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Conflict, Crisis, and Controversy in Schools: Critical Literacy for Educational Leadership Response and Responsibility

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Schools are inherently political and potentially contentious spaces (Hess, 2009; Jenlink, 2013; Nespor, 2010; Wood, 2012). Within these educational environments, teaching and learning are complex and context-laden activities marked by social, cultural, geographical, and historical concerns. Given that in the learning environment, students will wrestle with literary predicaments, civic dilemmas, and scientific problems, it stands to reason that they will need to face social issues and critical information that are grounded in conflict and controversy. Tensions relating to these conflicts and controversies in the classroom and schoolhouse settings have provided concerns for parents and community members for decades.

Teaching with controversy, in other words, presents itself as a topic of contention. In many school communities, controversial teaching is viewed as both a political and democratic polemic. As Nespor (2010) challenged,

> Educational discourse usually treats the school as a bounded system, a container of classroom processes and curricular texts, an institutional shell waiting to be filled up by the actions of teachers, students, and administrators. But looking at schools as somehow separate from cities, politics, neighborhoods, businesses, and popular culture obscures how these are all inextricably connected to one another, how they jointly produce educational effects. (p. xi)

In the early years of the 20th century, Dewey (1909) acknowledged education as a public concern, stating that the average citizen "will always have his right to some utterance on the operation of the public schools" (p. vi). Undoubtedly, parents have an interest in their child's learning. But to what extent? Here, Dewey called on the educational professionals who understood the "special mysteries" (p. vi) of education, asserting that the public must recognize the expert judgment of educators.

Bolstered by the polarization around critical race theory and the Black Lives Matter efforts, conservative suburbs and states have fostered a legislative movement against what they have labeled as *divisive concepts*. The Divisive Concepts Movement has legally defined and outlawed 16 concepts that hold that "an individual, by virtue of the individual's race or sex, is inherently privileged, racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or subconsciously" (Kruesi, 2021, para. 4). Although this is primarily impacting literature, social studies, and science in the PK12 setting, Florida's SB 266 (2023) issues a directive to

colleges and universities that will prevent curriculum or instruction "based on theories that systemic racism, sexism, oppression, and privilege are inherent in the institutions of the United States and were created to maintain social, political, and economic inequities" (SB 266, Section 1.5.a). Within this context, it becomes imperative that school leaders develop critical habits to maneuver their schools through the conflicts, crises, and controversies impacting their schools and the political perspectives of their stakeholders.

In this paper, I first explore the concepts of conflict, crisis, and controversy and consider ways they have had and do have an impact on education. Next, I will explore the potential of developing critical literacies in educational leaders to counter the effects caused by conflict, crisis, and controversy. I will focus on four critical literacies that offer the most potential frameworks. These literacies, moral literacy, political literacy, temporal literacy (a term I frame as *spatial-temporal*), and cultural literacy are taken from the literature on educational studies and leadership (Brooks, 2006; Brooks & Normore, 2010; Jenlink, 2013, 2014; Slattery, 1995). These critical literacies are discussed regarding educational leaders' need to understand the interdisciplinarity of problems and public perspectives. For this, I employ the term *ecological literacy*, which I have borrowed from environment(al) education (Bowers, 1996; Orr, 1990, 1991, 2015). Finally, I consider various implications for future research and recommendations for practice, preparation, and policy to inform and equip educational administrators for conflict, crisis, and controversy in the schools they lead.

Educational Impacts of Conflict, Crisis, and Controversy

Conflict

Conflict is defined as a "competitive or opposing action of incompatibles: antagonistic state or action (as of divergent ideas, interests, or persons)" (Merriam Webster, n.d.). Oberschall (1978) asserted, "Conflict results from purposeful interactions among two or more parties in a competitive setting" (p. 291). Discussing the social nature of conflict, Oberschall went on to state, "Social conflict encompasses a broad range of social phenomena: class, racial, religious, and communal conflicts; riots, rebellions, revolutions; strikes and civil disorders; marches, demonstrations, protest gatherings, and the like" (p. 291).

