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INTRODUCTION

The Critical Literacy pedagogy celebrated by this volume is designed to encourage teachers and their students to identify voices relegated to the margins of society, and through literacy, to creatively negotiate visibility and power for those voices within the social discourse. Why is this an important pedagogy for teachers and teacher educators? First, teachers must have tools to address the powerful messages about the reform of public education that convey its purposes as purely economic. President Obama (2014) recently addressed graduates at an award winning technical high school in my home city – Worcester, MA. The central message of his talk promoted an education focused solely on the imperatives of the labor market. The President's words summarized priorities currently supported by both political parties:

> We live in a culture that so often focuses on conflict and controversy and looks at the glass half empty instead of half full. And you're graduating at a time when you'll no longer be competing just with people across town for good jobs, you're going to be competing with the rest of the world.
>
> But when I meet young people like you I am absolutely certain we are not just going to out-compete the rest of the world, we are going to win because of you. Because we are Americans, that's what we do. We don't settle. We out-work. We out-innovate. We out-hustle the competition. (Applause.) And when we do, nobody can beat us.
>
> And that's why I've challenged high schools all across the country to do what you're doing here – better prepare students for the demands of the global economy.

The discourses of federal education policy visible in Obama's message is one of competition in a free market economy. In this post-industrial, technology dependent global marketplace there is a need for workers who possess a different set of skills than those required by the manufacturing economies of the last century. The words above reflect a strong push for reconfiguring public schooling to expedite the preparation of workers for these times. From the current government/corporate perspective this involves reshaping the classroom to more closely resemble the structures and practices of the business community and standardizing education for public school students to fit this model. There is a clear push for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) content, a requisite for workers operating in what have become highly data analytic, technically-demanding environments. Such a push can be observed in arguments related to the

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Common Core Standards that demand greater inclusion of informational texts related to STEM in the English Language Arts classroom (see Ravitch, 2012a;2012b). Relatedly, there is a diminished emphasis on the fictional novels and narratives that have been the primary focus for literature study. Educators are also urged to organize curriculum to mirror the flattening of the workplace hierarchy – that is, to provide students with experiences working with a team toward a common goal and to compete against other teams in order to "win."

This volume supports a humanizing dimension to education in this age of "econocracy" (Carr & Porfilio, 2011). It aligns with critical pedagogy advocates who argue that the political spaces of globalization are more than a space of domination (Giroux, 2013) and schooling must be more than the training of "homo economicus" (Luke, 2013) or a society where the production of capital is primary. These chapters demonstrate how education design works to embrace broader imperatives beyond simply the training of workers – where social, ethical moral as well as economic factors are central.

Second, in order to effectively participate in today's globalized society, literate citizens must expand their view of what counts as a text (print and beyond) and be able to negotiate the multiplicity of voices and perspectives present within the range of print, digital and hybrid text forms present in their daily as well as their work lives. Again, in a globalized society, an education for democracy is not merely one of assimilation to a common "truth" but an ability to negotiate new ideas at the intersection of multiple perspectives. The authors in this volume are invested in teaching Critical Literacy as part of a broader understanding of New Literacies. They join this movement advocating for a critical literacy for the reasons outlined by Allan Luke (2013) as "… [use of]the technologies of print and other media of communication to analyze, critique, and transform the norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of institutions and everyday life" (p. 21) to achieve what Henry Giroux (2013) calls a "radical democracy" or "a political, social, and ethical referent for rethinking how citizens can be educated to deal with a world made up of different, multiple, and fractured public cultures" (p. 53).

