



Communicative Justice and Data Literacy Study Circle

Dec 2022- May 2023

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Introduction

From December 2022 to May 2023, I had the opportunity to facilitate the Data Literacy and Communicative Justice Study Circle with 12 teachers. At the conclusion of the Study Circle, I had the opportunity to debrief the Study Circle experience one-on-one with the participants. This document contains a summary of these conversations which covered a range of themes and issues, including pressing needs regarding data literacy and Communicative Justice, teacher training and professional development, and contributions of CJI to their professional growth.

The pressing need to standardize data literacy definitions in adult classrooms and center curriculum on students' lives and experiences by balancing content and language. We also discussed the value need to incorporate and implement data literacy and Communicative Justice across skills in groups that are not traditionally included, for example: open-enrollment programs, GED programs for incarcerated learners, advocacy and leadership education, EL civics, LESLLA learners, vocational and career preparedness, health literacy, financial literacy, refugee resettlement and transitions programs.

In terms of **teacher training and professional development**, we talked about the connection between teachers' previous knowledge and skills to teach data and Communicative Justice and how willing they are to seek out opportunities to connect with other educators and to learn from them. Participants shared that data literacy and Communicative Justice need to be integrated in teacher training and diverse opportunities for educators (administrators and teachers) to reflect on their own practice while problem-solving with others.

They were eager to share **contributions of data literacy and Communicative Justice** to their professional growth that included reflecting about the role of data visualizations, data in everyday elements, and data storytelling in advocacy and leadership in adult classrooms. We had rich conversations about data privacy and consent, particularly when working with hard-to reach communities and learners who had experienced trauma. We also delved into the importance of a reflective pedagogical practice around ethics and responsibilities of teaching research, data, and leadership. Teachers also expressed that participating in the data literacy and Communicative Justice study circle allowed them to concretely think about democratizing data by learning and teaching *to speak data*.

The study circle helped me:

- Articulate and explain to others the theory and praxis behind Communicative Justice Initiative
- Ask for feedback and reflect on how to incorporate it into my practice and research.
- Imagine how the work I had done could be extrapolated to other subjects, skills, target populations, levels, and languages.
- Connect with other educators and learn from them- not only about how they would incorporate data literacy or Communicative Justice, but also about how they were already addressing pedagogical issues I was facing, too. It was a community and trust- building opportunity for me.

After meeting with the participants, I analyzed and coded our transcriptions and my notes. I was able to find 12 emergent themes. This process was extremely helpful for me as it invited me to reflect on the



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over 3 years I had been teaching and developing the Communicative Justice framework and Initiative. I found that the participants' struggles and insights shared during the study circle and the interviews resonated with my own journey as an immigrant, language learner, educator, and researcher. The following pages contain a summary/overview of the themes participants highlighted and were interested in delving into in the future.

1. Need to standardize data literacy definitions in adult classrooms

Educators posited that their participation in the study circle helped them notice that there is a need to standardize data literacy definitions in adult classrooms. These observations appeared since the first meeting, in which we talked about data literacy, but each one of us had different perspectives and our definitions were informed by our backgrounds, expertise, and the area we were working in within adult education.

The disconnected definitions pointed to the importance of developing an integrated and contextualized data literacy conceptualization that can be used to address different applications of data. For instance, some participants considered data as the information websites collect on users; others saw it as demographic and personal information gathered by state or federal institutions to support their investment/funding on programs; and others considered data as information the students collected to use when advocating for themselves and communities.

If you're interested in reading more about adult learner advocacy and democratization of data, I invite you to read the blog written by Alison Ascher Webber, Maricel Santos, and Maria Bastias [Advancing Data Literacy for Adult Learners and Democratizing Data - EdTech Center @ World Education](#). Moreover, the conversations and lessons learned around this theme support the need to continue developing a definition of data literacy that both allows flexibility and provides guidance for educators. Having this definition will foster implementation and assessment.

2. Teacher's previous knowledge and skills to teach data and Communicative Justice

Added to the disconnected conceptualization/definition of data literacy, participants also identify as a barrier for its implementation educators prior knowledge teaching data. One of the comments pointed to the traditional dichotomous perspective of language and science can affect educators' notions and willingness to "try" bringing data literacy and communicative justice to classrooms. Furthermore, it was mentioned that teachers' previous knowledge and skills (speaking and working with data) was connected to their willingness to seek out opportunities to connect with other educators and to learn how to bring data and Communicative Justice into their classrooms.

3. Connecting with other educators and learning from them

Educators participating in the study circle emphasized how important it was for them to connect with other educators and program directors to share ideas and concerns about data literacy and communicative justice in adult classrooms. They pointed out that having the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations with peers was essential for their willingness to try implementing the Communicative Justice framework and, most importantly, reflecting on implementation to make



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changes. They expressed that they felt inspired by each other's ideas and work, which made them more likely to think about new ways to bring data literacy into their programs and classrooms.

4. Integration and implementation of Communicative Justice and data literacy in professional development for adult education programs and teachers

Participants shared that they perceived a need to integrate data literacy and Communicative Justice in program planning, professional development, and program evaluation. They expressed that in training other educators, they [participants] would act as a) role models by demonstrating to teachers and administrators what communicative justice and data literacy look like in the classrooms; b) bringing communicative justice and data literacy to other education-related conversations such as onboarding, hiring practices, staff meetings, curriculum development, assessment practices. In general, they explained that they would train new and current teachers and would adopt data literacy and Communicative Justice as the expected approach.