Conflict in schools, particularly relating to curricular concerns, has been a long-established social concern (Apple, 1971; Dewey, 1906). Throughout the 20th century, many famous educational conflicts concerned the clash between

evolutionists and creationists. As a result, major court cases, including the Scopes Trial (*Scopes v. State*, 1927), *Epperson v. Arkansas* (1968), and *Edwards v. Aguillard* (1987), focused national attention on the interactions and competing notions of these two opposing views. *Textbook wars* have continued debates over creationism versus evolution and have been an enduring issue in several states, particularly in rural, remote, or under-resourced areas (Berstein, 1985; Kay, 2018; Zimmerman, 2002).

Over the last several decades, school leaders have seen a politically-driven rise in community concerns about the inclusion of critical race theory, multicultural education, and anti-racism in their children's classrooms. Similarly, of late, mask mandates and school closures during the pandemic have been sources of major school-community conflict. As Dewey (1909) noted, the conflict often develops between public expectations and the commitments of public schools, stating, "It is one of the complaints of the schoolmaster that the public does not defer to his professional opinion as completely as it does to that of practitioners in other professions" (p. v).

Therefore, school settings are well-known as arenas of frequent conflict and social tension (Göksoy & Argon, 2016). As Uğurlu and Şemin (2020) have noted,

> Schools are difficult places to manage as they are hubs hosting students with diverse cultural characteristics. They are such places that not only students from various age groups come together but also each specific age group exhibits its own emotional, social and cognitive behaviors and attitudes. (p. 199)

However, though conflicts and tensions may be a natural, regular, and expected part of schools as organizations, conflict in schools has been found to impact teaching and student learning directly (Argolli & Rada, 2015; Göksoy & Argon, 2016; Rai & Singh, 2021).

Crisis

A crisis is a particular or peculiar kind of conflict. Typically, a crisis can be understood as "an unstable or crucial time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending"; crises may also be viewed as circumstances that have "reached a critical phase" (Merriam Webster, n.d.). A crisis may be considered acute or chronic (Vigh, 2008; Weaver et al., 2022). Whereas I have conceptualized conflict as between two or more persons, parties, or places, a crisis may best be thought of as between a person or people and a *phenomenon*.

Examples, by no means intended to be exhaustive, are a person facing the crisis of a terminal disease, a community battling the opioid epidemic, the citizens of a nation-state struggling for resources or recognition during a humanitarian catastrophe, and populations of the world fighting to survive during a global pandemic.

Crises are often traumatic. School violence, the recent COVID-19 pandemic, war and invasion, and natural and man-made disasters can create a range of traumatic and adverse childhood experiences that have notable impacts on educational decisioning and resources (Striepe & Cunningham, 2021). School violence, such as school shootings, have traumatic effects on learners, educators, and the greater community (Cohen, 2021; DeMatthews & Brown, 2019; Huskey & Connell, 2021; King & Bracy, 2019; Kolbe, 2020; Lunneblad, 2019; McMahon et al., 2022; Metzgar, 2020; Sokol et al., 2021). The event impacts the emotional, academic, social, and community aspects of schooling (Grissom & Condon, 2021). Survivors, other witnesses, and those with close or community connections to victims can experience long-term trauma, anxiety and depression, and feelings of helplessness, as well as fear, grief, guilt, and distrust (Cohen, 2021; DeMatthews & Brown, 2019; Kolbe, 2020). The educational experience of the learner is disrupted indefinitely.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented another political crisis that penetrated the schoolhouse walls (Beauchamp et al., 2021; Harris, 2020; Harris & Jones, 2020; Jones et al., 2021; Roofe, 2021). The COVID-19 crisis profoundly impacted schools worldwide (Beauchamp et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2021). School leaders faced unprecedented challenges, including the abrupt shift to remote learning, ensuring the well-being of students and staff, managing limited resources effectively, and maintaining educational quality amidst disruptions (Grissom & Condon, 2021). However, social, racial, political, and regional differences created a crucial milieu that had a substantial impact on the learning environment. How citizens and school boards viewed masking and vaccinations, or their general views about the virus more broadly, shaped and hindered leadership responses and approaches (Harris & Jones, 2020; Roofe, 2021). As a result, the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on schools emphasize the critical role of leadership in responding to conflict in the face of unprecedented challenges (Beauchamp et al., 2021; Harris, 2020).

