

Collaborating with Critical Friends: Exploring Picture Books Through Self-study in Secondary and Post-Secondary Classrooms

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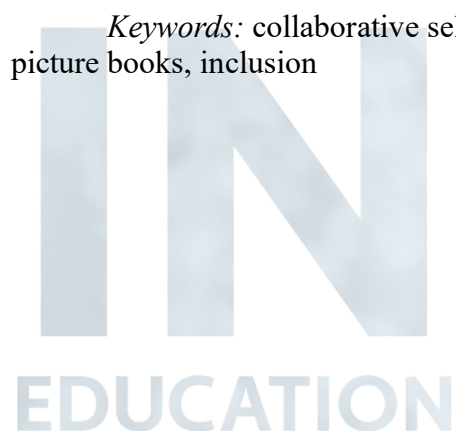
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Abstract

In this critical self-study, four educators located in two Canadian provinces in both secondary and post-secondary institutions investigated their pedagogical practices of using picture books as teaching tools. By exploring the intersection of critical friends and collaborative learning, we investigated how this synthesis enhanced teacher self-study practices and offered insights into effective strategies for professional learning in educational settings. Through self-study, we considered our use of picture books, our current personal and professional libraries, and our learning and growth from engagement in collaborative self-study with colleagues. This self-study revealed three critical findings: 1) the banning of books within educational settings, 2) the tendency of teachers to opt for books perceived as safe choices, and 3) the growing recognition amongst educators of the importance of selecting literature that reflects the diversity of individuals within the classroom. Implications for educators include exploring both the benefits of critical friendship in collaborative learning communities and teacher professional learning (TPL) opportunities to focus on equity and inclusion.

Keywords: collaborative self-study, critical friends, teacher education, critical literacy, picture books, inclusion



Collaborating with Critical Friends: Exploring Picture Books Through Self-study in Secondary and Post-Secondary Classrooms

The framework of Self-Study in Teacher Education Programs (S-STEP) offers a robust approach to enhancing teacher education, as it encourages reflective practice among educators across various levels, allowing them to critically analyze their teaching methods and effectiveness (Kitchen, 2023). Through self-study, we engaged with this non-linear methodology (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015) to examine our professional practices, specifically using picture books as pedagogy. In this context, picture books refer to texts that incorporate illustrations, typically accompanied by written language to convey the narrative. In some instances, they may forgo words entirely, relying solely on visual imagery. While often categorized as children's literature, picture books are not exclusively intended for young audiences. We are a professional learning community of four educators—an English and Social Studies teacher (grades 8–12) from a K–12 rural school on the island portion of Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada, and three teacher educators from a small university's Faculty of Education on Canada's east coast. Through our collaborative relationships, we established critical friendships (Kitchen & Berry, 2023; Stolle et al., 2019) to analyse our individual and collective professional experiences in teaching with picture books. Similar to Brewer et al. (2021), we adopted an equitable, authentic approach to cultivating our critical friendships. The members of our group had established longstanding professional relationships spanning several decades, which subsequently extended into personal spheres as well. The emphasis on collaboration and shared learning experiences with S-STEP supported our inquiry and afforded us opportunities to forge deeper connections between self-awareness and professional practice within our community (Berry & Kitchen, 2021). In bringing together colleagues from various levels of educational institutions, we aimed to contribute to Kitchen and Berry's (2023) call for more self-study involving secondary educators.

Self-studying and learning together with colleagues offer numerous benefits. For example, being part of a learning group fosters mutual responsibility and accountability (Diacopoulos et al., 2022). It provides opportunities to listen to and share diverse perspectives, enabling us to leverage each other's strengths and resources for enhanced learning outcomes. Like Appleget et al. (2020), we hope to further our professional learning journeys as educators. Below, we discuss our self-study within the context of using picture books as pedagogy and outline the critical friendship relationships that emerged through our shared learning and reflective practice.

In a previous broader study, the authors (Clarke et al., 2025) focused on a secondary school and the teacher education classrooms, where we examined equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) integration through the lens of critical literacy. In this collaborative classroom research, additional opportunities for teacher professional learning (TPL) through self-study emerged. We wanted to explore what happened when teacher educators intentionally studied their own practices, implementing EDI into their literacy and numeracy methods courses. As our self-study progressed, we extended our scope to include the following self-study questions grounded in professional learning:

- What did we learn about our use of picture books while investigating our current professional and classroom libraries through a critically oriented EDI lens?
- What was learned professionally from engaging in self-study through critical friendships with colleagues across post-secondary and secondary domains?

TPL, self-study, the importance of using picture books with students, and conversations with colleagues are interconnected through the shared goal of enhancing educational practices and outcomes. TPL involves ongoing reflection and adaptation of teaching methods to improve student outcomes by empowering teachers with the tools and insights needed to navigate the complexities of the classroom (Fullan et al., 2017). This is central to the self-study process. By engaging in self-study with critical friends, teachers collaboratively address specific challenges and opportunities within their own unique educational settings and take ownership of their professional growth. Picture books provide versatile educational tools for teachers to explore, through self-study, how they support diverse learning preferences, promote literacy, and foster critical thinking amongst students. This reflective practice not only enriches the TPL journey but also directly benefits student engagement and learning outcomes (Fullan et al., 2017; Hargreaves, 2019). By exploring the intersection of critical friends and collaborative learning, we seek to uncover how these factors synergize to enhance teacher self-study practices and offer insights into effective strategies for TPL in educational settings. Our study examines the role of critical friendship in facilitating self-study, addressing how collaborative and dialogic interactions between educators can deepen reflection, challenge assumptions, provide critical feedback, and foster professional growth.

Literature Review

As educators, we recognize the importance of reading the world through texts and encouraging students to bring their lived experiences into the classroom (Freire, 1983). Picture books provide occasions to share narratives of diversity in our society through the use of illustrations and are often combined with words. A growing movement to tell stories of complex issues in picture books (Clarke & Broders, 2022) signifies that these stories are for all readers, not just young children. As Kelly et al. (2020) have indicated, all children need access to stories that represent their identities and expand their knowledge. Reiker (2011) claims that it may be challenging for educators to use picture books with older students, as their colleagues and administrators sometimes feel that such books do not meet the rigour required in secondary classrooms. We believe, however, that picture books are significant teaching tools that promote literacy learning at all grade levels. There is limited research to suggest otherwise. Indeed, what research there is at this level focuses on students' reading and writing development or remediation for struggling learners (Premont et al., 2017; Reiker, 2011).

