

**Courageous RI**

# COURAGEOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## PROGRAM EVALUATION



COURAGEOUS RI is a media literacy program to reduce the hate that leads to violence by building a coalition of empowered people who recognize, analyze, and resist harmful forms of expression and communication. The University of Rhode Island received a grant for COURAGEOUS RI from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships, opportunity number DHS-22-TTP-132-00-01. Learn more: [www.courageousri.com](http://www.courageousri.com)

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## Overview

In the Fall of 2023, 54 middle school, high school, and college educators participated in a virtual Courageous Professional Development (PD) program consisting of 6 one-hour online sessions plus independent reading, viewing, writing, and other work. The program was offered every other week at 12 PM EST and 7 PM EST to accommodate the schedules of busy teachers. At the conclusion of the program, participants developed and shared a final assignment to synthesize their learning as they implemented an educational activity with learners in their own schools, libraries, and communities. This report summarizes participants' feedback and overall assessment of program quality.

## Program Content and Format

The program was collaboratively developed by Renee Hobbs, Kent Lenci, John Palella, and Benjamin Thevenin, who offered a 6-step learning journey over four months exploring how media literacy and active listening could reduce the hate and fear that leads to violence. The 6-step process included the following themes:

**Figure 1. Program Themes**



The program used a blend of Real Time (synchronous via Zoom) and Anytime (asynchronous via the Media Education Lab's Pathwright Learning Management System) learning experiences. Real Time sessions were offered at 12 PM or 7 PM and these one-hour sessions featured a lecture component and a small group discussion activity. In the Anytime learning component, participants completed reading, viewing, and discussion activities that helped them synthesize their learning.

## Participants

Participants included 54 educators were employed as middle school teachers (26%), high school teachers (54%), or college teachers (31%). Most participants identified as White (85%) with 12% identified as Hispanic and 3% identified as African American. Some participants taught at both the secondary and college level, and 3% of participants specialized in pre-service teacher education. Participants ranged in age, including 25 – 24-year-olds (10% of the sample), 34 – 44-year-olds (38% of the sample), 45 – 54-year-olds (31% of the sample), 55 – 64-year-olds (18% of the sample), and 65+ (3% of the sample). Participants came from Rhode Island and others states.

## Evaluation Methodology

We collected two types of evidence to report on the program's impact:

1. An **outcomes evaluation** that measured changes in participants' media literacy knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors, as well as other variables including intellectual humility, defensiveness, and their perception of their confidence in implementing media literacy instructional practices in relation to violence prevention and civic education.
2. A **program evaluation process** that helped us assess the program's overall quality and delivery methods, including participants' satisfaction.

In this report, we share evidence from the program evaluation process. Participants reviewed an informed consent document approved by the University of Rhode Island's Institutional Research Board (IRB). At the completion of the professional development program, participants were invited to complete an online survey using Qualtrics, an online survey tool. The questionnaire took about 15 minutes to complete. After reviewing the results, we analyzed data to generate average scores and charts. To examine participants responses to open-ended questions, we coded qualitative data to identify key themes brought up by multiple participants, using codes to categorize major themes.

## How Participants Describe the Program

How did participants understand the program's focus and themes? We asked participants to describe how they would explain the Courageous PD program to an educator who is unfamiliar with it. Most participants explained the program by connecting the topic of digital and media literacy to the problem of propaganda, hatred, violence, and extremism. Other participants described the program by focusing on its attention to critical thinking and communication skills, including the practice of dialogue and discussion. A small number of participants recognized that the program was designed to increase educators' confidence in addressing controversial issues like targeted violence with learners.

**Media Literacy Helps Address the Problem of Targeted Violence.** “We learned about the importance of Media Literacy skills for our students, and that this is so much more than validating that they're using a credible source. By embedding these skills, we can help our students be informed Media Consumers, so we can counteract the effects of propaganda, hatred, and extremism.”

**Lessons and Activities Address the Problem of Propaganda and Polarization on Media Platforms.** “Media platforms may be characterized by extreme political division, social radicalization, toxic influential imagery and messages and distorted versions of current events and the news. Courageous RI PD Program provides for a platform for discussion and education amongst educators. The program provided materials essential to comprehensive lesson plans and insights into various modes by which to distribute those materials.”

**Learned Practical Skills.** “It's a robust program designed to train and provide resources for educators who want to use techniques to reduce the polarization that leads to violence. Active listening, media literacy, and harnessing creativity are a few of the valuable skills I've learned.”

