideshow containing the following questions: “What is the Climate Change Debate? What is the debate about having a cat declawed? What is the Anti-Vaccination Movement? What is the Gun Rights Debate? The students were informed that for this lesson they would be researching these or other topics that they preferred as long as I approved it. As I expected, students again embraced the activity as they rushed to get to work on their research. Some students worked in pairs, and some worked alone, as they were given the option. In my research journal, I noted that students were eager to

move to the research activity. The conversations about the topic began to increase, and I could see that students were enthusiastic in their language while they began. For instance, two students were contemplating the gun rights debate. They both held opposite viewpoints, but they were impressively respectful of their differences. There was mutual respect. Another pair of students worked to investigate the notion of declawing cats. One exclaimed, “My mom would love this class. She does this for a living.” the student went on to discuss her mother’s profession at the Jersey Shore Animal Shelter.

The research activity showed students that there are plenty of resources available on the internet but that not all of them are factual and reliable. We used an anchor chart containing the critical components of reliable sources (See Appendix B). Students then searched for sources and used a graphic organizer chart to gather detailed information, ultimately deciding whether the source was reliable or unreliable.

The students were eager to begin the activity and worked to locate sources about their chosen topics. Some students used the existing topics from our previous discussion. Others had ideas of their own that they were excited to search for. For example, a student, Daniel, wanted to find a reliable source that supported the notion that the Holy Bible was not anti-gay. He was eager to share his findings with the class and me, so I said yes when he asked if he could.

Daniel found two sources that were reliable and credible by the advised standards. He shared the titles of each article and explained that they are credible because they fit the guidelines of our anchor chart. Daniel stated, “Both of my articles contain a main idea that the Holy Bible is being misinterpreted by people who claim that it states that homosexuality is a sin.”

No one argued with Daniel, and the class was respectful. I asked Daniel if he wanted to share his opinion of the articles he formed from reading them. He stated, “I think that the bible is being used as a form of oppression rather than as a source of religion. That the Bible has been constantly rewritten and that it is taken out of context.”

This was an enlightening and proud moment for Daniel and all students in the class. Though we ended it there so others could share their findings, it was clear that Daniel was reading with a critical eye and a critical lens. Perhaps everything that he learned about critical literacy showed him how critical literacy played a large part in what Daniel found in his research. Daniel no longer took words at their “face value.” He questioned the author. In my journal, I reflected on how he was an astute example for his classmates. As I witnessed this occurring, I realized that Daniel’s actions and examples tie directly into this research.

Daniel’s strong response was shared by him with the class. He organized his research about the bible as follows in Table 1.

Table 1

Daniel's Work Sample

Article 1 Title:	“What Does The Bible Really Say About Homosexuality”
Author and Publisher/Website:	Myles Markham, Christian Educator Master of Arts of Practical Theology, Columbia Theological Seminary https://www.hrc.org/resources/what-does-the-bible-say-about-homosexuality Not Available
Is this a credible scientific article?	Yes, because the website contains references and its website address ends in .org
State the main idea.	Same-sex relationships are not a sin. Dictatorships misinterpreted the language from the bible and used it to their advantage. There are many interpretations of the Bible, and there is not only one single way to interpret its meanings.
List 2 pieces of evidence to support the main idea:	“In fact, what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount about good trees bearing good fruit and bad trees bearing bad fruit (Matthew 7:17-18) indicates experience should inform how we learn God’s truth.” “While some Christians say that the Bible presents a variety of hard teachings as well as promising suffering for followers of Jesus (Matthew 16:24), it never endorses oppression.”
After reading both articles, what is your opinion? Use evidence from the article(s) to support it.	My opinion is that religion is often used to harm people most of the time and oppress other groups, and in many aspects, is hypocritical, especially in this topic. My opinion is that the Bible has turned into a religious tool used to back up oppression as if it is a reliable, scientific source instead of being a religious source to teach the Christian faith. It has been constantly rewritten and taken out of context, and the original meanings have been lost to time.

I reported in my journal that following Daniel’s sharing of his findings:

There was a moment of strong silence and quiet reflection. As the class regrouped, many students were excited to share their discoveries, too. Students did not waste any time on sources that were not credible and were quick to move from source to source in search of the reliable kind. I was in awe of their maturity and focus. Although there were some laughs, and instances of silliness.

Ultimately, the lesson objective was taken seriously. I observed students to be respectful and responsible with their comments and sharing. -Teacher Reflection Journal, November 14, 2022

This example further supports the theme of Discovering and Discussing Diversity.

From the topic of evaluating internet sources, we moved on to a lesson about Fake News and its possible impacts on society. The content was centered on detecting fake news in images and posts on social media. I created a slide show with an opening slide explaining that fake news is a recent term for an old phenomenon: misinformation. In my research, I learned that people might publish misinformation for a variety of reasons, such as political gain, advertising revenue, commentary on politics or culture, or even as a joke or a prank. I also stated that fake news instances are designed to look like news, spread virally, and draw on people's strong emotions. My next slide listed some tips on how to detect fake news: 1) You can't verify its claim 2) It appeals heavily to emotion 3) It is often disseminated by a "bot" 4) It cannot be found anywhere else 5) It comes from a fake site.

