Student Voice

A Companion to *Democracy and Its Discontents*

Karyn Cooper and
Sardar M. Anwaruddin (Eds.)

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JOHN WILLINSKY

FOREWORD

The foreword of this book, as it stands between the title page and the book proper, is just the place to consider the implications of this thoughtful book's title. This work is a "companion" to Karyn Cooper and Robert White's *Democracy and Its Discontents: Critical Literacy across Global Contexts*. At the same time, I'd like to suggest, it is the earlier book's perfect complement. After all, student voices have long been endemic to democratic discontent. I say this, if I may, as one who came of age in the sixties.

Student movements were then at the center of protest and dissent, in print and on the street, in Berkeley, Paris, Toronto (in my own experience), and in many other educational centers around the world. The Students for a Democratic Society, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and the Black Panther Party (which also had its start among students) led in the organized expression of democratic discontent. It seemed part of every student's workload during this period to join together to give voice to the sorry state of democracy on so many fronts.

They had to step out of the classroom, however, and go extra-curricular, however, to exercise the most basic of democracy's premises: freedom of expression and association, the right to dissent. The Berkeley Free Speech Movement in 1964 had been set off by the university's refusal to allow political protest materials – blatant acts of critical literacy – to be distributed and sold on the campus. The University of California was declaring, in effect, that direct and immediate expressions of political dissent had no place on a campus, as it was thought to disrupt, among other things, the study of such expression during the American and French Revolutions.

The university was operating as if it was only preparatory to – and not of – the world. It was well equipped to teach the young about historical foundations of this ideal political state of democracy, but did not yet know what to do with students voicing their discontent with the state of democracy. Many of those who later became the early proponents of critical literacy – among them Allan Luke, Peter McLaren, Michelle Noble, Colin Lankshear, Shirley Steinberg, Joe Kincheloe – cut their teeth on the student dissent of that era. It is what fostered their youthful reading of Angela Davis, Franz Fanon, Malcolm X, Herbert Marcuse, Paul Goodman, and Noam Chomsky, from which they moved on, as educators, to Paulo Freire, bell hooks, Ivan Illich, and others.

That decade of rising student voices, in all its democratic discontent with war, racism, and poverty, forged something of a new place for education in democracy.

Public schooling had long been held up as the flagship of democratic promise; it was celebrated as the engine of equal opportunity. The schools were to teach the young civics, equip them with a literate voice to write letters to the editor and have their say in their own governance, if only after they were done with their schooling. But the schools' own democratic shortcomings had already become too blatant to be ignored. In the United States, the courts declared the organization of schooling undemocratic in the extreme, most notably in the *United States with Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. The Supreme Court's declaration that separate was not equal in education pointed to how the schools shaped the meaning of race in America, even as we struggle to this day to overcome the continuing segregation and inequality of schools, as well as their inadequacies in teaching about race.

Now, to be fair, not all of the discontent voiced by students represents an articulate critique of democracy's shortcomings. Students may be acutely sensitive to the injustice, hypocrisy, bullying, and other behaviors that mar the present democracy. Yet more often in the day-to-day, class-in, class-out, flow of schooling, their discontent is muttered and conveyed in blanks stares and surly behaviors. The student malaise is more often boredom than moral outrage. It finds its voice in talking back to authority, rather speaking truth to power.

This is where critical literacy comes in. It catches the edge of this malcontent. Critical literacy may be fashioned out of that earlier student-movement sense of discontent with the democracy at hand. But it also has the ability to redirect students' and teachers' weary sense of school's daily grind toward an awareness of something deeper being amiss in how this world is organized. Critical literacy also provides a means of addressing that world. This is what Karyn Cooper and Sardar M. Anwaruddin demonstrate in their assembling and editing of this book with their students, and this is what Anna Ignagni, Johana Beeharry, TL McMinn, Rosalie Griffith, Mirela Ciobanu, Zhen Qiu, Jeremy Powell, Austen Koecher, Caileigh Lyn-Piluso, and Samantha M. Leska demonstrate in voicing their engagement with *Democracy and Its Discontents*.

It serves us well to reflect on the extent to which student discontent constitutes democracy's heartland and that discontent is to know no end in democracies. It is as endemic to democracy as it is to civilization more generally, as Freud had it. In light of this perpetual discontent, democracy is always, in Jacques Derrida's conception, the "democracy to come." That is, this present discontent always points to the need for and interest in extending the reach and extent of democracy in our lives. We are given to articulating ideals of democratic justice long before we are able to fully work out their implications for our lives and world.

This is often easier to grasp in looking back at the democratic shortcomings of an earlier era. Consider the roots of liberal democracy, as we know it. There stands the likes of John Locke, who in his 1690 book *Two Treatises of Government* makes a highly influential case for the desirability of government "by the consent of the people." It is easy for us to see now that, while we still hold to this precept, his and others of his ilk held an entirely inadequate, if not morally depraved, conception

of who counted as *the people*. Yet the obviousness of Locke's own compromised position on democracy, freedom, tolerance, and slavery should only encourage our own self-scrutiny. We need to grasp how the "Black Lives Matter" social media campaign suggests the democracy still to come in the United States. We need to see that, in very different ways, the Occupy Wall Street movement, Martha Nussbaum's cosmopolitanism, and Jürgen Habermas' critique of technocracy are all calls for a post-national democracy that is equal to the globalization of capital in advancing a more just world.

This is only to say that we are still learning about how to more fully and consistently realize long-standing democratic ideals and rights of justice of equality, consent, recognition, and deliberation. And in this critical learning process, we need to realize the necessary and vital role of discontent in the progress of democracy. We need to see that the democracy-to-come is not inevitable nor destined. It is something that we will always need to struggle for ingeniously, reiterate and reinvent relentlessly, and deliberate over without end.

This brings me back to student voice, amply represented, chapter by chapter, in this book. These students have come to terms with the need for and value of a critical, discontent-driven literacy; they speak to the healthy proximity and companionship of the title's terms: *student, voice*, *democracy*, and *discontent*. The authors of these chapters are more than students, of course. And by the same token, all of us would do well to be constant students of this democracy and of the democracy that will come of our best critical and constant efforts, which is, after all, what this book and its companion represent.

KARYN COOPER

INTRODUCTION

Student Voice: A Companion to "Democracy and Its Discontents"

> *Critical reflection on practice is a requirement of the relationship between theory and practice, otherwise theory becomes "blah, blah, blah," and practice, pure activism.*
>
> – Paulo Freire (2000, p. 30)

> *Our feelings are our most genuine path to knowledge.*
>
> – Audre Lorde (2004, p. 91)

I have always loved poetry and poetic language because I feel that a few well-chosen lines can engage both the mind and the heart and, yet, I believe that this connection is often not made central in many educational texts. As such, the first quotation, listed above, said to have been said by Paulo Freire, best speaks to the main reason for writing this text, *Student Voice: A Companion to Democracy and Its Discontents*. But, let me explain.

In *Democracy and Its Discontents: Critical Literacy across Global Contexts,* my co-author, Robert White, and I created a volume that discussed critical literacy and its connection to greater democracy. To this end, we employed a framework that we have found to be quite successful in isolating various parts of the discussion for closer examination. This framework we call the "Five Contexts" (Cooper & White, 2012), and each context, while distinctly observable from one to the other, tends to overlap and exist concurrently with the other contexts that we use. These contexts are identified as the autobiographical, the historical, the political, the postmodern and the philosophical context, respectively. In addition, that previous volume featured video interviews of some of the most thoughtful scholars in the field of critical literacy. Video-clips from these interviews are framed by the five contexts. The reader, prompted by a dialogue box, may view specific video-clips at different points throughout the book.

In that first volume, we specifically discussed critical literacy and its connection to democracy in three different countries, through five separate contexts, and included video-clips from interviews with scholars in each of these locales. We began our journey in Boston, Massachusetts to interview one of the great luminaries, not only of our time, but also of all time, Dr. Noam Chomsky. Then, utilizing the five contexts, we travel variously between Australia, South Africa and North America. We end our

journey in Greece, the cradle of Western democracy, and where democracy has been assailed by the new world order of neoliberal thought.

The premise of that first volume suggests that learning to become more critically literate may assist citizens in becoming more democratic, at least in part. This is so because the notion of democracy is a function of the actions, motives and values of the people within that particular geographical and political space. We feel this notion is of particular importance for teachers, as they, perhaps more than any other group of individuals, can influence the democratic process through engaging their students in acts of critical literacy.

However, in order to better mobilize the tremendous potential of the public school system, we must first recognize structures of oppression and then seek to neutralize them. But how can this be accomplished? Returning to the quotation by Freire, we believe that theory must always be connected to practice. This second volume responds to this call.

The second quotation by Audre Lorde, also quoted above, frames this call to action. Often when engaging with teachers and graduate students in critical literacy, it has been my experience that the real struggle becomes how to connect critical theory to practice. When my graduate student, Sardar Anwaruddin, and I used *Democracy and its Discontents: Critical Literacy across Global Context*s to frame this discussion in a recent critical literacy class, somewhat predictably, many of the participants had difficulty connecting theory to practice in their professional lives. Believing very deeply the words of Audre Lorde, that feelings are our most genuine path to knowledge, I asked the graduate students to produce work that speaks to their own interests and heartfelt feelings. Some of the best results of their work are featured in this companion volume. In creating these two volumes, it is hoped that the theory/practice and mind/heart connections are addressed in a more embodied way.

In Chapter One, Anna Ignagni, unpacks ways in which the literacy discourses in her family have shaped her identity. Anna makes use of some of the interviews found in Volume One and incorporates the work of Hilary Janks to examine how her father's literacy discourse interrupts the literate versus illiterate binary that positions the "non-literate" as powerless. In addition to this, Anna calls upon her two sisters to describe the literacy practices within their childhood home. In this heartfelt paper, she also comments on the contexts of historical, social, economic and political literacy factors that affect identity within cultural boundaries.

Chapter Two features Johana Beeharry, who, through an annotated bibliography of Barbara Comber's work in critical literacy, explores the possibility of "doing" critical literacy with Early Years students. Comber's work takes a critical lens to teaching practices, particularly in terms of teacher expectations, assessment, privileging of skills and abilities, gender, and the socio-cultural backgrounds of children. Developing this annotated bibliography allows Johana to recognize her own personal biases and to interrogate institutionalized prejudices and, thus, to continue to make positive changes in her own classroom practice.

TL McMinn, in Chapter Three, reveals the possibilities for critical identity literacies regarding Queer youth's use of the Internet and online communities in order to rehearse or "practice" identities. By creating and manipulating these practice identities, Queer individuals may use their "difference" as positions of power instead of weakness. This allows one to write one's own story and provide themselves the opportunity to embrace or discard stereotypes and/or labels they may have inherited.

Hilary Janks is featured in eight video-texts in Volume One and, in Chapter Four of this text, Rosalie Griffith incorporates the five contexts framework to compare Janks's Apartheid South Africa and its intersections with modern-day Toronto schooling for Black Students. This creative work underscores the importance of understanding literacy and its relationship to power not just in local contexts but also around the world.

In Chapter Five, Mirela Ciobanu draws upon the foundational ideas of Allan Luke and Hilary Janks in discussing why critical literacy is needed now more than ever in schools, particularly in mathematics classrooms. Mathematics wields considerable power, as it continues to be regarded as a subject of utmost importance for students. As such, it holds a special, privileged place among other disciplines and continues to be lauded for its claims of objectivity and neutrality. Ciobanu deconstructs this perspective on mathematics education.

Zhen Qui uses her own autobiography in Chapter Six to make a tentative inquiry into how English, as the language of power, has influenced English teaching and learning in Chinese schools. She then makes suggestions as to what English teachers can do to encourage critical literacy in their classrooms in China.

In the next chapter, Chapter Seven, Jeremy Powell examines four videos from *Democracy and Its Discontents,* featuring recorded interviews with Professor John Willinsky. In these video interviews, Professor Willinsky cites a number of philosophers to develop his ideas. Jeremy then returns to the original works of many philosophers that Professor Willinsky identifies in order to reveal new understandings and possibilities for practice.

Austen Koecher presents an annotated bibliography of Hilary Janks's work in Chapter Eight. Austen analyzes how Professor Janks's writing not only promotes social justice and equity through critical literacy but also how it can be applied to contexts outside of South Africa.

In Chapter Nine, Caileigh Lyn-Piluso presents an analysis of the Grade Ten "critical literacy" curriculum in Ontario, Canada. She discovers that critical literacy is presented in such a way that it has little potential to help facilitate the development of students' critical consciousness and projects of critical analysis. After this curricular deconstruction, she presents a critical literacy project incorporating meaningful ways to engage students in critical activities.

Samantha M. Leska, in Chapter Ten, critiques a newly designed curriculum unit from New Haven, Connecticut. She suggests how it can be altered to better emphasize truly critical practices. Through this process, she invokes teachers to

reimagine how they may adapt their own curricular materials to engage students in critical literacy, and hopefully in developing a more democratic society.

The epilogue is written by Dr. Robert White. In this final word, Dr. White moves through a succession of themes relating to critical literacy, as brought forward by the students who have made this volume a reality. This "afterword" highlights some of the comparisons and contradictions uncovered through the thoughtful pages of this book.

This practical text may be used in concert with the previous volume, *Democracy and Its Discontents*. However, this book may also be used on its own, as a perspective into the real lives and workings of real people. After all, it is the feelings that generate the "*most genuine path to knowledge"* and it is *our feelings* that guide us in our journey to understand others' feelings, values and circumstances that speak to us from the past, through the voices of our students, the wave of the future.

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ANNA IGNAGNI

1. CRITICAL LITERACY

One Family at a Time

INTRODUCTION

At moments in my life, I am reminded of my family's literacy practices. Literacy was central to our interactions with my father, as he pressured my sisters and me to be readers and placed high value upon the ability to critically analyze political situations in countries far beyond the scope of my experience and understanding. My father took up the role of critical literacy teacher in our home. Through a deluge of newspaper clippings, we were taught to "read the word and the world" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 135) according to my father's interpretation of freedom, justice, equality and power.

When I read *Turning to Literacy* by Hilary Janks (2010), during my first week of a Critical Literacy course at OISE, I was instantly reminded of my family's literacy stories. Janks examines an advertisement for Standard Bank under which the caption reads, "At my age most people forget how to count… To us he may look 73 years old, but inside he's more like a six year old with a whole new world to discover" (p. 8). Janks argues that the advertisement "infantilizes one of the learners in the programme within a deficit construction of illiteracy" (p. 9). Upon reading Janks' critique of the advertisement, I was struck with two thoughts: first, my grandmother, who was illiterate, had never been infantilized within my family's discourse; in fact, she had been celebrated for her financial literacy, tenacity, hard work and beauty. My second thought questioned the literacy practices that my father dictated within our own home and how negative discourses contradicted his celebration of my grandmothers' power.

In this essay, I will use the work of Hilary Janks to examine how my father's literacy discourse interrupts the literate versus the illiterate binary that positions the illiterate as powerless. My analysis is based on two interviews conducted with my father on May 27 and 31, 2014, in which we discussed the social, historical, economic and political factors that affected my grandmother's illiteracy. During the interview, my father honoured my grandmother's strength of character and power. He suggested that financial literacies, health and medical literacies, and the oral literacy practices within her rural Italian community empowered my grandmother. He further suggested that reading and writing were not valued within this historical, economic and social context.

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In addition to this, I will examine my father's lack of access to formal education and describe his drive to overcome these barriers in order to develop his own literacy. Finally, I will call upon my two sisters to describe the literacy practices within our childhood home, for, if "identity is shaped in part by the way literacy is used" (Cooper, 2005, p. 42), then my task in this essay is to unpack how the literacy discourses in my family have shaped my identity.

Hilary Janks (2010) questions, "How much literacy makes one literate? How many communities of practice do we need to belong to in order to do literacy across a broad range of practices?" (p. 2). My father pays tribute to his mother's strengths and, in particular, highlights her financial literacy. He explains that my grandmother had very strong numeracy and could easily manage both the local currency and government bonds. He states:

> Bonds she could read those very well. I still have some bonds from 17 years ago…She could read them anyway. And, she could recognize them because they were different colours. If it was 100 lires, it was green. If it was 1000 lires, it was red. They were different colours and she knew them very well. And, she could add very well. She could add better than me. (Interview with Arduino Ignagni, May 27, 2014)

This passage illustrates that my grandmother possessed some forms of literacy. Her ability to recognize numbers and to do calculations opened the possibility of purchasing government bonds and accumulating and maintaining investments. In addition, her financial literacy allowed her to engage in commerce. My father states:

> She sold some crops. She sold poplar trees to make paper, which now is out. Nobody wants to buy them anymore, but those days you could sell them. She did very well with that. There was a paper factory in the town that employed one thousand people. Then the [government] bought it and closed it down, and the paper then came from Brazil. (Interview with Arduino Ignagni, May 27, 2014)

He describes her business transactions with a large company despite her illiteracy and illustrates how she was financially stable or "could do well."

My father further explains that my grandmother's position as widow offered income from her husband's pensions, which she used to provide a home for her family. "With the pension she had, with the war pension, veteran pension and with the work, she built the house we had, a house that was almost one of the best at that time, in the 1950s, not really grand but more than an ordinary house" (Interview with Arduino Ignagni, May 27, 2014). These excerpts depict a financially astute businesswoman. During the second interview on May 31, 2014, he reiterates, "when my mother died, she had three pensions. She had her own. She had a veteran pension and she had the one from his work. So, she had three. [The pension was from] my father's work, so she was very well off. She was a lady in the end. She was a lady, you know" (Interview with Arduino Ignagni, May 31, 2014). Feeling that this claim

that my grandmother was a lady, despite her illiteracy was important to my father, I asked for clarification as to what constituted the title "lady." He replied, "The money. She had the money from the pension and plus she had a nice house. It was one of the best houses in the area there" (Interview with Arduino Ignagni, May 31, 2014). In my father's opinion, since my grandmother had access to land, housing and money, her illiteracy did not negatively affect her. When I visited my grandmother in Italy, she did not seem powerless. I viewed her as a powerful, resourceful and independent woman who lived a comfortable life.

If we overlay Bourdieu's description of forms of capital over my father's story, we can see my grandmother's struggle with the forces working within and upon her field. Bourdieu suggests that:

> [t]he 'winners' in this struggle are those who possess the requisite resources or 'capitals' deemed of most value within respective fields…The capitals that come to characterize a field are the product of a process of accumulation of particular traits, behaviours, properties, titles, academic qualifications, indeed any entity characteristic of the social world… (Cited in Hardy, 2010, p. 73)

Given my grandmother's lack of access to literacy, she engaged in a struggle to acquire financial security and a home. Having accumulated these capitals, my father has given her a title in order to describe her new position within her social world or field. My father has devalued literacy through his repeated claim that reading and writing were unnecessary skills and, furthermore, is not critical of his mother's lack of access to literacy. According to Janks, "…literacy is just one among many social goods that are distributed. Where we sit in the social hierarchy also affects our ability to access resources such as housing, land, healthcare, clean water, food and transport" (Janks, 2010, p. 5). It is interesting that my father has given value to financial security and housing rather than literacy.

I wonder if his own story is at play here. Like his mother, he did not have access to schooling and focused his work on the goal of achieving financial stability. A contradiction occurs in that he worked doggedly to develop his own literacy.

In addition to financial literacy, my grandmother took up many roles through her work and life on the farm. Through her five marriages, she became the mother of three stepchildren and the birthmother of two more. After the death of her first husband, my grandmother married my grandfather who was a widower with three children. Following these marriages, my grandmother had three more common-law husbands who she outlived. Given her large family, my grandmother performed many tasks beyond the scope of farming, all of which required literacy. My father claims that, due to the lack of access to doctors and hospitals, medical literacies were necessary on the farm and in her role as mother of five children. He states:

> You didn't need the school for this time in any country. You needed to work and you needed to be healthy. If you were on the farm and you collapsed, there was no doctor to look after you. They take you to the hospital and a week later,

> you are either back on the farm or in the cemetery. There were two places. If you broke your arm, you needed to know how to fix it yourself…if a tooth was sore, you had to pull it out. You didn't go to the dentist [laughs] you got a strong thread and you pull your tooth out. (Interview with Arduino Ignagni, May 27, 2014)

Moreover, during the World Wars and Great Depression, there was little assistance from the Italian government and the Italian economy was depressed. My father's interview reveals the intense poverty that his family endured and overcame through their resourcefulness and effort. His discourse suggests that the literacies of survival were the key to their preservation.

My father describes the role of the church as contributing to the oral literacy of my grandmother. According to Janks (2010), "…literacy has been defined as a social practice. The notion of literacy practice implies patterned and conventional ways of using written language that are defined by a culture and regulated by social institutions" (p. 2). The church played a central role in my grandmother's life and the life of her community, as it was a source of news for the citizens. There was little need to read, as the priest communicated most news. My father describes the literacy practices of his family:

> They had books, but you get the news through the church. If a person had died, they would ring slowly with the bell. If a person got married, they would have a sound…If they had a certain church service, they had a way to ring the bell and you know. And, when you go to church on Sunday, if there was any news, the priest would tell. The priest would tell if you lost a wallet or if they had found a ring or something like that. Everything would come through the priest's mouth. That is the only news you would get during those days. Newspapers. You couldn't afford to buy newspapers. You know, newspapers were expensive. And, plus, there was no reason, no time to read them. I remember when the war started in France, the bells were ringing and the soldiers were marching. (Interview with Arduino Ignagni, May 27, 2014)

Deborah Brandt (1998), in *Sponsors of Literacy*, suggests that "agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract…enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress or withhold literacy – and gain advantage by it in some way" (p. 166). My father's description demonstrates how the church, as a sponsor, regulated the kind of news that the citizens received, from current events to deciding which familial celebrations were to be publicized to the community. Given that many people did not have access to literacy education, the church could orally provide information about the community and global affairs. Through this role of sponsor, the church ensured regular church attendance and the illiterate citizens were given access to the knowledges that were selected and provided by the priest. My father is not critical of the church's role as a sponsor of literacy. Brandt suggests that "…sponsors deliver the ideological freight that must be borne for access to

what they have…the sponsored can be oblivious to or innovate with this ideological burden" (Brandt, 1998, p. 168). In contrast to my father's description of the various ideological slants of the newspapers, he does not question the power of the church and chooses to highlight the importance of membership in this sphere of literacy.