Controversy

Crises and conflict are often driving forces for controversies and conspiracies with which schools must then contend. Fundamentally, a controversy is a polemic contention, dispute, or quarrel that fosters disunity or

division. What is and is not considered a controversy is grounded in one's comprehensive worldview and deeply rooted in ideas that challenge the hegemony and taken-for-granted asymmetrical power differentials (Apple, 2019; Camicia, 2008; Gramsci, 1971). According to Camicia, curricular controversies "have been a perennial part of the American educational landscape" (p. 300). American history, in particular, can be controversial since history is "often structured as a meta-narrative that makes claims about the identities of individuals and groups" (Camicia, 2008, p. 300).

Similarly, social issues such as critical race theory and whether or not it is being taught in schools and disputes over mask and vaccine mandates in schools, although sources of conflict, have also reached statuses of controversy (Rogers et al., 2019). These types of controversies can have a temporal quality, dating back to the causes of the Civil War and continuing up to the modern disputes over mass voter-fraud claims. As mentioned under the heading of *Conflict*, divisive concepts such as anti-racism and opinions on the institution of slavery have brought into question instruction on Reconstruction, Jim Crow laws, and Civil Rights (Diem & Welton, 2020; Lomotey & Smith, 2023). As with these controversies, educators have had to approach topics, such as climate science controversies (Hollstein & Smith, 2020; Nation & Feldman, 2021) and conspiratorial theories (UNESCO, 2022; van Prooijen, 2017), with academic caution due to their potential of being or becoming divisive.

Not all significant controversies receive national attention. In 2013, a controversy in Texas broke out over innocuous educational materials that Educational Service Centers provided to under-resourced districts (Davies, 2013). After a mother-daughter team of curriculum authors accused the online curriculum management system, CSCOPE, of trying to promote Islam and "discredit Christianity" (Davies, 2013, para. 9) and of having "an anti-American slant" (para. 11) a state-wide controversy developed. The concerted effort that fomented around the contention led to the state's governor attacking the curriculum resources and several legal suits against school districts that had adopted CSCOPE as an educational tool (Chen, 2022; Smith, 2013). Not only did the controversy cost districts millions in redesigning curricular and instructional sequencing, but arguably, it deprived thousands of students and teachers in rural and under-resourced districts of materials that aided in the instruction and assessment of the state's own mandated student expectations (Davies, 2013; Michels, 2014).

Critical Literacies for Leading in Crisis, Conflict, and Controversy

In Brooks and Normore's (2010) "Educational Leadership and Globalization: Literacy for a Glocal Perspective," they present nine critical literacies they present as skills or capacities for educational leaders to think *glocally* [local + global] about education. These nine critical literacies are political literacy (Cassel & Lo, 1997; Denver & Hands, 1990), economic literacy (Spring, 1998), cultural literacy (Spring, 2008; Wolcott, 2003), moral literacy (Christians, 2003; Tuana, 2007), pedagogical literacy (Ludwig & Herschel, 1998; Maclellan, 2008; Olson, 2001), information literacy (Abdelaziz, 2004; del Val & Normore, 2008; Selwyn et al., 2001), organizational literacy (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Senge et al, 2008; Schein, 2010), spiritual and religious literacy (Dantley, 2005; Thompson, 2004; Uphoff, 2001), and temporal literacy (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Marx, 2006; Mintzberg, 2013).