Next, I shared an image that I created using a website called "Break Your Own News." This website was created for people to generate fake news stories. It contains a text box for users to type in their headlines and another text box for users to fill in a

scrolling “ticker” that would resemble closely what live news channels show. After completing the two text boxes, users can upload an image, and then the “breaking news” is created. Students were giggling and chattering about funny ideas they wanted to try. We created a silly example about a teacher who was caught stealing at a supermarket. I made sure to explain that this can be fun to do but also misleading to someone who might not know it is false.

After our lively discussion and exciting creations, I wanted to begin the learning assignment to address the objective of detecting fake news. On the screen, I displayed a slide containing a photo taken in London and posted on Twitter. The photo depicted a man lying face down on a busy street. There were five people hovering over him to help him up, and one woman casually walking past and talking on her mobile phone. The caption above the photo posted to Twitter reads: Muslim woman pays no mind to the terror attack, casually walks by a dying man while checking phone #PrayForLondon #Westminster #BanIslam. The username for the post reads “Texas Lone Star” and shows a photo of a white man wearing a cowboy hat.

I asked students to look over all of the details and create a list of anything that might be fake. I pressed them to look very closely at the photo and use their critical lens. As we discussed what Lone Star” might refer to, the class unanimously decided it was a “dude from Texas.” We continued to scrutinize and question every last detail, no matter how hidden or tiny. The list we created contained the following labels:

- Texas Lone Star was actually a Russian “bot” designed to depict Texas as racist
- Hashtags were emotional and falsely created for a currently trending incident
- The target groups were obvious-Muslim women, and #BanIslam

- The language was provoking hatred for target groups.

The closing slides and comments highlighted a key takeaway: *critical literacy can be transformative*. By using this skill, you can make informed decisions regarding issues such as power and control, and develop an ability to think morally and ethically. Students completed an exit ticket that asked two questions: 1) From the Twitter Post and photo, whose opinion was heard and whose was missing? 2) What is your opinion about using social media as a source of news or gathering important information?

A chart of 5 randomly selected exit ticket responses is provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Sample Exit Tickets

	Question 1 Whose point of view is heard? Whose viewpoint is missing?	Question 2 What is your opinion about using social media as a source of gathering information about news?
Sample 1	The (supposed) man, who is from Texas, was heard since he was the one who posted the tweet, while the women’s viewpoint was not heard because she didn’t get an interview or comment.	I think it’s not wise of us to get information from social media since it’s not always reliable or accurate.
Sample 2	The viewpoint of the Texas man is heard, but we’re missing the woman’s perspective.	“Don’t trust everything you see or hear” is a famous saying we should all take into account. I think we should take precautions when learning new things coming from all sources. Social media is one of the largest fake news finders.
Sample 3	The Russian bot posing as an American Man is the only point of view heard. The Muslim woman’s point of view was not.	My opinion about using social media is that it is not reliable, and you should not believe it unless you look further into it.
Sample 4	Only one POV is heard the person who took the photo. The Muslim woman’s POV is missing.	Most of it is going to be severely factually incorrect, and this is why you always need to check and make sure what you are reading is true by doing even a quick 5-second google search, instead of assuming its true and making assumptions.

In my teacher reflection journal, I noted that the majority of students responded that they do not trust social media for factual information. There was one response that stood out from the rest that was made by a student named Caprice. She felt so strongly against using social media for factual information that she raised her hand to share with the class, "I think people should have some common sense and a mind of their own and do their own research." I felt that there would have been a lot more conversation during class, but we needed to move to the next lesson and save the discussion for a later date.

As we were nearing the conclusion of the critical literacy unit instruction, Mrs. Gliddon and I decided to show a film to students titled "Akeelah and the Bee." We looked into different movies that had critical literacy themes and came across three fitting options-"Renaissance Man," "The Great Debaters," and "Akeelah and the Bee." My research on the topic informed my planning that films are part of society's discourse by giving us a world of words and images that can greatly envelop and affect us. (Hodges, 2010) After viewing all three films, I chose "Akeelah and the Bee," as I believed it would hold their attention, fit nicely with the unit, and the length of the film fit our block schedule time.

As students viewed the film, they were given a viewing guide containing five questions:

1. Compare your school to Akeela's school. Discuss the appearance of the campus and student behavior.
2. Why doesn't Akeela participate in the spelling bee? Would you feel the same if you were in her shoes?

3. Why do you think everyone in Akeela's neighborhood is willing to take the time to help her study? Why does she have 500 coaches?
4. What is the real reason Dr. Larabee didn't want to coach Akeelah any longer?
5. Read Dr. Larabee's Quote (provided in the guide) and summarize what it means to you.

Mrs. Gliddon and I viewed the film alongside the students. I observed students to be engaged and tuned in to the messages they were learning from the movie. Hodge's research (2010) expresses that films contribute to overall literacy and can often provide insights into the public's view of teaching and how students may view their schooling.

Student responses suggested that they were able to notice mirrors and windows concerning education, culture, and society. I believe that this film reinforced to students the topics we learned about at the start of the unit. They respectfully expressed opinions and shared personal experiences about their upbringing and school experiences.

Noticeable Improvement, Overall, in Work Habits and Classroom Conduct

In my teacher reflection journal, I noticed the recurring theme of positivity within the classroom environment. I found that the critical literacy objectives from this unit proved to be successful with this group. Interest was high, and students saw the work through to completion. The lessons we worked through included close reading strategies, analysis of Internet content, research credibility, and the fake news controversy. The learning groups worked together and supported each other.

