# Developing critical literacies in US adult education degree programs: What is advertised on university websites?

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*The purpose of this paper is to report the findings of an analysis of course titles and descriptions which are part of core adult education university curricula in the United States. The focus of the analysis was on understanding how well these adult education programs, and their curricula, address the need for developing critical literacy and critical literacies for advancing diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI), and social justice. Further, we discuss strategies for promoting critical literacies and DEI in adult education degree programs. The research process included a content analysis of course/class titles and descriptions pertaining to courses/classes offered in adult education programs in almost 50 US higher education institutions, most of which were at the graduate level. The findings revealed that references to the development of critical literacies with a focus on DEI were notably limited among adult education program offerings at identified institutions. Building on these findings, we propose an increased effort in integrating critical literacies (e.g., intercultural literacy, information*

*literacy, racial literacy, etc.) and DEI-related topics that align with critical literacy goals into adult education curricula, which would contribute to adult education students' career success by preparing them to navigate contemporary global, multicultural, and multilingual contexts. By developing critical literacy and related critical literacies, students would engage in critical thinking in a way that supports DEI and promotes social justice within organisations and communities globally.*

**Keywords***: critical literacy, critical literacies, adult education graduate programs, adult education curricula, United States, critical literacies advancement model (CLAM)*

## Introduction

Promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and the development of critical literacy has been on the agenda of higher education institutions for decades. Calls for promoting critical literacy and advancing DEI have pointed to reasons such as the need for critical thinking in students, increasing diversity in the student population and the drive to internationalise higher education (Özturgut, 2017), addressing the effects of globalisation and the need for a more responsive and fair education system (Lund, 1998), preparing students for an increasingly diverse society (Turner et al., 2008), and advancing social justice and global citizenship (de Oliveira Andreotti, 2024), among others.

Many higher education institutions have expressed commitment to supporting DEI, expanding these efforts to include belonging (DEIB) and accessibility (DEIA) (Friedman & Vlady, 2024). In the United States, some of this commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging/accessibility (DEIB/A) came as part of institutional change efforts in response to national racial and social injustice pressures, especially during the spring and summer of 2020 (Wesley et al., 2021). Further, the global COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted significant systemic racial inequities within health and education (see Garcia, 2022; Gravlee, 2020; Mitchell & Easton-Brooks, 2022) centring the discussion even more squarely in the nation's psyche, including higher education. However, within a central activity of these academic institutions— teaching—DEIB/A efforts still seem to be limited.

In fact, including DEI concepts in teaching can be perceived as problematic because of, among other things, polarised political climates. This is significant because "decisions about what should be taught are heavily influenced by socio-political needs and aspirations [and] ... political action has become a well-known force in education systems throughout the world" (Joseph, 2015, p. 14). This means that while higher education institutions across the United States have dealt with challenges related to DEI, these challenges have become even more apparent within the prevailing socio-political culture (Bushard, 2024; Gretzinger et al., 2024) and continue to be exacerbated even further by racial identity-politics and culture wars.

Intentionally promoting DEI through the curriculum has become even more challenging because of an unfortunate paradoxical predicament. There are several terms, including DEI, that should be seen as positive, but which have become contentious, controversial, and divisive (Friedman & Vlady, 2024). The result has been an attack on the integration of DEI topics in education and a wave of legislation which has already affected higher education in impactful ways, many of which are yet to be seen and some which may be difficult to articulate (Marijolovic, 2023). These resulting effects include changes to hiring procedures and jobs, training, diversity statements, and other DEI-related initiatives (Gretzinger et al., 2024), which have now effectively put some higher education institutions into the crosshairs of accreditation (Noone & Murray, 2024). This complicated situation makes it even more challenging to encourage or inculcate DEI-related concepts into higher education curricula.

Indeed, higher education faces critique that its curricula do not consistently but should always meet the needs of the national economy or society overall even in terms of future challenges or aspirations (Primrose & Alexander, 2013). Yet, to effectively meet the needs of learners in the 21st century, higher education institutions need to promote curricula tailored toward developing a wide range of DEI skills and, relatedly, critical literacy. Critical literacy, as conceptualised by scholars such as Paolo Freire (1972) and Allan Luke (2012) emphasises the ability to actively analyse, critique, and question power structures, ideologies, and social practices embedded in texts and media. Freire is credited with founding critical literacy theory in response to an agenda of decolonisation of education, and while there are many antecedents

to his approach (Luke, 2012), the core idea is that critical literacy focuses on ideology critique in various kinds of media and texts (Shor & Freire, 1987). Along with expanding definitions of literacy to include engagement with a range of texts and media (Coiro et al., 2008), there is an essential need for specific skills to think critically about issues of power within geopolitical and socio-economic contexts, especially as it relates to DEI matters.