Freire (1983) eloquently asserted, "Reading the world precedes reading the word, and the subsequent reading of the word cannot dispense with continually reading the world. Language and reality are dynamically intertwined" (p. 5). Critical literacy is analogous to reading the world. Just as readers must learn to decode and comprehend written texts to become literate, critical literacy requires the scholar-practitioner to decode the cues embedded in situations and comprehend the meaning of information and interactions by inferencing and drawing conclusions. In this sense, conflicts, crises, and controversies are social, political, and cultural texts that educational leaders can learn to interpret through developing critical literacies.

Given the context of resolving ethical dilemmas and responding to conflicts, crises, and controversies in PK-12 schools, I have elected to deliberate on four: political literacy, moral literacy, cultural literacy, and spatial-temporal literacy. I selected these four because I view them to be—perhaps—the most relevant. That said, critical literacy as a leader's general capacity for criticality is beneficial and worthy of discussion. However, for the scope of this paper, I limit the focus to the aforementioned.

Political Literacy

Political literacy enables educational leaders to understand the political landscape within and beyond the school system. This equips leaders with the habits and dispositions necessary to read between the lines of policies, mandates, and political influences that can impact decision-making during conflicts and crises and can disrupt schools through ideological rhetoric and controversy. Furthermore, politically literate leaders are also better prepared to advocate for the best interests

of their school community within the broader political context of the community and the country.

As established, schools are political spaces. Jenlink (2013) noted that because schools are practiced places, they are, therefore, political spaces; as a result, the work of educational leaders as scholar-practitioners requires an understanding of how ideological patterns and cultural meaning shape the school and learning. Likewise, Apple (2019) affirmed,

> [A] truly critical study of education needs to deal with more than the technical issues of how we teach efficiently and effectively—too often the dominant or only questions educators ask. It must think critically about education's relationship to economic, political, and cultural power. (p. xxvii)

Implied is that educational leadership must ask, "What does it mean to be politically literate for a school administrator?" According to Brooks and Normore (2010), "a politically literate educational leader is familiar both with various formal and informal processes by which people engage local and national issues and the outcomes and consequences of said processes" (pp. 55-56). The need to understand the politics of education and schooling beyond organizational politics has increased. Dogmatism, disinformation, divisiveness, and a wavering democratic faith are challenging education in pluralistic societies (Lowery, 2024).

Educational leaders have a role in providing teachers with sufficient resources to engage students in history, geography, social studies, and science, modeling and encouraging democratic debates, dialogue, and deliberations (Culp, 2019). Approaches grounded in political intelligence may involve encouraging students to delve into current events and analyze political and media discourses related to social disparities, environmental issues, and historical contexts (Lowery, 2024). Such education would be community-based, ecologically connected, and rooted in the local, associated way of living, but also allow students to view the national parallels of these concepts in tangible and relatable ways. The goal for school leaders would be to cultivate a culture of inquiry and critical consciousness as part of the school ethos, encouraging teachers and students (and, when appropriate, parents) to question political and cultural institutions and assumptions routinely. Through these efforts, educational leaders can empower stakeholders to become active and informed citizens.

Moral Literacy

Ethical dilemmas often require moral reasoning and the application of ethical frameworks and principles (Herman, 2007; Jenlink, 2014; Lowery, 2021a;

Tuana, 2007). Educational leaders engaging in moral literacy evaluate situations ethically, considering the moral implications of their decisions for all parties (Jenlink, 2014). This is crucial when school leaders are faced with ethical conflicts and competing moral values involving students, staff, or community members (Lowery, 2020; Lowery, 2021b; Leonard, 2007). The development of moral literacy can reinforce a school leader's ethical decision-making, resolve conflict, manage crises, and cultivate empathy and compassion in traumatic and tumultuous times (Christians, 2003; Jenlink, 2014).

Ethical decision-making. Moral literacy equips educational leaders with an ethical framework, allowing them to make principled decisions, especially in times of crisis, conflict, and controversy. Jenlink (2014) explained,

> Morality may best be understood as the behavior—judgments, decisions, and actions—responding to the human quandary "What to do?" in particular situations, whereas ethics are reflections upon the question of "Why do it?" Here the educational leader finds him/herself between saying he/she has done the right thing (ethics) versus thinking he/she has done the right thing (morality). (p. 2)

Morally literate leaders view the school as a moral community, evaluating situations through various ethical lenses and considering the rights and well-being of all stakeholders involved. Ethical decision-making requires leaders to have the agency necessary to adjudicate their responses to conflicts on the grounds of fairness, justice, and consideration of the moral implications of their actions for all competing viewpoints.