The results of this study suggest that when vocational school students experience reading lessons rooted in critical literacy frameworks that support the following themes: higher student interest and engagement with a willingness to participate in class

discussions, discussing diversity in a way that supports and inspires acceptance, and an overall improvement in work habits and classroom conduct. My observations concluded a notable increase in

- student participation in class discussions
- punctual completion and submittal of work
- quality of student work and attention to detail
- maturity of written responses and attention to detail
- student desire to read assignments, research topics of interest
- willingness to work diligently, independently or in a small group
- overall attention to classroom routines and daily objectives

During the study, I observed an increase in students' overall work and motivation. There were very few absences, and students tended to submit their assignments in a timely fashion, almost craving the opportunity to show their work and see their feedback and grades. There was very little, if any, need to ask students to turn in missing or late work; this is because students took pride in their learning. Their written responses were thorough and respectfully opinionated. Above all, the series of instructional lessons and activities revealed that students wanted to learn, complete, and share their thoughts. The energy and enthusiasm put forth by the classes were strong and healthy. Furthermore, the classroom atmosphere seemed highly improved to such a degree that overall student focus and learning were improved and carried over to the vocational trade area, Fashion Design and Merchandising, lessons, and learning objectives; the classroom climate was enhanced, and students showed increased productivity.

Survey of Students - Post Critical Literacy Instruction

To further assess my research outcomes, at the conclusion of my unit of critical literacy instruction, I wanted to ask students to provide their honest opinions about the work we completed. A short survey was delivered to students through a Google Form. The survey contained five questions plus one optional question shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Concluding Survey

	Survey Questions
Question 1	What did you like about the critical lenses/critical literacy activities?
Question 2	Was there anything you disliked about the critical lenses/critical literacy activities?
Question 3	Critical Literacy means learning to decode or detect any embedded hidden meanings, such as discrimination or bias, within all types of texts. Also, critical literacy involves the reader being able to examine these messages and questions them. Do you recall learning about Critical Literacy prior to this school year? <i>(Select Maybe if you are not sure.)</i>
Question 4	The heart of Critical Literacy is looking closely at texts of ALL kinds. What is your conclusion about critical literacy? (For example: is it important, unimportant? Why?)
Question 5	Do you feel prepared to be able to closely read a text and determine its author's purpose?
Question 6 (Optional)	Optional: What would help to make your school-based reading activities more relevant to you? (This can refer to your sending high school, OCVTS, or both schools.)

Question One: *What did you like about the critical lenses/critical literacy activities?* Student responses suggest that students received the instruction in a positive light and that they felt it was beneficial to their learning. For instance, one student responded, “I liked how it related to topics that not a lot of people talk about.” Another students wrote, “I liked the discussion we had for each of the activities, and how it made our brains work.” These responses suggest that students were engaged and that they had an increased willingness to participate in discussion.

Question Two: *Was there anything you disliked about the critical lenses/critical literacy activities?* Overall, students responded with more of the same types of attitude toward learning about critical literacy. For example, one student responded that, “There was not anything I disliked because I found the activities interesting.” Another student responded, “I can’t really say that I disliked any of the topics since I learned something new from each of the activities.” The theme of student engagement is again resonated through student responses to this question.

For Question Three, I asked students to read a short definition of critical literacy, and then respond Yes, No, or Maybe to an accompanying question: *Critical Literacy means learning to decode or detect any embedded hidden meanings, such as discrimination or bias, within all types of texts. Also, critical literacy involves the reader being able to examine these messages and questions them. Do you recall learning about Critical Literacy prior to this school year? (Select Maybe if you are not sure.)* Of 34 responses collected, 53% responded “Maybe/Not Sure,” 32% responded “Yes,” and 15% responded “No.” These results suggest that 32% of students have experienced critical

literacy instruction. However, the majority (68%) are not sure about it or they have not learned to ready with a critical eye.

Question 4 first states that, *The Heart of Critical Literacy is looking closely at texts of ALL kinds*. Then the question asks, *What is your conclusion about critical literacy? (For example: is it important, unimportant? Why?)* Student responses suggest that they saw the value in this work. For instance, one student response stated, “It’s important because we need to be aware of the things that are happening that we normally wouldn’t pay attention to.” Another responder wrote, “I feel that critical literacy is important because there is bias within texts. Also, when you are doing research, you cannot use sources with conjecture. You have to cite facts.” This response specifically suggests that the student gained a critical eye for reading.

Question 5 asked students, *Do you feel prepared to be able to closely read a text and determine its author’s purpose?* Responses for this question suggest that students mostly feel prepared. Out of 38 responses, 45% of students said they *Mostly* felt prepared, while 16% said they *Definitely* felt prepared. 37% of students said they *Sometimes* feel prepared, and one student (3%) said *No*. These findings suggest that the group is leaning toward the feeling that they can read closely and understand the author’s purpose for writing. The findings also suggest evidence that supports the theme of students having a noticeable improvement in their overall work habits since this skill connects to all learning disciplines.

Question 6 was optional. Students were asked: *What would help to make your school-based reading activities more relevant to you? (This can refer to your sending high school, OCVTS, or both schools.)* The data collected from this question suggest that

students prefer to have an opportunity to choose topics to read about. One student in particular responded, “To make school-based reading relevant to me, we can learn about what it means to be anti-racist.” This specifically suggests that student awareness in topics of racism was piqued and that the student wishes for more diversity in school-related reading. Sixteen responses to this question were collected, and the majority were focused on reading being stressful and that they are time-consuming.