**Digital Literacy Can Be Used to Fight Extremism and Hate Speech.** “The Courageous PD Program is a deep-dive, intensive experience designed to expand your knowledge of digital literacy. It goes beyond the basics, delving into crucial issues such as extremism, propaganda, hate speech, and free speech. This program provides a deeper understanding of digital literacy education, both comprehensively and intentionally. It's a transformative journey that equips educators with the tools and insights needed to navigate the complexities of the digital world meaningfully.”

**Teach Students How to Think.** “Courageous PD is about learning to integrate media literacy concepts into typical academic curricula and nontraditional educational programming to teaching students how to think, not what to think.”

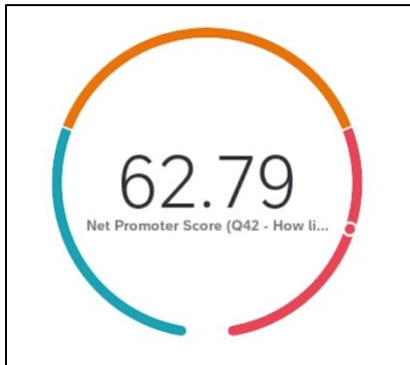
**Use Resources and Tools to Help Students Analyze Media.** “This is a program that give us tools to help students think more critically and respect different points of view when analyzing media.”

**Being Courageous in the Classroom.** “The Courageous PD program is built to educate educators on how to be courageous within the classroom when a topic arises that many feel uncomfortable. It allows teachers to build their toolbox of skills to facilitate a meaningful conversation within the classroom.”

## Overall Program Quality

We used the Net Promoter Score (NPS) which is measured with a single-question survey item: **How likely are you to recommend the COURAGEOUS RI PD PROGRAM to a friend or colleague?**

**Figure 2. Net Promoter Score**



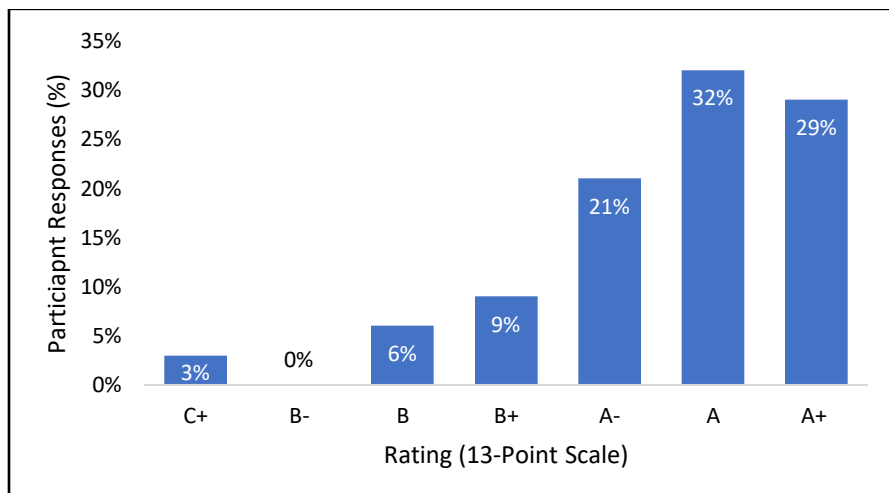
NPS is often held up as the gold standard customer experience surveys because it provides a snapshot of customers satisfaction. People who are happy with their experience are more likely to recommend it to others. Respondents give a rating between 0 (not at all likely) and 10 (extremely likely) Participants fell into one of 3 categories:

- **70% were Promoters** who responded with a score of 9 or 10
- **23% were Passives** who responded with a score of 7 or 8
- **7% were Detractors** who responded with a score of 0 to 6

The NPS score is calculated by subtracting the percentage of Detractors from the percentage of Promoters. The NPS score can range from -100 to +100, where a higher score is desirable. In the field of higher education, the average NPS score is 32. Among all industries, a score of 50+ is considered above average and 70+ is considered the very highest level of customer satisfaction. This data shows that the program was very well-received by the many enthusiastic promoters who were extremely satisfied.

In another measure of overall program quality, we also asked participants, “Please grade overall program quality of Courageous Conversations by using the letter-grade scale.”

**Figure 3. Overall Rating of Quality Expressed as a Letter Grade**



We asked participants to justify their reasons for the letter grade and found four themes that emerged in the analysis of their open-ended responses:

- **Fun and Practical.** “The program was really enjoyable but also highly practical, with people from various educational environments contributing ideas about how to build media literacy into students' experiences.”
- **Useful Information.** “I thought it was engaging, well planned, organized, thoughtfully and skillfully executed. There was interesting and insightful information shared that helped me to be a better critical thinker when engaging with media.”