Critical literacy is closely tied to DEI because it emphasises the ability to question and challenge dominant narratives and social injustices (Freire, 1972; Luke, 2012). By encouraging individuals to analyse whose voices are represented or marginalised, critical literacy fosters a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives. It also promotes equitable learning environments by empowering individuals to critically engage with content presented to them and challenges societal inequities. Most notably, scholars have examined the connection between critical literacy and DEI by examining how critical literacy can addresses issues of race and power by encouraging learners to critically examine how race, privilege, and oppression are constructed and reinforced in texts, media, and everyday discourse (hooks, 1994; Wills, 2023). In this way, critical literacy supports DEI by advocating for transformative practices that promote social justice and inclusivity (Comber, 2015). The development of critical literacy and DEI skills is especially valuable within adult education (AE) programs, whose focus is, among others, on helping individuals develop the knowledge and skills needed to thrive in a globalised, multicultural, multilingual world (see, for example, Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2008; Hanemann & Scarpino, 2016; Sim & Bierema, 2023; Robinson et al., 2021, who discuss the importance and relevance of developing these skills within adult education contexts) especially in relation to understanding societal power systems and structures. With this in mind, we argue that the development of critical literacy skills and exposure to related topics would provide a foundation for adult learners to act as DEI and social justice advocates and allies within organisations and communities. As such, we ask: *What is advertised on university websites in terms of courses focused on developing critical literacy and advancing DEI and social justice?* We utilise the terms 'course' and 'class' synonymously to refer to an individual subject/unit of study which would be part of the overall curriculum within a program of study, recognising this terminology

is more characteristic of a North American higher education context. Further, while we acknowledge the significance of discussing concepts like DEIB and DEIA, our focus remains on DEI as a prominent concept in literature and practice, to focus on issues of race, identity and inclusion.

## Adult and higher education context

The dialogue and efforts about and around issues of educational equity, inclusive curricula, and promoting social justice have been part of a longtime clarion call for adult and higher education to rethink policies and procedures that are exclusionary, and which do not support diversity, equity, inclusivity, and belonging. Even so, in the United States, the pendulum towards a collective awareness about social injustice, especially racial inequity, swung vigorously in 2020 with the many publicised traumatic events (including numerous killings of unarmed Black men) and protests (such as the Black Lives Matter movement) that spurred many organisations, including higher education, to issue statements of commitment and make public efforts in support of DEI (Benz et al., 2023). More foundationally, however, these philosophical views are not new or "trendy" in adult education. In fact, the basic philosophical tenet of promoting critical thinking in adult learners for them to become autonomous, critical, and socially responsible thinkers is at the core of the field of adult education (Garrison, 1991; Tisdell & Taylor, 2000). Additionally, as Alfred et al. (2021) highlighted, adult education's role is to serve as a strategic partner for human rights and vulnerable populations and these are key pillars of DEI work. The DEI-ethos and critical literacy are inherent in the philosophical tenets of adult education.

Historically, critical literacy within adult education has emphasised the empowerment of learners to analyse, critique, and transform societal structures through reading and writing. Rooted in Paulo Freire's (1972) pedagogy, it encourages learners to question power dynamics, challenge injustices, and engage in social action. Critical literacy goes beyond functional literacy by fostering critical consciousness, enabling adults to understand and act upon the socio-political contexts influencing their lives. According to Brookfield (1997), critical thinking in adult education involves recognising and deconstructing dominant ideologies while promoting democratic dialogue and participation. This approach

also aligns with Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning theory, which advocates for reflection and perspective transformation as key components of adult learning.