5. Incorporating and implementing data literacy and Communicative Justice in open-enrollment settings

Educators who were working in open-enrollment (as well as those who had done it in the past) pointed out that Communicative Justice and data literacy could be woven into placement, diagnostic, formative, and performance assessment. They appreciated the flexibility that the approach/framework provided for being implemented across skills and in small classroom activities. They emphasized the need for constant reflection and workshops that aid educators in creating new ways to bring data literacy in adult education. Assessing learners' prior knowledge regarding data literacy appeared to be essential to designing a curriculum that empowers them instead of challenging them.

6. Role of data visualizations, data in everyday elements, and data storytelling

Some educators pointed that participating in the study circle had helped them reflect on their own biases regarding data, data visualizations, and data storytelling. Participants recognized that engaging with data visualizations is critical to learner engagement and interpretation of data.

7. Role of data storytelling in advocacy and leadership in adult classrooms

Educators engaged in advocacy and leadership work explained that the study circle had expanded their thinking about how to uplift stories emerging from learners rather than from teachers. They pointed out that Communicative Justice was essential to implementing a student-centered approach as it provides concrete steps for moving into action.

They also recognized that one of the challenges that may appear in working with data storytelling is finding topics that are shared among the students, particularly in politics, religion, and socioeconomic themes. Educators perceived this as an invitation to continue exploring and developing the classroom application and implications of Communicative Justice and hoped to have more opportunities to participate in professional development like this study circle in the future.

8. Teacher reflections on data privacy and consent

Communicative Justice and data literacy conversations generated educators' reflections around consent and how it is addressed in adult classrooms. They expressed that reflecting more about consent as part of pedagogy and incorporating it in curriculum was extremely connected to data privacy and biases. One of the issues study circle participants saw in incorporating consent in their curriculum had to do with the complex language and digital skills needed to navigate data privacy. On the other hand, some participants explained that for them, consent around data had to do with being used to share personal, and sometimes delicate or confidential, information without being part of the process (rationale for collecting and storing their data).

9. Role of reflective practice on ethics and responsibilities of teaching research, data, and leadership

Educators shared that participating in the study circle and discussing data, privacy, data storytelling, increased their understanding of learners' times and pace for speaking up- instead of pushing them to advocate. They appreciated that the study circle was an opportunity for them to think about allowing space for learners to consider repercussions and implications of acting and speaking up. For educators it was also important to reflect on the cultural aspect of advocacy as for some learners this may not be familiar or comfortable to do.

10. Need for centering curriculum on students' lives and experiences by balancing content and language

Study circle participants shared that they were inspired to pay more attention to learners' stories and interests, and that these should be priority when developing curriculum and contextualized materials that can engage learners' by representing who they are. A couple of them explained that adult education professionals must support learners' interaction with content *and* allow space for language development. By recognizing learners' interests, background, prior knowledge, and lived experiences educators can provide opportunities for learners to use analytical skills.

Participants mentioned that the study circle had reminded them of the need to *re*-humanize education and disrupt their comfort zones, biases, and teaching methods, which sometimes can maintain traditional structures like teacher power, instead of learner-centered education.

11. Need for incorporating and implementing data literacy and Communicative Justice across skills in groups that are not traditionally included

Study circle participants appreciated learning about Communicative Justice and data literacy, because it represented both an approach and a set of competences they could include in their teaching. They pointed out that there is a need for frameworks/approaches that allow educators to implement data literacy and Communicative Justice across skills in all groups, but particularly in communities/learner groups that have traditionally left aside - often decisions are made, and information is not presented to



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them about health and their lives. Some of the groups educators referred to were:

- Communicative justice and data literacy to address misinformation and disinformation in incarcerated settings.
- Communicative Justice and data literacy in intergenerational education
- Communicative Justice, data, and research for learners with emergent literacies and language proficiency
- Communicative Justice and data literacy in open-enrolment
- Communicative Justice and data literacy in education for seniors, people with disabilities

12. Data literacy and Communicative Justice for academic purposes: highlighting students' stories to develop autonomy and civic engagement in adult [English] classrooms

Study circle participants working in pre-academic and academic levels pointed out that data literacy, data visualizations, and Communicative Justice were a great on-ramp to incorporate relevant issues and topics for learners into the curriculum. Bringing topics such as housing, financial stats, higher education, legal services, court representation, and voting rights through data for academic purposes represented an innovative approach that prioritizes learners' experiences and stories, and ultimately, to develop learner autonomy and civic engagement in higher education. Educators also pointed out that participating in this study circle reminded them that they needed to update their teaching and curriculum to address the new challenges associated with AI. According to a participant, data storytelling and data literacy required learners to use critical thinking skills beyond synthesizing. It invited them to reflect on deeper issues like representation, power dynamics, as well as culture and language.

Conclusion:

These themes represent my own reflections around data literacy in adult education and communicative justice, but also hours of rich conversations among dedicated and passionate educators that, like me, were working in classrooms, teacher trainers and program directors, engaged in research and policy.

As a data literacy and Communicative Justice leader/ambassador, I am constantly looking for opportunities to discuss, troubleshoot, and problem solve with other educators. Facilitating this study circle was an extraordinary learning experience for all of us, thus we hope that other educators and educational leaders are able to participate in the future.