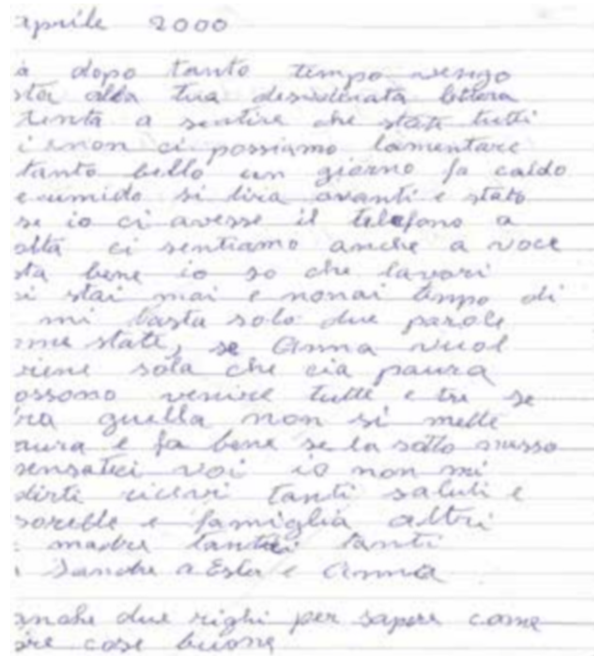
My father compares my grandmother's literacy to the others in her community. He acknowledges that literacy is classed. He states, "That was the life in any country in any society, except for the rich. The rich were another thing." (Interview with Arduino Ignagni, May 27, 2014) Luke and Freebody, in *Constructing Critical Literacies*, pose the questions, "Are they less powerful because they are less literate or less literate because they are less powerful...? What is clear here is that who gets to be a reader is not simply a matter of pedagogical efficacy – it depends in large part on patterns of the distribution of power and knowledge in a society" (Luke & Freebody, 2011, p. 200). My father suggests that all subsistence farmers worldwide, regardless of race, lacked access to literacy opportunities. He does not name the literacy practices of the upper class except to articulate the difference.

Figure 1.1.

By comparing my grandmother to others in her community, he sees her accomplishments rather than her lack of opportunity. Heath suggests that "…it is not possible to separate literacy from questions of power… the binary literacy/illiteracy offers only negative subject positions for people who are not literate" (cited in Luke & Freebody, 2011, p. 5). She further suggests that the middle class literacies are valued over those of working class. In choosing not to discuss the hierarchical nature of literacy, perhaps my father seeks to tell a story about his mother within her field as a subsistence farmer and not in relation to the upper class literacies that were inaccessible. Perhaps he chose to disregard the greater social structure of literacy in order to maintain the story of her power.

NONNA IOLANDA: ILLITERATE AND POWERFUL

Hilary Janks's article compelled me to question if my grandmother attempted to hide her illiteracy. Janks shares the story of Lily-Rose, a student at the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa, who wrote personal literacy accounts in order to consider what it feels like to be literate. Janks examines an excerpt of Lily-Rose's literacy history that tells the story of her amusement when she observed a man on a bus who attempted to disguise his illiteracy (Janks, 2010, p. 6).


aprile 2000

à dopo tanto tempo vengo
stai alla tua desiderata lettera
tenta a sentire che state tutti
i non ci possiamo lamentare
tanto bello un giorno fa caldo
e umido si tira avanti e stato
se io ci avesse il telefono a
olta ci sentiamo anche a voce
sta bene io so che lavori
si stai mai e nonai tempo di
mi basta solo due parole
me state, se Anna vuol
viene sola che cia paura
ossono venire tutte e tre se
ra quella non si mette
aura e fa bene se la sotto sunsso
sensateci voi io non mi
dirti ciccari tanti saluti e
sorelle e famiglia altri
madre tanti tanti
Sandra a Ester e Anna

anche due righi per sapere come
re cose buone

Figure 1.2.

When questioned about whether my grandmother disguised her literacy deficits, my father responded:

> No, she never hid what she didn't know because, like I said, before Napoleon's time, they all knew how to read and write because they lived in towns, walled towns, but after they spread out to the country, they lost the idea to learn, the interest to learn. The only thing they had to do was [subsistence] work. About half of the people in the community couldn't read or write and it was part of life. (Interview with Arduino Ignagni, May 31, 2014)

My grandmother lived in a community of subsistence farmers who managed farms and raised crops and animals, leaving little time for middle class literacies. My father's use of the words "idea" to learn or "interest" in learning is puzzling. In fact, he seems to suggest there was so much work in their lives that literacy was not a priority. When asked about what literacies might have been important during his mother's life, he replied, "None, you had to work. You had to have muscle. That's all you needed those days…It was not important in those days to know how to read and write" (Interview with Arduino Ignagni, May 27, 2014). During the second interview, my father reiterated, "[My mother] didn't have time for school, because school was not necessary. You had to work. You had to look good so you could get married at sixteen. You had to be healthy" (Interview with Arduino Ignagni, May 31, 2014).

This insistence that reading and writing during those days was not important began to raise questions. My maternal grandmother wrote beautifully and it was a source of great celebration when her letters would arrive. Moreover, in my childhood home, my father valued the ability to read and write. Given this contradiction, I began to analyze what my father had to say about his own literacy as a means of better understanding his identity.

ARDUINO IGNAGNI: FIGHTING FOR LITERACY

Throughout the interview, my father's literacy discourse presents many contradictions. As he speaks his mother into existence, he celebrates her success in the farming business, and he praises her ability to achieve financial stability and provide a home for her family. My father's story writes his mother into existence as the female hero who gained power through the literacies that she possessed, despite her inability to read and write the traditional texts that were valued by the middle and upper classes. Yet, a repeated contradiction appears throughout the data. For my father, an important goal was the acquisition of the traditional middle class literacies that he dismissed as unimportant in his mother's life. He speaks of being denied access to an education due to the historical context of his upbringing, describes the effort he put forth to become literate, laments the job that he was forced to accept due to his literacy deficits and criticizes his work colleagues for their lack of literacy. In an effort to "take apart the

endless layers that are seen to constitute [my father's] social reality" (Given, 2008, p. 8), his own literacy practices and attitudes will be examined.

Early in the interview, my father explains that, given his father's career, he was entitled to enter a college. He states, "[We] could go to the college without paying;" however, World War II interrupted his schooling. He explains:

> We had to stop for the war in 1942…41 – 1941 – and then there were too many cars. The Germans were moved down the peninsula and we had to cross a main road, which was Number Two Highway for the Roman standard and it was too dangerous, so we had to quit school around May 1943. I was in grade two. For two years, there was no school because there was no government in the Casino area; Casinato, they called it. So, I could go to college for free, but the president of the school didn't accept me because I had to be eleven, but I was thirteen. He said, "I cannot put a thirteen year old boy with eleven year old boys." So, I was out of that. I couldn't go. I went and finished my public school and that was it, and then I went to work. (Interview with Arduino Ignagni, May 31, 2014)

My father explains that, due to the war, he was denied access to formal education. First, the schools were closed due to the war and then he was too old to enter the first year of college. With his literacy possibilities closed off, he went to work. Unlike his mother, however, he struggled to further develop traditional middle class literacy skills.

My father is a reader. He devours newspapers; sometimes several a day. He did not have any friends to my knowledge, either at work or in his personal life. When he wasn't working, his time was spent reading or watching the news. Since he seemed to dismiss the need for literacy during my grandmother's life, and I knew this to contradict his own practice, I prompted him with a comment about his love of newspapers. He responded:

> … And, I loved [reading] then, too. The Bible was…the great-great-grandfather must have had a Bible with a leather cover, so I loved to read. I read about Joseph and his seven brothers. I read about almost everything anyway what the bible said… I read *Il Messagero*. I liked *Il Messagero*. It was sort of a liberal newspaper and the *Unity* was communist and I never liked it. *Avanti* was socialist and I never liked it because it was too much, too many radical ideas. The best was *Il Messagero* because it was a liberal paper and they told common stuff. (Interview with Arduino Ignagni, May 31, 2014)

His description includes his analysis of the newspapers available to him and their political slants. His analysis seems to suggest that he tried on ideologies through his reading of the papers. He settles on the liberal newspaper and its "common" ideas. This decision is consistent with his desire to work within the systems available to continue to become educated and to gain the capital of literacy within his field.

My father further explains that purchasing these newspapers required sacrifice, and he used his limited resources to gain access to the practice of reading. He states:

> When I had money I bought [newspapers] on a Sunday or Wednesday. There was all sorts of advertising and I bought it. It was expensive, the newspapers in those days. You couldn't afford much of anything. Maybe I could if I didn't care about piling up money to buy a house or to buy whatever. I used to buy comics, because, at that time, there was no television; so, I had to buy comic books. I used to buy comics but, after, I used to sell them to another kid who would give me a little bit of what I had bought if for. I would buy used ones. [In what year would you buy newspapers?] I came here in 1954; so, between 1950 and 1954, that's the time when I grew up. I was fifteen to eighteen, thirteen; let's say '48 when I finished my school to '54 when I came here. (Interview with Arduino Ignagni, May 31, 2014)

These literacy practices took place during his teenage years. Other boys his age might have been in high school or working, but it is interesting that work alone was insufficient, and he was struggling to build his knowledge through nontraditional means.

Another contradiction lies in my father's analysis of class and literacy. When describing his mother's literacy, he suggested that she had no use for literacy due to her class. I asked my father, "How did race, class and gender affect your literacy?"

Interestingly, he articulates that his literacy affected his access to jobs and limited him to manual labour. In this case, he suggests that this level of literacy hindered him. He, like his mother, possessed strong financial literacy skills but complains about the "mud" that he endured during his career in the water works. He claims that his work was a means to allow his daughters access to education and a better life. Once again, he is not accepting literacy as static but, rather, is using literacy to gain capital and transcend class. He states:

> Well, I could have had a good job. I had to work in the water works, work in the mud, for so many years, but I did it. I did what I wanted to do. I bought more than one house. I wanted to send you to the school, even if you didn't learn good enough, that's your problem, but you had a chance to learn. If you had five years in Kingston there, not in jail, in the university, you came out what you are. And, so it was for Sandra, you know. (Interview with Arduino Ignagni, May 31, 2014)

Perhaps, my grandmother's illiteracy prevented her from advocating for her son's education, or my father's focus on education was due to the barriers he faced as a young boy after the war. He suggests that my identity was shaped by my time at Queen's University. He claims, "…You came out what you are." Again, this is a contradiction to his description of his mother. My grandmother gained power as an illiterate woman through her labour and the literacies that she possessed. In contrast, my father claims that my sister and I were shaped by our time at university and presumably the middle class literacies that we gained there.

During the interview, my father is critical of his colleagues who did not take up the literacies that were offered to them. He explains that "some people, I worked with, some people here, they couldn't read the cheque and they were Canadians…I had to read how much money they got, and if you asked them, one country, maybe Chile, at that time it was Allende, they didn't know what Chile was and what did they care?" (Interview with Arduino Ignagni, May 31, 2014). Perhaps it was a source of pride that he knew more than these men who were given the opportunity to be educated. His story further demonstrates the value he placed on being able to read, know the world and understand the political tides of the times.

DEMANDING LITERACY: THE LITERACY PRACTICES IN OUR HOME

Most paradoxical to my grandmother's story were the literacy practices in my childhood home. My father was determined to teach us critical literacy. According to Luke and Freebody,

> …In an era of postcolonialism and global capitalism, marginalized, minority, and indigenous communities have an urgent stake in the nature and efficacy of literacy education efforts, and, importantly, in the dominant theories and methodologies used to legitimate these efforts…and to what end they can influence the development of literate citizens and workers. (Luke & Freebody, 2011, p. 192)

In our home, my father became the critical reading teacher in an effort to influence and shape our literacy and knowledges of the world. "Education opens doors" was a mantra in our home. We were told that education was the key to transcending our working class position. His "social purpose" for critical reading was to make us upwardly mobile in addition to raising awareness about social justice and political issues.

I have included the voices of my sisters in this article because, even as an adult, I still feel that my father's efforts to teach us to read the word and the world were detrimental to me as a daughter, student and teacher (Freire, 1970). During my childhood, my sisters were more able to read and write to my father's standards, and their recall of facts and cognitive processing speeds were exceptional. My father was very critical of my literacy deficits. Although I am thankful that he taught us to see the world from a variety of perspectives and to be wary of "propaganda," I am certain that my closeness to and rejection of my father's severe and relentless push to make us literate affected my reading and analysis of the data. In the excerpts below, my sisters share the literacy stories of our home.

SANDRA IGNAGNI (FROM EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE ON JUNE 10, 2014)

What were the literacy practices in your childhood home?

- *Having newspaper articles slipped under bedroom door upon waking*
- *Reading newspaper articles aloud at breakfast*

- *Being evaluated for clarity of reading voice (e.g., # of words stumbled over)*
- *For the most part, the public library provided childcare and therefore I had access to books*
- *Quiet reading time at home a rarity, however*
- *Watching the morning news over and over and over - developed political awareness through sheer repetition*
- *Knowledge of current events tended to undermine literacy because it meant I did not have to read anything in order to excel academically in elementary, high school and even university*
- *Quality of handwriting evaluated for clarity*
- *Wrote letters and other correspondences on behalf of parents*
- *Dad brought home a book of political cartoons (Ben Wicks), which I read several times and used it to learn about Canada's past historical leaders and key political events (esp. Trudeau/Clark years + OPEC oil shocks)*
- *I read books given to me by my sisters (Bruno and Boots, Adrian Mole, etc.)*
- *When bored (no TV + few friends) I read my sister's university textbooks*

How did these attitudes towards literacy shape your student identity?

- *Confidence re: Canada's political history*
- *Hate, hate, hate being asked evaluative type questions by teachers/others in positions of authority*
- *Horrible anxiety with presentations*
- *High level of writing confidence and I'm not sure where this came from*

ESTHER IGNAGNI (FROM EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE ON JUNE 10, 2014)

Obviously, I think our home placed a very high value on literacy – although this was not always conveyed in an inspiring or encouraging way.

Let me start with mum – who I think gets short-changed in our family discussions about scholarly life. I have such a strong image of her preparing 'tickets' on Thursday evenings. I was impressed by the number of sheets and the colours – little girl stuff. I remember asking her why the tickets were in different colours and she indicated that some workers couldn't read. I also remember her pride in the fact that her mother and grandmother could read – and as such could write letters. I sense those letters were everything to her – I have vivid images of her sense of satisfaction when she came home to a letter from Italy, and the rituals of writing a letter 'back home.' I was also impressed by the complexity of her literacy – she often negotiated the prices per 'piece' in the factory, since she and the union steward had the best math skills – or numeracy. This has likely enabled her to find dignified, decent work in the wake of the transformation of the Canadian fashion industry. I'm now thinking about how she worked with patterns – a material/technical literacy of sorts. I suppose I'm now also thinking about her considerable everyday literacy – reading labels, recipes, toy instructions, craft books, etc.

As my eyesight changed throughout my childhood, mom also was instrumental in getting me through exams. I remember, one year, her reading my biology text aloud so that I could study for the exam. I did well – despite the fact that some of the work was meaningless to her.

I don't know if you both remember when she went to union school and she began reading Hemmingway. That was very funny – and she was desperate to do well. I don't know how much of her work I proofread. At the time, I thought this was opening up new horizons for her – but I don't think I had an appreciation of her considerable scholarly knowledge.

I'm also wondering about her own academic history prior to coming to Canada. My sense is that she was good in school, but was not allowed to continue because she was a woman.

I start with these memories because I think they were obscured by the patriarchal presence of Dad. Not to say that Dad didn't have lots to do with influencing our literacy – it was far more overt and forceful. On its own, his insistence on reading the paper, looking up words in the dictionary, forcing us to write official letters, making us read his old Italian schoolbooks (and then translate into English) – could have backfired dramatically. That said, I think there were things he did that promoted a love of reading that was much more generative. I loved the "Readers' Digest" magazines he brought home. He filled the house with books from garage sales, the garbage and hand-offs to supplement his handyman wages. I particularly loved a very old (circa 1950s) children's encyclopedia he brought home. I could look at that for hours. He brought home Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and Anne Rice. He brought us to the library every Saturday and this was likely our salvation.

My sisters are highly literate. Both have earned doctorate degrees. They have been the honoured recipients of Governor General awards, a SSHRC and numerous scholarships. More importantly, they are kind, curious, tenacious and positive contributors to their communities. Perhaps one could suggest that the literacy practices in our home shaped, rather forcefully, our identities as learners.

By examining my father's construction of my grandmother's illiteracy and contrasting that assignment to his own literacy practices and the practices of my childhood home, I have begun to construct my personal literacy story. As a child, my father felt powerless and chose to celebrate certain literacies that his mother possessed. In his own life, he fought against the assignments of "uneducated" due to his lack of access to formal schooling. When given power within his own home, he took up the role of critical literacy teacher in order to empower his daughters. This examination of our literacy story has raised my awareness of my own identity, allowed me to examine my family's constructions of literacy, offered an opportunity to reflect upon the literacy practices in my childhood home, and broadened my definition of literacy. I no longer consider my grandmother illiterate but, rather, acknowledge the many forms of literacy that she possessed. This story, however, is incomplete. I would like to further examine the silences in the data regarding my grandmother's relationship with my father. My father did not refer to

my grandmother as loving, kind or caring. Despite prompting, why was my father focused on material success rather than my grandmother's personality? With these questions and a deeper understanding of my identity, I hope, through the process of writing this article, I have become more critically literate.

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JOHANA BEEHARRY

2. EMBRACING THE CRITICISM

Barbara Comber

Critical literacies are practices for interpreting our lives.

This was the opening sentence on the syllabus for a course on critical literacy, taken at a time when my understanding of literacy had just become redefined. The course asked its participants to consider literacy through the lens of criticism, considering its history, its importance and its practical application. Encountering those questions that first evening was confounding. I had just finished a course that allowed me to understand and define literacy in a whole new way. The very limited definition I had of literacy, going into that course, became stretched, redefined and much more meaningfully rich. Now that I had a deeper and more profound understanding of literacy, it was time to tackle critical literacy. That first evening, I had no idea what the answers were to the questions posed. I knew it was a good thing and I should be doing it in my classroom. But how? Wasn't "being critical" picking things apart? Wasn't it holding something up for closer examination to only comment on the negatives? I knew I could be critical but could I be critically literate?

As the course progressed, I came to define critical literacy as a framework that allowed one to ask, "Why" and "How come?" It gives permission to challenge established power structures, question privilege and examine history, politics and society through a lens of inquiry. The purpose of asking those uncomfortable questions is not to recognize and highlight the negative but to see the whole, multi-layered picture and ask the artist to explain. Being introduced to the "Discourses" of James Gee and his view of literacy having cultural, political and historical connections; the "pedagogies of multiliteracies" of the "New London Group" and exploring what was new in "New Literacies" with Lankshear and Knobel tore apart my narrow and limiting definition and understanding of what "literacy" as a study and practice was. The work of Karen Wohlwend and Vivian Vasquez helped me view literacy practice and study within an Early Years context.

I initially chose to explore Comber's article, discussing the possibility of "doing" critical literacy with students in the Early Years. This was my first encounter with her work. The article asserts that the practice of critical literacy is easily at home in the Early Years classroom. This is an assertion I agree with, since I have engaged

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in critical literacy activities with my Kindergarten classes even though I was not completely aware I was doing it. I wanted to continue to explore Comber's work in critical literacy with children. I wanted to seek out ways to broaden my teaching of critical literacy with Kindergarten children in a meaningful and appropriate manner and situate myself in the critical literacy milieu. I wanted to be marinated in the critical literacy discourse.

As I encountered Comber's work, I was bombarded with the critical questions she had about classroom practice, teacher expectations of students, the role of assessment, the socio-cultural backgrounds of children, the privileging of skills and abilities and how cultural capital limited and benefited students, the role of gender and the social recapitulation institutionalized by current school and teaching practice. I found I either could not answer the questions she posed or realized I had never posed them to myself because I had not held a critical lens to my teaching practice.

I consider myself to be a reflective teacher, one who evaluates personal practice in the classroom in an attempt to perfect it, tune it and make the learning outcome of the student greater, but I couldn't answer Comber's questions. I needed to answer those questions and I needed to expand my focus beyond critical literacy in the Early Years. I needed to use Comber's other areas of interests to ground myself in critical literacy before I ventured any further with students of any age. I needed to be schooled, critically and employ her questions, Comber style.

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Kerkham, L., & Comber, B. (2007). Literacy, places and identity: The complexity of teaching environmental communications. ***Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*****,** ***30*****(2), 134–148.**

Summary

This article discusses the issue of "place identity" of teachers and its impact on the curriculum they construct with students. The relationship with place(s) impacts teachers' thinking concerning their work, how they understand the identity place of their students and the types of literacy tasks they construct. Teachers in this article speak to the critical literacy work done on an environmental issue within a community. Positions include those of landowners, farmers, users of the Murray-Darling Basin

and environmental activists. The article explores the relationship between place, teacher identities and literacy.

Response

I include this article because I want to address the issue of "place." Reading the article prompted me to ask what Kerkham and Comber meant by the term. Were they referring to professional, historical or psychological place? Previous to reading this article, I never articulated concepts of my personal and professional "place." Professionally, I am an experienced Primary teacher in Toronto, working for the largest school board in Canada. I have predominately taught children from middle-income homes, to those of low socio-economically situated schools with high ESL populations, Special Needs and IEP students within my classrooms. For five years I taught in a school that serviced a women's shelter. I have a degree in English Literature and am working towards a M.Ed. in Primary Literacy. Language is very important to me and I place a very heavy importance on literacy. I privilege reading, writing and oral communication in my classroom whether I am teaching Kindergarten or Grade Four. Having students employ proper conventions is very important to me. I felt that pursuing social justice issues from the larger world—global equity, diversity and human rights with a class came second after "making them literate"—teaching them to read and write. That would give them paths to follow, a say in the world and the power of options and choices. I was enacting social justice with them and on their behalf through reading and writing. I believed that they would be able to act locally and globally on issues of equity, fairness and human rights and assume a shared responsibility towards contributing to positive social change only when they could read and write.

I naively thought that having those skills would allow my students to do well in school and allow them, through meritocracy, to advance in the world and be "successful." By having those capabilities and the power associated with them, my students could then advocate for external social justice causes. I am in such a different place now. By expanding my definition of *literacy* and viewing it through a *critical* lens, I am a better teacher because I am facilitating instead of instructing.

Kerkham and Comber speak to teacher's orientation as impacting the objects of their study. I now realize that when, designing curriculum, I need to be cognizant of my situated place. Curriculum must be co-constructed with students who have had the opportunity to situate themselves and critically question their placed boundaries. I need to push my own professional and attitudinal boundaries and reframe tasks with student place in mind and expand my feedback to encompass a newfound critical stance. The next article looks at the advantages to students when tasks and attitudes of the teacher are refocused towards student success.

Comber, B. (2004). Three little boys and their literacy trajectories. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, *27*(2), 114–127.

Summary

This article is Comber's view on the literacy development of three very different little boys. It showcases the impact that their cultural capital—the skills learned at home—and their social context have on their relative successes and failures at school at the beginning of their careers. It shines a light on the skills, attitudes and values we look for when a child comes to school and the misinterpretations about ability certain non-school behaviours may lead teachers to believe. It touches on the issue of gender and the current hysteria about boys and literacy, which also may trap a child into having a single story constructed about them.