Picture books help initiate interesting conversations between teachers and students, and their inclusive and welcoming nature strengthens student-teacher relationships (Clarke et al., 2025). Picture books promote literacy learning; the simplified texts allow readers to concentrate more on comprehension rather than on decoding. While it may appear that students are engaged in a simplistic text, these books can portray multiple complex issues. As described by Leland et al. (2022), picture books offer fresh perspectives, and one of the main goals in their use is to create critically thoughtful citizens.

Picture books may be used as teaching tools from pre-school to post-secondary. Daly and Blakeney-Williams (2015) found that picture books were central for many teacher educators and an important part of their teaching pedagogy. They are often used to integrate curriculum across subjects such as language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Picture books can also reflect diverse voices and perspectives, promoting inclusivity and cultural values (Throop-Robinson, 2023). Picture books are complex and powerful pedagogical tools in preservice teacher education (Daly & Blakeney-Williams, 2015; Johnston & Bainbridge, 2013); therefore, valuable

teaching tools at all levels of education. To explore picture books, we engaged in teacher self-study with a group of critical friends.

Critical friendship is a vital component of teacher self-study, providing a supportive and challenging environment for reflective practice and professional learning. In embracing critical friendship, educators achieve deeper understanding, continuous improvement, and meaningful transformations in their teaching practices. In self-study, critical friends listen carefully, ask challenging questions of each other, and encourage reflection to help clarify ideas and improve the coherence and quality of the research process (Alan et al., 2021). Olan and Edge (2019) highlight the role of collaborative meaning-making and dialogic interactions in the critical friendship process. Stolle et al. (2019) provide a detailed examination of the layers involved in critical friendships, revealing the complexities and benefits of these relationships in the context of teacher self-study. Through open and honest conversations (Grant & Kastberg, 2023; Olan & Edge, 2019), as well as trusting relationships (Stolle et al., 2019), teachers can explore their beliefs, challenge assumptions, and co-construct knowledge. This collaborative process enhances reflective practice and ensures that multiple perspectives are considered, thus leading to a more nuanced understanding of teaching practices (Hargreaves, 2019). For teaching professional learning to be optimal, it is cradled in critical friendships.

Teacher professional learning (TPL) emphasizes the importance of continuous, reflective, and collaborative processes in enhancing educators' skills and knowledge. Bautista and Ortega-Ruiz (2017) highlight the role of professional learning communities (PLCs) where teachers engage in collective inquiry, share experiences, and collaboratively solve problems to improve their instructional practices. This collaborative approach fosters a culture of mutual support and shared responsibility for student outcomes. Postholm (2012) underscores the significance of reflective practice, whereby teachers critically analyze their teaching methods and outcomes to identify areas for growth and innovation. By integrating these perspectives, TPL becomes a dynamic process that not only focuses on individual development but also leverages collective wisdom to foster a culture of continuous improvement and pedagogical excellence.

In education, 'experts' are often expected to offer quick-fix or one-size-fits-all learning models. Instead, we must prioritize tailored solutions within our own organizations to meet learners' needs effectively. As Routman (2018) explains, the rarity of such professional learning stems from our persistent reliance on external programs or experts to solve problems when, in fact, we should be empowering "ourselves as experts" (p. 106). With traditional professional development facing criticism (Fullan, 2015; Fullan et al., 2017), there has been a shift towards collaborative learning within and between schools (Katz & Dack, 2012). This approach to TPL encourages an inward look at what is happening within our schools and how educators can all learn from one another; hence, self-study with critical friends.

Critical friendships may have a transformative impact on individual teachers (Grant & Kastberg, 2023). The support of critical friends within TPL is crucial in allowing teachers to step out of their comfort zones and explore new teaching strategies. The research showed how critical friendships led to significant transformations in teachers' professional identities and practices. As teachers developed a deeper understanding of their roles and responsibilities, it led to meaningful changes in their teaching practices (Grant & Kastberg, 2023). TPL with critical friends within self-study allowed us to come together as secondary teachers and post-secondary educators, extending our personal and professional relationships. Such an opportunity addresses the gap in education of secondary and post-secondary educators working collaboratively.

In what follows, we first describe the conceptual framework underpinning our conversations and the methodology guiding our self-study before discussing our learning as it occurred among critical friends.

Conceptual Framework and Theory

The conceptual framework for this paper arises from the complex intersection of teacher self-study, critical friends, and collaborative learning. Drawing on a robust theoretical foundation encompassing critical literacy (Comber, 2001, 2016; Luke, 1995), reflective practice (Roffey-Barentsen, 2013), and social constructivism (Adams, 2006), we aim to conceptualize the dynamic process of teacher self-study.

Critical Literacy

Critical literacy is an area which resists a final or single definition, and there is no recipe for teaching critical literacy. Like many terms, critical literacy is always ‘under construction’ and will always defy an exact definition. Critical literacy, however, is a major part of social transformation. It fosters a questioning stance in students concerning whose interests are being served by various texts in a range of contexts (Comber, 2001; Vasquez, 1994). Critical literacy is not used only to ‘read’ the everyday world but to transform and to address issues of social justice in the world. Luke (1995) claims that individuals “use texts to make sense of their world and to construct social actions and relations required in the labour of everyday life” (p. 13). When critical literacy becomes a focal point in classrooms and schools, it encourages students to use language to question the everyday world. It also provides opportunities for students to interrogate the relationship between language and power to understand how power relationships are socially constructed. As Comber (2016) explains, no texts are neutral, and critical literacy theorists point out that power relations are always embedded in language practices. When negotiating critical literacy practices in classrooms, young children often develop a sense of “how texts work for and against the interests of different people” (Comber, 2016, p. 10). Critical literacy is crucial so that learners develop critical thinking skills that bring about change and socially just practices. We see books and other texts as a bridge to a safe, supportive, and engaging space for conversation, where learners can make meaningful connections to themselves and others.

Reflective Practice

Reflective practice (Roffey-Barentsen, 2013) is a fundamental component of TPL and emphasizes the critical examination of one's teaching experiences to foster continuous improvement. The process involves a deliberate and systematic approach to reflection, whereby teachers analyze their instructional methods, student interactions, and educational outcomes to gain deeper insights into professional practice. Roffey-Barentsen highlights that reflective practice is not merely a retrospective activity but also a forward-looking one, and guides teachers to set goals and implement changes based on their reflections. With an increased awareness of their strengths and areas requiring growth, educators execute more intentional and effective teaching. This ongoing cycle of reflection and action creates a responsive and adaptive educational environment that enhances student learning and promotes professional growth.