By cultivating critical literacy, adult educators aim to develop informed, reflective, and active citizens capable of contributing to social change (Degener, 2001; Robinson et al., 2021). Critical literacy is directly relevant and significant in the field of adult education since critical literacy disrupts and informs social construction of the self (Degener, 2001; White & Cooper, 2015) and adult education is concerned with our ongoing development. Further, critical literacy helps challenge the status quo to discover additional paths for self-development and serves as a mechanism for inequity (Degener, 2001; White & Cooper, 2015). In this vein, implementing initiatives such as developing inclusive curricula in adult education programs, and especially ones that focus on developing critical literacies and understanding DEI concepts, can help promote the required knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to advance social justice and global citizenship (de Oliveira Andreotti, 2024; Stevens & Campbell, 2006)—one of the targets of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Namely, the SDG 4, calls for ensuring inclusive and quality education for all and promoting lifelong learning (United Nations, 2015). According to the United Nations, "Global citizenship is the umbrella term for social, political, environmental, and economic actions of globally minded individuals and communities on a worldwide scale," and "promoting global citizenship in sustainable development will allow individuals to embrace their social responsibility to act for the benefit of all societies, not just their own" (https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/global-citizenship).

Adult learning theories and principles provide effective frameworks for designing instruction that can intentionally help to develop critical literacy and, as such, intentionally address inequities and systematic societal issues that marginalise and perpetuate social injustice. Since adult education is a tool to help mobilise social change, innovative curriculum development and targeted instructional design can be used to facilitate transformation. This transformation is prioritised especially when centred on the sociocultural factors that influence curricula (Robinson & Stojanovic, 2021) but can be central in promoting social change through critical thinking and social consciousness to advance equity and inclusion (Knowles et al., 2025). In this regard,

we propose that critical literacy, which is foundational to social and cultural analysis, empowerment, and social action (Luke, 2012), is also foundational to the holistic development of other types of non-traditional literacy skills (critical literacies) that are needed in the 21st century for the development of positive social change and global citizenship, as described in the Critical Literacies Advancement Model (Robinson, 2021). The model emphasises four key pillars: critical theory and critical literacy, practical literacy skills (critical literacies), informed behaviours and actions, and positive social change. Given the focus on global citizenship and positive social change, in this regard, we consider DEI as an integral element of these critical literacies.

## Method

Considering the goal of this study to analyse what is advertised on US university websites in terms of courses focused on developing critical literacy and critical literacies and advancing DEI and social justice, content analysis was the appropriate methodological approach. As described by Neuendorf and Kumar (2015), content analysis is a type of textual analysis as it refers to "the systematic study of written text or transcribed speech" (p. 1). The focus of content analysis as a research methodology is on making inferences from textual data, which would then help the researcher answer the research questions (Krippendorff, 2004).

In identifying adult education programs at US higher education institutions, we took a staged approach. We started by examining published articles in adult education journals focused on adult education programs. While not recent, one of the most up-to-date published articles which satisfied this criterion and included a comprehensive list of adult education programs in North America was authored by Tisdell et al. (2016). We also had access to a list of adult education programs in US and Canada compiled by adult education faculty in these areas and shared through the listserv of the Commission for Professors of Adult Education (CPAE)—a community of adult education faculty and scholars grouped under the umbrella of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE). The version of the CPAE list we used was shared in 2022. Considering that both the list provided by Tisdell et al. (2016) and the CPAE list of adult education programs included those in the US and Canadian institutions and considering that our focus for

this project was on the US context, the first steps was to cross-compare these lists for overlap and remove references to programs based outside of the United States. Next, we conducted an internet search for any missing programs and to eliminate from the list those programs that may have been terminated since the lists were created. This resulted in a list of 45 US higher education institutions which had at least one adult education program advertised (see Appendix A).

Next, we accessed each program's website to review published course offerings to identify specific courses focused on critical literacy and DEI. This search was done based on the following key search terms: divers* (i.e., diversity, diverse), equity, inclusion, critical, literac* (i.e., literacy, literacies), as well as some other related terms: cultural, multilingual, racial, technology. We also searched for terms which may be used as synonyms for literacy in a non-traditional sense (e.g., competence, intelligence). For each of the courses which aligned with these search terms, we sought to also identify course descriptions. Once we completed data collection, we proceeded with the content analysis of the course descriptions to identify major ideas and themes in the adult education courses which focus on critical literacies and DEI. By course descriptions, we mean the brief synopsis/overview for the course included in the university/college academic calendars. In the following sections, we discuss the key findings of this content analysis, offer a brief discussion of the limitations and incidental findings (i.e., challenges navigating the sites), and discuss practical implications.