For those who offered a score less than A, these reasons were provided:

- **Not Enough Practical Activities.** “I wanted more practical strategies that I could immediately share with my colleagues, and they could implement right away in their personal lives and classrooms.”
- **Not Enough Diversity in the Views of Participants.** “The cohort inspired in-depth thinking about important topics. There was an imbalance in terms of how the political spectrum was represented in its participants. That was responsible for more biased commentary from both presenters and participants. As an Independent, it was the more challenging aspect of the experience. However, I would still recommend the experience to peers.”

## Program Components

We asked participants to review the Courageous PD Program components and rate their perception of the value of the components to their overall learning experience. Participants used a four-point scale (not valuable, somewhat valuable, valuable, highly valuable). As Table 1 shows, participants valued the transmission of knowledge by faculty experts (M = 3.64) and the opportunity to develop an independent project as their Final Assignment (M = 3.62), followed by assigned readings and videos (M = 3.49). The least valued program components included the mentor support (M = 2.97), digital annotation activities (2.87) and the emotional check-in (2.54).

**Table 1: Mean Scores: Perception of Most Valuable Program Components**

Faculty-Led Presentations	3.64
Final Assignment	3.62
Readings and Videos	3.49
Email Reminders	3.33
Final Showcase	3.31
Collaboration/Thought Partners	3.21
Small Group Discussions	3.18
Threaded Discussions	3.00
Mentor Support	2.97
Digital Annotation Activities	2.87
Emotional Check In	2.54

## Program Impact on Teacher Behavior

We compared teacher self-report data at pretest and posttest to discover some of the behavior changes that occurred because of the program. First, teachers estimated how frequently they engaged in three different behaviors associated with media literacy in the context of targeted terrorism and violence prevention. Participants selected from among these options: (1) I have not done this, (2) 1 – 2 times, (3) 3 – 5 times, and (4) 5 or more times. Table 2 shows the percentage of participants who indicated at pretest and posttest that they engaged in these activities more than five times per month.

**Table 2: Program Impact on Teacher Behavior, Percentage Responding “5 or More Times”**

How many times in the past month have you:	PRETEST	POSTTEST
Asked critical questions about what you watched, read, or heard in news or current events	62%	79%***
Talked with someone with a different background or life experience about a news or current event topic	20.8%	31%***
Searched for different points of view about a news or current event or topic of interest	25%	36%***

\*\*\*p < .001

Then, we asked teachers to rate their knowledge and competence in applying knowledge to (1) the practice of critically analyzing media messages, and (2) the role of social media as it affects communication and relationships. Participants rated their knowledge on a five-point scale (strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree). Table 3 shows that there were statistically significant differences between pretest and posttest, providing evidence that participants increased knowledge and competence.



**Table 3: Change in Media Literacy Knowledge and Application Scores from Pretest to Posttest**

	PRETEST	POSTTEST
I am knowledgeable about how to critically analyze a media message	3.98	4.61***
I apply my knowledge about how to critically analyze media when I am using media and technology.	4.02	4.51***
I am knowledgeable about how social media affects communication and relationships.	3.96	4.61***
I apply my knowledge about how social media affects communication and relationships.	3.87	4.54***

\*\*\*p < .001

Finally, at the conclusion of the program, we asked teachers to rate their level of confidence in a variety of teaching practices that were emphasized in the program. Participants rated their level of confidence on a seven-point scale (from not at all confident to strongly confident). Table 4 shows that participants reported the most confidence in helping students recognize and resist hate, violence, and extremism (M = 4.60) followed by analyzing propaganda and disinformation (M = 3.63).

**Table 4: Self-Reported Confidence in Teaching Practices Associated with Program Themes**

	POSTTEST
I teach critical thinking about media and technology	3.13
I explore multiple, diverse, and competing interpretations or points of view	3.35
I analyze propaganda and disinformation	3.63
I connect media literacy education to my content area	3.13
I help students recognize and resist hate, violence, and extremism	4.60

## Evidence of Learning Engagement

The Courageous PD Program included an asynchronous component as participants were encouraged (but not required) to engage in reading, viewing, and threaded discussion activities in advance of each of the synchronous meetings. We used the Media Education Lab’s Pathwright Learning Management System for this program component. After participants registered for an account, they received reminders to engage with content every week.