The survey responses further reflect on each of the themes presented. Themes of increased engagement in learning, discussing diversity to inspire openness and acceptance, and the overall improvement in student work habits and classroom conduct are evident in these findings. Additionally, the survey results suggest that students found the work to be meaningful and useful to their lives and education. I gathered this data to further examine the effects of critical literacy instruction and determine if students could express their skills learned from the experience. In summary, the results from the survey strongly support my three recurring themes from this study.

Conclusion

My research suggests that critical literacy frameworks support student learning in various ways, as explained in this chapter; also, it reveals that critical literacy has a place within vocational and technical education classrooms. The critical literacy frameworks presented in this thesis support all learners and create a space where the learning *includes* the learner.

Chapter 5

Summary, Limitations, and Implications

Summary of Findings

In this research process, I found that students responded to the critical literacy frameworks that were presented to them. The purpose was to illustrate and examine how Critical Literacy frameworks can work in Career and Technical Education Settings and if it is successful. Applied English in vocational schools provides many possibilities for presenting critical literacy instruction. The goal was to establish a starting point and set a pattern of trial lessons to see how critical literacy can find its place within CTE. In addition, I wanted to share findings with peers when developing an updated curriculum and planning that serves students with the 21st Century CTE skills required in today's workforce.

After working with students using critical literacy frameworks, the data suggest that students in the CTE environment showed great engagement regarding the Critical Literacy objective unit. The classroom environment and established routines helped support this research study's success. Introducing the concept proved beneficial to students, and many took every initiative to participate whenever they were given a choice. This research supports the statement that providing students with opportunities to reflect on their worldview supports their learning about themselves and others. Critical literacy instruction helped the students in my study to examine what they are reading and viewing and understand that they can consider their perspectives of the text while considering the perspectives of others. This resulted in students practicing openness and

acceptance, especially during controversial topics. When their opinions were challenged, students behave mindfully and respectfully.

As the series of Critical Literacy lessons progressed, the conversations grew in length and participation. Each week, students became more comfortable and familiar with the objectives and expectations for learning. They took responsibility for their work, and their perspectives evolved and expanded with each new task. The data shows that many students who are usually reluctant to contribute to class conversation found their voice and were motivated to have their voices heard. I also noticed that students turned in their assignments early and were excited to receive feedback on their submitted work. These results showed that students focused and contributed to each lesson, whether independently or cooperatively. Overall, the findings suggest that students worked with positive attitudes, particularly findings from the concluding student survey.

The most notable finding is that students who were typically unmotivated showed interest and responsiveness. Each student demonstrated that they understood our learning objectives. Data suggest that the openness and sense of community established from the beginning of the unit led to mutual respect for one another. This may be due to the transparency set-forth early on in the unit. Students maintained respect for one another and only wanted to make new discoveries. They worked with maturity and professionalism when they were given a choice in their assignments and voice for their stances and positions. Critical Literacy frameworks “very deliberately open up a universe of possibilities, of possible critical readings, critical reading positions, and practices.” (Luke, 2004, p. 17).

Limitations of the Study

Two significant limitations of this study could be addressed in future research. First, this study took place in only one vocational school trade class environment. Further investigations are needed to expand research about the effects of Critical Literacy instruction within trade classroom settings. There are more than thirty unique trade programs that contain students who come from all over the community. Research can expand to include studies within all trade learning programs. Learning objectives may need to be adjusted to fit within these environments; however, the original learning model could be delivered so that students receive the core standards of Critical Literacy in a way that connects to their subject matter. The second limitation was the schedule of the shared-time vocational school. Students have time for Applied English built into their daily “shop” grades. This affected the study, leaving only a short period for critical literacy instruction.

Implications for Teachers and Educators

Future research should involve implementing the types of Critical Literacy teaching frameworks successfully utilized in this study. For instance, Child Care Professions coursework includes critical literacy in choosing literature used in child care settings. At the same time, Culinary Arts students could benefit from experiencing cultural research about food and additional instruction about detecting fact from fiction in reading various forms of text, especially regarding workplace readiness and entrepreneurship. Findings and conclusions can be used to guide CTE administration and educators in developing and improving literacy components focused on critical literacy standards in the 21st Century vocational school schools.

One area that could be further investigated is how critical literacy can support vocational learners over a much longer period. For instance, what are the effects on overall reading abilities when implementing long-term, routine, and consistent instruction using critical literacy frameworks in the CTE setting? Teacher researchers who plan to conduct a similar study might benefit from designing a structured study plan using critical literacy frameworks spanning an entire semester or school year. This would allow for a closer and more in-depth look at the types of literature that work best in this setting.

Furthermore, researching how reading instruction in the CTE setting can impact overall reading ability can better inform CTE educators about how they deliver instruction and how they select the best materials to support their students. Since prior research on critical literacy and how it can be implemented in career and technical education settings is lacking, this would allow for a deeper look at how critical literacy can support and benefit CTE learners.

In summary, using critical literacy frameworks within the CTE setting can help students develop a critical lens by strengthening their ability to examine what they read more closely to detect bias and hidden meanings. Vocational schools are designed to support learners in their career paths, and developing a critical lens might further help their confidence in learning and career readiness. This study suggests that by incorporating critical literacy frameworks, students are learning to question what they read, examine texts for hidden biases, and gain a deeper understanding of the language used. Finally, by introducing opportunities for students to find deeper meanings in reading, vocational instructors can support student learning by teaching them to read everything with a conscious *critical* eye.