## Findings

Before we present the findings, it is important to provide a description of the profile of adult education programs in the United States. As stated previously, we identified adult education programs at 45 US higher education institutions (listed in Appendix A). Out of the 45 institutions, five are private universities (one for-profit and four not-for-profit) with the remaining 40 being public. Based on the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (https://carnegieclassifications.acenet. edu/), most of these institutions are categorised as doctoral universities with very high or high research activity (30 universities), with the remaining being either: doctoral universities with moderate research activity, master's colleges and universities, baccalaureate colleges, or special focus institutions.

Considering the nature of the adult education field, it was expected that undergraduate program offerings would be limited. Namely, the only undergraduate adult education programs we identified are the 4+1 Undergraduate to Graduate Pathways at SUNY Buffalo State College Buffalo, NY and the BA in Adult and Organizational Development offered by Temple University Philadelphia, PA. On the other hand, we identified a wide range of graduate programs, inclusive of master's (MA, MS, MEd), doctoral (PhD, EdD, EdS), and graduate certificate, as well as some micro-credentialing options. These programs are housed in different departments, schools, or colleges, including those encompassing and/or focusing on leadership, technology, public service, counselling, educational administration, professional studies, human development, family science, and human resource development.

In terms of course offerings related to critical literacies, DEI, and/or social justice, we identified a limited number of offerings. Notably, more than half of the institutions (24 of 45) from the list did not advertise any courses matching our search criteria, while we identified potentially relevant courses at the remaining institutions. Based on the examination of course titles and descriptions, we identified 32 relevant courses at 21 institutions, which we grouped based on topic into four overarching categories: (1) courses focusing on critical thinking and critical literacy, (2) courses focusing on diversity and inclusion, (3) courses focusing on social justice and equity, and (4) courses focusing on non-traditional literacies/types of intelligence. Tables 1-4 list these courses and the corresponding institutions at which the courses are offered.

**Table 1. Courses focusing on critical thinking and critical literacy**

| Course Title | University Offering the Course |
| --- | --- |
| Critical Race Theory | Montana State University Bozeman, MT |
| Critical Theory and Adult Learning | Columbia University New York, NY |
| Developing Critical Thinkers | Columbia University New York, NY |
| Developing Critical Thinking & Transformative Learning | Park University Parkville, MO |
| Workshop in Adult Education: Critical Literacy | Columbia University New York, NY |

**Table 2. Courses focusing on diversity and inclusion**

| Course Title | University Offering the Course |
|---|---|
| Adult Learning and Workplace Diversity | Cleveland State University Cleveland, OH |
| Adult Literacy and Diversity | Virginia Commonwealth University Richmond, VA |
| Building 21st Century Organizational Capability with Cultural Intelligence | Columbia University New York, NY |
| Designing Culturally Responsive Learning Environments | Appalachian State University Boone, NC |
| Diversity and Multicultural Perspectives in Adulthood | Northwestern State University of Louisiana Natchitoches, LA |
| Diversity Issues in Adult Education and Training | SUNY Buffalo State College Buffalo, NY |
| Foundations of Adult Education and Diversity | Western Washington University Bellingham, WA |
| Gender in Business and Leadership | DePaul University Chicago, IL |
| Issues in Multicultural Foundations of Urban Adult Education | Cleveland State University Cleveland, OH |
| Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in the Classroom | University of Southern Maine Portland, ME |
| Meeting Diverse Needs in Adult Education Settings | Auburn University Auburn, AL |
| Multicultural and Special Populations | Colorado State Fort Collins, CO |
| Multicultural Diversity & Educational Leadership | University of Idaho Moscow, ID |
| Multicultural Perspectives in Adult Education | Capella University Minneapolis, MN |
| Multicultural Perspectives in Postsecondary Education and Adult Education | Texas State University San Marcos, TX |
| Teaching Disadvantaged Adult Learners | Northwestern State University of Louisiana Natchitoches, LA |
| Teaching Race in Predominantly White Organizations | Columbia University New York, NY |

**Table 3. Courses focusing on social justice and equity**

| Course Title | University Offering the Course |
|---|---|
| Adult Education, Globalization, and Social Justice | Texas A&M University College Station, TX |
| Power & Privilege in Leadership | Oregon State University Corvallis, OR |
| Scholar Leader: Diversity and Equity in Schools and Communities | North Carolina State University Raleigh, NC |
| Social Justice and Cultural Issues in Adult Education | University of South Dakota Vermillion, SD |
| Social Justice Leadership, Equity, and Change | University of Connecticut Storrs, CT |