Response

I found this article very engaging, and it made me realize I have taught these three little boys many times. It also made me realize that I did a disservice to some of these boys because I did not match my teaching practice and expectations to their skills, ways of being or temperament. Little boys who begin school with academic skills, like knowing the alphabet, printing their name, knowing how to sit and listen to stories, always did well in my class because that's what I expected from them and valued in them. They were "focused," "on-task" and demonstrated "self –regulation." They were to adapt to me, and the school programme. Never the other way around. I never inquired about their interests or abilities. I never attempted to hook those boys who had difficulty by connecting their home experiences to something to engage them with school. Utilizing the questions posed by critical literacy, I would now know that it is *my* responsibility to value the child before me instead of the child I could create once they sat quietly on the carpet. As Comber notes in the article, I now know I need to expand *my* repertoire of practice to suit the student by asking myself critical questions about my pedagogy and practice. Children come to us at various entry points in their life and school, and its literacy practices need to mesh with their areas of competence and not the other way around. I recall the work of James Gee (2001) and his ideas about Discourses. He writes that each situation – home, work, school, hockey team etc. – requires a matching persona. Children come to school with various "Discourses." The school Discourse should not be valued over another, even if it doesn't correspond to the expectations of the Ontario Curriculum. In terms of gender, I wonder how these little boys might

have fared if they were girls? Comber makes me wonder if the same outcomes would be realized if Campbell was a Camilla or Sean was a Seana? Comber's next article tackles the issue of "readiness."

Comber, B. (2000). What *really* counts in early literacy lessons. *Language Arts*, *78*(1), 39–49.

Summary

This article looks at early student experiences with school literacy and questions their relative successes and failures within the rigid framework of school readiness. It addresses the fact that different children have different learning outcomes, which relate in ways to their socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, race, location, parent education and attitudes to education. The three children discussed in the article present great differences in their literate competences before beginning school, and those differences grew exponentially after nine months of schooling. Comber makes the point that "lives are not background to what occurs in school" (p. 40). It reminds teachers that much of what we use to stratify children is beyond their control and is based on issues not of ability but access to school-based competencies we expect them to have before attending school.

Response

I include this article despite its similarity to the previous article because it encourages a deeper analysis of what we, as educators, value in students within our classrooms. It strongly speaks to the value of home discourses (Gee, 2001), and the power they have to affect school experiences both positively and negatively. If I critically reflect on my practice, I can say that I never really considered or valued the home Discourse unless it mirrored the school Discourse—exposure to early literacy skills of reading, writing and listening to printed text read aloud in English. I never considered other skills as valuable and never asked my students about their home competencies. Of many of the schools I worked in, I do not believe that parents considered those non-school skills as valuable either. They were probably viewed as home secrets—things that carried no academic weight—but they are presenting their economic, cultural, social, symbolic, and *linguistic capital* and *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990 cited in Comber, 2000). Comber asks what would happen if we fashioned school literacies around home literacy and life literacy?

Comber, B. (1998). *'Coming, ready or not!' Changing what counts as early literacy*. Keynote address presented to the Seventh Australia and New Zealand Conference of the First Years of School, New Approaches to Old Puzzles – Reconceptualising the Early Years of School, The Australian National University, Canberra. Retrieved from http://www.schools.ash.org.au/litweb/barb2.html

Summary

In this keynote address Comber speaks to the term "readiness." She points out the contradiction in the concept. Children are to be made ready to enter school. But is not school the place where children are aided to become ready to encounter the world? School should be making children ready so that they may negotiate a world of differences. Comber notes that the term "ready" is too common a refrain in the discourse associated with early childhood education. Her point is that home is to make ready the learner so that school can assess that learner in this anxiety-riddled age of paranoia surrounding needed skills for the 21st Century. She maintains that what different children bring to school will either work for or against them, depending on what schools offer to those children and how children are able to access those learning opportunities. Our goal should be to create a permeable curriculum that is based on reinvented pedagogy that is responsive and inclusive for all children.

Response

Knowing Comber through her writings and the research I have read, I can imagine her delivery of this keynote. I imagine her spitting out this speech, steam escaping from her ears as she progresses. Her disgust for assessment and standardization is palatable. Canada mirrors Australia's urgency for standards and testing. In this keynote, she eloquently pleads for teachers to build on the skills, knowledge(s), and experiences children bring with them from home, and life experiences. I agree with her assertion that teachers should access new research done now with the children in front of them. As a teacher, I never save activity sheets or lesson plans. I find they are never relevant for another class. I never use lessons from the Internet because they never address students' needs or questions. I never use the same activity sheet with the PM Kindergarten class that I use with the AM class for that very reason. Again, Comber poses useful guiding questions in her work that help to identify the essence of what we need to do as teachers to allow children to "cash in" their knowledge and skills at school. She reminds us to consider what different opportunities exist for different children, how their personal repertoires can access school and what types of cultural capital and habitus matter in school environments. One must make congruent what counts in school with what resources children bring with them and can access. In an age of measureable and

timely success regarding criteria goals, it only makes sense to provide students with opportunities that will result in successful learning. With a little bit of shrewd tinkering, we can tailor the curriculum to ensure that success. Comber speaks to the work of Vivian Vasquez and her "audit trail" or "learning wall;" a truly teachable moment for both students and teacher. I plan to post curriculum expectations on the wall next year with my Grade Four class and have them connect their areas of interest and expertise within the curriculum so that we can co-construct the knowledge building we will commit to for the year. This visible record will be a permanent reminder of the negotiated curriculum. It will also allow the students to gain ownership over their learning and to learn how to tweak the system for their own benefit. This gives them agency.

Comber, B., & Nichols, S. (2004). Getting the big picture: Regulating knowledge in the early childhood literacy curriculum. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, *4*(43), 43–63. doi:10.1177/146879840401455

Summary

In this article, Comber and Nichols discuss the tension felt by teachers who are asked to achieve minimal benchmark levels of literacy and numeracy competency with students by taking a "back to basics" approach and, at the same time, to foster creativity and advanced thinking skills through innovative teaching. Governments, wanting measureable early literacy levels, are investing considerable amounts of money in literacy programmes, teacher training and assessment. The assumption is a literate society will produce a smart workforce able to compete in the global economy and become responsible citizens. Dominant educational and political discourses are being used at the school level to construct leveled learning identities for students. The article profiles this practice of teacher-student interaction at Riverside Primary School in Adelaide, a culturally diverse, socio-economically disadvantaged suburb.

Response

Like Australia, educational and governmental policy makers in Canada are decrying the lack of minimal literacy levels as reported by the results of standardized testing. Scripted programmes that standardize teaching are being encouraged. The cry of school readiness is deafening. Students are encouraged to come to school knowing the alphabet and their numbers, how to spell and write their names and be able to sit through a story. This is a prerequisite for the early learner entering Kindergarten. No other skills, abilities, knowledge or interests are of any significance to the receiving teacher, who is expected to conduct Marie Clay's battery of assessments: a letter identification test, a concept of print assessment and a developmental reading assessment soon after the child enters the classroom. Comber is blunt in her article

that families which do not prepare or make students ready with these literacy skills are viewed as deficient as the students. Before students leave for Grade One, teachers are to administer a *Burt Word Test*—a long list of words the student is asked to identify. The test is complete once the student has identified all the words or misidentified ten words in a row. In between, teachers are expected to have a play-based programme that is student-centred and driven by student interest and inquiry. I suspect my Australian colleagues feel they, too, are suffering from a case of split personality. Students not achieving at level six in the Developmental Reading Assessment may qualify for Clay's Reading Recovery programme—an intense, scripted, one on one reading intervention programme, taught by a teacher trained in Clay's methods. The books used by Reading Recovery and by the classroom teacher during Guided Reading are very expensive and offered by every publisher. Teacher experience and knowledge are not called upon. We just need to move the students up through the leveled texts.

In Riverside Public School, Comber draws our attention to students who are made to undergo the same types of standardized teaching and testing found in many Canadian Kindergarten classrooms. Children who are identified and described as curious, bright, eager to start school and begin to read by parents, caregivers and pre-school staff are not described as such by their classroom teachers. The experiences, interests and cultural capital exhibited by those children in locales outside of school do not carry academic value within their classrooms and this results in teachers having a limited view of the student. Regrettably, I can think of times in my teaching experience where I formed my opinions about children based on their assessment results. But then Interview time came and I got the chance to meet and speak with parents. Based on colleague comments, I suspect I am the only teacher who enjoys parent interviews. I love being able to get a better, broader sense of the child and, therefore, the student. I always ask the parent to tell me about their child. I am always met with nervous laughter and looks of panic. I ask what the child likes to do at home and how they spend their time. The next morning, I always seem to have a new class in front of me. Instead of letter identification scores, I have individuals with hobbies, interests and connections to the world. I would use the information related by parents—this reciprocal listening to change the classroom—to provide books that I knew appealed to the students, change the nature of centres, ask questions about topics that I knew engaged the students, which lead us onto experiments and exploration. It was not always perfect, but it was better. I realize that I still privilege written responses too heavily but, using a critical literacy lens, I know now to broaden my acceptance of how students can demonstrate their knowledge and engage with pedagogy in a way that is meaningful to them, values their home and community practices and works with their abilities. A negotiating of relationships brought about by feedback from both teacher and student will help to establish a permeable curriculum and draw upon the funds of knowledge all stakeholders in the classroom possess. I suspect this will more than accomplish the minimal literacy benchmarks established by political and educational discourse.

Comber, B. (2013). Critical literacy in the early years: Emergence and sustenance in an age of accountability. In J. Larson & J. Marsh (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of early childhood literacy* (pp. 587–603). London, England: Sage Publications.

Summary

In this chapter, Comber introduces the concept of critical literacy. She sees it as a focus on language and power and repudiates the idea that it is an area more appropriate for older or more advanced students. Until recently, critical literacy has not been a force in Early Years education where pedagogy has been dominated by developmental theory. The emerging literacy of a young child is thought to be the result of a naturally developing learner placed within the right conditions to acquire literacy. This is incongruent with those who see critical literacy in much more Freirean terms—as a tool that positions people to argue their rights after reading the word and world. The evolving repertoire of analysis and interrogation are available to the young learner. Whether it be from micro-texts to macro-institutions, young learners are very well adapted to confront this type of analysis, Comber asserts. She cites the work of scholars Vasquez, O'Brien and Dyson, working within Early Year settings to illustrate the possibilities. It is an evolving process, employing power, language and representation in texts. Critical literacy is introduced into a classroom as curriculum when co-created by children, based on their social and cultural questions. It is an agenda that needs active attention to sustainability in this age of standardization as accountability.

Response

This chapter encapsulates so much of what is possible with an Early Years class. Comber shows that critical literacy is possible with young children and that it is not much of a stretch for those young learners, once they are given the opportunity to critique and have access to the discursive language. They can easily see the imbalance of power within society because they are usually the powerless. They see whose voice is showcased and who is silenced because they are often the ones ignored or silenced. They are daily witnesses to institutionalized structures that roll over them. So how would critical literacy be too difficult for them to master? The difficulty lies in the pedagogy of the instructor. Once we wrap our heads around the capabilities of our students, it is easy to access issues of dominance, power and social injustice with young children. Yet, many Early Years teachers wonder how to broach critical literacy with their students. Comber discusses O'Brien's work with questioning text authority through the representation of the family in literature. This is an approach I would use or suggest to a reticent colleague. Then one could use Vasquez's (2004) model and work with everyday issues that have been put to the side. By addressing inequities the teacher is not frontloading social justice topics but negotiating co-constructed curriculum—topics suggested by students and specific curriculum expectations like

letter writing, surveys, graphing results and discussing ideas. That should satisfy the accountability merchants found at the Ministry of Education.

Comber, B. (2007). ***Reading places: Creative and critical literacies for now and the future*****. Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/2123/2326**

Summary

In this article, Comber presents critical literacy undertaken by young learners reading and writing authentically about two different environmental projects. Comber states the need to learn from past work, move beyond pedagogical bandwagons and explore new media. Young learners need to access their cultural histories, need exposure to current cultural vistas and invent new ways with words and images. Differences between in-school and out-of-school literacies demonstrate the pedagogical pull of valued school-based literacy practices, compared to less than desirable out of school literacy practices. A marriage of old and new literacies will allow learners to make new meaning and represent their thinking in new and traditional formats.

Response

The learners discussed in this paper use school-based literacy skills—reading, writing, and speaking—to complete real world activities with greater value and meaning. They have demonstrated that literacy practices and personal thinking can mesh together to be authentic, situational, and inspirational. So many times teachers forget about communicating the big picture of literacy, the "why" of what we are doing with students. It is apparent to us, so we assume students are aware of why they are learning these skills. They need to realize that reading is more than completing the novel assigned for Guided Reading, or that writing is more than answering the questions at the end of the chapter. Reading is accessing that newspaper article. Writing is composing a letter to the editor. Communicating is speaking at a Town Hall meeting to eloquently move the audience into taking action. That is what the students in this article did. I consider it a great reminder to inform students of the bigger picture behind what we are attempting in the classroom. The literate practices became alive for the students in this article because it touched on issues of identity. This identity work involved used the literacies of school, which sometimes can alienate a learner. Students were asked to incorporate their out-of-school identities in their work that called upon utilizing school literacy skills. Suddenly, students have an answer to the "Why are we learning this?" question. The learners in the article used traditional school literacies like surveys, debates, diaries and letters in new and emerging ways—web pages, computer-aided design, film production and installations that captured their interests and demonstrated to them the out of school "situatedness" of literacy skills like reading and writing. Comber reiterates the sobering future these students will face—economic uncertainty and

increasing disparity, environmental damage and threats to peace. By being able to critically approach topics and use school-based literacy practices, critical literacy and being able to question language, power and injustice becomes a life skill. I plan to communicate the big picture to my students so they can see the necessity of asking, reading and writing, "Why?" "How come?" and "Who says?"

Comber, B. (2001). Critical literacies and local action: Teacher knowledge and a "new" research agenda. In B. Comber & A. Simpson (Eds.), *Negotiating critical literacies in the classroom* (pp. 271–281). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Summary

In this chapter, Comber seeks to define critical literacy as a series of questions that asks about language, language practices, power, morality, ethics, lifestyle, and those it advantages and disadvantages. Critical literacy's detractors use negative assertions and criticisms to block innovative teaching, which limits student learning. Comber suggests that successful practitioners of critical literacy need to provide a database or exhibit artifacts as a guide to others to demonstrate their situated successes. It should not be used as a "textbook" for successful critical literacy lesson plans but, rather, an anthology of projects that saw fruition.

Response

I think this chapter is the perfect ending to this exploration of critical literacy. It reminds me to continue to ask those uncomfortable and complicated questions. Who is this class comprised of, where did they come from, what are their funds of knowledge and how can it be used to build curriculum? What do we need to dispose of, ignore or interrogate? What do I know about pedagogy and how can it be influenced by the students in front of me? What counts as literacy? How do I use technology to critically examine a "text"? Do I need to learn a new technology to pursue this critical question? It reminds me if the potential of critical literacy as a positive and active action that needs to be co-constructed with the class, using their strengths and attributes, and be comprised of locally negotiated practices. It admonishes me for not questioning what I had previously taken for granted. For my practice, this is what I feel is the most valuable aspect of critical literacy. It has demonstrated to me that I should be questioning instead of accommodating tradition.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND NEXT STEPS

All children begin their school careers bringing with them a collection of skills, interests, and abilities. Many have had experiences that mirror those they will encounter in the classroom. They have a personal collection of books, and access to

literate adults that value reading, writing and education. They have markers, crayons, scissors and time and a place to use them. These are the skills that are explored within the walls of the classroom. They are valued and privileged by the education system and by me. Many children come to school without these particular skills but with other experiences and skill-sets to draw upon that enrich their experiences. Many times these skills and experiences, not valued by school, remain hidden because teachers like me did not seek out the home identity of the student in front of me. These students know they are not "doing" school in the accepted and stereotypical manner. Reviewing these articles and book chapters by Comber has allowed me to recognize my personal biases and the institutionalized prejudices that I perpetuated. After engaging with these texts in a critical fashion, I am now able to move onto exploring critical literacy with students. But my questioning and reflecting cannot end there. With students, I want to access the work of Canadian academics working on critical literacy. I want to explore the idea of the messages and modes we use in critical literacy through the lens of Marshall McLuhan's writings on the subject. But, most importantly, I have to remember to keep asking, "Why?" and "How come?"

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TL MCMINN

3. SOMETIMES IT'S EASIER TO FIND YOURSELF BY PRETENDING YOU ARE SOMEBODY ELSE

How I Used 'Practice Identities' to Discover the Real Me

Growing up I was labeled a "poor" or "struggling" reader by my teachers. It wasn't that I *couldn't* read; it's just that I did not enjoy reading. I found reading too hard and time consuming; it could take me hours just to find a book I found interesting enough to even *attempt* to read. I loved the idea of books, and thought it was cool to own them, display them, and peruse them every once in a while, but I just did not enjoy reading. This was not made any easier by the fact that I was a native-English speaker and was enrolled in French Emersion until the seventh grade. Although I was able to "get by," I was never very good at speaking, reading or writing in French, so when it came to quiet time or silent reading, I gravitated towards the books with pictures as much as I could, because at least then I could make it look like I was reading, even though I was just waiting for the next lesson to start. As Lin (2008) posits, "[I]dentity is … thought to matter as a theoretical and practical construct in literacy research and education because identity labels can be used to stereotype, privilege, or marginalize readers and writers as 'struggling' or 'proficient,' as 'creative' or 'deviant'" (as cited in Moji & Luke, 2009, p. 416). Being labeled a poor reader impacted my identity and my self-worth, which influenced my everyday actions and may have contributed (but was not necessarily the cause) to why I would 'give up' if I couldn't understand or get into something right away. I felt stupid; I hated that what seemed to come so easily and naturally to my classmates felt so hard for me to understand. My teachers and mother insisted that I needed to slow down, calm down and take my time; they tried to get me to believe that I would catch up to the others eventually. I didn't understand why I needed to wait, so instead of slowing down, I would just give up. Everyone already thought I was a poor reader, writer, speaker; so why bother changing? It was not until high school that I began to *identify myself as*, not only a reader, but a writer as well. I feel that this is an important distinction to make because up until this point, I had allowed everyone around me to dictate who and what I was. The shift may have been influenced by the fact that late adolescence is when (theoretically) one has more autonomy, more ability to choose for oneself, that I felt it was easier to choose my own label(s), instead of simply accepting those that others gave me (Dansei, 1994). I discovered that reading and writing provided me with options and opportunities I hadn't considered before; using my new literacies

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meant that I could be absolutely anyone I wanted to be, and at a time when I would have given anything to be anyone except who I was; that was huge.

Although I was not a 'reader' growing up, I did recognize the importance of books and the information they could provide; thus, depending on where my interests lay at any particular point, the books in my possession (usually) reflected that interest. This did not mean I became *literate* in these interests. By 'putting on' or 'trying out' different types of identities[1] it has been argued that by doing so more knowledge can be gained towards, and intuition could be gathered about, the use and practical applications of one's own identit(ies). This could include how any particular identity may or may not be static or fixed, but instead can change or flux given the situation at hand (Duggan, 1993; McKinney & Norton, 2008). In other words, the use of any identity ("true" or made up) can be used strategically to blend in or even to further a goal. In this paper, I hope to reveal the possibilities for developing *Critical Identity Literacies* via the use of Craig and McInroy's (2014) work regarding Queer youth's proficiency in using the internet and online communities as a rehearsal or "practice identity" to which they may eventually be transferred into a person's "real" or offline life. Following the work done by Craig and McInroy, "practice identities" can and are used by Queer individuals, particularly Queer youth, as a start up towards how they would like to live their offline lives. By creating and manipulating these "practice identities," Queer individuals enable themselves to use their difference as a position of power instead of a position of weakness (McKinney & Norton, 2008, p. 195), as it allows for one to write their own story, and be given the opportunity to either embrace or discard any stereotypes and/or labels that may have been given to them (Kinloch, 2005).

Identity literacy has been described as a "readers' proficiency in the practice of engaging the meaning systems embedded within texts, considering while doing so whether to adopt, adapt, or reject these as part of their own personal meaning systems" (Schachter & Galili-Schachter, 2012, p. 3). This means that a reader engages in the "processes of personal identity development" as they interact and engage with different texts (p. 3). For the purpose of this paper *Identity Literacies* are viewed as a process to which there needs to be a sense of not only *knowing* and *understanding* who we are, but also being able to read and communicate yourself to yourself and to others. Through this process, using Côté and Levine's (2002) theory of a *viable social identity*, it should be possible to view and assess situations or environments we are in and choose (or not) an 'appropriate' identity to go along with any particular situation. As Halverson (2005) states:

> Côté and Levine's (2002) theory suggests that developing a sense of self involves the synthesis of these…concepts, wherein individuals can reconcile their psychological, personal, and social identities in a way that makes sense to them and to the people in their lives. The synthesis of these dimensions of identity facilitates success in the world; by working to align these three facets of identity, a person emerges as a young adult with a sense of how they fit into their communities. (pp. 70–71)

Knowing and understanding yourself and being able to differentiate which self is applicable to any situation is one thing, but it is another to understand *why* there needs to be a separation in the first place. Thus, it is just as important to be critical about the awareness one may or may not possess and question how they came to be. By utilizing Hillary Janks' (2010) definition of the word *critical,* which"…no longer only means reasoned analysis based on an examination of evidence and argument" but is "used to signal analysis that seeks to uncover the social interest at work, to ascertain what is at stake in textual and social practices…it signals a focus on power…in what is sometimes called ideology critique" (pp. 12–13). *Critical Identity Literacies*, then, implores the self-awareness that is required by both my and Schachter and Galili-Schachter's (2012) definition of identity literacy, but also the awareness that one needs to question and explore *why* the need for different identities exists. In order to be *critical* about one's own or even other's *identity literacies* one also needs to be able to critically analyze *why* one kind of identity is more 'welcome' or 'acceptable' in certain situations and postulate as to *how* these types of associations have come about. This use of *Critical Identity Literacies* follows in line with Mary Gray's (2007, 2009) concept of *queer identity work* which is described as "the collective labor of identity construction that at once chips away at and stabilizes coherent gay and lesbian identity categories" (2007, p. 7) and the "…crafting, articulating, and pushing the boundaries of identities" (2009, p. 1170). One needs to "push boundaries" and "chip away" at already stabilized identities and wonder/analyze/reflect on what else may be possible and why these dominant identities are seen as the 'norm' and are thus "acceptable" and "right."