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism posits that knowledge is constructed through social interactions and collaborative processes. Vygotsky's (1978) seminal work emphasizes the role of social context and cultural tools in cognitive development, highlighting the concept of the Zone of Proximal

Development (ZPD), where learners achieve higher levels of understanding through guidance and collaboration with more knowledgeable others. Adams (2006) builds on this by illustrating how learning environments that promote dialogue, negotiation, and shared experiences contribute to deeper understanding and critical thinking. Kapur (2018) further explores the practical applications of social constructivism in educational settings, demonstrating how problem-solving and collaborative activities enable students to co-construct knowledge and develop higher-order thinking skills. Together, these perspectives underscore that learning is inherently a social process, facilitated by interaction, communication, and the shared construction of meaning within a community.

Within this framework, we conceptualize self-study as a deliberate and systematic inquiry into one's own teaching practices, emphasizing the role of self-reflection and inquiry in fostering professional growth (see, for example, Kitchen & Berry, 2023 – S-STEP). Integral to this process are critical friends, individuals who provide supportive yet constructive feedback (Schuck & Russell, 2005) in a collaborative learning environment (Azorín & Fullan, 2020; Fischer et al., 2020), which facilitates collective exploration and knowledge sharing.

Methods

Teacher self-study has emerged as a significant methodology in educational qualitative research, providing teachers with a reflective practice framework to critically analyze and improve their teaching methods (Kitchen & Berry, 2023). This qualitative research approach empowers educators to be both practitioners and researchers, fostering a deeper understanding of their pedagogical practices and their impacts on student learning. Self-study helps develop and contribute to educators' professional capital; through a collaborative approach, it enhances school culture. Collaboration, open dialogue, and shared purpose enhance the collective efficacy of professional groups. Teachers' willingness to collaborate with colleagues as they question and reflect on personal practices helps them grow in confidence, explore new strategies and practices, and achieve the best learning outcomes for all learners. As a group of educators who collaborated and reflected on our pedagogical practices and were open to new strategies and practices, our study aligns with these beliefs. As a method for research within teacher education, it is important that self-study must be a lived experience (Diacopoulous et al., 2022; Gregory et al., 2017). Self-study is a journey of learning without a single defined route (Loughran, 2018), which is rooted in curiosity and practice (Pithouse-Morgan, 2022). Within our critical friendship group, we exposed our own vulnerability within the goal of improving our teaching practices, professional attitudes, and a focus on building better relationships with students (Frambaugh-Kritzer & Stolle, 2019; Nolan, 2010). These claims reiterate the importance of self-study across all levels of education.

Initially, we began our collaborative self-study as a group of researchers investigating the diversity of and in picture books. We were new to self-study research, acting simultaneously as researchers and learners in this process. We acknowledge that we grappled with the complexities of constructing a path and made shifts throughout the process. The efficacy of the self-study would not have been possible without critical friendship. We had already built, amongst the group, friendships where we could be honest, vulnerable, and critical (Frambaugh-Kritzer & Stolle, 2019; Nolan, 2010, 2016). This degree of comfort allowed for great discussions on our varied uses of picture books in the classroom, which embraced the values of EDI. Individually and collectively, we advocated for and embraced critical literacy as a means for social justice and as a means of continuous engagement in transformative learning endeavours (Zapata, 2024) and to promote allyship and support through critical friends (Wideman-Johnston & Brewer, 2014). The use of

picture books emerged as a possible pedagogical tool for depicting narratives of diversity and complexity within society, for challenging the conventional notion of their exclusivity to young audiences (Throop-Robinson, 2023). The process of collaborative self-study allowed us to explore, question, and reflect on using picture books in our classrooms, as well as to analyze books in our current professional libraries. We believe that our learning and our teaching will reflect the beneficial nature of this practice.

A pivotal component of our conceptual framework and collaborative learning involves adapting an analytic framework to evaluate picture books through an EDI lens. Relying on the tenets of critical friendships, we worked to adapt the *framework for selecting and using children's literature to support EDI in mathematics education* (Throop-Robinson, 2023) for use in literacy by adding 'thinking about critical literacies' (see Table 1). This critical adaptation promotes interdisciplinary approaches to TPL, where the principles and strategies employed in one domain, such as mathematics education, can be effectively applied to another, such as literacy instruction.

Table 1

Framework for Selecting and Using Children's Literature to Support EDI in Education

Building relationships	Thinking about critical literacies	Thinking mathematically	Reading the world	Integrating for learning
Does the book reflect the uniqueness of the child and consistently consider EDI with/in power relations?	Does the book use images and language that are inclusive?	Does the book foster inquiry and wonder about mathematical ideas and the connections to culture?	Does the book broaden appreciation for and connection with students' culture, heritage, and world view?	Does the book facilitate application of ideas in the students' world?
Does the book promote ethnic, gender and cultural inclusiveness?	Does the book make visible a variety of identity groups (gender, race, ethnicity, ability or disability)?	Does the text incorporate vocabulary familiar to mathematics teaching?	Does the book allow students to see themselves and understand the interrelatedness of peoples in the world?	Does the book provide broad and rich perspectives to reinforce the learning process?
Does the book show and encourage positive role models and relationships with family,	Does the book address current issues or past issues appropriately and accurately?	Does the book model problems connected to students' mathematical experiences and talk in the world?	Does the text show students how to use language to communicate ideas, challenge dominant ideologies and	Can this book be used as a stimulus to promote an active learning environment?

community, and others?			stir emotions creatively and playfully?	
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Note. Adapted from *Framework for selecting and using children's literature to support EDI in mathematics education* (Throop-Robinson, 2023).

By leveraging this framework, educators can systematically select and integrate picture books into literacy curricula, harnessing their potential to enhance EDI in literacy education. Pre-service Teachers (PST) can also be equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively select and use picture books as a tool for promoting EDI in literacy instruction, thereby fostering a more inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment in classrooms.