**Table 4. Courses focusing on non-traditional literacies/types of intelligence**

| Course Title | University Offering the Course |
|---|---|
| Building Productive Relationships with Social Intelligence (SQ) | Columbia University New York, NY |
| Emotional Intelligence at Work | DePaul University Chicago, IL |
| Leveraging Emotional Intelligence (EQ) to Enhance Organizational Effectiveness | Columbia University New York, NY |
| Data Literacy for Leaders | Capella University Minneapolis, MN |
| Instructional Technology & Digital Literacy | Western Washington University Bellingham, WA |

As seen from Tables 1-4, while there is a limited number of courses focusing specifically on critical literacies, there are still several courses that examine related constructs, including different types of competencies or intelligence (five courses listed in Table 4, in addition to the Workshop course examining Critical Literacy offered by Teachers College at Columbia University and listed in Table 1). A notable finding was that the highest number of identified courses included the terms "diversity" or "multicultural" in their titles (17 courses listed in Table 2). However, a challenge that we encountered in the search is that, while multiple programs offered seminars and current issues/special topics courses, the topics of such courses were not publicly available on program websites. While these are excluded from our findings, it is worth noting that, considering the sociopolitical climate surrounding DEI and critical literacy topics in the United States (Bushard, 2024; Gretzinger et al., 2024), and based on our experience of teaching in different adult education-focused programs in the United States, it is possible that DEI/critical literacies courses are also offered and marketed as the "special topics courses" that we had to exclude from our analysis.

Considering the limited number of institutions and adult education programs which offer courses focused on critical literacies, DEI, social justice and other, non-traditional types of literacies and intelligence, it is particularly useful to examine the profiles of those institutions that do offer such courses, and especially those that offer more than one such course. While the profiles of all 21 institutions that offer relevant courses are compiled in Appendix B, Table 5 specifically highlights six institutions that offer more than one course relevant to our analysis. An interesting finding in terms of institution type is that four out of five private institutions with adult education programs were identified

as having programs which offer courses focused on critical literacies, DEI, social justice and/or other, non-traditional types of literacies and intelligence, and three of those offer more than one such course. Teachers College at Columbia University New York stood out, not only as a private institution on the list, but also as the institution that offers most (seven) courses that examine issues related to critical theory, critical literacy, race, as well as social and emotional intelligence. This institution is also unique in its designation as an exclusively graduate/professional institution, with 4,547 students enrolled in fall 2020 (as reported by the Carnegie Classification, https://carnegieclassifications. acenet.edu/institution/teachers-college-at-columbia-university/).

**Table 5. Showcase of universities that offer more than one course focusing on critical thinking and literacy, diversity, inclusion, social justice, equity, and other relevant types of intelligences**

| University Name | University Location Within the United States | University Type | Basic University Classification | Size and Setting |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Capella University Minneapolis, MN (two courses identified) | Midwest | Private for-profit | Doctoral Universities: Doctoral/ Professional Universities | Four-year, large, primarily nonresidential |
| Cleveland State University Cleveland, OH (two courses identified) | Midwest | Public | Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity | Four-year, large, primarily nonresidential |
| Columbia University New York, NY (seven courses identified) | Northeast | Private not-for-profit | Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity | Exclusively graduate/ professional |
| DePaul University Chicago, IL (two courses identified) | Midwest | Private not-for-profit | Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity | Four-year, large, primarily nonresidential |
| Northwestern State University of Louisiana Natchitoches, LA (two courses identified) | South | Public | Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs | Four-year, medium, primarily nonresidential |
| Western Washington University Bellingham, WA (two courses identified) | West | Public | Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs | Four-year, large, primarily residential |

Another notable finding pertaining to the institutions which offer more than one course related to critical literacies, DEI, social justice and/or other, non-traditional types of literacies and intelligence is that, geographically, most of the institutions are located in the Northern part of the United States (the states of Minnesota, Ohio, New York, Illinois, and Washington), while only one is located in the Southern United States (Louisiana). The findings are similar when we examine the full list of universities that offer at least one relevant course, in that only one third of the institutions is based in one of the Southern US states.