New media resources have become a "go-to" for many Queer individuals, especially when searching for information about how they are feeling, regardless of if they constitute these feelings of same-gender attractiveness or gender dysphoria as "wrong," "curious," "new" or simply "confusing." New media, which refers to "Internet-based media including websites, web-based TV, web-based news, social media, social networking, and video sharing," allows queer individuals to "explore identities, behaviors, and lifestyles that might remain inaccessible offline" (Craig & McInroy, 2014, p. 95). This may be necessary due to the fact that those in their immediate social and/or familial circle who "are overwhelmingly likely to be heterosexual;" thus, having access to the internet and new media may allow for more candid discussions regarding their experience(s) and feelings with others who may have experienced or are experiencing similar circumstances or events (Hillier & Harrison, 2007, p. 90). This is not to say that all Queer individuals who search online or use new media to express themselves will have no one in their offline world who "understands" or be able to relate to, simply that this outlet, because of the (real or fictitious) anonymity of it, may have greater advantages for Queer individuals rather than speaking to someone in their offline life (Craig & McInroy, 2014; Hillier & Harrison, 2007; Pascoe, 2011). When I first began the process of "coming out" – that is, when I began admitting to myself, and eventually others, about my non-heterosexual sexual identity, the online world, as we know it, like me,

was in its infancy or perhaps its adolescence. But even without the resources and knowledges of today, I did manage to find some ways of discovering myself with the help of the Internet. One of the ways I did this was through the (re)invention and (re) visualization of stories and characters that I already knew and loved.

Having been given the chance or the ability I would have (re)written my life multiple times over growing up. Although I prided myself for being unique, different, (ab)normal, there were many times when I wondered what it would be like to "fit in," which in my mind was equated to being able to speak my mind regardless of the situation or the company, just as I imagined my friends were welcome to do. My high school was nothing special, it had many of the traditional "cliques" that are ruled by popularity, common interests, intelligence. However, I always characterized my high school as having two 'popular' groups: the first being those deemed superior via their athletic abilities, the other recognized more so for their intelligence and artistic ability. Even though the bulk of my friends in high school belonged to the latter "popular" group, I would not have considered myself to have been part of or have had *full access* to the group, as I did not *fit in* enough to actually be considered a viable candidate for the inner group. Regardless of whether this separation or segregation was purposeful or something made up in my own mind, I believed it to be real. This aside, in order to solidify myself, however much, into one of the only social circles I had access to I did what I could in order to maintain some kind of recognition within the group. As Marcel Danesi (2004) stated in his book *Cool: The Signs and Meanings of Adolescence*:

> By unconsciously modelling [their] behaviour after clique members, the teenager is really seeking to secure protection against the psychological ravages associated with what Erikson (1950) called 'identity diffusion,' a state in which teenagers feel overwhelmed by the many choices they face, including choices about gender identity. (p. 59)

This is why, when I "figured out" that I was queer, I didn't tell many people. A lot of my friends were fairly, if not entirely, conservative, so I knew many of them would not understand and would have difficulty being supportive. I quickly realized that the person I wished I could be, or the person I was becoming, was not welcome in my current social group. The more I grew into my Queer identity and began feeling more sure about myself, the more I found myself wanting to be more vocal with my friends. I wanted to share my opinions and give my views of the world, which should be completely "normal" behaviour. However, I found that my opinions were rarely accepted as, more often than not, they differed from the bulk of my friends, which I discovered went against the social structure(s) of youth social circles. So I kept them to myself. Because I spent most of my youth hiding and pretending to be someone I was not, lying, in a way, became second nature; it was the only way I could think to protect myself from the negative thoughts and opinions of those around me. By this point, hiding and lying to my friends no longer had anything to do with feigning 'normalcy', whatever that may be, but more to do

with a preservation of my psyche; I didn't trust the bulk of my friends enough to allow them to see who I really was.

Knowing most of my friends' thoughts regarding non-heterosexual identities, I knew that for many of those that I associated with this 'new me' was never going to be accepted. So, for the most part, I hid and censored my thoughts and feelings, and carefully gauged what could and couldn't be said based on who I was with. Having to hide from almost everyone around me was hard and began to take a toll on my overall wellbeing, so I knew that I needed to find some kind of outlet to showcase and experience myself in a safe (and private) environment. Being able to go online and talk to strangers as *myself* was exhilarating; however, I felt uncomfortable sharing my "true" identity online and found it easier to create and "try on" different identities. These "practice identities" allowed me the freedom to experiment and "change," in a sense, anything about myself that I didn't particularly like, including anything from my everyday outward personality, how I interacted with people, to the shape and size of my body (Craig & McInroy, 2014; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). I could have been anyone, and for a time I was, but what I really wanted was to be myself, so even though I never used my given name or my exact history, I created an online persona that represented the person I wanted to be in my offline life, which allowed me to explore the life I dreamt of and always thought I wanted. Experimenting with this online persona or practice identity was also a way of protecting this "new me" from the isolation and rejection I felt almost every day. The experience(s) that these "practice identities" can give a person, what they gave me, were experiences I felt could never happen offline. Regardless of how real or how false this belief was the use of "practice identities" or alternative online personalities had a profound influence on my life. I felt free to do or say anything because it 'wasn't real' and the Internet, unlike 'real life', was supposed to be *safe* and *secure*, so even if a persona didn't work it didn't matter because no one knew who I was. Thus, anonymity led me to believe that there could be no repercussions in my offline life. In their research, Craig and McInroy (2014) found that "[m]any participants emphasized the ability to explore, develop and rehearse their LGBTQ identities online" and that "[t]he anonymity of new media allowed participants and their peers to be creative with their presentation of self in a relatively safe space, as well as provided participants with the ability to restart or alter their personas at will" (p. 101). I felt as though I could create and delete as many characters or identities as I wanted to; for the first time I felt in control over my own life.

I came out at a time when there was not a lot of (accessible) information regarding non-heterosexual sexual identities (in print or online), which forced me to be creative in regards to figuring myself out. Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) had not yet made headway in Canada yet, there were no youth groups dedicated for Queer youth or their allies, and most celebrities had not yet emerged from their closets. Thus, beyond Googling keywords such as "lesbian," "gay," or "homosexual," which, I will admit, did not always bring up the most "kid/teenager friendly" websites, I spent a lot of time reading (and eventually writing my own) fanfiction. Fanfiction,

or "the 'raiding' of mass culture by fans who use media texts as the starting point for their own writing" (Jenkins, 1992 as cited in Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003, p. 556), was my escape from reality. Being able to pick and choose stories that were written about characters that I already knew and cared about made selecting reading material a non-issue. Where it used to take hours for me to find something that I was interested in, within minutes I could find ten different stories. Some authors follow the show/novel/comic/etc. closely, but may add their own original character(s) or scenarios; others create entirely different worlds and use the existing characters along with their own creations to bring the world to life. Anything goes, including relationships and sexual orientation(s) of the characters involved. I had created a few different characters to utilize in my own fanfiction, some I created in my own likeness, and others were not. Trisha Takyami was not the first character I created that was based on myself, but she did become one of two go-to characters when I wanted to be myself away from myself. What I mean by this is that Trisha became and eventually epitomized everything that I wanted to be in my everyday *offline* life. She was outspoken, confident, sure of herself and she didn't care what anybody else thought about her, she only cared what she thought about herself. In so many ways, she was everything I never thought I could be but almost everything I wanted to be. I initially created Trisha as a character for a story, and had no intention to have this online personality intermingle with those in my real life. But the opportunity arose in which I could use Trisha to see if this person, i.e. me, would ever be welcome in my larger group of friends. So Trisha became not only an online experiment and "practice identity" for me, but she also became a bit of a social experiment to see how well she (which was me) meshed with the people in my offline life, or, to be more specific, how Trisha meshed with someone whom I considered to be one of my best friends.

Anime – or Japanese animation – was a common interest for myself and a few of my friends and this is where my fanfiction interests lay, and how I found myself interacting with and meeting new friends online. One of these interactions occurred in a *MSN Group*, which is basically an *online community forum*, which was focused around the topic of Anime. A friend of mine had created the group, and although I cannot remember who first suggested bringing Trisha into the group (as she had her own email account), but I couldn't help but wonder what would happen if I were to "introduce" Trisha to some of my offline friends. I, as the self that everyone offline knew, was also a member of this forum and would often communicate with Trisha in order to keep up appearances. Trisha would often come up in conversation between my best friend and me, and she soon became a bone of contention between the two of us; I liked and would defend Trisha in whatever way necessary, whereas my friend disliked this person very much and could not understand *why* I insisted on defending her. Although masochistic in a way, I enjoyed these conversations and hearing what my friend truly thought about Trisha, because the more she spoke about all the things she disliked or didn't understand or didn't agree with in regards to Trisha, the more I knew that this friendship was not going to last. In a sense being able to interact

with my friend in this way allowed me to mourn our dying friendship. I'm not sure if she also felt our friendship dying but, by the end, I stopped caring because I knew, through her interactions with and our conversations about Trisha, that she hated me. And I was finally at a point where I could begin to admit that I felt the same way about her.

The deception that played out between myself and my friend may now be seen as a form of "catfishing," which is defined as the creation of "online identities and entire social circles to trick people into emotional/romantic relationships (over a long period of time)" (*Catfishing*, 2013); there was no romantic relationship between my friend and me, nor between my friend and Trisha. I did, however, trick my friend for my own benefit. She saw this as a betrayal of our friendship, which in many ways it was, but I needed something from her. Because I did not have the confidence in myself to talk to her directly, I used Trisha to learn how to express my thoughts and opinions to others, especially to her. Through Trisha I became *literate* about myself. It was through Trisha that I gained enough confidence to start to be her (i.e. myself) in my everyday offline life (Craig & McInroy, 2014), as "writing is not merely an act of constructing identity; it is [its own] identity, it builds the self (not just a sense of self, but the actual self), sustains the self, and emanates from it" (Moji & Luke, 2009, p. 425). Trisha jumpstarted this process of self-discovery. She allowed me to be critical and to think critically about *why* I felt that I needed to change who I was depending on who I was with or where I may have been. Trisha allowed me to do this publically and in the safest way I knew how, for the growth and development of *Critical Identity Literacies*, like *queer identity work* "mediates both a sense of privacy, so critical to self-definition, and the publicity needed for testing out and validating constructions of selves" (Gary, 2007, p. 13). Using "practice identities" online allowed me to do this. It was only through my online interactions that I began to understand not only how to act in certain situations, as I already knew that parts of me and my identit(ies) were not welcome in all parts of my world, but I began to question and challenge these dominant realities and began to see that "language," which is often tied with notion and questions of identity, "is fundamentally tied to questions of power" (Janks, 2010, p. 11). My awareness of the power that language possesses may have been stunted or held back by my not being constituted a "reader," but that does not mean that I was powerless; I see it more as a vulnerability, which ebbs over time, and in different ways for each person. When I "figured out" that I was Queer, I gained power over myself; when I in effect became a "reader," I gained power over myself. Being able to explore and expand myself online allowed me even more power because I became *literate* about who I was becoming. "Practice identit(ies)" allowed for opportunities to gain or experience a power that might otherwise be out of reach. Regardless of the negativity I encountered regarding my reading and writing skills, reading and writing are part of the reason why I begun to believe that I could be exactly who I wanted to be, online and offline. It wasn't until I began reading and especially when I started writing that I developed the language, my language, to be able to deconstruct the dominant realities that I lived in, which in

turn allowed me to gain my own sense of power. *Critical Identity Literacies*, I feel, are a strong hold to self-awareness, in all aspects of life.

NOTE

[1] For example, dress-up/pretend, acting or role playing, a way of 'figuring out' who you are, gaining a sense of safety in all or certain environments, or even for moral or familial reasons.

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ROSALIE GRIFFITH

4. APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA AND ITS INTERSECTIONS

Modern-Day Toronto Schooling for Black Students

INTRODUCTION

In an application of my prior learning, I will first locate myself in this Critical Review of Hilary Janks. I am a child of Caribbean parents and I am a woman of African heritage.

As a child, even at an early age, I was told, "You will have to work twice as hard to get half as far." Being the oldest, and of a Type A personality, that was not a problem for me but these words were given to prepare me for a world where I hold less value. I know that my racialized students hold less value in society.

I was oblivious to a lot of racism as a child. I had two parents and lived in a middle class community (even though we became poor when my father lost his employment) with a strong education system. It was shocking and hurtful for me as I grew *into* a realization that my family and I were at risk because of our colour. That is in Ontario, Canada. My parents kept a lot of things from me while they tried to prepare me for this world.

My mother, however, once shared with me that, when they first bought their house, they found notes in their mailbox that they would come home one day and their house would not be there. I think to myself, what did that mean for a couple with two small children to have to worry about the safety of their family in that way? I cannot even imagine.

It is, as I look back, that I can see the moments when racism touched me. For example, I remember the supply teacher that was very upset to see me in the Enrichment Science class, who, without rhyme or reason, made me sit facing the corner the whole time that she was with us. I also remember the physician who was supposed to do an allergy test for bee stings, who met me with his feet on the desk and, then, after expressing surprise that I got into Queen's University, told me he would test for a bee allergy only after I was stung and had an allergic reaction. (I was there because I had an allergic reaction when I was younger that landed me in the hospital.) I remember being so angry when I left that I was going to report him to

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the Medical Association, but my mother talked me out of it. I remember her words, "You know this place is small."

I now better understand the world that my parents gently taught me to navigate. I know my identities of power and privilege (my education, communication skills and profession) and I know my identities of disempowerment (my race and gender). There are certain transactions that I only do by phone because on the phone I can put myself in a place of privilege, through my intonation, vocabulary, and verbal confidence; I know that, in person, there is a distinct possibility that I will not have the same level of success because of the identities that dis-empower me.

Despite all of this, it is truly through my racialized students that I have become a strong and vocal advocate for Black children. They are my kids and, like a lioness with cubs, I am protective of them and motivated to demand better for them.

A forty percent "push out" (Dei, 1997, p. 19; Brown, 2008) rate for Black students in Toronto is completely unacceptable. Travelling across the Greater Toronto Area – different school boards and different cities – and seeing again and again the repeated and clear pattern of the streaming of Black students into the lowest academic spaces just hurt my heart.

This is not Apartheid South Africa. Or, is it? How can we have these commonalities decades later in a country that touts itself to be among the most "democratic" and "inclusive" in the world?

For these reasons, Hilary Janks' words spoke to me.

I learned long ago that LANGUAGE IS POWER.

That has always been my theme when teaching Senior English. My students, many of whom are Black, need to know how to tap into the power and privilege that language can give them – for themselves, for their families and for their communities. Language can provide my students with tools that will enable them to advocate, defend, articulate, counter, or engage – in either written or verbal form – with a world that constantly tries to disadvantage them. This is my mandate as a teacher of Language. And this is a mandate that I believe Hilary Janks understands.

To add a creative element to my critical review, I decided to use a style that I saw in an article by Steven Unger, entitled "Beyond the Empire of Signs," where he responded to "Empire of Signs" written by Roland Barthes. Unger's article was written in two columns: one side was Barthes' original text and the second column was his response. It is my hope that this "talk-back" approach works equally well for my Critical Review of Hilary Janks' eight video-texts: *What is literacy? Autobiographical, Historical, Philosophical, Postmodern, Political, Salient Points Must be Considered in Teaching,* and lastly *Technological Considerations.*

What is Critical Literacy?	
• "There are different elements that have to be taken seriously in critical literacy. Power, of course, is one of them. The other one, which in a way I suppose is an aspect of power, are questions of identity and difference, which, in the work that I've done I describe as diversity. It could equally be described as difference" (Video-clip Timestamp (*VT*) 0:49)	Critical literacy, like language, is power. If the diverse students in Toronto are not supported to fully understand their identities in the modern world we live in, if they are unable to negotiate difference and the various forms of diversity that can be found in the most multicultural city in the world, they will be powerless and, as educators, we will have failed them.
• "There is no such thing as a neutral text, even a redesigned text is not a neutral text" (*VT* 2:55)	All texts, including those redesigned and created by students, have power. By helping our students to build their critical literacy, they will not only be empowered, they will be given a voice. *Critical Question: How can we teach students to utilize their voice and the power that they can have through language, despite having other marginalizing identities?*
Autobiographical • "Didn't have a sense it would end" (*VT*) 1:15)	Since "the 1980s, reports indicated that Black youths in Toronto were *still* experiencing low educational achievements and high drop out rates" [italics added] (James, 1994). In the most recent achievement data released by the TDSB (2013), over a third of self-identified Black students are not graduating; Black students still have not only the highest "drop out" or "push out" rates but the lowest literacy scores (according to the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test), and the highest school suspension rates. *Critical Question: Why would* one *demographic group consistently demonstrate significant underachievement across decades in a society that prides itself on a strong,* accessible *public education system?*

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• "Friend across the colour lines" (*VT* 2:30)	Growing up in small town Ontario, and being one of the few racialized children, most of my closest friends from my childhood are White. One of my dear friends is a microbiologist, so each year I would invite her to speak to my Senior Biology class and we would prepare interesting lab activities to engage my students in the study and field of Microbiology. The first time that she visited, I came to a strange realization; my students were perplexed. My friend is blond-haired and blue-eyed and many of them had never seen a positive, close relationship with a "White" person. Their interactions with White people were usually as authorities – teachers and police – and often negative. I realized, in that moment, that Microbiology was not the only thing my students learned that day. *Critical Question: Why did my students in "inclusive, democratic" Canada have a reaction that quite possibly could have occurred in Janks's South Africa?*
• "Struck me as something completely bizarre" (*VT* 3:37)	*Two Worlds and Stunned Silence:*
• "Being White, I didn't even know" (*VT* 4:33) • "It was like people were living in two different countries" (*VT* 4:40)	As long as racism and discrimination have abounded, disenfranchised Blacks have had to navigate two worlds. However, it is the complete ignorance of a "two world system" by Whites that is most noteworthy. Janks's comments on her surprise at discovering that the life she lived was not the same for her "coloured" friend.

• "It was the kind of rare opportunity as a young woman growing up to have a sense of what life was like for a girl my age that didn't have the privileges I had" (*VT* 4:50)	This ignorance is mirrored in a contemporary Canadian context also. I remember the "surprise" uttered by my classmates in 1991 when the video recording of the vicious and unprovoked beating of Rodney King by the police was made public (King, 2014). I remember my unemotional response to their surprise, wherein I proceeded to tell them that there was not anything "surprising" or "shocking" about what happened because it happened every day. The *only* thing unusual about the incident was that it had been 'caught on tape.' I remember their stunned silence. I could see in their faces how foreign this idea was for them. In a much later chapter of my life, while travelling with two friends, both White women – one Canadian and one American – we had a conversation one evening about the corruption of South American policia. (Colleagues in various Latin and South American countries had shared their negative experiences with the policia, which included the policia returning and stealing what remained in their home immediately after reporting a robbery). I remember one of my colleagues remarking how wonderful it was to live in Canada and the US, where no one has to fear the police. I remember feeling cold in that moment, while the third member of our party happily nodded her agreement, because I realized that they really did not know. Echoing Hilary Janks, "being White, [they] didn't even know." My response, calm, clear and immediate was, "Unless you are a young Black male." (The recent event of the police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri clearly demonstrates the truth of that statement). Yet again, I was met with stunned silence.

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	This ignorance cannot be simply dismissed as expressions of adolescence or early adulthood. My mother once shared with me a conversation that she had with one of her close friends – a White woman – while living in Brantford. Her friend remarked that she must be so happy to live in Brantford, Ontario, since she would not experience racism there. In that moment, it was my mother who experienced stunned silence. Her friend had no idea about the racist notes she received in her mailbox when she bought her house, or the bank that came to a complete standstill when she stepped inside, or the apartment rental signs that often disappeared as she walked up to the residences and which reappeared as she walked away. My mother's friend was living in a very different world. *Critical Question: What are the social constructs that allow such radically different experiences for its citizens? Is racism only evident to some? What allows some to live in blissful ignorance while others face the psychological, emotional and, sometimes, physical consequences of racist acts and attitudes? Why can unarmed Black teens get repeatedly gunned down and killed with seeming impunity by police and others, such as the* Trayvon Martin case in Miami Gardens, Florida, or Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri?
Historical	
• "They were deeply concerned about their children losing out on education and they have since been called 'the lost generation' because they didn't have education" (*VT* 6:35)	The parallels between the present educational accounts of Black children in Toronto, Canada, and Hilary Janks's Apartheid South Africa of the 1980s and early 90s are disturbing.
• "An attempt to formulate an alternative system of education" (*VT* 6:50)	Right now 40% of Black students in Toronto (as high as 55% in some school communities) are not graduating with a minimum high school education (TDSB, 2013; Brown, 2008).

	Even local Toronto media has acknowledged our own "raced" and "gendered" lost generation. In the *Toronto Star* article, "Black Students in Focus," it reads, "There's a good chance that … a young, black male will be on the pages of this newspaper this weekend – another victim of gun violence … Almost immune, Torontonians spend little time connecting the dots between blood on the streets and failure at school … Two black parents have connected the dots" (James, 2007).
	Like Janks's South Africa, Black parents in Toronto in 2007 began to demand an "alternative system of education" for their children. So began the journey to one elementary and two secondary Africentric alternative programs. The mandate of these Africentric alternative schools is to develop curriculum and strategies to meet the needs of Black students that could also then be exported to all schools to ensure that Black students would finally have their needs met in our public education system.
• "What we were trying to do was trying to conceptualize a very different kind of curriculum for Africa" (*VT* 7:30)	The goal in part was to conceptualize a very different kind of curriculum and pedagogical approach for children of African heritage.
• "South Africa was changing … [the curriculum that was initially prepared for underground] was published" (*VT* 10:50) • "The historians had been doing a lot of work … to tell other versions of what had happened historically" (*VT* 7:10)	Curriculum, prepared underground, was becoming mainstream in Janks's South Africa. Similarly, curriculum that was developed and exclusively used in the Africentric alternative schools is now stepping into the daylight. In September, 2014, nine mainstream TDSB secondary schools will be piloting Africentric curriculum developed by the alternative schools, in core academic subjects.

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	Students and teachers in Toronto have also had the opportunity to explore “other versions of what had happened historically.” One example is the TDSB Locally Developed Open Grade 11 *History of Africa and Peoples of African Descent* course that “investigates the history of African peoples from ancient times to the present and traces their influence throughout the Diaspora with a special focus on Canada … [and] examines[s] the influence of selected individuals and groups in Africa and the Diaspora [and how they have] profoundly influenced world history” (TDSB, 2008). Additionally, the series of Native Study courses, including the Grade 10 *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada* and Grade 11 *Current Aboriginal Issues in Canada,* highlight twentieth century history and contemporary issues from an Aboriginal perspective (Ministry of Education, 2000). *Critical Question: What learning, commentary and discussions should take place within the school community and with students examining the fact that African and Aboriginal history courses are optional courses and, therefore, not offered in most schools, while the only mandatory History course in Toronto (and Ontario) curriculum is Eurocentric in nature?*
Philosophical • “We still live in a very unjust, very unequal, very differentiated world, where there are still haves and have nots, where there are still people who have power over other people” (*VT* 1:50)	A 2010 report entitled *The Three Cities within Toronto* clearly exposed the gross inequities within our city. In the three “cities” documented (the upper, middle, and lower class areas of the city) the average income of City#1 was $88, 400 while the average individual income in City#3 was $26, 900 (which is below the poverty line for a household of three or more) (UFCW, 2009). The researcher describes his findings as “disturbing” due to the “clear concentration of wealth and poverty that is emerging” (Hulchanski, 2010, p. 7). It is clear that, if nothing is done, the projections for Toronto are dire.