Context

Initially, a group of four critical friends, three researchers at a rural university and one secondary school teacher, all located in Atlantic Canada, embarked on exploring the benefits and challenges of incorporating picture books in various educational settings, including secondary school and teacher education classrooms. Carolyn has spent more than 30 years in education and held positions including Elementary teacher, District Literacy Leader, Consultant, and Administrator. She has worked at the university level for many years. Carolyn's educational journey has always valued collaboration, and making a transition to self-study with critical friends was a natural part of the learning process. Participating in self-study research with critical friends helped her gain a deeper understanding of the benefits and challenges of using picture books in secondary and post-secondary school classrooms. It allowed accountability, not always present when independently exploring a topic or engaging in professional learning.

Evan was an elementary teacher who is now a teacher educator with experience in schools and universities in Canada. As a consultant, he supports teacher training and curriculum revisioning in mathematics education outreach activities across the Caribbean. Evan continues to work in classrooms through research, incorporating picture books with mathematics education for children and supporting discourse development for preservice teachers through number talks. For Evan, the presence of critical friends has been invaluable in challenging and refining pedagogical decisions and strategies. Thoughtful questioning and commentary with critical friends have fostered continuous improvement while providing safe spaces for the emergence and discussion of EDI issues.

Ellen taught for many years in public school settings, teaching in upper elementary, middle school, and secondary mathematics before joining the faculty of education. Her interest in mathematics education includes trauma-informed practices and decolonization. She is committed to advocacy and support for the education of children and youth in care. Ellen began this project with critical friends believing in the importance of incorporating diverse perspectives and voices, promoting cultural awareness, empathy and critical thinking, and holding some foundational knowledge of equity and diversity. As a secondary mathematics educator, she has a small library of picture books used to support inclusive practices and was just beginning to explore their potential in mathematics instruction.

Jo Anne is a secondary English Language Arts (ELA) and Social Studies teacher at a rural school in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) with twenty-eight years of teaching experience. She continues to focus on critical literacy within her teaching and learning experiences. She previously

worked as an assistant principal and as an ELA program specialist for grades 7, 8, and 9 with the Department of Education (NL). After Covid-19, Jo Anne observed that people were ready again for collaboration and friendship to reestablish the socialization they had missed. For Jo Anne, collaboration is always positive as it means sharing plural perspectives on topics and thereby offering a range and diversification of thoughts conducive to improving accuracy and extending learning. Through collaboration, critical friends can achieve new social partnerships that offer opportunities for learning partnerships. Jo Anne believes that collaboration is a way to refreshingly change and enliven a daily schedule as well as effectively invigorate and motivate our pedagogical approaches.

The team received approval from both the university research ethics board and the public school board ethics committee to conduct classroom research. Our focus was on "picture books as pedagogy" across different education sites: In summary, Carolyn in elementary literacy; Evan in elementary mathematics; Ellen in sociology and secondary mathematics; and Jo Anne in teaching English and Social Studies to secondary students.

Through our collaborations as critical friends, we felt the need to respond to the current trends on social media platforms, other media outlets, and public discourse, which show an increase in book banning and the prohibition of topics in schools. Given current trends in many countries to exclude diverse groups and take away rights, there is a need to expand social justice practices at all levels of education. Picture books can help provide entry points into difficult conversations on many topics with students (Clarke & Broders, 2022). It is more important than ever that educators advocate for institutions that are experiencing pressure to exclude voices.

Data Generation

The data sources for this self-study came from the examination of our own professional libraries, our classroom library, student-created books, live notes and transcripts from Zoom conversations, and notes compiled while analyzing books using a framework and the Nova Scotia Bias Evaluation Instrument (NSBEI). The self-study unfolded in two phases (see Table 2). In Phase one, we examined our professional and classroom libraries at the Faculty of Education and Secondary School to identify prevalent picture books and evaluated them using an analytical framework (see Table 1) and the NSBEI (2015) to determine representation of diverse individuals and ethnicities (Tate et al., 2022). Jo Anne then engaged students in creating their own picture books. Jo Anne shared these books with critical friends (Schuck & Russell, 2005) during our conversations. These student-created books served as data and discussion points, shaping our understanding of picture books as pedagogical tools with secondary and post-secondary students, tools we could use to enhance teaching methods, learning activities, and instructional strategies. In Phase two, our findings and reflections from Phase one deepened our discussions, guiding the next steps of the self-study.

Table 2

Data Collection

Researcher Role	Phase One Data
All researchers	Examined classroom libraries – Field Notes

All researchers	Reviewed book being used in classrooms using the <i>Framework for selecting and using children's literature to support EDI in education</i> and <i>NSBEI</i>
Researcher 4 worked with students to create books	Student created books
All researchers	Regular Zoom meetings (monthly approximately 1hour) and live notes
Researcher Role	Phase Two Data
All researchers	Reviewed field notes from Phase 1
Researcher 4	Shared student created picture books with critical friends.
All researchers	Independently read and analyzed transcripts from Zoom meetings to identify themes.
All researchers	Met on Zoom to discuss themes that emerged during data analysis.

Building upon the groundwork of Phase One, we incorporated selected picture books into our classrooms, making them a regular part of our teaching practice. Data was generated through reflective notes on the overall experience of reading and creating picture books with students, and from student-written reflections on the process of listening to and creating personal picture books. Evan used math-themed picture books to foster cultural awareness of mathematics among pre-service teachers (PSTs). In Ellen's sociology of education class, PSTs evaluated picture books using the framework (see Table 1) to determine their suitability for classroom use and their potential to address EDI concerns. Carolyn used picture books as entry points for discussions on various topics such as equity, implicit bias, and identity with elementary PSTs. Jo Anne continued to engage secondary students in reading, creating and sharing picture books to support learning. Her students also completed written reflections about the process and experience after they finished their books.

During Phase two, over six months, our group of critical friends met monthly for collaborative one-hour conversations. These conversations occurred on Zoom, were video recorded, and later transcribed. At the first meeting, we discussed the purpose of our study, how often we would meet and plan for our next session. At each meeting, we shared 'what was right on for us in our investigation of our personal library, the school library, and how students responded to creating their own books'. We also discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the books available in our classroom libraries. Books within our personal and classroom libraries constituted a variety of literature: picture books addressing diverse topics, mathematics-themed literature, young adult novels, poetry, etc. The investigations and reflections conducted before our meetings served as entry points into the conversations with our critical friends. Any live note-taking during the Zoom sessions was also included as data. Researchers' notes from using the Framework for selecting and using children's literature to support EDI in education were also part of the data generation. Our conversations involved our personal reflections and shared analysis about what was happening in our classrooms.