Conclusion

Incorporating Critical Literacy frameworks will expand CTE student engagement with texts and promote active thinking and learning. There are endless possibilities for using Critical Literacy frameworks in vocational-technical content areas. Reading and writing instruction changes when these frameworks are used, and teachers can add to their students' literacy growth by incorporating foundational critical literacy instruction into their literacy teaching routines. Critical literacy instruction uses a reading and writing curriculum that is relevant and, therefore, interesting to students' lives. Thus, the research outcomes suggest that critical literacy instruction can result in better-informed students and have lifelong effects on students studying vocational trades in a career and technical education setting.

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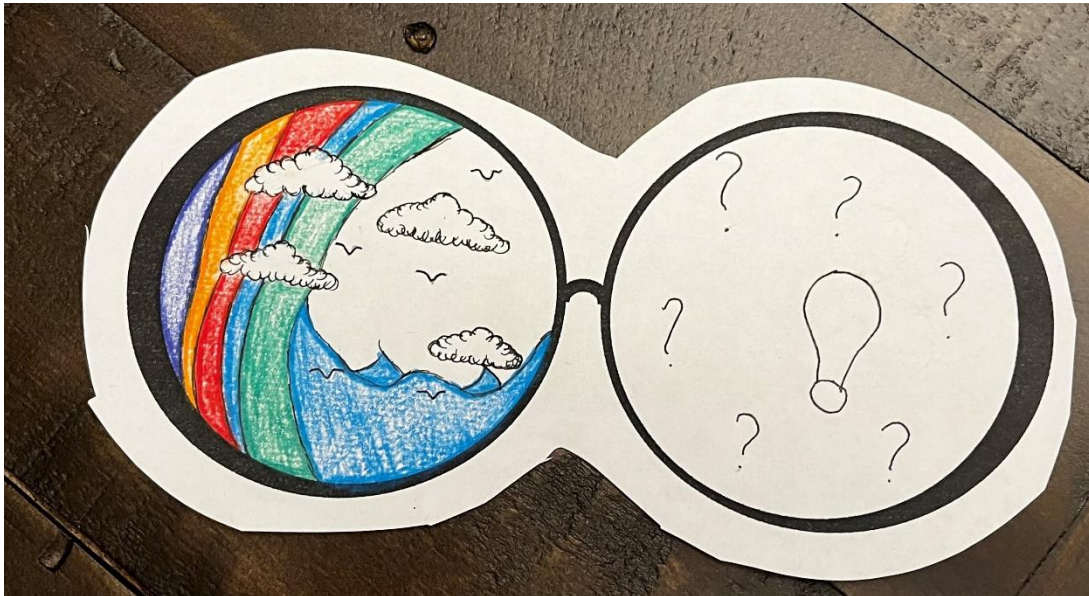
Appendix A

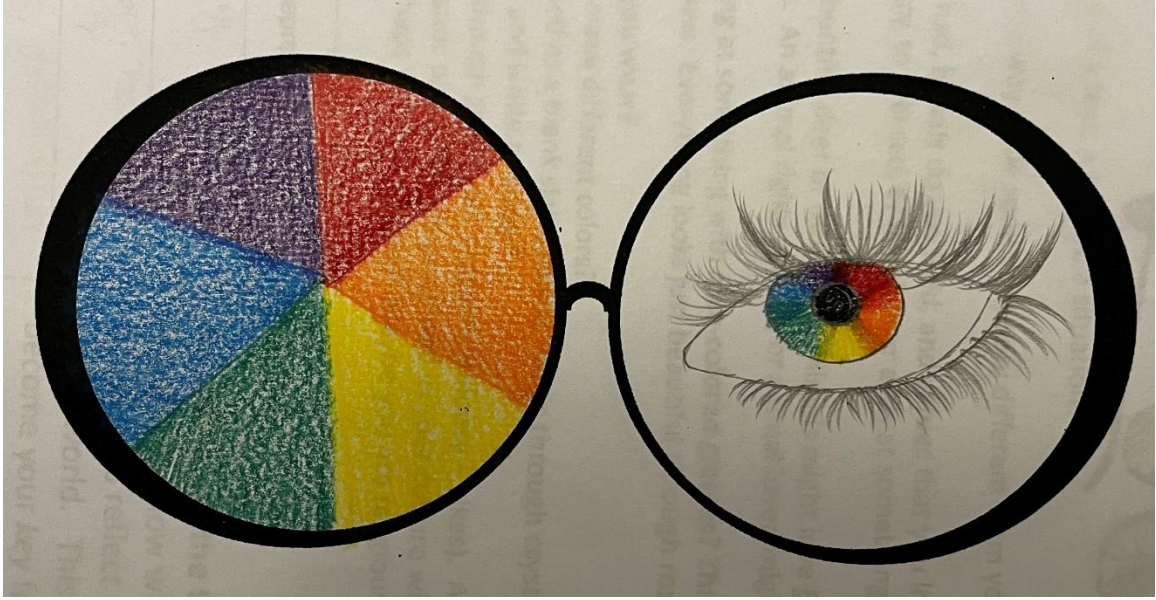
Sample Student Work - Lenses


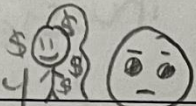

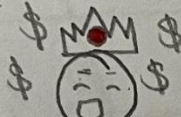

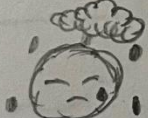





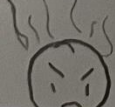
Color or Symbol	Represents...
	My love for everyone in the world
	My love of singing, music
	My Filipino and Chinese culture
	My closed of sadness from the world
	Love for instruments
	Love for family

A. Complete the table to the left to show what colors or symbols reflect your view of the world. This will become your key for the graphic in the next activity.