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<td>Critical Questions: What are the policies that are contributing to this trend of inequity? What are the policies that will need to be put in place to reverse this condition? What can our students, as citizens, do to put pressure on the policy makers to demand changes that can lead to a more equitable income distribution and spatial distribution of affordable housing?</td>
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<td>• “If you deny people status for 40 years, as a people, status becomes very important. And so the outward trappings of status matter … People want to be Principals of schools because it gives you status. They don’t want to be Principals of schools because they want to do something for education” (VT 3:50)</td>
<td>Self or Service:

I once worked with an embodiment of Janks’s caution. In a marginalized school in one of the “priority” neighbourhoods of Toronto, I know of a Vice-Principal, a man of colour, who spent a great deal of time connecting with community leaders and who had a close personal relationship with the school trustee (the political representative of the school board for the area). Shortly after his arrival at his school, pointing at the Principal’s office, he told a staff member, “That is going to be my office.” Sure enough, less than two years later, he was installed as the principal in that office, despite many concerns with his work as a vice-principal and allegations of human rights abuses.

He was someone who greatly valued status. He drove a luxury car, wore expensive clothing and would take the opportunity to tell staff members how much his accessories cost.

Sadly, behind the scenes he committed many destructive and denigrating actions on staff and students, while he promoted himself actively in the outside community.</td>
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	Critical Questions: How can we screen and protect school communities from those that seek their own self-promotion and status over the interest of students and student learning? Is it for "service"? What is it about human nature, and the social conditions in these two countries, that foster these attitudes found both in post-Apartheid South Africa and modern-day Toronto, Canada? Are men and women of colour more susceptible to this trap, due to the lack of opportunities for mobility and advancement endured historically?
• "We still have a two-tier education system. Poor people are still at the receiving end of poor education" (*VT* 4:24)	In Toronto, there is a direct correlation between postal codes (socio-economic class marker and geographic indicator in the city of Toronto) and results on the standardized Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) (Brown & Sinay, 2008; McKnight, 2014). Poor, racialized students perform poorly. Students in our marginalized schools also have less access to technological hardware and are frequently subject to a revolving door of new, inexperienced administrators. *Critical Question: Why are the types of economic and literacy disparities of South Africa echoed across the globe in a country that was ranked sixth out of sixty-five participating countries in PISA reading scores?* (CMEC, p. 34)
• "Health service is in a mess, the schools are in a mess" (*VT* 5:00)	While Toronto students can access universal health care, which has become one of the social trademarks of our country, the "two-tier" system in health care, like education, can also be found here. Due to my position as a Biology teacher, many of my students have shared and sought my advice regarding medical concerns. I am often frustrated at the appalling treatment, and *lack* of treatment that they are regularly subject to.

	Critical Question: Even though there may be greater "access" to medial facilities and schools, what are the attitudes and prejudices that underpin Canadian *institutions, such as health care and education, in a way that continually disadvantages Black students and school communities?*
Political	
• "I really did start from a linguistic perspective" (*VT* 1:03) – looking at language	As an English teacher, my exploration of identity and power began through language or "linguistically," like Janks. As a Black woman in Ontario, I quickly realized that (like Janks's South Africa), power was clearly related to race, which was almost always coupled with class.
• "I was very interested in those identities that were empowered and those that were disempowered. In South Africa, it was along the lines of race" (*VT* 6:40)	It is as a Black woman, who grew up poor (but with many outward trappings of the middle class), that I have engaged in critical literacy. It is from my location and identities that the patriarchy, racism, classism and colonialism of society, text and language have been, for me, glaringly obvious. Through these lenses I have observed and advocated, taught and learned.
• "It's always seemed to me that the people who have worked in critical literacy best are the people who have had some struggle in which they themselves are invested . . . where has the struggle been for them and then they start there and then they move out into other kind of spaces. I started with my own racialized identity and its position of privilege in relation to other people who were not white but then you move out, you move out from there because none of us are just white or just a woman" (*VT* 7:05)	I am aware of my identities of empowerment and disempowerment. I am empowered as an educated citizen with strong English communication skills; however, I am disempowered as a woman of African heritage. I have learned how to manipulate these identities. There are transactions that I purposely will choose to do by phone. My European oriented name (part of my legacy from slavery), and my use of language as an educated English speaker give me access to power that my race could negate in person. I have learned as a Toronto-born Canadian which identities give me access to what.

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• "Which identities give you access to what" (*VT* 7:58) • "You can see the interrelationship between identity, access, power (and is there any way of interrupting this and redesigning it)" (*VT* 8:01)	*Critical Questions: Why are some identities more powerful than others? How can students be taught to negotiate and manipulate their identities? Should this be a skill that is taught in the classroom? Can educators from positions of privilege teach this skill and/or are they even aware of these identities and power differentials?*
Postmodern	
• "It's there now in the curriculum" (*VT* 0:39) • "Critical literacy hasn't really penetrated into classrooms" (*VT* 0:28)	Janks's comments about critical literacy, classrooms and curriculum ring true for me as a Toronto English teacher. Critical literacy is a thread that runs throughout the Ontario English curriculum, which is the only discipline that is mandatory for our students every year.
• "It's penetrated very widely into teacher education" (*VT* 0:35) • "That word critical is so slippery and it can mean so many things and I don't think people are doing serious critical literacy work in the classroom" (*VT* 0:45) • "The way to go is to help a teacher to ask critical questions … how do you learn to ask critical questions, what do critical questions look like, how do you frame them, when is a question critical and when isn't a question critical?" (*VT* 3:15)	As a Toronto-based teacher and teacher educator through a recent secondment opportunity at a Faculty of Education, critical literacy has been an integral part of the pedagogical discourse for teacher candidates, including focusing on how to integrate it into the classroom. However, in the classrooms across the system, critical literacy (despite being a curricular mandate) has not fully penetrated many secondary classrooms because teachers lack the expertise (and sometimes the will) to make it a priority. Despite my classroom experience and will to more fully integrate critical literacy, I know that there is much more that I need to do in this area; through my graduate studies, I hope to do it more effectively.

	Critical Questions: What are the consequences for our students if critical literacy is not effectively or consistently taught? Why is there a resistance or hesitancy to do the work of critical literacy in the classroom, despite having a curricular mandate to do so? Why would an Ontario trained, experienced teacher still remain unconfident about her ability to teach critical literacy? Why is this concept seen as so "slippery"?
Purposes of Critical Literacy • "It's not just the continuation of privilege and power and disempowerment. It's also that the planet is under threat" (*VT* 0:30) • "Peter Freebody has been saying for a long time that if we don't have a critically literate citizenship, how can they make sense of the scientific arguments about whether there is or there isn't global warming? We need people who have this kind of critical literacy. Because at the end of the day, they are the people who vote for people who make decisions, and who believe these different arguments from different sides. So he sees it as a fundamental aspect of democratic citizenship" (*VT* 0:45)	As a Biology teacher and former Environmental Sciences teacher, it is vital that students can couple scientific literacy with critical literacy. In the *TDSB Years of Action: 2013–20*17 plan, implementation of a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) pedagogy to develop student thinking is one of the key priorities. How can students embrace STEM pedagogy without critical literacy? As Freebody notes, critical literacy is needed in order to have an informed citizenship. Our students are our future citizens. Right now, we are laying the foundation of our future society; our environmental and political future rests with the students that we have now. *Critical Question: How can we truly have a democratic society, in Toronto, Canada, or South Africa, if your citizens have been subject to gross social and educational disparities and if they have not developed the critical literacy to navigate the various texts that will confront them each day?*

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Salient Points Must be Considered in Teaching	
• "People are very happy to go along with looking at texts critically until such time as you hit a text upon which their own identities are predicted. And when that happens, you get a lot of resistance because people have to hold on to who they are and their identities and what's at stake for them" (*VT* 0:38) • "They did not want to be blamed for the sins of the fathers, so to speak. And having to confront their own Whiteness and their own privilege was not something that was easy for them" (*VT* 1:15)	As an adult educator and teacher educator in the GTA, I have faced the denial and resistance of a predominantly White, middle class audience when delving into issues of race and equity. White Canadians will almost unanimously condemn inequality, injustice and racism. However, confronting their own Whiteness and privilege is far more objectionable. They often do not want to accept that their privilege is not universal; they especially do not want to acknowledge that their privilege came at the expense of someone else's lack of privilege. I have led and initiated many uncomfortable conversations on these topics. I am optimistic that some of my teacher candidates took what they learned to heart, but I am not naïve enough to believe that I had a 100% success rate. This means that, potentially, some Toronto students, even now, will have teachers before them that refuse to recognize the "two worlds" of privilege and inequity. *Critical Questions: How can an educator that does not acknowledge inequity work towards eliminating inequity? How does a lack of understanding about White privilege affect the relationship, classroom environment and instruction of classes that include non-White students, which is the reality for most classrooms in the GTA?*

• "In a way, it's a bit easier to do critical literacy with people who are at the disempowered end of the spectrum, and it's much harder to do critical literacy with people who are the powerful end of the spectrum. Because their power is taken for granted, it's normalized, it's not actually recognized as power per se. So that makes it really difficult" (*VT* 1:30)	Most of my career has been working with students in one of the most marginalized communities in Toronto. I have seen first-hand the truth of Janks's words. I have worked in private and all-White settings and I have found *that* work on occasion the most frustrating. In my experience, those students were so unaware and ignorant to social inequities and disparities and, so, were adamant that they were not implicated, that it felt at times that, as an educator, I was fighting a losing battle. Once, when discussing racial issues raised in Harper Lee's classic *To Kill A Mockingbird* at the private school I worked in, one of my students exclaimed that they were so glad that there wasn't racism in their country. I hid my initial surprise and asked them why many of them had Black maids. The response was that their maids were very happy to work for them and didn't experience racism. When I asked if they didn't think their maids would prefer to take care of her *own* children rather than them, my students vehemently disagreed and did not want to engage in the conversation any further. They simply repeated that there wasn't racism in their country. Experiences such as these have made me deeply appreciative of my "disempowered" students who are far more aware of the true nature of our society.

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• "Black girls were in no-woman's land. You know? Where do you go? Do you come down on the side of race or do you come down on the side of gender? So in fact, most of them were very silent" (*VT* 5:00) • "One doesn't just have a single, essentialized identity position and there was more than one identity position at play" (*VT* 5:25)	As a Black woman I have had moments where I have been forced to choose if I was Black *or* if I was a woman. For example, I had an unethical and destructive principal that began a pattern of abuse and denigration of all of the women with leadership positions in my school. His actions became so vile that human rights complaints were made to the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal. The principal was a Black man. In that moment, I had to choose which of my identities would be given priority. Was I Black first and foremost? I knew if I spoke out about his abuses and harassment I could be criticized by my community, considering the challenges and obstacles that Blacks often face in leadership positions. Or was I a woman first and foremost? If so, how could I stand by and watch the abuses of other women, and myself, silently? In the end, his behaviour was so egregious, I made the decision that, in that moment, I needed to be a woman first. I did receive criticism from members of the Black community who did not know the details of what had occurred, and who alluded to a perceived disloyalty to the community. However, I knew that I had made that right decision. *Critical Questions: How do we mediate identities that are in conflict with one another? How do we help students to explore their multiple identities? Are some members of our society psychologically, emotionally, and socially overburdened by students in situations where they feel that they need to choose between their identities?*

Technological Considerations	
• "Technology, like literacy, is about access. The poorest people have got the least access." (*VT* 1:00) • "Now going into critical literacy through access more than through power" (*VT* 7:20)	Our education system in Toronto, like our city, is tiered. Based on my observations and visits to schools throughout the GTA, it is evident that computer access at the poorest schools is woefully limited, compared to schools in more affluent areas of the city – within the same public school board. *Critical Question: How does limited access to technology impede the development of critical literacy, especially as it relates to digital literacies? How does this inequity further disadvantage Black (and other marginalized) students?*
• "We keep trying to plug middle class, western literacies in communities that don't read stories to their children, that don't think of text as fiction, who value literacy for information and for work and for access to information" (*VT* 1:42)	Working in the school that has been ranked highest on the *Learning Opportunities Index,* which measures the external challenges affecting student success, I not only see the disparity in access for my students but I have also fully valued the need to find relevant texts for their age and backgrounds. As the former Curriculum Leader of that school's English department, it was my mandate to ensure that we had a wide variety of texts that reflected the demographic groups in our school. We had Vietnamese, West African and South Asian adolescent protagonists in the books on our reading lists.
• "If kids are making texts that matter to them, on topics that really interest them … then they're going to go and look for information and they're going to read way above their competence because they're really interested … the motivation to produce a text on something that matters to you … will make them read. But they're reading for their own purposes in relation to text production" (*VT* 2:45)	It was also important, especially for my boys, that we had a wide variety of non-fiction texts. My boys read books on astronomy, autobiographies, sports articles and even electronics flyers – and did so willingly because these texts mattered to them and provided information that interested them.

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• "If we can hook kids by letting them use literacy for their own purposes, then I think they'll want literacy. And once they want it, I think it will improve" (*VT* 4:19)	I was pleasantly surprised this year to learn of a new fictional genre, "Twisters," which are short stories written in the form of Tweets. In the past, I supported the purchase of books that were written completely in the form of text messages.
• "Everybody is texting. People are actually writing more than they ever did before. So if I can build on that existing text production practice, as opposed to imposing kind of western stories on these kids, I think we stand a chance" (*VT* 6:02) • "Students can play a game for twenty minutes, and for ten minutes, they can post a review online, they can send an email to somebody telling them why the game is cool. They can write a description of their avatar, they can keep track of their scores. They can use literacy at the end of the game playing for a variety of different purposes" (*VT* 7:50)	These are real literacies that our students are engaged in. We can use new literacies to teach them the skills that they need in the future in an authentic way. Students are engaged when they can see a task as authentic. Blog posts, emails, texting, tweeting are among the text forms that we should not fear to embrace. When was the last time that you actually mailed a letter to a friend or business? Communication mediums have changed and real critical literary work must fully engage with modern-day literacies. We must use "texts that matter to them" and ensure a diversity of texts – in style, content and form – especially in the GTA, as our student body is among the most diverse in the world. *Critical Question: How can educators be encouraged to embrace and teach critical literacy in conjunction with new forms of literacies?*

CONCLUSION

A number of themes emerged in the critical literacy commentary by Hilary Janks, namely power and its connection to access, race, class, privilege and language. Janks also clearly elucidated the "Two Worlds" of White privilege and lack of privilege. As she stated at the outset, "it was like people were living in two different countries" (*Autobiographical*, *VT* 4:40).

Although Janks's home of post-Apartheid South Africa and my home of modern-day Toronto, Canada, are literally two different countries, the experiences are eerily similar. How is it possible that the educational patterns among the "haves" and "have-nots" and the educational outcomes of Black children are virtually interchangeable between these countries, despite the difference in time and political orientation? How can two racial worlds exist so clearly in Canada – a country that is renowned as one of the most "accepting" and "multicultural" in the world? These are questions that require further critical exploration.

The only distinct difference is related to freedom of access of materials, since Janks "had books that [she] shouldn't have had" (which would not be a legitimate concern for us in Canada), and the initiative shown by Janks's Apartheid-era students. She notes, "the struggle had been led by the youth" (*Historical*, *VT* 6:25). In Toronto, our students have not led the demands for improved educational support. Advocacy and outrage over the educational inequities and underachievement of Black students have come from parents, educators and academics. What does it mean that our students have not advocated for themselves? Does it reveal an even greater failure of *our* educational system?

Critical literacy is essential if we hope to empower our Black students (and all students) to understand and critique the current social order and their identities, and to effect the change needed in the future – to effect positive change.

Critical literacy is even more essential for the new literacies that our students interact with daily. Gone are the days when all content and "information" passed from author to editor to publisher, undergoing countless revisions and intense scrutiny. Blogs, emails, wikis, tweets, and text messages are often not screened, edited or authenticated in any way. Our students, all students, must learn the skills to successfully navigate these newly evolving literacies.

As an English and Science teacher with a curricular mandate of critical literacy, as a Toronto (GTA) born and raised teacher educator, and as a Black woman, Hilary Janks's words connect with me deeply. It is my hope, moving forward, that the words of Hilary Janks continue to motivate and elucidate the situation of Black students. May her words help each of us in this important work to develop critically literate, democratic citizens for our future.

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MIRELA CIOBANU

5. MATHEMATICS IS A POWERFUL TOOL

Let's Get Critical about It

> What matters is that our students understand that the small steps taken on 'the long road to freedom' (Mandela, 1994) can be as powerful as the flap of a butterfly's wings.
>
> – Hilary Janks (2013, p. 239)

In the epigraph above, Hilary Janks refers to the "butterfly effect," a metaphor for interdependence she has used in her research in 2005. The metaphor is based on the words of meteorologist Edward Lorenz (1975) who argued that a single flap of a butterfly wings in Brazil could set off a tornado in Texas.

This chapter begins by drawing on the fundamental critical literacy ideas of Allan Luke and Hilary Janks, identifying areas in which the two scholars are similar and different, in an attempt to argue why critical literacy is needed now more than ever in Ontario classrooms, particularly in mathematics. It then traces a short history of the development of critical literacy in mathematics, focusing mostly on the work of Danish researcher Ole Skovsmose, arguably the most notable name in critical literacy in mathematics education. Mathematics commands a considerable amount of power, as it continues to be constructed as a subject of the utmost importance for students. It holds a special, privileged place among other disciplines and it continues to be hailed for its claim of objectivity and neutrality.

I use Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis to identify the ideology behind mathematics and mathematics education as prescribed by the Ontario Mathematics Curriculum, Grades 1–8. Two professional resources are then contrasted on the basis of their potential use for critical literacy in two separate mathematics classrooms. Both are articles published in *Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School,* the purpose of which is to present current best practices in the mathematics classroom. I will use Hilary Janks's interdependent framework of critical literacy (power, identity/diversity, access, design/redesign) and Ole Skovmose's four elements that address the relationship between mathematics education and democracy (citizenship, mathematics archaeology, "mathemacy" and deliberate interaction) to critique their potential use in the classroom.

I ask, "What would a student in either class think that mathematics is about? What social and political interests does mathematics education serve? For whom is mathematics education working?" While selecting resources, teachers could use

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critical literacy to select and redesign professional development resources, question their intent and identify ways in which power is enacted through them, even when they are produced and distributed by reputable organizations like NCTM's (National Council for Teachers of Mathematics).

THE NEED FOR CRITICAL LITERACY IN THE CLASSROOM

For Allan Luke (2012, p. 4), there is a moral imperative for critical literacy in the classroom. Freedom, civil society and human relationships are all dependent on the free flow of knowledge and, any time text access, critique, and interpretation are closed down, human agency and freedom are at risk.

In *Literacy and Power* (2010) Janks provides an argument for why critical literacy is needed in today's rapidly changing world, "in which the only thing that is certain, apart from death and taxes, is change itself" (Janks, 2013). Critical literacy's agenda is to focus on and change the socio-historical and political contexts by changing the nature of dialogue in the classroom.

For Luke (2012, p. 5) questions about whose version of curriculum, history, culture and everyday life count as official knowledge are ultimately curriculum questions. Then, there are the pedagogical questions of the types of "texts" valued in the classroom, modes of information, scripts, designs and genres that are deemed "worth" reading and writing, as well as the tools used to read and write for certain purposes and intents.

Like Janks, Luke is aware of the transformative intention of critical literacy and offers a practical approach to curriculum,

> Critical literacy has an explicit aim of the critique and transformation of dominant ideologies, cultures and economies, and institutions and political systems. As a practical approach to curriculum, it melds social, political, and cultural debate and discussion with the analysis of how texts, where, with what consequences, and in whose interests. (Luke, 2012, p. 5)

Such a practical approach is represented by critical discourse analysis, derived from systemic functional linguistics that brought together ideological critique and how texts work (Luke, 2012, p. 8).

Both Norman Fairclough and Hilary Janks have researched the relationship between language and power. For Norman Fairclough (2003, p. 193), teaching critical language awareness is a significant objective of language education. His purpose has always been to help increase consciousness of how language contributes to social oppression and, thus, a first step towards emancipation is to increase consciousness.

> That consciousness of language in particular is a significant element of this 'first step' follows from the way domination works in modern society: it works through 'consent' rather than coercion, through ideology and through language. (Fairclough, 2003, p. 193)

Critical literacy is built, according to Luke and Janks, on cultural and linguistic practice. Practicing critical literacy involves, therefore, an understanding of the manipulation or the ideology that underpins each text, which aims at representing and changing the world. However, this is not to say that reducing domination is limited to critical language awareness. The real social emancipation, according to Fairclough, is primarily about "tangible matters such as unemployment, housing, equality of access to education, the distribution of wealth, and removing the economic system from the ravages and whims of private interest and profit" (2003, p. 193).

Today's world is a more complex one than the one in which Freire created his famous model of education theory, based on the binary analysis of oppressed-oppressor. Today's world is faced with more complex economic and political forces, "the emergence of multiple forms of solidarity and identity, new political coalitions and social movements" (Graham, 2006, in Luke, 2012, p. 9).

Allan Luke recognizes the positive impact of new media in terms of semiotic forms and warns that, apart from the promise of "designer careers," these new media do not, by themselves, constitute critical literacies. What truly matters, explains Luke, is how they are used to change people's relations to power, economic and social relations, but not through simple engagement itself. One only has to look at the failure of the Twitter campaign, "Bring Back Our Girls," which is now recognized as an un-useful form of engagement, called "clicktivism," with the new media that leads to no real social or political change.

For Hilary Janks, the educators' role is to consider the type of students we want to teach, in relationship to developing the students' sense of human agency, equity, respect for diversity and environment protection. For Janks, critical literacy is about reading various types of texts and their relationship to power, identity, access to knowledge, skills and tools. At the same time, it is about writing, as a process of "writing and rewriting the world" (Janks, 2013, p. 227). Allan Luke sees critical literacy in the same way. It is an ongoing process of "naming and renaming the world, seeing its patterns, designs, and complexities, and developing the capacity to redesign and reshape it " (Luke, 2012, p. 9). This Freirean idea is acknowledged by Janks, as well, when describing her design-redesign cycle. The new text is another text that can, in turn, become problematized and open to deconstruction.