Data Analysis

We employed an emergent design of analysis through reflection on our critical friends' conversations, live note-taking, student-created books, and student reflections. Each researcher had access to all transcript data and their individual live notes. Individually, we reviewed the transcripts and identified emerging themes (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004), came together to discuss those themes and decided “which data to include as evidence for the story that is developing” (Simons, 2009, p. 118). Each researcher individually identified themes that emerged from their notes, the transcripts, and student reflections; the researchers dialogued collectively to identify common themes. All researchers colour-coded, labelled and categorized their findings. When we regrouped, we shared our findings and then identified themes that were common to all.

Concerning our first research question (What did we learn about our use of picture books while investigating our current professional and classroom libraries through a critically oriented EDI lens?) the three main categories identified included: 1) banning books; 2) books to avoid conflict; 3) books to reflect diversity and authenticity. Our categories of book banning and books that avoid conflict surfaced from our analysis of the transcripts of our Zoom Meetings and were identified by all four researchers. The third category, books representing diversity and authenticity, emerged from our reflective notes recorded when investigating our personal and classroom libraries and the written reflections of secondary school students. During the research journey, our critical friendship pushed us to think about the importance of the representation of all students in the classroom. It led us to investigate whether our libraries were diverse and inclusive. For example, we discussed whether our libraries included books representative of various cultures, diverse families, genders, sexual identities, races, socioeconomics, abilities/disabilities, etc. Additionally, to address our second research question (What was learned professionally from engaging in self-study through critical friendships with colleagues across post-secondary and secondary domains?), the self-study data shed light on the benefit of professional learning with critical friends across different educational institutions.

Through data analysis and sharing, we found synergies, overlaps, and dissonance amongst the individual thematic reflections. For the duration of our analysis, we focused on the data representing our pedagogies of practice as “partial, incomplete, and always in a process of a re-telling and re-memoring” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. ix) while keeping in mind the framework and theoretical components that solidified our work (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). As identified by Mena and Russell (2017), constant comparative analysis helps enhance the trustworthiness of the qualitative self-study process. As a group of researchers with more than a century of collective teaching experience, our critical friendship played an important role throughout this research process and pushed our thinking. Our extensive experience and the level of comfort we felt in each other led to trustworthiness between all researchers and a trust in the self-study process (Brewer et al., 2021).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a crucial aspect of any self-study conducted with teachers in education. In the context of such research, trustworthiness refers to the credibility and reliability of the findings, ensuring that they accurately reflect the experiences and insights gained through the self-study process (Hamilton et al., 2020). In our context, for example, we offered honest voices about issues that arose in our classroom and within ourselves, which were ignited by the diverse issues that picture books evoked. We could comfortably talk about controversial issues such as cultural

identity and implicit bias. Our collective experiences gave us the confidence to address any concerns that arose during the research.

Establishing trustworthiness involves employing various strategies such as member checking, peer debriefing, and maintaining detailed documentation of the research process (Creswell & Guetterman, 2020). Our self-study process integrated each of these strategies. For example, member checking occurred regularly during our Zoom meetings, and we often asked each other to clarify or further explain our thinking. Peer debriefing was accomplished by sharing and discussing our findings from our data analysis through the process of labelling, coding and categorizing data. We maintained detailed documentation through the entire research process by recording and transcribing each Zoom meeting, live individual note-taking, and reflective notes from classroom sessions. By upholding principles of trustworthiness, self-study researchers with teacher educators and teachers can enhance the validity of their findings and contribute valuable knowledge to the field.

Findings

Throughout the analysis of the data generated through our critical conversations, three prevalent themes emerged: 1) Choosing books to reflect diversity and authenticity, 2) Addressing book banning trends and the Nova Scotia bias evaluation instrument, and 3) Playing it safe: Teachers choosing books to avoid conflict. In the next section, we share a description of our three key findings.

Choosing Books to Reflect Diversity and Authenticity

The self-study highlighted a growing recognition amongst educators of the importance of selecting literature that reflects the diversity of individuals within the classroom and in society. The importance of diversity and authenticity in picture books was also highlighted by all researchers in the student response data, which Jo Anne brought to the group. As one student explained, “I can write about my culture in my book, and other students can learn about my culture.” This statement reinforced for us the need to expand classroom libraries to include authentic stories from various cultural backgrounds and marginalized communities. Central to the members in this study was a framework developed by Evan for selecting and using children’s literature to support EDI in mathematics education and to support EDI more broadly in picture books (see Figure 1). We used an adapted framework to analyze our classroom libraries. The analysis allowed us to see a variety of patterns in the picture books available to us. For example, Evan spoke about the books for the mathematics classroom that use math concepts (e.g., the number zero, the addition sign, multiplication, etc.) as characters, thus avoiding the inclusion of any kind of diversity that might reflect the young audiences. The prevalence of animal characters also provoked our thinking because “it kind of erases diversity for students, particularly with respect to race (Carolyn).” Evan argued that animal characters are “geared toward a generic society where there are no inequities, no diversity, and no issues.” He also pointed to the use of fairy tales, which may not be “sending the right message [because] they are stereotypical heteronormative.” Our critical friends’ conversations, however, shifted our thinking to looking at multifaceted perspectives. Sometimes, difficult conversations can be supported by creating an emotional distance for children through books using animal characters (Burke & Copenhaver, 2004). Ellen highlighted the book, *Tiam* (Young & Paul, 2014), written from the perspective of the moose in the story. A complication arose for Ellen using the framework as support for *Tiam*. Mi’kmaq culture and values are central to the story. Mi’kmaq people are represented, yet the narrative of the story comes from the

perspective of the animal and speaks to the responsibility of the people to care for the moose. The self-study group felt this was a unique approach to using an animal character that avoided the cute animal hook for young children and the neutrality of character symbols. This particular book generated conversation regarding the lens we use to critique and assess our picture books. Ellen also commented on the use of animal characters, saying that some writers may be “intimidated in terms of the diverse and inclusive nature of writing. So, animals are safe.”