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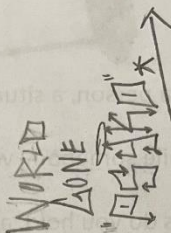




Color or Symbol	Represents...
green 	mems envy 
purple 	rapty 
blue 	Sad 
black 	evil 
pink 	love 
red 	anger 



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WORLD
GONE
PSYKO

1. It shapes my Pov because with the way I carry myself and always making sure I am respectful.



2. By just

-What are you? being polite,

- ↳ Son
- ↳ Fashion Designer
- ↳ Caring + Helpful
- ↳ Like to talk ab. music + fashion
- ↳ Making sure people are okay

with bring polite and having manners can go a long way.

3. It is important because it can change the people around you and have a negative effect.

4. It means to own up or take charge for what you said.

*Why is it imp. to see from another's Pov

↳ You never know what another person is going through and it is better to ask question than assume

Appendix B

Anchor Chart for Internet Research

Source Evaluation Cheat Sheet

Examples of sources that are often the most credible:

- Official government websites
- Institutional sites that represent universities, regulatory agencies, governing bodies, and respected organizations with specific expertise (e.g., the Mayo Clinic)
- Peer-reviewed journals
- Reputable news sources
- Websites ending in .edu, .gov, .org

Examples of sources that are often considered less credible:

- Blogs
- Web forums
- Individual or business websites
- Materials published by an entity that may have an ulterior motive
- Websites ending in .com, .net, .biz

<i>Factors to consider</i>	<i>Least reliable</i>	<i>Possibly reliable</i>	<i>Most reliable</i>
Type of source	Unfamiliar website	Published material	Official websites, institutional sites, academic journals
Author's background	Uncredited	Educated on topic	Expert in the field
Date published	None	Outdated	Recently revised
Depth of review	Controversial reviews	Good public response; general approval	Peer-reviewed by reliable sources
Sources cited	None	Credible sources	Citations referencing other well-cited works
Objectivity	Clearly biased	Sponsored source	Balanced, neutral

Appendix C

Concluding Survey – Sample Questions and Answers

Question One:

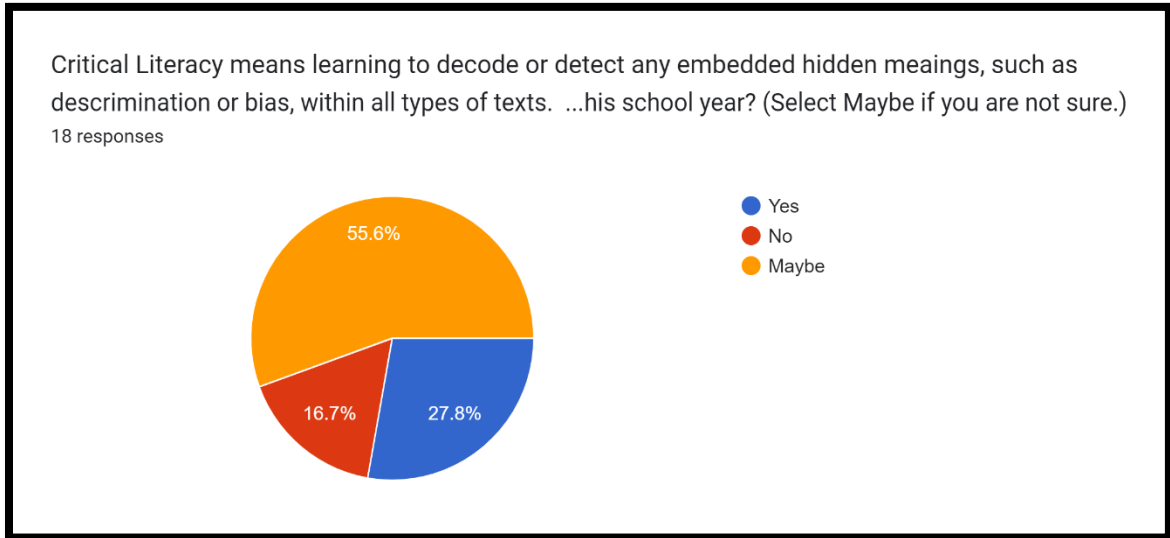
	Was there anything you liked about the critical lenses/critical literacy activities we have completed? Please explain.
Sample 1	I enjoyed that we were able to interact and be creative with our own responses and share our opinion.
Sample 2	I liked the one about the social media one on how some information are fake or how people can change the perspective of a photo.
Sample 3	i liked the discussions we had for each of the activities, and how it made our brains work
Sample 4	I liked how it related to topics that not a lot of people talk about.
Sample 5	I thought that the Social Media Lesson was interesting because it taught us that there could be other meanings behind posts that are not shown.
Sample 6	Yes, when we went over critical reading and getting information from social media
Sample 7	I liked that we explored about how other people feel about certain topics. With this, we can get a better understanding of different opinions and ideas to make the world better.
Sample 8	I really enjoyed the first activity that we did. Creating our own lenses, it gave us free range with our creativity.
Sample 9	I liked how we got to explain are opinion without getting criticized and everyone was able to openly share how they felt
Sample 10	I enjoyed the lesson on how to we can detect fake news or not reliable websites. I had a journalism class last year so it was nice to learn more about this topic.
Sample 11	I did like learning about reliable sources so I could properly distinguish which are true.
Sample 12	I liked that we had the right to have an opinion on something without people saying something about it