> Design is the productive end. There is no use in really looking at what it is that needs to be deconstructed if you have no way of intervening and then redesigning whatever it is that you have deconstructed with a different set of possibilities. (Hillary Janks, 2013, Video clip timestamp (VT) 1:20)

Words, according to Janks, are neither innocent, nor free from ideology. Texts, original or redesigned, are never neutral texts (Janks, 2013, VT 2:35). The design – redesign cycle possesses critique at its centre. The role of the critique is to look backward at the text and forward at its redesign, repositioning the text. The only end points are the social and ethical reconstruction. Thus, critical literacy is meant to be transformative (Janks, 2013, p. 229). Janks has created a model of critical literacy

education that includes four interdependent elements: power, identity/diversity, access, design/redesign. This interdependence was argued for by focusing on any one of the four elements without considering the others.

THE NEED FOR CRITICAL LITERACY IN MATHEMATICS

Emeritus Professor Allan Bishop from Monash University, Australia, has dedicated his entire career to exploring the notion of mathematics as a cultural product or artifact, which is neither neutral nor free of ideology. In 2000, at the 9th International Congress of Mathematics Education, he pointed to the non-democratic situation in current mathematics classrooms and that governments use curriculum as a form of control. Teachers are slaves of the textbook business rather than being "enlightened users," and assessment in mathematics is just a mechanism for the selection of the elite (Keither & Vithal, 2008, p. 167).

What is the goal of school mathematics? What is the mathematics involved in governing our world(s)? How is it used in decision-making? What is real world mathematics? Do students see themselves as participants in decision making that involve mathematics? Which mathematics designs are dominant in constructing the world and their identities? Does mathematics discriminate? Who and what determines what constitutes knowledge in mathematics education? However, before addressing these questions in relationship to the Ontario Curriculum, I wanted to embark on a short quest for the roots of critical literacy in mathematics.

I learned mathematics as an elementary school student in Romania during both the Communism regime and in the years that followed the 1989 Revolution, which marked the dawn of democracy in all of Eastern Europe. Similar to the situation in post-apartheid South Africa, developing a curriculum that redesigns the education model as part of a democratic system was a slow process in the '90s, and I would argue even now, more than 25 years later, it still has a lot of catching up to do. My mathematics textbooks were filled with fossilized mathematics. In them, the tasks were worded in command-like phrases. The language for problem-solving was also gendered and propaganda-filled (e.g., a man and his son, an engineer, a farmer and his son), and infused with communist ideology about the various roles the country's citizens had or were expected to take in relationship to the communist party in power and its propaganda training-stages.

For example, all Romanian students from grade 2 to grade 8 were called "Pioneers" (Tr. *Pionieri*) and, later, became member of the Union of Communist Youth. "Pioneers" became so through grandiose ceremonies during which they swore allegiance to the Communist Party. The propaganda training started earlier, in kindergarten at the age of 4, when all children were called "Soimii Patriei" (tr. "Country's Falcons", my translation). A student was set to become a member of the Union of Communist Youth in grade 9.

Moreover, the ideas and content in textbooks were all based on the work of various white, male mathematicians, mostly of European descent. I do not remember seeing

a female mathematician whose work was presented in the textbooks. As a young girl, I felt counted out. Although my mathematics teachers were all female, they acted as confident deliverers of the program, not as role models.

Judging by these contexts for learning mathematics, it was clearly signaled to me what type of world awaited me outside of the classroom, and what type of mathematical knowledge and skills the state wanted me to develop to serve the "productivity" ideal in all possible contexts of an industrialized country (e.g., working in a factory, mine or farm). Was mathematics delivering its promise for *all* students? Why is it that everywhere in the world mathematics is still the discipline that divides people who "produce" it, and who have a completely different view about it from the ones who "consume" it? Why is it that, of all the disciplines, the one that is held in the highest regard is the one that excludes so many students?

In 1983, in the United States, Marilyn Frankenstein was the first to use the term "critical" in relation to mathematics. Her work is based on Freire's development of 'critical consciousness" and transformation. Working with adult students, she used statistics to point out political and social issues that were directly connected to the world of mathematics. Thus, her program aimed at developing critical citizenship (Pais et al., 2012, p. 28). In 1994, in Denmark, Ole Skovsmose developed his ideas about critical mathematics education, based on the theories of the Frankfurt School, pioneers in critical thinking. His book, *Towards a Philosophy of Critical Mathematics Education* addresses the role mathematics has in the way it portrays the world. He argued that mathematics can "format" the way students are expected to interact and understand the world outside the classroom (Pais et al., 2012, p. 28).

In addressing the relationship between the research in mathematics and the practice of this discipline, Skovsmose (2006, p. 268) points out that neither should be the signifiers of progress. This dynamic is problematic when looking at how changes to mathematics education are made in the name of "progress" and "improvement." Whose progress? Does all research promise improvement? Who decides what research is needed? When? To address what issues as pertinent to whom? Skovsmose addresses the notion of "uncertainty" which affects research and practice relationships. It is particularly important because mathematics can serve various social functions; so, it becomes what it does, "its essence is produced as it is acted out" (p. 268).

> I find mathematics education to be a significant social system to the extent that it has socio-political and economic impact. Thus, mathematics education could be of interest for a globalizing economy. It could be of importance for productivity. Mathematics education could provoke both exclusion and suppression… Mathematics education may operate as a secret weapon of Western imperialism as indicated by Bishop (1990) as part of cultural colonization, as observed by D'Ambrosio (2001) and Powell (2002). (Skovsmose, 2006, p. 268)

How is the meaning of mathematics constructed by various groups of students? Skovsmose categorizes four practices of mathematics, outside of school mathematics, that help us understand how power is exercised through the mathematics curriculum. Power is exercised through the priorities of "those out-of-school practices" that are referred to (in the curriculum) and over those who are left out. He calls these practices (p. 269): constructors, operators, consumers and disposables.

a. *Constructors* (mathematics serving informational technology by groups of people who are going to maintain and further develop the knowledge, technique, etc.). The jobs associated with this are considered mathematics-rich practices of construction. For example: engineers, computer scientists, etc.
b. *Operators* (packaged mathematics used implicitly in many work processes). Mathematics is incorporated in the job situation or as part of the tool a person operates. For example: the mathematics needed by a person who is responsible for landing a plane makes estimations and judgments based on numbers.
c. *Consumers* (mathematics and decisions presented to us in numbers and figures). This is one area of practice, in particular, that Skovsmose observes as "the entire forum of democratic debate is deluged by numbers, figures and statistics." One can only remember how numbers and statistics-rich the televised debates were during Ontario's 2014 general elections last year to understand what the practice of consuming mathematics entails.
d. *Disposables* (those working in selling and buying). Those on the fringe of the information economy, which is organized according to the dominant economic interests and priorities.

The above "out of school practices" will be further addressed later on in relationship to the Ontario Mathematics Curriculum (2005).

The socio-political issues in mathematics education that make it discriminatory, as identified by Skovsmose (2006, p. 276), are (1) discrimination in terms of resources, (2) racism, (3) sexism, (4) discrimination in terms of language, and (5) discrimination in terms of 'ability.' "*Mathemacy*" is the term Skovsmose introduced in 1994 (Pais et al., 2012) and which refers to critical mathematical literacy or "critical content of mathematics education." Much like Luke and Janks who, when responding to the question about defining critical literacy, mentioned that it is a stance which could use frameworks but which cannot be prescribed, Skovsmose finds it difficult to define critical literacy as well:

> There is no simple way of discussing an educational practice from a socio-political perspective. When we want to address socio-political issues, we apply a conceptual framework, which is complex, contradictory, at least complementary. A concern for the socio-political dimension of mathematics education cannot rely on any platform. It has to face uncertainty. (Skovsmose, 2006, p. 280)

Thus, mathemacy could be many things and address many purposes from environmental stewardship to a critical evaluation of mathematics itself.

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: THE ONTARIO MATHEMATICS CURRICULUM (2005, GR. 1–8)

The Ontario Mathematics Curriculum Grades 1–8 is, in essence, a text designed to describe the totality of the desired learning experiences that the Ministry of Education envisions for elementary students in Ontario. It begins with an introduction about the importance of mathematics, the principles that underpin the curriculum, and details the roles and responsibilities of the subjects that intersect in the social setting of the school and classroom. Subsequently, it proceeds to detail the program's components, the mathematical processes, assessment and evaluation, and considerations for program planning. What are the functions that mathematics seems to serve in society, according to the Ontario Curriculum? How does the language of the curriculum prescribe and format students' worlds? What type of learners of mathematics does the curriculum envision in regards to the way the world is already formatted for them? What type of society does mathematics seem to serve? What is the ideology behind the importance of mathematics presented in the curriculum? I will use Norman Fairclough's ideas of critical discourse analysis to answer these questions.

Language, according to Fairclough, (2001), "has significance in contemporary socio-economic transformations." Social life is seen as an intersection between various social practices. A social practice, teaching included, is a "relatively stabilized social activity" that occurs in a "relatively stabilized" setting, always including discourse. The elements of teaching as social practice are teaching and learning activities, teachers and students and the relationships between them, the tools or instruments they use every day, objects, forms of consciousness, values, time and place, and discourse. All these elements are interconnected, although they are discrete, and each internalizes the others but cannot be reduced to them. In essence, there are three types of ways in which discourses appear in social practices; (1) as part of the practice (e.g., being a mathematics teacher, using the mathematics and teaching jargon), (2) through representations (e.g., using various representations that belong to other practices, through contexts used, as well as representations of mathematics itself), and (3) they appear as ways of being, in the construction of identities (e.g., the identity of a mathematician as a way of being).

While each element of teaching as a social practice internalizes others, it is also internalized. This is the dialectical relationship between all the elements of the social practice. For Fairclough, the idea that we live in a knowledge driven, knowledge based socio-economic order also implies "discourse driven." For example, new technologies are used in the new capitalism to restructure and rescale it (Bob Jessop, in Fairclough, 2001). Buzzwords are "information economy," "globalization," "flexibility" and "learning economy." What transformations of the new capitalism have made their way into the Ontario Curriculum, as signaled by its language?

For instance, Bourdieu and Wacquant (2001, in Fairclough, 2001) characterize the language used in these transformations as being "endowed with the performative power to bring into being the very realities it claims to describe" (p. 6). Such words

are “globalization,” “flexibility,” “employability” and “exclusion.” This is the neo-liberal agenda of removing obstacles to the new economic order. Most importantly, using such words or phrases implies that the socio-economic transformations are inevitable, represents desires as facts, and their inclusion in curriculum policy as representing the world as it already is.

> An information…and technology-based society requires individuals who are able to think critically about complex issues, analyze and adapt to new situations, solve problems of various kinds, and communicate their thinking effectively. (Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8 Mathematics, p. 3)

First of all, the rescaling of capitalism that Jessop mentions above as undergoing socio-economic transformations is implied by the use of the buzz phrase, “*information- and technology-based society*” (Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8, 2005, p. 3). This suggests a change in quality that our society and economy have undergone, and this change in quality is what indirectly assigns even more significance to mathematics. Is our society information and technology based? This is also an imagination of a world the curriculum provides us with to describe the social practices that will be enacted in the classroom setting.

Additionally, if we refer back to the four “out of school practices” of mathematics, identified by Skovsmose, that are or are not mentioned, it seems that constructing and consuming it are two of the main curriculum priorities. In other words, it caters to those types of jobs that use technology to create knowledge. In addition, if we are to select “think critically about complex issues” and “problem solve,” we might even say that the curriculum envisions learners as critical consumers of mathematics outside of the classroom:

> The study of mathematics equips students with knowledge, skills, and habits of mind that are essential for *successful and rewarding participation* (my emphasis) in such a society. *To learn mathematics in a way that will serve them well throughout their lives* (my emphasis), students need classroom experience that help them develop mathematics understanding, learn facts, skills and procedures; develop the ability to apply the processes of mathematics and acquire a positive attitude towards mathematics. (Ontario Curriculum, 2005, Grades 1–8, p. 3)

It seems that the curriculum presents itself as the imaginary of an information-driven society that rewards individuals who learn the facts, understand and apply mathematics, and, along the way, it would pay off if they also learned to enjoy it. If, in the first statement, the study of mathematics implies that it needs students who are critical participants in the society not only as consumers of the models of the world provided through the help of mathematics, this second statement contradicts it.

Let’s consider the cognitive processes and learning dimensions that are described as the expectations of such a successful participation in society, as described above. We can only identify three learning objectives: remembering, understanding and

applying as three of the six cognitive process dimensions of Bloom's taxonomy, the most basic ones. The phrases in bold also signal the performative power of the vocabulary in terms of employability. It also indirectly specifies the power mathematics has in creating a workforce that would be able to continue to deliver in this re-imagined version of capitalism. To clarify what this means, the curriculum states, "through mathematical activities that are practical and relevant to their lives, students develop mathematical understandings, problem solving skills, and related technological skills that they can apply in their daily lives, and, eventually, in the workplace" (p. 3).

That math has power is indubitable. As a matter of fact, the word "power" is used twice in the first three paragraphs in the introduction of the curriculum. Mathematics "equips students with concise and powerful means of communication" and "mathematics is a powerful learning tool." The word "power," here, is used in relationship to knowing and using mathematics in the way the curriculum envisions our students will apply mathematics in their daily lives.

One of the underlying principles in the mathematics curriculum is acknowledging the benefits of technologies in the classroom. It is therefore assumed that technology is equated to quality classroom teaching and learning. What about the access to technology? Isn't this a discriminatory practice? What about the way it is used in the classroom? How is its power used? Which students are excluded by this statement? We can conclude that the curriculum relies on a classroom prototype as a shared reality. Advanced technology is simply *not* the reality for the majority of our students and teachers.

In describing the roles of the subjects involved in mathematics education, success is only described in terms of responsibility and commitment towards learning which, in turn, is treated here as a function of effort and willingness. No other factors are acknowledged as hindering or facilitating success, even though subsequent sections of the curriculum identify some considerations regarding gender, special needs and ELL students. Success seems to be all a matter of students' self-determination to achieve these expectations. As teachers, we know that there is a myth of active learners and motivated students. Motivation is a complex construct that depends on a plethora of internal and external factors. It cannot just be simply set to happen. Students who are struggling are seen as lacking responsibility and, therefore, they need patience, attention and encouragement as factors of success.

With regards to students' roles, the curriculum states, "responsibility for their own progress and learning is an important part of education for all students" (p. 4). So, in an information and technology-based society, the role and responsibility of the learner is to achieve, show commitment to these directives and, while doing so, enjoy mathematics. Additionally, the role of the parents is to familiarize themselves with the curriculum and join forces with the school to ensure the achievement of these expectations.

Aside from teachers' responsibility for implementing the curriculum, some statements' ambiguity leaves some leeway for engaging with critical literacy. For

instance, teachers should provide “opportunities to relate knowledge and skills to wider contexts [that] will motivate students to learn and to become lifelong learners” (p. 5) and:

> Effective instructional approaches and learning activities draw on students' prior knowledge, capture their interest, and encourage meaningful practice both inside and outside the classroom. Students' interest will be engaged when they are able to see the connection between the mathematical concepts they are learning and their application in the world around them and in real-life situations.” (Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8 Mathematics, p. 5)

Using real life situations can present both an opportunity and a problem when trying to do critical literacy. The phrase, “the world around them,” needs clarification, too. There are various communities in which the students' identities are constructed and where various social, political and economic contexts intersect these constructs. The term, “real,” might lead to unjust and inequitable learning situations because what is real for one student might not be something another one can relate to or find relevant. The term, “real,” in the curriculum assumes a common understanding of reality. Teachers need to be able to discriminate and judge, based on the diversity of learners in their classrooms, what real life context and meaningful learning means in mathematics. Students' sense of reality is culturally and historically constructed. Students' success in the “real” world problems depends on their socio-linguistic background (de Freitas, 2008, p. 49).

Ole Ravn (2010, p. 175) approached mathematics from four philosophical perspectives, which he mentions intertwine in reality. In my opinion, such perspectives can help teachers find mathematics contexts that they might bring into the classroom:

a. *Where is mathematics* (an ontological perspective)? Is mathematics in the physical nature outside of us? Is it created by us and projected onto the world?
b. *How certain is mathematics* (an epistemological perspective)? Mathematics thrives on proofs and logical reasoning. How certain and reliable is mathematical truth? What proof techniques are the best?
c. *How social is mathematics* (a theory of science perspective)? Though Ravn uses here the definition of individuals as parts of a community or social group of mathematicians, teachers can use this perspective to see how mathematics brings together groups of people who construct knowledge in their communities and how exclusive this knowledge or approach might be for those who are situated outside those communities of rich mathematics practices. For instance, an idea will be to look into how mathematicians have constructed certain models or representations that, in turn, affect our perception of the world. I would also use as an example the linearity of the Western perspective (Numbers are represented on a number line and they follow each other towards positive or negative infinity. Time is measured as flowing in one direction. What has passed cannot be lived again. By contrast,

Indigenous people of North America value cyclicality. Life is represented as a circle, as the symbol is divided into four sections or cycles. The same stages can also represent the world and the interconnectedness between earth, fire, water and air. The circle symbolizes the equal roles that all members of a community play in the community.

d. *How good is mathematics* (an ethical perspective)? A practical approach to this perspective, in my opinion, is the use of examples in which mathematical applications in economy, industrial planning, marketing are used to support and justify the technological advances of humankind. Mathematics is the tool which is used to hail the ways in which we have transformed our world at the expense of the environment and the quality of life of so many people. Not all technology is good and this is a good opportunity to discuss the way technological "progress" is not necessarily ethical in nature and is a relative concept.

Mathematics education has a hidden curriculum. Here's how Ole Skovsmose puts it, "It is emphasized that mathematical studies tend to improve the students' abilities to structure and solve logical problems. However, the rituals of mathematical education take another direction. Students learn (also) to follow explicitly stated prescriptions: "Solve the equation…" "Find the length of…" "Calculate the value of," etc.

More than that, what is worrisome is the very idea of democracy and its connection to mathematics, based on the Ontario Mathematics Curriculum. We have seen how the curriculum places the highest value on the people who will use mathematics in relationship to technology. This is profoundly discriminatory, given the number of students who do not have computer access in Ontario schools. Additionally, even the expectation is one of servitude towards a technologically based society and the developments associated with this field. Knowledge produced by students, as a result of problem solving real life situations, is mostly used to practice and understand skills and procedures.

In addressing anti-discriminatory educational issues, the curriculum points out that some male students need support with literacy, perceived as the ability to use language effectively and to "complete mathematical tasks effectively," while some girls need to see strong role models or female mathematicians as guest speakers (p. 29). This idea is in itself hilarious, given the rarity of such individuals in the educational landscape. How closely are mathematicians working with teachers? How often do we see any mathematical idea or concept presented by female mathematicians in mathematics textbooks?

Additionally, acknowledging the various cultural experiences that students bring into the classroom is reduced to a mention that is folklorish in nature (e.g., use of Asian architecture patterns and Aboriginal basketry, p. 28). What I would find more interesting to discuss is whose version of mathematics we study and why and how some ideas belonging to ancient Asian or Arab mathematicians, for instance, were borrowed or built on successfully by Europeans, who also seemed to be the ones getting recognition for them.

Finally, mathematics is presented as a field in which nothing new happens, as if mathematicians have already discovered all that someone needs to know. This is a situation unlike any discipline, where the work of mathematicians is clearly disconnected from the ones who study their ideas. By doing so, mathematics is dehumanized, reduced to a fossil, in the service of technology, science and so on. It rejects participation and discovery, and ultimately critical literacy and creativity. Those who have access to technology will be more successful than those who have limited access and even they should not be too critical about the model of the world that mathematics has helped to construct.

In conclusion, if we consider Hilary Janks' interdependent model for critical literacy, power is at stake, as the above critique points out, in the values and the models of the students' world that this curriculum imagines and demands, while describing who its successful citizens will be. Access is a problem of positioning for both teachers and students in various contexts students inhabit, not to mention access to resources and technology. The curriculum sets aside sections for the diversity of the students but fails to recognize how language, race, class, values, history, socio-economic positioning can play a role in what it is envisioned as "success" in the mathematics classroom in Ontario.

AN EXERCISE IN CRITICAL LITERACY IN MATHEMATICS EDUCATION: "A TALE OF TWO STOCK MARKETS" VS. "FRACKING: DRILLING INTO MATH AND SOCIAL JUSTICE"

The articles compared in this section were both published in 2015 in two different issues of *Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School*, a peer-reviewed journal of the

Figure 5.1. Image on the front cover

National Council For Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). I chose to analyze them because both of them claim to bring real life issues and data into the classroom in two different ways.

First, I would like to limit myself to the “facts” in the text, as presented by the authors, although I am aware that texts are positioned and positioning (Janks, 2013, p. 231). This is my attempt to read *with* the texts. To refrain from critique I will also choose quotes from the text that speak for themselves, though the simple selection and sequencing might show my own position, which I will detail later.

Article 1: Armstrong, M. H., Piercey, V. I., & Greene-Hunley, S. (2015, May). A tale of two stock markets. *Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School, 20*(9).

QUOTES AND SUMMARY

- “Introducing the stock market to students during math class makes both economics and mathematics more meaningful, teaches mathematical concepts using real-world data, and fits in well with the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics (CCSSM) (CCSSI, 2010b). Furthermore, fluctuations in the stock market can lead to valuable student insight about change in function values over time.”
- “This article describes two different projects using the stock market as a context for learning. For both projects, students “bought” shares in individual companies, tracked stock prices for a period of time, and then “sold” their shares at a gain or loss.”

Figure 5.2. Visual on page 523

- *Project 1* lasted three weeks. The audience was made of two Grade 5 classes. In the introductory lesson, “students learned that companies sell stock to raise money and that shares of a company can be bought and sold in a stock market.”
- During *Phase 1:* “Pepsi/Coke Challenge – students tracked the stock of the two companies for two weeks. Each day the teacher projected the stock quote and students recorded the values as the daily value of a share each day. At the end of the week, students graphed the data in a double line graph.
- A discussion followed, comparing the performance of the two companies.
- *Phase 2:* students select their own stock from a list of familiar companies. Using the school’s computer lab, students use Google Finance to learn the basic elements of stock. Students recorded the price of their stock to represent the purchase price. The next time they used the lab, students wrote the new quote, determining their “gain or loss.” This phase claims to involve students gathering the information from digital resources, assessing credibility, and paraphrasing the data of others, “*all found in the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy*.”
- *Project 2:* The project lasted one month and its audience was a fourth grade class. To introduce the project, the teacher simulated the stock market using slips of paper representing shares of Facebook. Students were randomly given pieces of paper, labeled as $200, $500, or $1000.