A central theme arose in the critical friends’ conversations about embracing authentic narratives from the community to enhance students’ sense of belonging and foster empathy and understanding. Evan showed books bringing a range of diversity in the mathematics community “that show women and Black men, Black women, men and women from India, gay mathematicians, lesbian mathematicians...to diversify our understanding of what a mathematician looks like.” He described a class assignment that involved choosing a picture book and developing rich tasks around its themes. One group chose *Blockhead* (D’Agnese, 2010) to tell the story of the well-known mathematician Fibonacci, who used observation to describe patterns and sequences in nature. The group first outlined the mathematical concepts and the Fibonacci sequence to develop tasks. As they unpacked the story further, however, they gravitated towards the social dynamics of his life and “issues of being different, of being an outsider, being bullied and the consequences on mental health.” Similarly, Carolyn referenced multiple books: “All of those books have more diverse characters”. But she reflected on a comment from a colleague who made her think more deeply about the picture books she was choosing, “or trying to choose picture books that show diverse characters. Are we sharing books that are being told from African history perspectives, or are we telling stories of how ~~Black~~ people of colour were accepted by white people?” This shift towards inclusivity underscores a commitment to promoting social justice and equity within educational spaces.

Increasing recognition of educators toward the importance of selecting texts that reflect the diversity of individuals, culture, and society is necessary within the classroom. The importance of diversity and authenticity in picture books allows all learners to see themselves inside the walls of the classroom, positioning them as respected participants within the learning community. Intentionally incorporating a variety of voices and experiences through picture books, educators can provide both windows and mirrors for students—windows into the lives and experiences of others, and mirrors that reflect their own identities. This allows all learners to see themselves as respected participants within the learning community and can challenge stereotypes, fostering a deeper understanding of the world around them.

Addressing Book Banning Trends and the Nova Scotia Bias Evaluation Instrument

The self-study revealed a concerning trend of book banning within educational settings, particularly in secondary classrooms, indicating a potential threat to academic freedom and the diversity of perspectives available to students. The practice of book banning is increasing, as is its focus in media and public discourse. Ellen identified that the two most important points for her were about “banning books and how that [book banning] may impact pedagogy, and whether we’d use the books again or wouldn’t use the books again.” The practice of banning books may undermine the professional autonomy of educators, who value students’ intellectual independence and encourage the exploration of diverse ideas, however controversial, challenging, and uncomfortable. Book banning also emerged as an important theme for Carolyn as she believed that “finding ways to use books that may cause conflict and controversy and focusing on that as an educational perspective instead of just really sanitizing our curriculum” is crucial for critical

literacy development. Limiting access to certain texts risks silencing marginalized voices and narrowing the range of perspectives to which students are exposed. In contrast, a commitment to inclusivity affirms the value of all voices in the educational landscape.

During the self-study collaborative conversations, we noted instances of censorship and restriction of literature, notably with Jo Anne, who commented on the banning of *Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger, 1951) for use in some classrooms and with Carolyn, who recalled recent bans on JK Rowling's texts because of the author's comments on social media. The introduction of the Nova Scotia Bias Evaluation Instrument underscored a proactive approach to addressing biases within educational materials and books. For example, Ellen asked teachers in a differentiated instruction and mathematics course to evaluate picture books according to their inclusivity and representation. One book, *We Move Together* (Fritsch & MacGuire, 2021), became the focus of a learning center on ableism and representation.

Evaluating texts serves as a mechanism to assess and mitigate biases present in picture books, fostering a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. Evan commented on the systemic nature of book banning, whereby administrators rationalize, "We can't mandate teachers to do things a certain way or have this knowledge like we hope it would be." Systemically, there is "an assumption that we have a lot of teachers who aren't doing this [critically evaluating texts]" and therefore, "as a system [school systems] need to make that decision because we can't trust that it will happen otherwise." In this context, the use of a bias evaluation tool can serve as a valuable resource to support educators in making informed and reflective decisions about the texts they bring into their classrooms.

Our self-study underscores the critical importance of addressing book-banning trends within educational settings, while initiatives like the NSBEI offer proactive steps toward fostering inclusivity and equity in the curriculum. Ongoing discussions within our self-study highlight the need to balance the removal of books which may be seen as controversial with respect for teachers' autonomy and professional judgement, acknowledging systemic challenges in promoting critical evaluation of texts.

During the critical friends' conversations, Carolyn introduced us to author Deborah Appleman, who wrote *Literature and the New Culture Wars* (2022) and offered educators ways to continue teaching troubling texts while confronting the conflict and controversies they invoke. Carolyn described Appleman's hope that children, young people, and university students be given the tools to think critically about texts, and ultimately, the opportunity "to make their own decisions about books themselves." Carolyn elaborated on a growing concern amongst educators of a "blanket ban" on certain texts that imposes on the "professional decision-making processes of teachers." For Carolyn, this is akin to "stealing from the children an opportunity to have some of those difficult conversations that would be sparked [from reading the text]." It is important to ensure all learners have access to a variety of texts through which they can view and evaluate through a critical lens. There was hope across our study that such conversations are happening regardless of obstacles and the concern that all teachers may not feel comfortable or culturally competent to engage students in "difficult conversations and invite students to make [their own] decisions (Carolyn)." Decision-making is an important skill for all children of all ages. Evan also reflected on recent classroom experiences with banning topics and books from the classroom, saying, "Just about the time Florida decided that they were going to take LGBTQ issues out of their curriculum...I was holding up and reading *The True Story of Alan Turing* (Revell, 2017) and his mathematical code breaking that would eventually lead to the end of the Second World War."

Evan explained that as a gay man, Turing was persecuted by the authorities and eventually incarcerated, leading to his eventual suicide. Evan described the students' conversation in his class; they were "reminding me that in some places in the world we can't even hold this book up because of who he was." Students felt that it was precisely because of who he was and what he had accomplished that "We need to talk about this person" and tell his full story. Students need to engage in conversations to help understand how merely banning books prevents individuals from seeing themselves in classrooms. The critical friends' conversations underscored the importance of equipping students with critical thinking skills to navigate complex and controversial texts. Censorship threatens democracy (Leland et al., 2022), and while it is essential to advocate against blanket bans that restrict educational opportunities, it is equally vital to recognize the responsibility of educators to intentionally facilitate critical literacy and social justice learning through their use of controversial texts. Educators must move beyond neutrality to actively foster classroom environments where students critically engage with issues of power, privilege, and representation. This includes using controversial books as pedagogical tools to challenge dominant narratives and affirm marginalized voices.