Conflict resolution and crisis management. During conflicts, leaders engage in moral literacy to mediate disputes with a focus on fairness and consideration of all parties' interests and ethical principles (Lowery, 2021b). School leaders can inform and influence discussions, safeguarding against resolutions that are not practical or morally sound. By addressing the root ethical issues in conflicts, leaders can create socially just solutions aligned with democratic values that nurture a sense of evenhandedness and equity within the school community (Culp, 2019; Peterson, 2019).

In times of crisis, morally literate school leaders work to maintain integrity, which is crucial to trustworthiness and community relations. Leaders with moral literacy recognize and respect the ethical values and views of others and do so with honesty and transparency in their thoughts, actions, and communication. By serving as a model to others and demonstrating moral courage, school leaders face moral difficulties and dilemmas with impartiality and equity. This integrity builds trust

among students, staff, and stakeholders; it enhances the community's confidence in the leader's aptitude to manage conflicts and maintain composure and consistency during critical events.

Cultivating empathy and compassion. Moral literacy emphasizes empathy and moral care for others (Jenlink, 2014; Lowery, 2021a; Orr, 1990). Educational leaders prioritizing these values cultivate supportive and inclusive school environments, especially during conflicts and crises. By encouraging empathy, leaders can likewise mitigate the disruptions caused by controversies by promoting acknowledgment and acceptance, intervening to de-escalate hostilities, and encouraging peaceful and productive dialogues among the parties. By incorporating care and compassion into conflict resolution and crisis management, leaders can face social issues and concerns with integrity and impartiality, fostering an environment of open discussion grounded in respect, recognition, and moral reasonableness (Rivera-McCutchen, 2021).

Cultural Literacy

Critically, school leaders must find ways to acknowledge, accept, and appreciate the diverse backgrounds and cultural groups of students, families, and staff members (Fraise & Brooks, 2015). School leaders with the ability to comprehend different cultural dimensions and the nuances of culture at the individual level may be better equipped to recognize and respect different norms, traditions, values, and worldviews, forming the foundation for democratic communication and meaningful relationship-building. Fraise and Brooks (2015) borrow the concept of *propriespect* from anthropology to describe this ability. Propriespect plays an essential role in making place-conscious and community-based decisions, such as resolving disputes between competing values and allocating resources for inevitable crises. According to Fraise and Brooks (2015), school leaders

> must abandon (or enter into with great caution) discussions of shaping or changing culture, discontinue melting pot and salad bowl metaphors, and instead seek to build bridges and cross borders so that the multiple cultures in the school-community can have empathy and define their own values instead of having this done by someone else. (p. 8)

Therefore, schools should be environments where students and parents from all cultures and backgrounds can feel a sense of belonging and are given recognition and respect as individuals. In this manner, cultural literacy can serve leaders as they

negotiate culturally sensitive issues (including politically and morally based issues) and promote unity and cohesion within their broader school community.

To accomplish this, school leaders can work to create a welcoming school climate by fostering cultural sensitivity to distinctions and differences and ensuring that the classroom and the campus are no places for cultural biases or stereotypes. Leaders equipped to address culturally sensitive topics and challenges may be able to take more nuanced and nimble approaches to intervening in polarizing clashes over polemic topics. Whether the conflict or controversy stems from curriculum content, dress codes, or religious practices, leaders can make critically informed decisions that respect cultural diversity while ensuring safe and inclusive learning environments for all students.