Figure 5.3. Visual on page 525

- The teacher presented the following situation to the students, “Pretend I own Facebook. I want to expand it by buying a new server that costs $4000. How do I get the extra money? I can sell pieces of my company.” She cut a piece of paper into 8 equal pieces and asked the students if they would like to buy a share at $500 to own a piece of Facebook.

- Some students could not afford a share and others bought two.
- The teacher explained that she still controls the company, as she kept most of it.
- During the discussion, the students were told that an increase in popularity inflates the price of the stock and asked if anyone would like to buy or sell if the price rose to $1000?
- The class continues to discuss the situation when a competitor is introduced into the market, which will deflate the price of Facebook stock and students will lose money.

Figure 5.4. Visual on page 526

- After a reflection about the activity, the authors comment, “Journal entries such as that in Figure 5.3 demonstrated understanding of an intermediate step between a company selling stocks and making more money; the company uses the capital to improve its products.” The illustration in Figure 5.3 reads, “ I learned that stock markets can go up and down in stock and people try to sell pieces of their company to get more money so they have to invent something better that people would want to buy.”
- A new challenge was introduced; buying 100 shares of stock on April 4 and selling it on April 9. All students were asked to invest $1000 in the stock market to calculate how much money they would make or lose.
- Following this, the students were asked to work in groups and choose from a list of “student-friendly” stocks: Facebook, Coca-Cola, Hershey’s, McDonald’s, Apple, and Disney. Each day, the students recorded the share price value and the value of 100 shares.

Figure 5.5. Visual on page 527

- After 2 weeks the students graphed the data. At the end of this phase the students reflect on their learning and according to the authors demonstrate "greater knowledge" as compared to day 1. Students were able to explain reasons for stock price changes.
- The discussion focuses largely on how people make money, profit, loss, gain, change in value.

Figure 5.6.

- Towards the end of the article the authors add, "Students should not think of stocks as a source of easy money. Both projects addressed this issue, with Project 2 improving significantly on Project 1 by repeatedly addressing the risk of loss.

Students should also learn that higher risk entails both the possibility of greater reward as well as more likelihood of loss."

- The article ends with these two points: "Instead of expecting students to learn concepts so that they could use skills later, teaching mathematics in context demonstrated the need of skills now. This created a "time for telling" because the students were prepared to absorb the significance of the lesson… Through their own knowledge of the companies, students could make sense of the business purpose for raising capital as well as how product announcements and public opinion could affect stock prices, allowing students to become the "experts" and "draw their own conclusions" (Schwartz & Bransford, 1998).

Article 2: Hendrickson, K. A. (February, 2015). Fracking: Drilling into math and social justice. *Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School, 20*(6), 366–371.

Figure 5.7. Visual on page 366

QUOTES AND SUMMARY

- "A community-focused lesson that allows students to explore and model their findings with mathematics can also produce students who are aware of the environment" (p. 367).
- "Teachers need to create opportunities for students to make sense of the real world situations" (p. 367).
- "One of my goals is to teach mathematics for social justice, helping students see the value of math as a powerful tool for understanding social issues. I hope that my students will become critical participants in the world, asking questions, and using mathematics to make sense of what is happening around them."

- "Fracking is a hot button issue for our community."
- "High levels of shale have recently been identified in our rural, high poverty area, and oil and gas companies have begun offering landowners large sums of money to allow drilling on their land."
- Introducing an exploration of the environmental effects of fracking might isolate parents who value the financial aspects of fracking.
- The author worried at the beginning that her focusing on the calculation of various percentages of chemicals and water consumption involved in fracking turned into a lesson that is too procedural with lost content (p. 368).
- "I realized that to increase the cognitive level of the lesson, I needed to present my students with messy situations. I decided that my students should choose an aspect of fracking to explore; sift through websites, articles, and data sets; make sense of messy information; and make decisions about the importance of information."
- During a lesson in science, students are introduced to fracking, but the author acknowledges that they already had experience with this and were openly sharing them.
- Various reasons why people might accept the money and allow fracking on their land were discussed.
- The teacher exposed the students to a variety of print and news media text so that the students would get access to both sides of the debate.

Figure 5.8. Visual on page 370

- Students also reflected on the question, "How do you think math can be useful in understanding issues like fracking?"

- Each student then chose a question about fracking (previously brainstormed as a class), created a mathematical model of the answer, and designed two presentation slides.
- As students were researching their questions, the findings led to formulating new questions. For example, “How do they measure the right amount of fracking fluid to break up the rock?” She found that the amount could vary. However, in the process of gathering her research, she also learned that 70% of the fracking fluid can leak underground if it is not controlled. This intrigued her, so she calculated the amount of fluid that would be lost underground in the United States if it was not “controlled.”
- When students were working with numbers that were too large for them to imagine, she asked the students to try to convert them into reference objects they could visualize, e.g., an Olympic swimming pool.
- During sharing, “students asked one another questions about their models, which required that presenters justify their decision making, such as why they chose to report the effects of fracking for oil rather than natural gas.”
- “Students who compared the amount of water used in fracking with the water used by one household explained that math can help you make comparisons to understand things better.”

CONCLUSION

How is the discussion between mathematics and democracy possible when comparing these two articles from the perspective of classroom practice? I have chosen here the four issues Ole Skovsmose used to describe a successful project designed and planned by two teachers in the village of Hinnerup in Denmark, entitled “Our Community.” Grade 10 students were asked to work in the village as librarians, porters, teachers, environmental supervisors, unskilled labourers, kindergarten assistants, etc. Aside from learning about the workplace, the participants were asked to ask questions about its organization and who makes the decisions. They concentrated on selected problems and, in the end, through mathematics, they had a chance to make several recommendations to the mayor regarding various issues that concerned their village.

Skovsmose noted that the students “had more ideas about the structures of decision making in a local community and about the economic possibilities and limitations” (1998, p. 198). I am aware that the first article did not claim to focus on social justice. What I tried to convey through this paper is that, if mathematics education is not used as a powerful tool to make the society a more just and equitable one, a more democratic one, then the mathematics learned in the classroom is simply a mechanism for reproducing injustices that already exist outside. The comparison that follows tries to show how different classroom practices can convey different messages in terms of how mathematics power truly is used and how it can benefit them.

The four issues pertinent to classroom practice used as a base of comparison are: *citizenship, mathematics archaeology, mathemacy and deliberative interaction* (Skovsmose, p. 199).

The comparison issues (Skovsmose, 1998)	*"A Tale of Two Stock Markets"*	*K. A. Hendrickson: "Fracking: Drilling into Math and Social Justice"*
Citizenship (p. 198) • It means learning about the local community of which you are a member. • It means not accepting the social facts, the 'output' from the authorities but providing an input to authority, talking back to it. It means participation. • It means being able to participate in political discussions about the local community using mathematically formulated arguments	There is no learning about the local community. Students track stock market values of companies that might exist in their communities without being challenged to wonder about the power of the stock market on companies that might be present in their communities. No one asks themselves about the financial inequalities that are enacted in their own classroom setting. The teacher hands them out "money" that comes from nowhere and their only purpose is to make even more money, focusing on short-term goals and immediate success. There is a less attractive face of the stock market, which is only mentioned briefly in the teacher reflections (p. 528), but this is not one of the lens through which the lesson was delivered. Moreover, students are presented with a student friendly list of companies, all of which can represent serious worries for their products and students are asked to track their stock market value.	• The students are learning about using mathematical modeling to understand the issue of fracking, which is dividing their own community (some families value the financial benefits of fracking, p. 368) • They researched a question about the issue they chose and used mathematics to support their findings and present them in various ways to the class • Students lived in the community affected by fracking for shale gas and some of their parents valued the financial aspects of fracking.
Mathematics archaeology (p. 199) • It refers to 'excavating' the mathematics that is encapsulated in political arguments, which exercise a formatting power of the world	This is not a part of this project. Students are given the data, do not question its power, the selection offered by the teacher, nor question the power of the companies the teacher suggests.	• It was interesting to notice how the students who were involved in Hendrickson's lesson wanted to explore the prevalence of fracking in the United States.

• It means deciding what kind of mathematics-based argumentation is supposed to be used to make decisions.		• Mathematics was excavated here to see why fracking is so widely spread in many communities in the United States (5%) and not only in theirs. Ole Skovsmose would applaud their initiative by saying, "it does not make sense in a democracy to take care of an isolated case without discussing whether a particular decision has general consequences or not" (p. 198). • Many students chose to convert their big numbers to objects of reference easier to visualize, a technique popular particularly in speeches in that involve large numbers.
Mathemacy (p. 199) This is critical literacy in mathematics, understood as a competence in interpreting social life through: a. A math oriented reflection (*Did I do the calculations correctly?*) b. Model –oriented reflection (*Is the output of the modeling process reliable*?) c. Context-oriented reflection (*Consider math power in political, social and cultural contexts*) d. Life-world oriented reflection (*How much am I aware that math helps me in the real world? How useful do I see mathematics to be?*)	This lesson does not claim to do critical literacy. In fact, unlike the fracking lesson, which uses math to make sense of the world, this lesson's purpose is to make math meaningful by "anchoring math in the real world" whatever that might mean, assuming that it is the same version for all students, or that math has not already formatted the world. Additionally, the use of graphs was necessary to represent data (p. 529) and "instead of expecting students to learn concepts so that they could use the skills later, teaching mathematics in context demonstrated the skill now." The authors also add that the students were prepared to "absorb the significance of the lesson." Judging by the visuals embedded in the text we could get a clearer picture of what the significance it might be, including for the publisher, as some pictures are provided by the authors and some are clearly added on as interpretations of the text, emphasizing its significance. What is most troubling is the image on the cover of a boy dressed as an adult ready to take on Wall St.	a. One student reflects on his answer "The number is really big and it doesn't quite make any sense to me" (p. 370). b. Students who compared the water used in their homes to that used by fracking reflected on how mathematics helps you "make comparisons and understand things better" (p. 371). c. One student reflects on the learning experience regarding fracking and how mathematics can help people understand the world. The student reflects, "It can help them solve things that they don't know, using information they do know" (p. 371). d. Others found numbers regarding how the price of homes can be affected by fracking. They used that information to calculate how their own homes located near wells can decrease in price.

There was a missed opportunity for teachers to have capitalized on when a student noticed that even a robbery at a Domino's did not affect the value of the stock. "US corporations have been buying back their own stock to keep the prices high. Where mathematics should have come in handy was to question why even when 10% of the share holders own 90% of all stock, the top 1% owns more than half of all shares" (Maier, 2001) Students are not told the true story about the stock market; that the rich today tend to become richer in the future. How does this contribute to a more equitable society? When some companies' share value goes up, who suffers because of that? Which companies might be laying off employees? How is this contributing to an equitable society?

Another missed opportunity is discussing how corporations or companies decide to introduce a new product on the market. How does this affect us? Do we need it? What drives it? It is worrisome that a student reflected that, in order to make more money, companies sell shares of their companies "*so they can invent something better that people would want to buy*." Better? For whom?

Deliberative interaction (p. 200) Allow the communication in the classroom to be about dialogue and negotiation	The negotiation is staged and conducted by the teacher, very much in control, making choices, deciding the direction in which students should go next. There is no learning freedom associated with any part of this project. The end result is students being interviewed on questions pertaining to selling and buying stocks, making money, connecting the numerical value of the stock to the graphed data.	There are plenty of opportunities for discussion described in this article. I like that the teacher does not tell them that fracking is wrong for them and the environment. She lets them discover and deal with the "messy information" (p. 368), using mathematics to formulate their own decisions about the issue. Students engage constantly in justifications about how they chose mathematics to justify their models. One student, who looked at solar panels and solar energy, said, "math can help you 'solve' problems like fracking" (p. 371).

Based on the 4 interdependent model of critical literacy developed by Hilary Janks, the second article is a very good example.

Design	Fracking is a "hot button" issue in the community (high poverty, rural area).
Diversity	Students will have different initial positions to the issue, as some of the students' parents might like the financial benefits of drilling for shale on their land.
Access	Access to various points of view and information on the Internet determines the positioning in the end.
Power	Power is at stake in the struggle over which values (economical, environmental, social) prevail.

Below I have created two "Wordles," which speak for themselves when it comes to the language that students might have heard and used during both projects. They are self-explanatory in the sense that they clearly show the relationship between language and power in the discourse involved in the classrooms. In the first article the authors used a representation, an imagery of life, playing life, performing capitalism. The second used mathematics to make sense of preexisting decisions that structured their world. This Wordle is created from the entire body of the article, "A Tale of Two Stock Markets."

This next one was generated from the text of the article "Fracking: Drilling into Math and Social Justice."

AN ALTERNATIVE LESSON USING MATHEMATICAL LITERACY:
THE PROPOSED SALE OF HYDRO ONE

This lesson sequence I am describing below will address all four issues presented by Skovsmose, which are detailed above. Students will begin by first watching a short video in which philosopher Mark Kingwell and renowned scholar Noam Chomsky explain why public institutions are needed for the economy, especially in times of recession, and how privatizing them as a short term solution is not the best solution in the long run. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7P8a_GY_Ls

Figure 5.9.

Noam Chomsky argues in this video that public institutions have run at a loss for many "side benefits." For example, he explains that a steel institution running at a loss provides cheap steel to other industries. Public institutions can have a "counter cyclic primary." That means that, in times of recession they maintain employment, which increases demand that helps the economy get out of recession.

Private companies don't do that. They only care about making money and, during a recessionary period, they throw out the workforce when running a deficit.

This is particularly important background knowledge for students in order to understand the fact that Hydro One is a public institution, which is currently making a profit, and the government of Ontario has proposed to privatize it, selling 60% of its shares. The money obtained from the sale is to be used mainly to cover the cost of transit.

This issue has sparked a lot of debate at Queen's Park and among Ontarians. How can mathematics help excavate the mathematics involved in the proposed deal by the premier? How can mathematics help students understand the issue? Why should they care? To introduce this problem I have chosen an open letter to the *Toronto Star* from May, 2015, written by Keith M. Summers, a former hedge fund manager, convicted of fraud in 2014, who explains why, in his opinion, Ontarians should be worried about this proposal. His letter is a perfect example of what the power of critical literacy in mathematics is and does, especially when talking about citizenship; doing math to uncover the truth and not accepting the world as is, as presented – not accepting the "deal." I do not want to influence the students' final decision about the sale benefit (or lack of thereof) nor do I want to leave them with the ideas expressed in the initial video above. Therefore I have deliberately removed the title ("*Hydro One sell-off the 'biggest con job I've ever seen*') and the second half of the letter in which the author, Keith M. Summers, uses mathematical modeling and argues mathematically why the sale is an extremely bad deal for Ontario. I have included the sections from the letter that I have adapted below, as they constitute the math problem I would like the students to try to make sense of and use critical literacy when they present their solutions to their peers.

Source: Retrieved June 12, 2015, from http://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2015/05/28/hydro-one-sell-off-the-biggest-con-job-ive-ever-seen.html

CHRIS SO / TORONTO STAR

Hydro One's profits have grown 6.3 per cent per year for the last 14 years.
By: Keith M. Summers. Published on Thu May 28, 2015.

As a convicted white-collar criminal, Queen's Park proposed sale of a majority stake in Hydro One has sparked my interest. (…)

Investment people—like the people who have agreed to help Queen's Park unload its majority stake in Hydro One—value companies based upon a couple of different factors. Sometimes the value of a company is based on the value of its assets: land, factories, intellectual property, and brand name recognition. The thinking being that better management of those assets might generate higher profits. Sometimes the value of a company is based on its profitability. A stable stream of income is worth paying good money for. Some companies are valued on their assets, others are valued on their earnings; sometimes it's a little of both.

Figure 5.10.

Hydro One is a stable generator of profits. It has been profitable since it was created out of the breakup of Ontario Hydro. Its profits have grown 6.3 per cent per year for the last 14 years. It reported earnings of $749 million for 2014—all of which belong to the people of Ontario. You and me.

Now, we all know that the province is in debt. $284 billion. That's the bad news. The good news is that investors love to buy government bonds. Investors are so eager to buy Ontario bonds that they compete as to who will accept the lowest interest rate. In March, bond investors lent Ontario money for 10 years at a rate of 2.1 per cent. Our average interest rate on all our existing debt is only 3.8 per cent (and falling).

So, we have some numbers to work with: 1) Hydro One earns $749 million. 2) The province pays, on average, a 3.8-per-cent interest rate on its outstanding debt and 3) the province can borrow new money at rates as low as 2.1 per cent for 10 years. So here's the question: how much should we, as Ontarians, receive for selling this $749-million income stream?"

… $15 billion. That's the value that the premier has put on Hydro One…

Keith M. Summers is a former hedge fund manager and was convicted of fraud in 2014. He is currently serving a three-year sentence. His book, *Conned: How Wall Street rips you off and how to fight back* will be published this fall."

After viewing the video I would like to ask the students to first read the text and have a discussion about the following issues, most of them based on John Willinsky's ideas about Critical Literacy.

1. What seems to be at play in this text?
2. What is an urgent issue here?
3. Whose interests are being served by the text?
4. What are the interests of the author? What does he have to gain?

5. What are the credentials of the author?
6. What did he hope to achieve by writing this letter to the *Toronto Star*?

I am hoping that the students will use their knowledge of percentages and calculate the price for which the premier should have accepted the sale at the interest rate, with which the government could either borrow or continue to pay the interest for its debt, using the profit Hydro One makes every year, assuming it will continue to do so at a steady rate. On the other hand, I would like them to move beyond the "bad deal" or "good deal" debate (as resulting from solving the problem based on the numbers provided in the letter) and extend their thinking to understand how this sale will ultimately affect the prices of electricity bills for regular citizens of Ontario. Being public property, it means their parents' money, their quality of life.

Hilary Janks recommends a transformative action component of the redesign cycle. This lesson can culminate with a letter signed by all students and sent to Queens' Park, explaining why the deal is not a good one and how much money she will lose by selling 60% of shares at 15 billion. They could identify other burning issues the government could use the money for if they would accept a better deal, or not privatize at all.

Most importantly, this is the second year I have had a chance to organize Student Vote (studentvote.ca) at my school. Students hold parallel elections for the federal or provincial leadership. This fall, we will have the vote for the federal leadership but definitely this involvement in citizenship, in democracy, as informed by mathematics, is important for creating an engaged and powerful electorate later on in life. My lesson still builds on the basic understanding of how companies sell stock to earn money. However, I am hoping to unveil the interests at play behind many sales involving companies that are public property. We can talk about why 60% and not 50%. The NCTM lesson was not connected to their immediate community or any issues that could be better explained in their community by employing mathematics.

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ZHEN QIU

6. DOING CRITICAL LITERACY IN CHINA'S ENGLISH EDUCATION

There has been a frenzy of learning English all across China. In 2006, a report in *China Newsweek* estimated that 400 million people were learning English all across China (as cited in Li, 2006, para. 1). While China has opened its door more widely to the outside, people in increasing numbers are realizing the importance of English as a global language.

It is believed that a foreign language should be learned as early as possible so as to establish a solid foundation in that language. Therefore, children are urged to learn English at a younger age in order to have an edge "at the starting line." In schools, English has become a compulsory subject in every grade from the elementary level all the way to university. In each stage, students are made to take numerous English tests and enter competitions to demonstrate their English literacy, the result of which is regarded as an important indicator of their academic achievement. Take Shanghai's College Entrance Examination as an example. In this examination, a total score of 150 is allotted to English, amounting to nearly a quarter of the total score of 630. It means that one can hardly survive the Examination if she/he fails the English test, which would then deprive the student of the opportunity to enter a university. In universities, students have to pass another nationwide test, the College English Test (Band 4), to successfully obtain their graduate diplomas. For students who plan to further their study either at home or abroad, the first hurdle they need to sweep is still the English tests: The National Entrance Examination for Postgraduate, IELTS (International English Language Testing System), TOFEL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) or GRE (Graduate Record Examination).

Even after graduation, when students seek employment, a good command of the English language is an absolute asset for job-hunters. English literacy remains a crucial criterion for employers to determine whether one is qualified for the position. Students with fluent English literacy have greater access to "success," while teachers teaching English literacy are widely recognized as "holding a wonderful career." This nationwide craze for learning English also gives rise to the flourishing of the English language training market in China. Various kinds of English learning and training organizations are springing up all over the country. According to one report, "English-language training in China is an industry worth around 15 billion yuan a year, or about £1.3bn, and there are more than 50,000 English-training organizations

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in China" ("Crazy English," 2009, para. 10). Undoubtedly, the significance of English literacy can never be overemphasized in Chinese society.

On the other hand, the teaching of English in China has been under criticism for a long period of time. The standard learning and teaching practices in English classes have rarely changed over the years. The following is a picture of a typical English teaching classroom:

With a textbook, a lesson plan and teaching notes in her hand, the teacher enters the classroom. She starts with a brief introduction of the topic (designated by the textbook) and then goes over the vocabulary list of the reading text, explaining the pronunciation and usage of each word and phrase. Next is the highlight of the class; the teacher gives detailed analysis of the text by reading and explaining each sentence, stressing again and again the difficult language points and grammatical structures to be memorized. Students are busy taking notes and preparing themselves to be called to do the language drills. Both the teacher and the students are working hard toward the shared goal; to get a high score in tests.

Though reforms of English curricula have been well under way, teachers, as an integral part of the curriculum, are confronted with daunting tasks of transformation. Teachers are in a predicament; they all have passion and enthusiasm for teaching, while each of us has our own puzzlement about where we are going. What stands in the way, what shall we do and what can we do? In light of my own past learning and teaching experience, this essay intends to make a tentative inquiry into how English, as the language of power, has influenced English teaching and learning in Chinese schools and what English teachers can do to encourage critical literacy in their classes.

THE METHOD OF CURRERE

In *Toward a Poor Curriculum*, published by Madeleine Grumet and William Pinar (1976), it is stated that the method of currere is regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical. Currere "is therefore temporal and conceptual in nature, and it aims for the cultivation of a developmental point of view that is trans-temporal and trans-conceptual. From another perspective, the method is the self-conscious conceptualization of the temporal, and from another, it is the viewing of what is conceptualized through time" (Grumet & Pinar, 1976, p. 51). Simply put, the method of currere is an autobiographical approach that provides a framework for reflection on educational experiences using a subjective and narrative perspective. Its four steps ask the person involved to slow down, think of their past and imagine their future, in order to understand the present they are living. Each of the four steps will be closely examined, below.

REGRESSION

In this step, Grumet and Pinar (1976) explained that, "one returns to the past, to capture it as it was, and as it hovers over the present" (p. 55). Those involved are

encouraged to recall educational experiences from their pasts and see how these have guided them in their development, attitudes, and beliefs of education.

One's present is deeply rooted in and shaped by what she/he has gone through in the past. It is the same case with one's educational experience. According to Pinar, the first step is to go back to one's past, observe and examine past educational experiences by using current mind-sets. Regression helps us visualize where we come from, how such experiences affect our development and how they continue to define certain aspects of our lives. It allows us to accept, to become free of our past and, thus, to see it in a whole different way.