Current trends on social media, in public discussions, on podcasts and webinars show an increase in book banning and the banning of certain topics in schools. Public libraries face scrutiny of their holdings and are experiencing pressure to purge picture books dealing with human sexuality, racism, and particularly those showing representation of the LGBTQIA2S+ communities (Jones, 2024). Jones (2024) claimed this movement increasingly makes it challenging for teachers to use their professional judgment and choose the books that they deem the best teaching resources. Routman (2023) explained that such moves degrade our faith in children, educators, and public-school systems. Appleman (2022) had a similar view, claiming that it is important to trust students to be capable of learning to read the words and the world through a critical lens and cautions against reactionary attempts to remove any material that is potentially "offensive in any way to anyone" (p. 78). Leland et al. (2022) claim it is imperative to consider the perspectives of others, or issues such as racism, that go unchallenged. Their claims aligned with Appleman, who challenges those in power to disrupt and reread texts rather than simply resorting to book banning.

Playing it Safe: Teachers Choosing Books to Avoid Conflict

A prevalent theme identified by all researchers in the transcript data was instances of teachers "playing it safe". Teachers often opt for books perceived as safe choices, particularly in the aftermath of sensitive events such as suicides or natural disasters that claim lives. While books perceived as "safe" may reflect a commitment and a desire to protect the emotional well-being of students, they may also limit opportunities for critical dialogue and difficult but meaningful conversations with children. Jo Anne described how when she had worked for a publishing company, employees were advised that "if the language in the book is considered racial or if there's a lot of offensive language, turn the book down because you didn't want the teacher, in the classroom, to get negative feedback from parents. We could not approve something that could get teachers in trouble." Given the accessibility of social media and comments that are posted, casting teachers and schools in a negative light, teachers and administrators often make the safest decision. Leland et al. (2022) refer to the proclivity of teachers to 'play it safe' as self-censorship, where they opt to protect themselves rather than include controversial books or topics in their teaching.

This careful approach may also be connected to the complexity of maintaining respectful and inclusive environments while navigating diverse community values. Teachers may

demonstrate a reluctance to introduce literature that could potentially provoke conflict or questioning among students or parents. For example, Carolyn recalled teachers at the school where she was an administrator debating the use of *And Tango Makes Three* (Richardson & Parnell, 2015) in classrooms. The picture book tells the true story of two male penguins at Central Park Zoo, who form a bond, get help from the zookeeper, look after an egg that hatches, and care for the baby penguin. Teachers were fearful of parents who might question their decision to promote same sex marriage. This reluctance was exemplified when Jo Anne recalled a tragic event in her classroom, the death of a student, “I had never experienced [this] before, there was no PL [Professional Learning] on it.” Reflecting deeply on the emotional well-being of her students, Jo Anne decided to omit some literature that touched on sensitive topics (e.g., *The Outsiders*, Hinton, 2006). *The Outsiders* (2006) has long been a controversial book, banned in some schools for gang violence, underage smoking and drinking, strong language, and family dysfunction, while part of the curriculum in others (Baldassarro, 2011). Jo Anne continued, “I left out so much stuff for about 3 years. I would not deal with it, and it wasn't about me; it was about protecting those [students]. I didn't want them to feel extra sad when they came to my class.” Jo Anne referred to her actions as “self-banning,” yet in the critical friends' conversations, others commented on Jo Anne's choice as a “professional decision” rather than a ban that may have come from an “outside” source. Carolyn responded to Jo Anne's strategy of “purposeful selection” saying, “critical selection is so valuable.” Jo Anne's cautious approach to book selection may have inadvertently limited the exposure of students to diverse perspectives and critical discussions. The avoidance of books related to sensitive topics, however, reflects a broader need for educators to navigate challenging subjects with sensitivity, prioritizing the importance of fostering critical thinking and empathy in students.

The critical friends' conversation continued to dig deeper into issues of professional decision-making, purposeful selection, and critical thinking. For example, Carolyn interjected with the possibility that teachers could do more than remove troubled texts, “We need to trust our students and ourselves to teach them, to trouble them, and to engage [them] in the kind of rigorous, intellectual and authentic debate that is a critical part of literary study.” Jo Anne quickly agreed, recalling a conversation in her secondary classroom with Deborah Ellis, author of *The Breadwinner* (2000). Students, teachers, and Jo Anne discussed the importance of young adults reading texts that describe difficult accounts of war and brutality. Jo Anne recalled Ellis' powerful statement, “Because it's just happening to one group in the world [Afghan children], the other group [Canadian children] should be able to read about it, in the same age group.” Ellen connected this conclusion with educators' responses to the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement after the murder of George Floyd. With some teachers choosing not to talk about it in classrooms, Ellen reflected that many Black families are necessarily already engaged in this conversation. She asked educators to “hold a mirror up to yourself [to reflect] the privilege that you can safely decide to not pay attention to this.” As Ellen reiterated, “For many people, it is not a choice to not talk about it.” Indeed, Ellen described parents in her community talking to young children about socio-cultural issues like “how we behave when police are around in order to keep [us] safe.” She highlighted *Up Home* (Grant, 2008), written by an African Nova Scotian woman who recalls growing up in the Black community of North Preston, and questioned other books in her library, “Who are telling our own stories? ...not from our White perspective ... that is different.” Her question raised other concerns in the critical friends' conversation about how, “even though we're trying to be inclusive and using books that we think are diverse, are they still sending the messages that we want to send?” The conversation highlighted the imperative for educators to trust students

with challenging texts, engage in rigorous debate, and confront socio-cultural issues head-on, recognizing the privilege inherent in the ability to choose whether to address them.

Benefits of Professional Learning Through Self-Study with Critical Friends

The importance of self-study has been demonstrated through professional learning, collaborative learning communities, and opportunities for inclusivity. Self-study can provide schools and other educational institutions with opportunities to promote reflective practice with critical friends and continuous improvement. Through a group of trusted professionals, teachers currently facing anxieties in choosing resources, lacking a voice within the system, and diminishing authority in curricular decision-making, will have an opportunity to express concerns, receive collegial support, and reach meaningful solutions. As Jo Anne explained, “coming together to talk about what we've been doing and using—this sort of self-study to me is the most effective model of professional development or professional learning that we can be involved in.” Our critical friendships served to highlight the shared concerns within our professional community and strengthened our reflective practices. As Evan stated, “being with critical friends provides an opportunity to feel safe to discuss learning.”

Establishing collaborative learning communities through critical friendships can also enhance the effectiveness of self-study by providing teachers with peer support and diverse perspectives. Through collaboration, “we're having excellent conversations, but then we're also accountable to us as a group of professionals, because we're all going back and doing our thing and coming back and talking about it” (Carolyn). Evan continued, “It's that engagement in conversation with each other, going back, trying things, and then coming back and sharing whether it worked.” That is the essence of collaborative learning communities with a group of critical friends.