All 54 participants engaged with the online content and we measured participant engagement through a point system, where participants earned points for completing weekly activities. Each

session, participants could choose from 3 – 7 activities to complete. Most activities involved reading documents or viewing videos and using digital annotation or threaded discussion to provide a response. Some examples of activities included the following:

1. Read 2 chapters of Kent Lenci’s *Learning to Depolarize* and pull a quote from the book to comment on.
2. After learning about different strategies for de-polarization, consider one or more of the following bulleted questions:
  - a. What strategies do the different interventions employ to reduce support for anti-democratic attitudes, political violence, and partisan animosity?
  - b. How might we adapt, modify, or take inspiration from this research in our own work with students?
  - c. Two of these strategies rely on prominent leaders to get across their messages. As leaders ourselves-- in the classroom or beyond-- what opportunities might we find to model kindness, curiosity, and active listening?
3. View a short video demonstration lesson where 8<sup>th</sup> grade students analyze newspaper front pages to examine how different news media organizations represented the storming of the Capitol. What patterns are evident in children’s responses?
4. After watching the short youth-produced video, “Just Like a Lion by Daniel Allison,” what were your personal and professional reactions to this video? How did it speak to you personally? How would your students react to this video or one like it? In what ways could you envision yourself scaffolding your students to do storytelling like this?
5. After viewing an excerpt from the documentary, “The Interrupters,” consider these questions in responding to the video:
  - a. What did you notice about Eddie’s approach to teaching?
  - b. When teaching others to exercise their creativity in ways that express their perspectives on violence, where do you start?
6. Take time to reflect on your learning to gain insights on yourself as a leader in media literacy.

As Table 5 shows, 43% of participants were highly active in the asynchronous activities, contributing frequently to threaded discussions and using digital annotation tools in response to reading and viewing activities. Faculty responded to participants’ contributions and lively discussions among participants also occurred. Many participants were at least somewhat active, engaging selectively with activities (24%). For 33% of participants, their pattern of engagement diminished in frequency from the beginning to the end of the program.

**Table 5: Level of Participation in Anytime Learning Activities**

	NUMBER	PERCENT
Highest Engagement Level (300 – 365 points earned)	23	43%
Engagement Level (299 – 200 points earned)	0	0%
Engagement Level (199 – 100 points earned)	13	24%
Lowest Engagement Level (99 – 20 points earned)	18	33%
TOTAL	54	100%

## Implementation & Reach

The Courageous PD Program helped teachers, their colleagues, and their students, reaching 10,098 people over the course of a year. Program participants were asked, “Since you began the program, have you incorporated ideas, information, or instructional strategies in your work with learners or colleagues?” Only 1 participant indicated a negative response. Participants were also asked to estimate their reach on a scale from 1 to 300. On average, participants indicated that they reached an average of 55 people during the Fall of 2023 when this program was implemented, resulting in an indirect reach of 2,970 people.



We also asked, “In the next semester, how many students and colleagues will you be able to reach?” The average score was 132, resulting in an indirect reach of 7,128 people. By totaling participant estimates for Fall and Spring semesters, we estimate that 10,098 people were impacted by this program.

## Program Strengths & Limitations

We asked participants, “What were the strengths and limitations of the program?” Thematic analysis of open-ended responses revealed the following insights. Participants recognized that the overall program design, faculty facilitators, and small group discussions were the most important program

features. To a lesser extent, they also appreciated the chance to collaborate on their final assignment using “The Power of Two” approach pioneered by the Media Education Lab. Table 6 shows that participants commented on the participant demographics of middle school, high school, and college teachers and librarians, noting that more diversity might have improved the overall program experience.

**Table 6: Program Strengths & Limitations**

<b>Program Elements</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Limitations</b>
<b>Overall Program Design</b>	<p>“This Program did an exceptional job packing a great deal of information into a 6-week period. I appreciate that each week was led by a different Courageous RI team member who brought a different perspective to the weekly conversation, discussions, and work.”</p> <p>“The program was very organized and very well run. The meetings were engaging and did not skip a beat. There was the opportunity to listen and to contribute appropriately.”</p>	<p>“I both loved and disliked the program being virtual. Being virtual made the program accessible and allowed for a diverse group of participants. I also feel that it is easy to get distracted and to not engage fully when PDs are virtual. I feel like being in a room with other people and having courageous conversations in real life would have been very powerful. However, I understand that we would not have been able to have the reach that we did if we were only in Rhode Island.”</p> <p>“The limitations include the lack of time (i.e., 1 hr. sessions), meeting periodically and trying to retain all of the information provided.”</p>
<b>Faculty Facilitators</b>	<p>“I think the mix of educators at different levels was a strength. I started to list this as a limitation but on thinking about it, I feel like I gained a lot of insight about the concerns (etc.) of working with students at</p>	<p>“While generally the range of educators was a strength, I did sometimes feel like information or activities were pitched at a bit of a lower level than what I needed as a university educator.”</p>