Similarly, in times of crises, school leaders who exhibit a more profound awareness of the cultural nuances of tensions can facilitate open communication dialogues, work more effectively in conflict mitigation and resolution efforts, and maintain an unwavering focus on community engagement. Leaders who understand the distinctions and dimensions of cultural expressions will navigate disagreements and disputes more effectively. They can mediate conflicts by considering cultural perspectives, recognizing one another's humanity, and ensuring that attempts at resolutions remain culturally sensitive, just, and mutually relevant for all (Dantley, 2005).

Spatial-Temporal Literacy

Spatial-temporal literacy means understanding space and time and its impact on educational and school-community contexts. Educational leaders must be prepared to respond to crises, conflicts, and controversies with historical and geographical implications. These types of concerns impact schools with nuance because they are dimensionally informed. Spatial-temporal issues involve the corporeal and chronological aspects of a situation. As Hoffman (2009) stated, "The problem of time is inseparable from that of meaning. Time is the fundamental medium and condition of human meanings. It is the finitude of that element which is the ground of all existential quandaries" (p. 182). Drawing from de Certeau and Yi-Fu Tuan, Vanclay (2008) affirmed, "'Place' is generally conceived as being 'space' imbued with meaning. Thus, it refers more to the meanings that are invested in a location than to the physicality of the locality" (p. 3).

Educational leaders can be better prepared to analyze how the spatial layout and locale of the school and its surroundings and environs might influence conflicts or crises. Jenlink (2013) acknowledged, "Space may depict many states of being: emotional, linguistic, pedagogical, aesthetic, cognitive, cultural, economic, ideological, etc. In this sense, the educational setting remains an uneven tapestry of ever-changing spaces, juxtaposed, and overlapped" (p. 341). Therefore, the spatial

aspect enables leaders to assess how the physical design and direction of internal spaces (classrooms, common areas) or external (the campus, the community) have meaning. Proximities of schools to particular local resources or regions not only create or limit extended learning places but can also work to escalate or mitigate internal and external conflicts.

The temporal aspect, then, emphasizes how leaders perceive and understand events in relation to the future (i.e., planning), the past (i.e., historical and cultural development of ideas and ideologies), and the present (i.e., the operationalizing of beliefs formed by the past and the future into procedures and policies). Brooks and Normore (2010) called temporality an "important and neglected aspect of educational leadership" (p. 70). As they defined it, "In the most basic sense, temporal literacy has to do with being able to read and understand the history, present, and future of people and institutions" (p. 70). Slattery (1995) offers a postmodern conceptualization of time based on premodern and Indigenous beliefs and values: In his view, time is neither linear nor limited. The temporally literate leader understands that "randomness and chaos more accurately define their lives than predictability and stability" (p. 11). Complexity, for these leaders, is inherent to human interactions. In Slattery's view, this means "time can no longer be separated from space" and "the past and future cannot be separated from the present" (p. 17). Therefore, educational leaders face the conundrum of reconceptualizing time and the temporal aspects of conflicts, crises, and controversy.

Leaders with spatial-temporal literacy analyze historical patterns of conflicts within specific areas of the school or local community—they evaluate place-based issues in terms of reflective (past), reflexive (present), and projective (future) considerations. By identifying recurring issues in particular locations or at specific times of the year (i.e., local and national elections, holidays observed by various local religions, and international incidents and movements), leaders can implement targeted interventions and responses to be democratically sensitive to all constituents and stakeholders.

Reading the historical patterns and possible outcomes of conflicts and controversies, thus engaging in spatial-temporal thinking (what Slattery called a *proleptic* understanding of time), leaders make long-term plans to handle crises and anticipate controversies before they arise. Likewise, the need exists to develop plans and policies for resourceful and place-conscious responses. Educational leaders engaging in proleptic thinking analyze the historical roots of conflicts or controversies and make informed predictions. Understanding the traditional and topographical context can provide valuable insights into the underlying causes of issues, helping leaders address the root causes rather than just the immediate symptoms. Responses are nuanced and not simply reactive.