Teacher self-study could be leveraged to address inclusivity and equity, encouraging teachers to develop culturally responsive and inclusive teaching practices. Our focus on picture books opened space to talk. The notes recorded while each researcher investigated their classroom libraries highlighted the importance of a diverse collection of picture books. It also brought to light current issues of book banning that have become prevalent across many provinces in Canada. We are hopeful that through discussion and education, we can help others understand the importance of using all texts as critical resources and pedagogical tools. As Ellen explained, we have to analyze books “to see who's represented, who's not, and how they are represented, it's all connected to identity.” Students at all levels—from the earliest grades to post-secondary—need to see themselves represented in their learning environment. As a result of self-study, we acknowledge the importance of continued professional learning and collaborative learning communities with critical friends. We also acknowledge the benefits of socially constructed knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978) and the value of critical literacy (Comber, 2001, 2016; Luke, 1995; Vasquez, 1994) to enhance learning.

The findings of this self-study illuminate the complex dynamics surrounding book selection and censorship within educational settings. While concerns regarding book banning and the avoidance of controversial topics persist, there is also evidence of a growing awareness amongst educators of the importance of diversity and authenticity in literature. Moving forward, there is a need for ongoing dialogue and professional development to empower educators in navigating these challenges while upholding the principles of academic freedom and inclusivity. By fostering a culture that embraces diverse perspectives and authentic narratives, educators can

create enriching learning experiences that empower students to become critical thinkers and compassionate global citizens, as well as further develop their own professional learning.

Discussion and Implications for Teachers and Teacher Educators

Engaging in self-study with critical friends was indeed a professional learning journey (Appelget et al., 2020; Loughran, 2018). The concepts of critical literacy (Comber, 2001, 2016; Luke, 1995; Vasquez, 1994), reflective practice (Roffey-Barentsen, 2013), and social constructivism (Adams, 2006; Kapur, 2018; Vygotsky, 1978) were the theoretical underpinnings of the research process. As educators, it provided us an opportunity to strengthen our relationship between self and practice (Berry & Kitchen, 2023; Frambaugh-Kritzer & Stolle, 2019) as well as with colleagues. Learning together is a process facilitated by interaction, communication and shared meaning within a community (Adams, 2006; Kapur, 2018; Olan & Edge, 2019), which was demonstrated by our self-study. The connection across institutions—secondary school and post-secondary—enhanced our learning and deepened our understanding of both self-study and our professional practice.

Even after our formal self-study, we continued to share information and current happenings related to our collaborations. For example, *The Hate U Give* (Thomas, 2017) was removed from Nova Scotia's curriculum because of language in the book. The Department of Education claims that it was not banned but merely removed from the recommended reading resource list; the book will be available in school libraries if a student chooses to read it. Such a move links to our critical friends' conversation that limiting exposure limits the depth of conversation for students from local affected communities. Chisholm (2023), reporting for CBC News, notes that one Nova Scotian teacher responded to the removal of *The Hate U Give* by writing, "Are we sending the message that the topics, experiences, and language a Black author chooses to use are not welcome as a choice in high school? How do we address systemic racism and disrupt inequalities from our history, without the history?" (n.p.). These questions are well aligned with the conversation of our collaborative self-study. We also add questions such as: How are teachers positioning themselves if they choose to use a book not on an approved list? Will teachers self-ban the book? Will teachers continue to play it safe? Are they willing to put themselves in a place and space to be questioned and challenged and feel supported to do so? Will teachers be willing to speak out?

This study enhanced the connection between secondary and post-secondary educators and the need for further collaborations between these groups. It is beneficial for both teachers and students in these classrooms, as many commonalities exist across educational fields. Our collaboration and exploration identified both strengths and concerns that can benefit teaching and learning in secondary and post-secondary classrooms. Kitchen (2023) identified that there is a need for self-study to be promoted as a valuable tool for professional growth at all levels of education. Our study addresses the need by extending our self-study to include secondary and post-secondary educators, which makes this a more unique self-study. Additionally, we recommend that more educators in secondary and post-secondary education embrace similar self-study.

As Jo Anne reiterated, "collaboration is a great tool to help improve teaching, but more importantly and more crucially, it is a tool to help improve student happiness and understanding as they grapple with issues they face in their own lives". If it did not help students, we would not value it as we do; our students are the leaders and are a daily inspiration for us to do our best as educators. We feel privileged to have participated in a collaborative self-study with other educators, all of whom are invested in improving and invigorating education.

Limitations

While a self-study involving three education professors from a single institution and a secondary teacher from a different province can provide valuable insights into teaching practices and collaboration across geographic boundaries, it also presents certain limitations. The small size of the group may restrict the diversity of perspectives and experiences represented, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings. The self-study, however, was intended to examine the personal, not create a generalization. The geographical distance between the secondary teacher and the institution prevented face-to-face interactions, thereby impacting the depth of collaboration through online platforms and email exchanges. The focus on a single institution and a secondary teacher from a different location may also overlook the broader contextual factors and variations in educational settings that could influence the effectiveness and applicability of the study's findings. These limitations underscore the importance of considering the scope, diversity, and context of participants when conducting self-study research in education.

Concluding Thoughts

Throughout our collaborative self-study, we experienced learning as a journey with multiple ways to get to a destination (Loughran, 2018). Our journey left us at multiple destinations—as one never truly arrives at a final destination on a learning journey—our journey left us with as many questions as it did answers. For future self-study and professional learning, we are contemplating a book study through collaborative self-study. In Appleman's *Literature and the New Culture Wars* (2022), the author makes a very solid case for not banning books, concerns with book banning resonated with us all; as Carolyn stated “we wish we had time that we could actually all read this and come back and have that conversation in a book study...not just this book [*Literature and the New Culture Wars* (2022)], but we have a potential way of extending our learning and our knowledge through this approach [self-study] that we're doing, right now”. We hope that our experiences will contribute to the existing scholarship about collaborative self-study among critical friends. We hope our readers will embrace self-study with critical friends as a means of professional learning and to grapple with issues that arise during the learning journey. As well, teachers may find the DEI framework and NSBEI tool useful to question their choice of texts used in classrooms. We recognize the differences between and similarities to other self-study researchers and hope that our contribution will ignite a passion for others to engage with colleagues to learn together through self-study.

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