	different levels. Each facilitator brought something a little different to the table.”	
<b>Small Group Discussions</b>	“I think the strength of this program is hearing from people with diverse opinions and learning from other educators.”	“The limitations really had to do with the time allotted and with the quality of the breakout sessions. I often felt that many people were unprepared or unwilling to engage in conversation.”
<b>The Power of Two Thought Partners and Collaborators</b>	“Connecting with partners and working together on projects is a fantastic experience. It adds a personal touch to the learning journey, making the program engaging and enjoyable. The dialogue that was happening during sessions was invaluable, and it brought other perspectives alive.”	“I enjoyed chatting with my partner/collaborator. However, I recognize how this could go wrong for some people. For me, it provided an opportunity for collaboration that would have otherwise never happened.”
<b>Participant Demographics</b>	“The program successfully reached the goal of developing teachers and librarians. I think the connections and the online sessions were important to create a sense of belonging to a community of people.”	“I think a limitation of the program is what we discussed early on - how most of the educators came from similar political backgrounds. Opening the program to other backgrounds would be beneficial.”

## Opportunities for Improvement

We asked participants how the program could be improved, and these themes emerged from the open-ended data.

**More Time Needed.** One participant said, “The abundance of new knowledge and information presented in the quick hour felt a bit overwhelming. A more extended timeframe could facilitate more group conversations and outcomes while allowing ample time for processing the dialogue discussed to provide more intentional discussions. As someone managing school, full-time, and part-time work, I appreciated the extra week to catch up on homework—especially considering this was a voluntary commitment for me.” Another explained simply, “As with any great PD, I don't want it to end.”

**More Focus on Practical Learning Tools.** One participant noted how important it is to apply the new knowledge learned to situations that educators encounter on the job. Another explained, “For

me, some more practical tools and techniques for leading controversial discussions would have been helpful. Maybe techniques for diffusing situations where students do get triggered.”

**Increase Attention to Political Diversity.** One participant noted that the program could help to amplify a more diverse range of voices, noting that “It’s challenging to pinpoint whether this gap stems from the audience we’re reaching, the locations of our promotions, time constraints, or varying levels of interest.” Another who identified as a conservative wished for a little more political balance in the use of examples.

**Revise Small Group Discussion Element and Structure.** Participants valued the chance to talk with their colleagues and wanted more such opportunities. One participant suggested the idea of having “specific discussion questions from readings (etc.) that we know in advance we were going to work on in our breakout groups.” Another participant did not like that small group discussions were a required element of every session. This individual “wanted to hear more from the experts and leaders of the program, especially for some of the sessions.”

## Conclusion

It has been said, “When you teach, you also learn.” The program faculty who conducted debriefing sessions each week at the end of each program observed that they were aware of the program’s impact on their own learning. The program evaluation data from the Courageous PD program offers rich evidence to reflect on the design strategy used in teaching educators how to advance critical thinking skills about media and technology in relation to the problem of disinformation, propaganda, hate speech, and violent extremism. The high levels of program satisfaction suggest that online programs that combine Anytime and Real Time program elements can be effective in creating a learning community that informs, inspires, and builds skills and confidence.

## Authors

### **Renee Hobbs**

Renee Hobbs is an internationally recognized authority on media literacy education. Through community and global service and as a researcher, teacher, advocate and media professional, Hobbs has worked to advance the quality of digital and media literacy education in the United States and around the world. She is the Founder and Director of the [Media Education Lab](#), whose mission is to improve the quality of media literacy education through research and community service.



### **Yamaya Jean**

Yamaya is the Program Director for COURAGEOUS RI. Her work centers around maximizing the impact of community-centered investments through cross-sector collaboration, relationship building and agile project management. Yamaya brings her experience as an independent consultant, partnering with nonprofit organizations in facilitation, technical support, data analysis and program evaluation. Yamaya's work is guided by her commitment to social justice, and she practices this through a human-centric approach to data collection and analysis.



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