Question 2

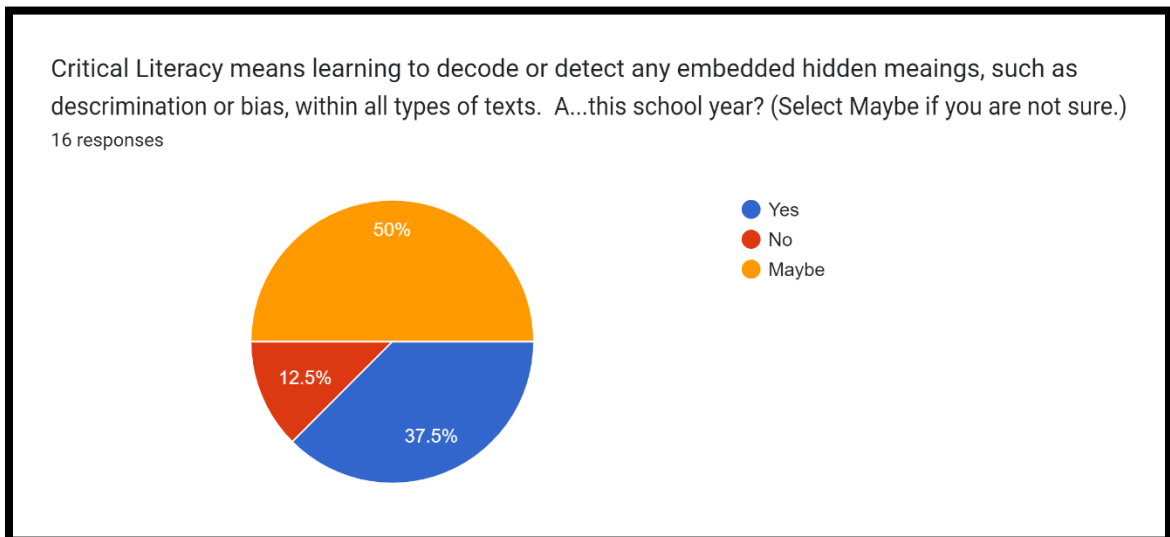
	Was there anything that you disliked about ANY of the critical lenses/critical literacy activities? Please explain.
Sample 1	Just reading sometimes it makes me sleepy...
Sample 2	No, I did not dislike anything about any of the critical lenses/ critical literacy , I liked how they were straight forward
Sample 3	There was not anything I disliked because I found the activities interesting.
Sample 4	some topics were a little to contervsale (controversial)
Sample 5	There wasn't anything I disliked about the lessons.
Sample 6	There wasn't really anything I disliked.
Sample 7	I only dislike that it can be boring at times. Reading is not my favorite but it's important to improve how to pick up hidden meaning and learn words. It helps in writing as well.
Sample 8	There wasn't anything I really disliked about the activities. All of it was good and nothing was conflicting in thoughts.
Sample 9	No There was nothing I disliked about the activities.
Sample 10	No, I can't think of something I did not enjoy.
Sample 11	I can't really say I disliked any of the topics since I learned something knew from each activities.
Sample 12	I'm not sure I believe it was very eye opening.
Sample 13	I don't think I disliked something, I liked them all

Question 3:

Group One:



Group Two:

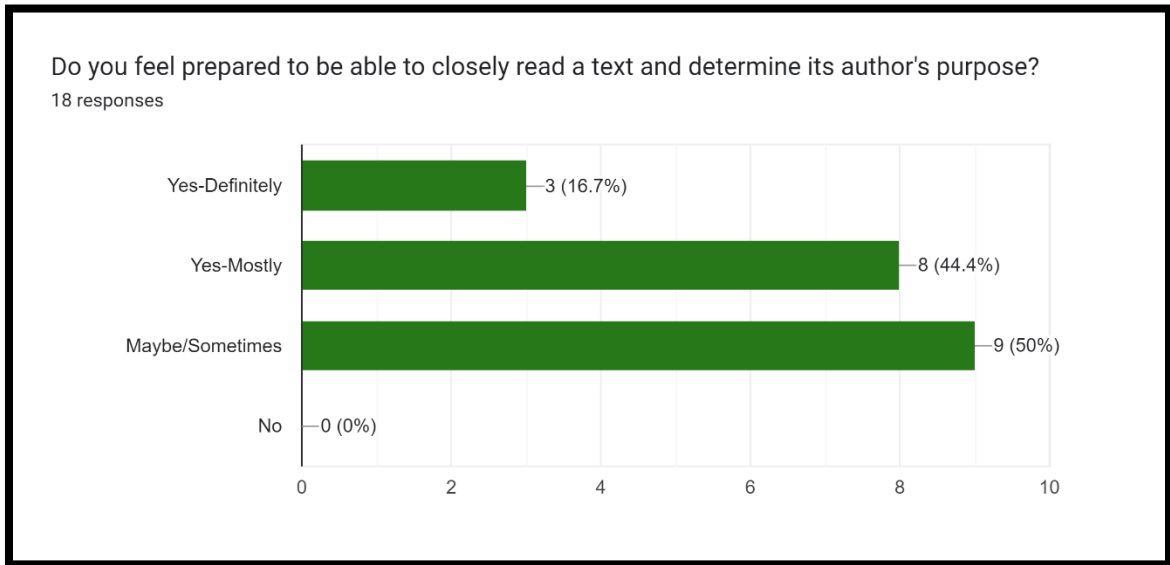


Question 4:

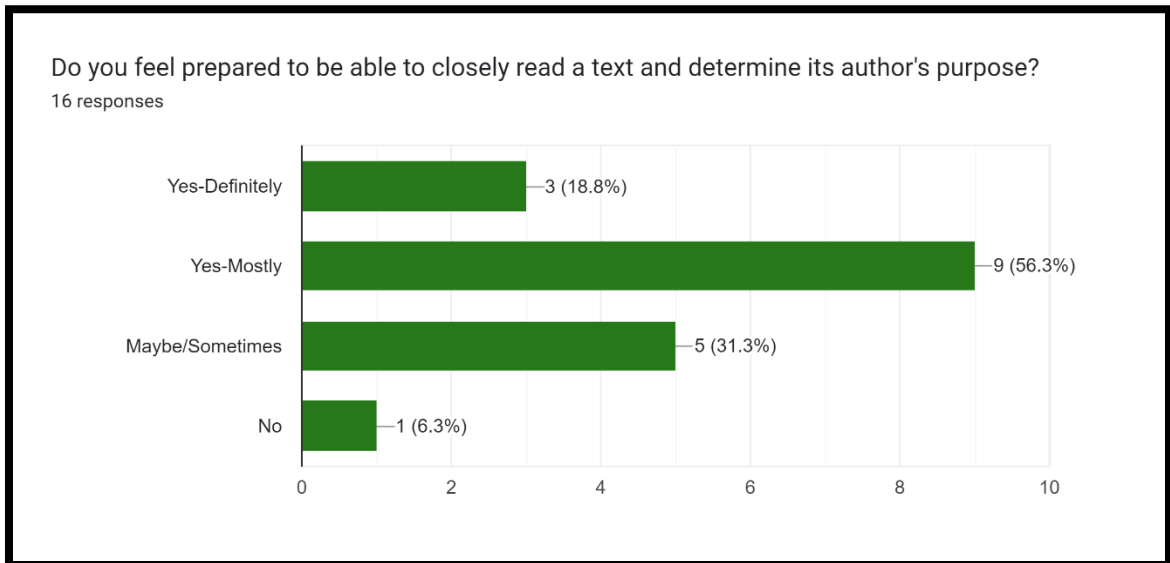
	The heart of Critical Literacy is looking closely at texts of ALL kinds. What is your conclusion about critical literacy? (For example: is it important, unimportant? Why?)
Sample 1	It's important, because we need to be aware of the things that are happening that we normally wouldn't pay attention to.
Sample 2	It is important because it teaches you about stuff you think you do not need to know
Sample 3	I think it's important because I think it's good to know more about that.
Sample 4	I think it's important since you can detect hidden meanings.
Sample 5	It's important to learn and detect certain things, makes your mind think, and you use your eyes.
Sample 6	Critical Literacy is important, because it makes you think, and read into words or topics more.
Sample 7	I feel that critical literacy is important because there is bias within texts. When you are doing research, you cannot use sources with conjecture. You have to cite facts.
Sample 8	It is important because it helps you know when something is fake or real. It's better to be aware of what is going on social media.
Sample 9	It's important because we have to figure out what is facts and what is opinion based
Sample 10	Critical Literacy is important because it helps you analyze things and helps you fully understand the impact of full story of that piece.
Sample 11	It is very important because critical literacy helps you determine what text <i>*really*</i> means and what it is <i>*really*</i> saying, if you don't look at text closely there can then be room for misinterpretation.
Sample 12	Critical literacy to me is important to look at in all texts. To see this different viewpoint, shows how others can be or how they feel. If everyone considers each other's feelings, the world can help each other improve.

Survey Question Five:

Group One:



Group Two:



Question Six (Optional)

	<p>Optional Question: What would help to make your school-based reading activities more relevant to you? (This can refer to your sending high school, OCVTS, or both schools.)</p>
Sample 1	for my homeschool i would say to make the stories more interest and that teachers actually read the book to the whole class instead of them sitting down and doing what they have to do sometimes... like today i have a test and i don't even know what the 3 chapters we have been reading:./
Sample 2	Probably just giving the students more of a choice in what they read. Often times we don't have the opportunity to pick what we want to read, but rather told what we can read.
Sample 3	Both schools maybe a shorter lesson because, longer lessons make me bored and I don't really pay attention as much if it's a short brief lesson.
Sample 4	More about mental health and how students are feeling instead pushing the agenda that only grades matter and running yourself into the ground is wanted and encouraged.
Sample 5	Maybe one of the topics in a reading activity would be talking about hard work and how sometimes people that work too hard can get burnt out and stressed.
Sample 6	The school actually letting us choose what we can read.
Sample 7	taking notes on what I'm reading
Sample 8	Touching real like sinarious (scenarios)
Sample 9	To make school-based reading relevant to me, we can learn about what it means to be anti-racist.
Sample 10	make it more things that are happing in today's day and time
Sample 11	make it more things that are happing in today's day and time
Sample 12	Current topics and problems going on in the world, maybe teen related articles