## Discussion

Given that promoting DEI and developing critical literacies has been shown to have wide-ranging benefits (de Oliveira Andreotti, 2024; Turner et al., 2008), it is prudent to ask about these gaps, especially in public (e.g., land-grant) institutions with missions to prepare students for the globalised world. Based on geographical data, it could be argued that the political landscape is one determining factor for any potential lack of growth or stymieing of the development of these kinds of curricula offerings (Bushard, 2024; Joseph, 2015). Other challenges include the bureaucracy involved for adding this kind of programming as well as staffing courses. All curricula need careful creation, implementation, evaluation, and on-going refinement and given the evolving nature of DEI-topics, courses focused on critical literacies and DEI would require constant review as language and understanding advance; c.f. cultural competence and cultural humility; etc. It would also be beneficial for the concepts related to DEI and critical literacies to be incorporated and threaded throughout the entire curriculum (Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2008; Thomas et al., 2010; Sim & Bierema, 2023) to not be a token or one-off course. In this way, there would be evidence of strong commitment to the values of global citizenship and DEI to effectively promote understanding of difficult or controversial concepts.

Degener (2001) posits that adult education programs should be broad in scope and not focus singly on literacy skills but be contextualised to focus on critical skills within a framework of social activism and societal transformation. One tool that can be used to leverage effective curriculum development and instructional design to help meet the needs of the global village and promote critical literacies to advance DEI values

is the Critical Literacies Advancement Model (CLAM; Robinson, 2020). This model contributes to the expanding academic discourse on socially constructed, non-traditional, critical literacies which are considered in context of the dynamism in life and society. In full embrace of the broad definition of literacy, beyond the scope of literacy referring to the ability to read and write and have numeracy skills, the model outlines various practical literacies, stemming from and building on critical literacy that are organised into separate but inter-related categories (illustrated in Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Critical literacies advancement model (CLAM)**



Source: © Robinson, P.A. (2020). Adopted/Reprinted with permission.
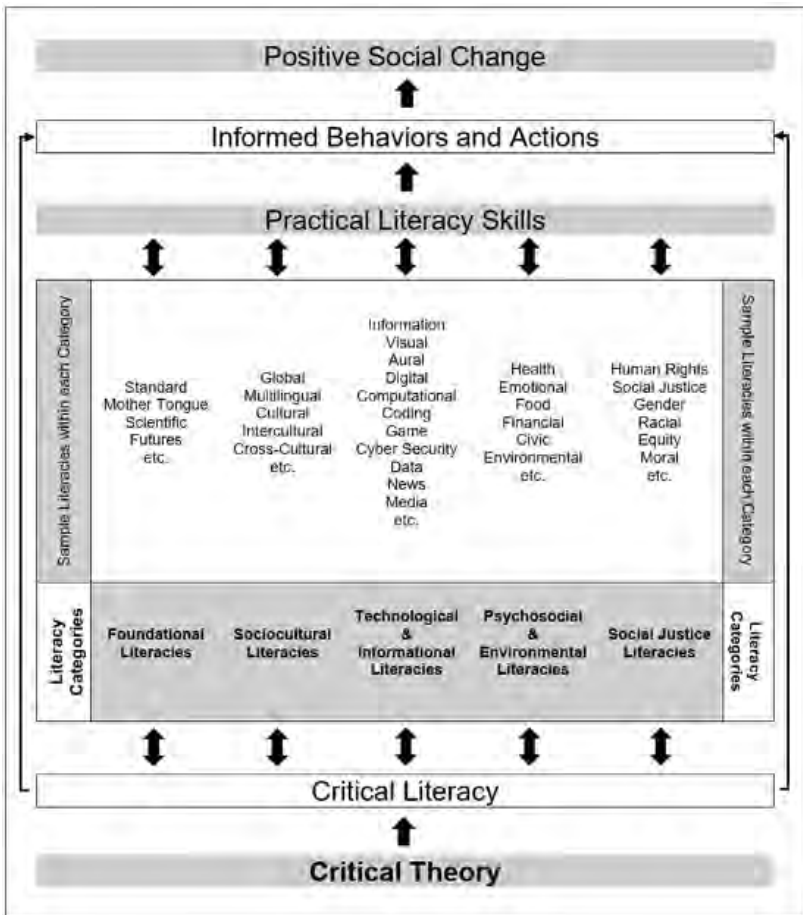
As a framework, the CLAM would be a useful tool for the development and/or enhancement of adult education curricula in terms of critical literacy and DEI, given the foundational role of these in the development of a comprehensive set of critical literacies needed for social justice and positive social change. This framework could guide curriculum and course designers in integrating critical literacy elements into coursework and in developing specific courses focused on critical literacies.