Crisis response and preparedness. Educational leaders use temporal literacy to engage in planning to prevent future conflicts. By anticipating potential issues based on historical patterns and trends, they can implement proactive strategies, policies, and interventions to create a more harmonious school environment. Understanding both spatial and temporal dimensions is crucial for effective crisis response. Leaders can develop spatially informed plans that consider the layout of the school and its surroundings, ensuring safe evacuation routes and secure areas. Temporal considerations enable leaders to anticipate crisis escalation points based on historical data, allowing for proactive response strategies. Spatial-temporal literacy involves being prepared for future crises based on past experiences. Leaders can develop place-conscious crisis management plans by learning from historical and regional crises.

Understanding the evolution of educational policies over time is crucial. This preparation ensures that schools can respond efficiently and effectively, minimizing the effect that crises have on teaching and learning. Spatial-temporal literacy enables leaders to evaluate existing policies critically, the structures in which they developed, the socio-political constructs behind them, the physical hinderances or impetuses, and whether or not the policy will remain effective. Reading these features helps leaders shape new policies or revise existing ones to address conflicts and controversies more directly in the contemporary context.

Stakeholder relationships. Historical and geographical knowledge of community dynamics and relationships can guide leaders in managing conflicts involving various stakeholders. Scott (1998) used the Ancient Greek word *mêtis* to describe this skill. Metis was a Titan deity—a counselor and consort of Zeus and the goddess of planning and wisdom (Mackay et al., 2014). As such, *mêtis* has come to frame wisdom gained from the "common features of the local ecosystem" (Scott, 1998, p. 312) and "situated resourcefulness" (Mackay et al., 2014, p. 427). Spatial-temporal literacy empowers leaders to engage in *mêtis*—a place-conscious recognition of evolving community identity and expectations. *Mêtis* adapts strategies to the local, maintaining a positive rapport with its locality. By learning from the spatial-temporal dimension, leaders build on their practical local knowledge of *where* and *when* to address crises, conflicts, and controversies with a comprehensive perspective informed by place and time.

Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

I argue that critical literacies can meaningfully and significantly augment the aptitude of educational leaders to access and respond to conflicts, crises, and controversies in PK12 school settings. By critically reading their worlds (i.e., their provinces of practice), school leaders can develop habits of comprehension and

inferences needed for unconventional and nuanced responses that are better suited for a politically polarized and socially divided society. I focus on political, moral, cultural, and spatial-temporal literacies in this essay. This is not to say that other of Brooks and Normore's (2010) nine critical literacies, such as spiritual, economic, or information literacy, are irrelevant to the types of conflicts that school leaders face. I would argue that they are. However, for the scope of this paper, I opted to focus on only four. My hope is that by considering the political, moral, cultural, and spatial-temporal domains of crises and controversies, leaders can begin to develop habits of critical literacy, more broadly speaking. In conclusion, I offer some practical applications based on the critical literacies I have discussed. These recommendations are intended to counter the tendencies to control speech and facilitate open dialogues about conflict, crisis, and controversy in complex and uncertain times.

Recommendations for Practice

School leaders can organize workshops and training sessions for teachers and staff to aid in better understanding informed decision-making during conflicts, particularly those related to procedural or policy changes. Regarding external leadership, school administrators can host community engagement forums to hold dialogue and mitigate misunderstandings. These democratic spaces should create a sense of mutual responsibility and association among school leaders, local policymakers, community members, and parents. Finally, school leaders can collaborate with local partnerships and political advocacy groups to stay abreast of legislation and valuable insights into possible conflicts and arising controversies in the community.

Although diversity and inclusion have become problematic terms in some states, school leaders can still work to cultivate a democratic ethos of pluralistic involvement for all stakeholders. These programs and policies can enrich social, cultural, and spiritual differences at the individual and community levels, with the hope of increasing intercultural understanding and reducing conflicts in the classroom, school building, and public.

Finally, employing critical literacies, school leaders can innovate ways to integrate local history and geography into the school and classrooms, thereby increasing citizens' understanding of the spatial and temporal underpinnings of the community and helping contextualize community-based conflicts. Emphasizing how traditions and customs have evolved over time and within a given space may help students and stakeholders question certain long-held assumptions about their way of life and that of their neighbors.

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