The volume specifically chooses to tap the field of popular culture for examples of forms and content that lend themselves to such productive critique. The inclusion of popular genres in the classroom provide content, as well as language forms and formats where youth can explore and "critically challenge the diverse cultural discourses, practices and popular media they experience in their everyday existence" (Giroux, 2013, p. 44) – what they face as they grow into adulthood in their own communities of peers and adults, as well as what they witness in the world at large. The chapters explore popular culture texts that are both complex and meaningful to youth and their lives. The authors illustrate ways in which a critical teaching of these texts encourages students to experience literacy as an empowering social practice important for full social participation and transformation in today's world. Teachers and teacher educators face a set of choices within a highly visible site of struggle among English Language Arts educators and policy makers. This volume supports teachers who ask:

- What are and should be the intellectual challenges of the English Language Arts classroom?
- What are the various text forms that appear in academic and social lives of today's citizens?
- What are the goals of an intellectually complex literacy curriculum? What texts lend themselves to such a curriculum? What habits of text analysis and navigation enable students to achieve these goals?

These authors, teachers and teacher educators themselves, share a range of conceptual and empirical evidence to demonstrate the power of creating a critical literacy pedagogy using texts found in the popular culture of today's youth. Theoretical models helpful to teaching a critical literacy are explored. Included are typologies such as Morrell's (2004) description of four types of capital (utilitarian, culture, critical, and recontextualized), Jank's (2000) four themes important to critical literacy (access, domination, diversity and design), Barthes (1975) conception of texts of pleasure vs. texts of bliss, Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theories of text consumption and production, and Luke and Freebody's (1990) Four Resources model, to name a few. Text variations include postmodern picture books, YA (Young Adult) fiction, adult fiction, graphic novels, science fiction, Steampunk fiction, dystopian and fantasy genres, video games, and even students' lived experiences as texts. The critical literacy pedagogies that accompany study of these texts are both complex and hybrid, providing learners with relevant experiences in using literacy as a vehicle for questioning and transforming the world for social good. Students are positioned to use literacy as part of a social community, both real and imagined, in ways that prepare them not only to be 21st century workers but more importantly to be 21st century citizens, innovating and creating new relationships that keep social justice and equity at the forefront. Each chapter supplies not only theoretical and evidence-based support for this work but suggest syllabi, materials, and activities for readers who may be seeking to introduce or extend their own teaching with similar goals in mind.

In this age of collaboration and competition, an intellectually rigorous English Language Arts education must offer students economic benefits, but not without ensuring that society benefits. To his credit, later in the same speech Obama reminded students that they were also expected to participate in the political process:

> I tell you all this not just because you stand to benefit from changes in laws, but because you're going to have to be a part of helping to shape the law. You're going to have to shape public opinion. You're going to have [to] remember everybody who invested in you. You're going to have to remember the experience of being part of this incredible community. And then, when you go out into the world, whether you are a businessperson, or you are in the military, or you are an academic, or a doctor, or whatever it is that you're doing, you're also going to be a citizen. You're also going to be somebody who has a voice in how this country operates. And you've got to push so that others get the same chance you did.

While the majority of those interested in English Language Arts education argue for the humanities as a site for teaching a deep analysis of issues pertinent to a civic or democratic participation, there is a debate between those who advocate for standardization in education and those who advocate for education to be culturally, linguistically and socially responsive. Advocates for the former regard literature study as leading to assimilation into a common, dominant belief system found in the Western Canon (Stotksy, 2012). Following this line of reasoning, close and intellectually rigorous analysis of texts remains focused on the author's message "within" leading to a directly "knowable" and mutually accepted reality (Cervetti, Pardales, & Damico, 2001). In contrast, a critical literacy represents the opportunity to question dominant ideologies and question the power dynamics involved in how those ideologies benefit some but not others, and using literacy to transform inequities that emerge within this process (Cervetti et al., 2001; Janks, 2013). The authors of this volume would interpret Obama's message above as advocating a critical citizenry where students experience literacy practices that support their political involvement in a "radical democracy." The use of popular culture benefits this latter set of educational goals. As chapter author William Reynolds argues, it is popular culture that creates "cracks" in the common sense, providing opportunities for readers to grapple with the complex and critical issues that arise in contemporary times. A critical reading of Obama's message above would support a pedagogy of activism as the means to "shape the law" and the exemplars provided in this volume provide many examples of the effectiveness of a complex critical literacy in achieving habits of mind to accomplish productive social change as part of a rigorous, complex curriculum.

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