Further specific action steps that would support the integration of critical literacies into adult education programs could include a multi-pronged approach to target course design (specific topics), course materials (specific readings and visuals), and course assignments and activities (specific practices) that intentionally incorporate often marginalised perspectives (Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2008; Sim & Bierema, 2023; Thomas et al., 2010). These specific guidelines, paired with the broader, CLAM framework, could support the growth of adult education programs and the needs of adult learners in the 21st century, as well as meet the long-standing goals and values of the field of adult education.

## Conclusion and implications

Critical literacies are required to help people become critical thinkers who understand that the issues of intolerance, universalism, and dualistic thinking are contrary to the foundation of DEI and global citizenship (de Oliveira Andreotti, 2024; Stevens & Campbell, 2006). The adult education field has always been and should always be concerned with matters of equity and social justice and is known for "critical, radical, emancipatory theories and practical applications to teaching and learning" (Robinson & Stojanovic, 2021, p. 4).

This study is not without limitations, which, when discussed along with the findings highlight opportunities for future research. Specifically, considering our comprehensive approach and goal to include all US adult education programs, in our analysis, we were bounded by the information regarding curricula and courses readily available online on university websites. Further research could examine courses offered at specific institutions by reviewing syllabi and course assignments, to evaluate the extent to which those courses provide students with practical knowledge and skills related to DEI and critical literacies.

If based on the findings of this study (i.e., targeting the institutions identified to have the best practices in terms of teaching critical literacies and DEI-related topics), further, in-depth examination of curricula and course syllabi could provide guidelines for other programs to follow. Additionally, empirical studies focusing on piloting new critical literacy courses would be beneficial for further course design, development, and evaluation, and for understanding how such courses best fit into adult education curricula. Lastly, considering that this study focused specifically on adult education programs, but knowing that adult education courses and topics are not necessarily housed solely in adult education programs/departments, additional research could broaden the focus beyond these programs and examine human resource development, leadership, and higher education programs and their curricula in terms of DEI and critical literacies and related topics.

In proposing the CLAM as a tool to support and understand the development of critical literacies, this paper furthers the academic dialogue which connects Critical Theory, critical literacy, non-traditional literacies, and adult education. It highlights the need to use and continually develop theories, models, and frameworks founded on the principles of Critical Theory and social justice in exploring issues relevant for 21st century learners, leaders, and citizens. It also underscores the potential of using these theories and models in designing higher and adult education courses and curricula, and in that way preparing individuals to navigate the complex contemporary contexts of diverse organisations and communities.

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# Appendix A

**Appendix A:**
**Alphabetical List of US Higher Education Institutions with Adult Education Program**
(Bolded font indicates universities that advertise courses focusing on critical literacies, diversity, inclusion, equity, social justice, and/or different types of intelligences)

1. **Appalachian State University, Boone, NC**
2. **Auburn University, Auburn, AL**
3. Ball State University, Muncie, IN
4. **SUNY Buffalo State College, Buffalo, NY**
5. **Capella University, Minneapolis, MN**
6. **Cleveland State University, Cleveland, OH**
7. **Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO**
8. **Columbia University, New York, NY**
9. **DePaul University, Chicago, IL**
10. East Carolina University, Greenville, NC
11. Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL
12. Florida International University, Miami, FL
13. Indiana University Bloomington, IN
14. Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA
15. Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS
16. Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI
17. **Montana State University, Bozeman, MT**
18. Morehead State University, Morehead, KY
19. North Carolina A&T State University, Greensboro, NC
20. **North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC**
21. **Northwestern State University of Louisiana, Natchitoches, LA**
22. The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH
23. **Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR**
24. **Park University, Parkville, MO**
25. Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA & Harrisburg, PA
26. Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA
27. **Texas State University, San Marcos, TX**
28. Temple University, Philadelphia, PA
29. **Texas A&M University, College Station, TX**
30. University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR
31. **University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT**
32. University of Georgia, Athens, GA
33. **University of Idaho, Moscow, ID**
34. University of Memphis, TN
35. University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, MN
36. University of Missouri, St. Louis, MO
37. University of Rhode Island, Kingston, RI
38. **University of South Dakota, Vermillion, SD**
39. **University of Southern Maine, Portland, ME**
40. University of South Florida, Tampa, FL
41. University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN
42. University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI
43. **Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA**
44. Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Falls Church, VA
45. **Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA**

# Appendix B

Appendix B:

**Characteristics of Universities that Offer Courses Focusing on Critical Thinking and Literacy, Diversity, Inclusion, Social Justice, Equity, and Other Relevant Types of Intelligences**

| University Name | University Location Within the United States | University Type | Basic University Classification[1] | Size and Setting[2] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Appalachian State University Boone, NC | South | Public | Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs | Four-year, large, primarily residential |
| Auburn University Auburn, AL | South | Public | Doctoral Universities: Very High Research Activity | Four-year, large, primarily nonresidential |
| Capella University Minneapolis, MN | Midwest | Private for-profit | Doctoral Universities: Doctoral/ Professional Universities | Four-year, large, primarily nonresidential |
| Cleveland State University Cleveland, OH | Midwest | Public | Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity | Four-year, large, primarily nonresidential |
| Colorado State Fort Collins, CO | West | Public | Doctoral Universities: Very High Research Activity | Four-year, large, primarily residential |
| Columbia University New York, NY | Northeast | Private not-for-profit | Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity | Exclusively graduate/ professional |
| DePaul University Chicago, Il | Midwest | Private not-for-profit | Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity | Four-year, large, primarily nonresidential |

[1] Information retrieved from the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (https://carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu/)
[2] Information retrieved from the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (https://carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu/)

| University Name | University Location Within the United States | University Type | Basic University Classification[1] | Size and Setting[2] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Montana State University Bozeman, MT | West | Public | Doctoral Universities: Very High Research Activity | Four-year, large, primarily residential |
| North Carolina State University Raleigh, NC | South | Public | Doctoral Universities: Very High Research Activity | Four-year, large, primarily residential |
| Northwestern State University of Louisiana Natchitoches, LA | South | Public | Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs | Four-year, medium, primarily nonresidential |
| Oregon State University Corvallis, OR | West | Public | Doctoral Universities: Very High Research Activity | Four-year, large, primarily nonresidential |
| Park University Parkville, MO | Midwest | Private not-for-profit | Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs | Four-year, medium, primarily nonresidential |
| SUNY Buffalo State College Buffalo, NY | Northeast | Public | Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs | Four-year, medium, primarily residential |
| Texas A&M University College Station, TX | South | Public | Doctoral Universities: Very High Research Activity | Four-year, large, primarily nonresidential |
| Texas State University San Marcos, TX | South | Public | Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity | Four-year, large, primarily nonresidential |
| University of Connecticut Storrs, CT | Northeast | Public | Doctoral Universities: Very High Research Activity | Four-year, large, highly residential |

| University Name | University Location Within the United States | University Type | Basic University Classification[1] | Size and Setting[2] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| University of Idaho Moscow, ID | West | Public | Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity | Four-year, medium, primarily residential |
| University of South Dakota Vermillion, SD | Midwest | Public | Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity | Four-year, medium, primarily residential |
| University of Southern Maine Portland, ME | Northeast | Public | Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs | Four-year, medium, primarily nonresidential |
| Virginia Commonwealth University Richmond, VA | South | Public | Doctoral Universities: Very High Research Activity | Four-year, large, primarily residential |
| Western Washington University Bellingham, WA | West | Public | Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs | Four-year, large, primarily residential |

## About the authors

***Petra Robinson*** is an Associate Professor and Director of Faculty Affairs and Professional Development at Louisiana State University (LSU). Her work centers on centers on educational equity, critical literacies, political polarization, and social cohesion, with a strong focus on innovation in adult learning. Dr. Robinson is actively involved in mentoring graduate students and advancing qualitative research, particularly through her teaching.

Her work is widely recognized, including co-authorship of *The Adult Learner*. Dr. Robinson's projects, supported by numerous grants and collaborations, align with her commitment to empowering diverse student populations through inclusive pedagogies. Active in academic leadership, Dr. Robinson continues to influence the field of adult education through research that bridges theory and practice in support of individuals from marginalized and underrepresented backgrounds.

***Maja Stojanović*** is an Assistant Professor of Adult Learning and Leadership at Kansas State University. Her research focuses on professional and career identity and development in international and multilingual contexts, the development of critical literacies through adult education, and supporting adult learners with unique identities and in diverse contexts. Dr. Stojanović has presented at national and international conferences as well as published peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters on topics related to professional development, diversity and inclusion, and intercultural communication in higher and adult education. She also co-edited the book *Global Citizenship for Adult Education: Advancing Critical Literacies for Equity and Social Justice*.

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