Looking back on my past, I can still vividly recall the excitement and exclamations of the whole family when I received the admission notice from one of the top universities in our province. It was believed that being an English major in that university meant a prosperous future awaiting me. With all the expectations, I set out, unswervingly determined. To be a top student as I had always been, I worked extremely hard. Teachers, who seemed knowledgeable and omniscient, were idols for me. I followed the teachers' every instruction, sitting still, listening to their lectures attentively and taking notes frequently, while, after class, I devoted almost all my spare time to reviewing teachers' lectures, memorizing grammatical rules and commonly-used words and expressions. Luckily, all my hard work paid off four years later when my dream of being an English teacher finally came true. I began to teach at a privately run university. Again, all my family was thrilled to hear the news, for being an English teacher brought not only a stable salary but also enormous social recognition.

Then, I began to give lectures. Most of the students were "well-behaved and cooperative" – sitting still, listening to my lectures attentively and taking notes frequently, just as I had done and as I expected. Deep in my heart, I still believed that only in this way could students get good grades and locate decent jobs when they graduated, just as I had. Having taught English for three years, I was somewhat confused about my work and future and started to ask myself, "What is the meaning of my teaching? To transmit knowledge to students? To train students to be skilled? To prepare them for a career?" After serious consideration, eventually I came to the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) with the hope that the pursuit of knowledge here would be satisfying and rewarding and, most importantly, shed some light on my puzzlement about what it means to educate.

PROGRESSION

Progression, the second step in the currere process, is a view of the future. Pinar (1976) explained that, in this step, "We look at what is not yet the case, what is not yet present" (p. 58). The progression step enables the involved to look into and imagine the future they have desired or planned. It is where we are headed for. In our case, it is to become future teachers. We must view this future state as reasonable and possible, and not take it for granted.

My passion and enthusiasm for teaching English persists. When I go back to China and continue my teaching, I shall strive to make some changes. I would no longer regard myself as the centre of the classroom. I would no longer emphasize language skills. I would no longer expect students to follow my every instruction without any thought. I would no longer request students to be silent and obedient. I would have dialogic communication with every student, as if we were equals. I would look forward to being questioned or challenged by my students. I would encourage them to make use of their own learning experiences and think for their future, for the meanings of their life. I would shift students' attention to the society they are living in. I would do whatever I can to explore a new world of language learning together with my students.

ANALYSIS

The third step of Pinar's currere asks us to "describe the biographic present, exclusive of the past and future, but inclusive of responses to them" (1976, p. 59). That is, the involved analyze their present (temporarily put aside their past and future, but consider its influences), here and now, what they are living through. In this step, we evaluate our present. We place our past and future aside but remain conscious of them. It is important to understand the roles the past and the future play in our present.

Now I am in the Language and Literacies Education Program at OISE. With easy access to diversified teaching and learning resources of high quality, I eventually have some ideas of what it is to educate. Inspired particularly by different scholars of critical literacy – for example, Allan Luke, Hillary Janks, and John Willinsky – I learn to look back on my past experiences from different perspectives.

The standard learning and teaching practices in the Chinese educational system are typical of the "banking model" described by Freire (1970), where "Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor" (pp. 163–164). Teachers, in the position of power in the classroom, act as knowledge-givers, impart skills of the English language (divided into reading, speaking, listening and writing) onto the students, who, because of their position as students, have less power. For the students, learning is waiting to be filled by the teachers. They are denied any opportunity or power to render and reinvent what has been taught. The destiny for them to be in the classroom is to take things as they come. Janks, Dixon and Ferreira (2013) further explained:

> If people *consent* to being powerless then those in power need to use less *force* (armies, police, courts) to maintain their power. Convincing and persuading people to consent to society's rules is often the job of families, religions, schools and the media. All these social institutions use language and it is largely in and through language that meaning is mobilized to keep things the way they are. (p. 5)

In this process, students at school gradually learn how to be well-behaved students and, later, law-abiding citizens who follow rules and disciplines, obey, respect and even fear the power of authority. According to Apple (1979), schools "facilitate the political socialization of the mainstream young and tend to equip them with the tools necessary for the particular roles they are expected to play in a given society" (pp. 79–80). For a country living under dictatorship, China witnessed tremendous economic progress but lagged far behind in its democratic reforms. The real powers of the country are in the hands of the few rulers, while the general public is deprived of the freedom to voice their dissatisfaction, to argue for their needs, to protest or to fight against the unfairness imposed upon them. For the central and local governments, only the "political quiescence," "consensus," or "conformity" (Apple, 1979, p. 79) contributes to a well-functioning stable society. In this case, youth in the country, who are regarded as the future of the nation, are taught to keep their mouths shut. When this generation of youth is mature enough to embark on their teaching careers, they become "experts" or "authorities" in classrooms. By the same pattern, they unconsciously start to teach their students to live a life of obedience. Now, the question is posed in front of us: what can we do about it?

SYNTHESIS

In the synthesis step, one is encouraged by Pinar (1976) to "conceptualize the present situation" (p. 61). The involved considers the three previous steps. They observe how their past, present, and future have moulded them into a professionally complete being. It is where we connect everything together. We become aware of "who we are" as we perceive our past, present and future as a whole. We acknowledge ourselves, our personal and professional perspectives. In our case, as educators, we see ourselves becoming teachers through the experiences in our past, present, and our goals for the future.

Embracing critical literacy offers me new perspectives to re-examine my past experience of being a learner and a teacher. My theoretical studies of critical literacy are particularly meaningful and inspiring when I apply them in analyzing my own experiences. Even more exciting is when I figure out there are "cracks," where teachers can function to make a difference. A good case in point would be to do critical literacy. The concept of doing critical literacy probes into the deep and profound meaning of literacy education, as opposed to staying at the superficial level of bare language learning. According to Comber (2001), "Critical literacies involve people using language to exercise power, to enhance everyday life in schools and communities and to question practices of privilege and injustice" (p. 173). For English teachers in China, I propose the following three steps by which they can implement critical literacy in the classroom.

To do critical literacy, teachers should, first of all, raise their own critical consciousness about the true essence of education. Shor (1992) defined "critical consciousness" as "the desocialized thinking" which referred to "the way we see

ourselves in relation to knowledge and power in society, to the way we use and study language, and to the way we act in school and daily life to reproduce or to transform our conditions" (p. 129). To transform the status quo of education, teachers should have that consciousness to critically relate the language they teach to the larger society. Learning, after all, is for better living in society. As McKinney expressed in her interview with Cooper, "…critical literacy really demands a lot from the teacher and it assumes that you already have the critical consciousness, you have deconstructed the text in many possible ways…" Many teachers however, tend to teach students in the way that they think is best, based merely on their own seemingly successful experience. It is the experience of locating a decent job due to excellent functional English literacy. It is quite similar to the picture presented by Anyon (1981) in her study of middle-class school, where students and teachers regard knowledge as something having market value and can be traded for something rewarding. English is the language of power that enables students to have easier access to a more promising future. With this notion in mind, teachers are busy preparing students for various types of English tests for the sake of all the "golden" certificates. More often than not, they are likely to ignore the true essence of literacy education. Inspired by Humanism, which advocates "a commitment to the release of human beings for participation in the world as subjects-persons who are present to themselves and others, who create themselves as they communicate and act with others, whose authentic voices can be heard" (Greene, 1975, p. 185), I believe that to educate is to inspire students to interpret the world using their own lived experience, to awaken students' consciousness to be a responsible member of society and to nurture a generation capable of promoting social and cultural transformations. Every student is a unique human being and (s)he is entitled to interpret the world. In teaching English literacy, we should stop calling students' attention to the static knowledge of language skills as if they were passive recipients of the packaged knowledge. Rather, students should be encouraged to fully utilize their lived experience and try to expand their own horizons through the medium of language. Luke and Freebody (2011) maintained that, "to teach critical literacy thus encourages the development of alternative reading positions and practices for questioning and critiquing texts and their affiliated social formations and cultural assumptions" (p. 218). Teachers should have the clear idea that English language should be like a channel that leads students to a broader world where there are more and newer possibilities and more perspectives to reflect on one's own existence. In order to inspire students to do so, teachers, in the first place, should be conscious and sensitive, have sharp powers of observation and exercise their own judgments about social, political and economic conflicts. Just as Comber (2001) has observed, "When teachers develop their own analytical capacities they are in a position to introduce young children to critical reading practices" (p. 173).

Secondly, encouraging democratic engagements in the classroom is of equal significance. "Democratic Engagements," as Kinloch (2005) explains, are "exchanges" in which "students express their feelings and ideas through oral and written mediums" (p. 98). In her creative writing classroom experiences with middle

school students, Kinloch encouraged students to use whatever style and language form they liked to write creatively and imaginatively. In the process, students began to understand that "the times they live in, we live in, are complicated by social and political struggles for power" (p. 106). And by the end of the program, every person – students and teachers alike – believed,

> …the hands that could write and erase his ideas until they became just what he wanted signified creative power and intellectual freedom in a place that supported individual and collective imaginative thoughts, multiple voices, varied writing styles, self-expression, and student differences. (p. 105)

It is a brilliant example of doing critical literacy. The purpose of literacy education rests not merely on literacy skills, to teach students how to read and write, but on motivating students to use the language to "read both the *word* and the *world* critically" (as cited in Janks, 2010, p. 13). Kumashiro (2000) argued that, "when students have both knowledge about oppression and critical thinking skills they will be 'empowered' to challenge oppression" (p. 37). He further quoted Freire's (1975) statement; "Critical education or 'consciousness-raising' (what Freire calls conscientizacao)" entails learning "to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (as cited in Kumashiro, 2000, p. 37). Students in English classrooms should be constantly encouraged to challenge or question things that have been taken for granted and change their habitual ways of thinking. According to Qu (2011), "To promote critical capability, we need to address the paradox by exploring possibilities of liberating ourselves from the habituated thinking paradigms in which we are trapped inescapably in the process of socialization" (p. 302). Questions can be as simple as "Why are you here? Why do you learn English? How learning English makes you different from others?" These serve as preliminary steps to introduce students into the critical world. Kinloch (2005) also offered some insights about how to develop critical intelligences in terms of Democratic Engagements:

1. Agreeing to be listeners, thinkers, readers, and writers;
2. Embracing the idea that we are all writers participating in a learning process;
3. Working in small, focused writing/ reading groups before convening as a large group;
4. Respecting the thought processes of others by taking notes and offering critical responses;
5. Drawing on prior knowledge and home practices to interrogate the usefulness of creative writing and standardized, or "academic," writing;
6. Reading and responding to poems, essays, short stories, and commentaries of current events;
7. Volunteering to be lead experts on a particular literary theme or concept;
8. Refusing to have identities and writing styles defined in limiting categories that do not celebrate language and the democratic orchestration of multiple voices (p. 107).

These practical strategies can function as a guide to teachers doing critical literacy in class. Teachers do not necessarily need to stick to these principles to carry out their lesson plans, but they certainly provide a good model for reference.

Lastly, we teachers need to work as a team to create a "third space," where we are safe and able to do critical literacy. In response to mounting criticism about English teaching in China, there has been an increasing fever to follow the western literacy education models. As it has turned out, most of the models failed in the Chinese context.

Wang (2006) described the new space called upon by interaction between Chinese culture(s) and U.S. culture(s) as a "third" space (pp. 115–116). Here I would make use of "the third space" to refer to a new education model in-between the East and the West. Specifically, it is to create a critical literacy education model that draws upon the merits of western theories but with an obvious Chinese identity. English literacy education transcends the linguistic level and becomes the site for doing critical literacy. As Qu (2011) observed,

> Thus, the English class as a contact zone may not be merely confrontational… It can be a place where English is viewed as the significant other which offers different perceptions that can liberate us from the constraints of our own culture, a place where people choose a perception not on the basis of simplistic identity politics that stresses differences only, a place where people, sharing the benefits of differences, can develop the translingual ability to 'translate, transpose and critically reflect on social, cultural and historical meanings'. (p. 303)

This, undoubtedly, calls for a concerted effort to be made by all English teachers in China, who hold and will continue to hold positive expectations about Chinese education in the future. Comparing teacher-artists to "a company of actors or an orchestra of musician," Grumet (1989) stated that "their capacity to influence curriculum, to influence the climate of their schools, to learn from each other, and to share responsibility for children will rest on their ability to work together" (p. 16). Working together, we would know how we are concerned about different dimensions of literacy education, ranging from the course selections, the teachers' syllabuses, to the lecture arrangements and classroom activities. We would at least know the directions in which we should head.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the use of the concept of currere guides me to contemplate my past and present learning and teaching experiences, and to look towards my future professional goals. The method of currere allows me to understand how English, as the language of power, has been taught to English language learners in China. I understand what can be improved in my teaching English and what implications can be drawn. It also provides me a chance to think about my future, to consider where I am going and how I would get there. The currere process allows teachers to see

themselves as active participants in doing critical literacy along with their students. I believe that each teacher's understanding and implementation of critical literacy in terms of their lived experience is an essential aspect of effective teaching.

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JEREMY POWELL

7. FOLLOWING CITATIONS

What Philosophical Specificity Can Teach Us

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I examine four videos from a recorded interview with critical literacy scholar and professor at the Stanford Graduate School of Education, John Willinsky. This interview was conducted by Dr. Karyn Cooper as part of a much larger project that involved interviews with twenty scholars on the subject of critical literacy and surrounding scholarship. In the videos, Willinsky responds to various questions that probe his views on critical literacy, and various perspectives and contexts within which it exists. In his responses Willinsky cites and makes use of many philosophers and theorists to develop his ideas, to make explicit his thinking and to track trends and historical narratives in the field.

To examine his responses, I choose one scholar per video and select one of their writings as a starting point to find both agreement and differences in thought between the thinker and Willinsky, himself. I hope that this return to the theorists' fundamental texts and their own words will deepen and enrich some of the ideas that Willinsky expresses throughout the videos and the interview as a whole.

I believe that these thinkers and their texts hold value and promise for further investigation and insight in doing critical literacy independent of Willinsky's thinking. For some of the texts the connection is obvious, or they even directly address and deal with critical literacy or ideas around it, like Allan Luke's paper on critical literacy and American schools. However, others are more removed, like Theodor Adorno's *On (political) Commitment* that deals more with political semiotics in visual art and theatre than anything else. Each video and text pairing will be examined by: first, justifying the thinker and their text; second, by giving my analysis of Willinsky's response to the question or prompt; third, by analyzing the text in light of Willinsky's thoughts and ideas; and fourth, by looking for more practical implications from the dialogue and exploring some of the consequences for critical literacy.

WILLINSKY: DISTINCTION BETWEEN CRITICAL LITERACY AND NEW LITERACY (CLICK HERE TO WATCH THE VIDEO ON YOUTUBE[1])

Much of John Willinsky's work has considered the power of texts. From his first book, *Empire of Words: the Reign of the OED* (1994), to his more recent work addressing

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academic texts and issues of access, he recognizes the importance that texts and their context take on. Through both history and position texts gain and lose meanings for different readers. In the video that will be discussed in this section, Professor Willinsky discusses the “multi-modalities” that more engaged forms of literacy can make apparent. Allan Luke, whose work Willinsky addresses specifically, writes similarly about literacy.

Allan Luke has written, and continues to write and teach, on various education subjects, notably, for our purposes, issues of identity in critical literacy. In 2012, while he was teaching at the Queensland University of Technology, he published in the journal *Theory Into Practice* the article, “The Future of Critical Literacies in U.S. Schools.” This article deals with the “lineage of critical literacy from Freire through critical pedagogies and discourse analysis” (Luke, 2012, p. 4) and, in discussion of that history, the need for some contextual definition of critical literacy. This text gives some insight into Luke’s thinking on the naming of critical literacy and what meanings it carries.

In this section of the interview, Willinsky is asked about the distinction between critical literacy and “new” literacy. His comments focus on how new literacies are bringing new texts and new forms of text into the Canon and into the curriculum. He describes his excitement at the promise of these moves, but cautions that a critical perspective has to be a part of the expansion. He asks that, when these new modes are introduced, that ideas of interests and standpoints are not forgotten. He says that, while a “harsh political” critique is not necessary, it is important to continue asking what is at play in each text. He credits Allan Luke and others as bringing attention to “occupational or vocational” literacies and that they are an important addition to the conversation. He finishes by stressing that labels are less important than the work being done, by saying that, “I don’t think it’s about policing.”

In his paper, Luke (2012) calls for an opening up of the binaries inherent in past practices of critical literacy, which he sees as a hindrance to its anti-hegemonic goals. While describing the legacy of Freire as one of the prime originators of criticality in education, Luke addresses the dialogical set up that critical literacy has been forced into. Binaries abound in Freire’s pedagogy because it uses dialog as its main mechanism of education. This is demonstrated by the two parties that are at work when Freire asks that education not be ‘A’ *for* ‘B’ or by ‘A’ *about* ‘B,’ but by ‘A’ *with* ‘B’ (Freire, 2000). Luke does not trace the source of critical literacy’s binaries back to their origins, but he does attribute to it the focus on ideological critique and cultural analysis as key elements of education against marginalization and cultural exclusion (Luke, 2012). Luke points out that this “anti-hegemonic” work is inaccessible, since our students do not live their lives in neat, contained and discrete binaries, but are forced to deal with multiple power structures, that Luke calls “genres of power.” These “genres of power” are difficult to access and teach about, so he calls for educators to teach students the analysis of a range of texts, such as functional, academic, and literary texts, attending to lexico-grammatical structures, ideological contents, and identifiable conditions of production and to use

these as a possible solution to these challenges (Luke, 2012). Drawing on this, when Willinsky asks, "what is at play?" in a discussion of "critical perspective," he wants to know what the text is addressing, dealing with, critiquing, co-opting. In short, how does this text relate to the world? Luke would say that we need to take as much into account as possible – including the formal linguistic – to bring more and more into "play." It is in that play that there is "the possibility of using new literacies to change relations of power…" (Luke, 2012, p. 8).

While Luke and Willinsky agree on the need to broaden rather than narrow, they disagree on labeling, Luke is looking for (a) definition(s) of critical literacy, while Willinsky is much less concerned with naming. Luke fears that, if we settle on a Freirian model, we risk losing the complexity that needs to be present to do the "anti-hegemonic" work. This seems to be a contradictory goal, to both broaden the scope of critical literacy and find articulable definitions of it, but perhaps the search for definition is an important tool in focusing continuing development and doesn't need to ever settle or find a finalized solution.

WILLINSKY: HISTORICAL CONTEXT (CLICK HERE TO WATCH THE VIDEO ON YOUTUBE[2])

When Willinsky sets out to trace a narrative of critical literacy throughout Canadian history, he struggles with issues of inclusion and exclusion. A spectrum of literacy practices have been used at different moments in Canadian history, from utilitarian to academic, and to reconcile them to a single linear development is an impossible task. Only once has Willinsky sketched a narrative that includes the histories of indigenous and rural Canadians, and drawn attention to a narrative that includes institutional figures like Northrop Frye.

Northrop Frye was among the highest calibre of literary critic. His writing changed the way that the field of literary critique conducted itself and left indelible marks on how we read literature, especially in Canada. He was an intellectual heavyweight who encouraged intertextual examination. In a 1962 lecture at Harvard University, which was later published under the title "The Developing Imagination," he addresses the role of literature in education. He positions literature as a cycle of remaking/retelling of narrative, myth and culture and, by examining these retellings, we can find the underlying structures (Frye, 1962). While Frye is only addressing literature in this text, his ideas are easily grafted into a broader contemporary context of critical literacy.

Willinsky attempts to trace an origin for critical literacy in Canada during the interview after being asked to speak about the historical context of critical literacy. He reaches back to Socialist Prairie movements and Co-operative movements on the East Coast, but then firmly locates a date-of-birth for what would become critical literacy in Canada in the actions of Louis Riel during the Red River Rebellion and, in particular, his seizing of the printing press in Winnipeg. In doing this Willinsky acknowledges the intense and continuing history of Native Canadian critical literacy

that positions education as political. He sees these traditions as "being critical about literacy" and never formally called critical literacy. He talks about these traditions as "… much stronger than he realized…"

Frye calls for us to "interpret every work of literature in the light of all the literature [we] know" (Sloan, 2003, p. 150). In "The Developing Imagination," he also draws attention to the issues that he saw in 1962, that teaching at all levels largely remains the old "taste," or "appreciation," reinforced by a variety of "backgrounds," such as biographical, historical, and linguistic, none of which seem to contribute directly or systematically to the problem at hand (Frye, 1962). We can see this tendency still at play now, when an English teacher pulls out this year's Shakespearian play in the hope that, by spending time in the Canon, students may develop a "taste" for it and be improved, as if through osmosis, by it. Frye saw literature critique as identifying major focal points of cultural imagination, that make history politics, religion, and social life considerably more intelligible (Sloan, 2003). While Frye stops short of calling these things texts, he is trying to open the possibility of intertextual dialogue because only in that critique will the structures that organize our world emerge (Frye, 1962). His work, in this way, is littered with proto-critical literacy; Frye is opening doors between text and the world. His views on the critique of literature have a place in the genealogy of critical literacy.

I think that Willinsky correctly cites Frye as having an important role in Canada's traditions of unnamed critical literacy. Frye's work investigating the mechanisms of literature and, in this particular case, drawing attention to underlying structures and myths that repeat throughout the Canon demands that students "ask 'Why?' with more purpose and direction than he ordinarily employs with that word" (Frye, 1990, p. 83). While Frye's ideas on critique stop far short of criticality, they do ask for more than simply the text to be brought to the table.

WILLINSKY: PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT (CLICK HERE TO WATCH THE VIDEO ON YOUTUBE[3])

In contrast to the dangers of philosophical eclectic that Willinsky warns against in this section of the interview, the addition of a particular philosophical framework to a discussion of critical literacy offers clarity. Willinsky stresses that there is a strong historical materialist approach that is fundamental to critical literacy and, although Marx may be the originator of that approach, more contemporary thinkers like Theodor Adorno may better articulate that influence.

Theodor Adorno stands as one of most important philosophers of the twentieth century. His writing and his teaching dealt with the largest and most pressing concerns of his time, the decline of modernism, the trauma of the Holocaust, the meaning of science and a call for a radical self-examination. The text that I have chosen to draw from is *On (political) Commitment* from *Notes to Literature, Volume 2*. This text deals with how art can or cannot be political in a post-modern, post-war, world. By trying to locate meaning, any meaning, in art, Adorno takes up authors like Brecht

and his overt attempts at political art to discover how they fail to produce, and others' work that attempts neutrality but cannot help being infused with politics (Adorno, 1991).

In this section of the interview Willinsky describes the philosophical underpinnings of critical literacy as falling into three converging modes of thought. First, he talks about Marx and the historical materialism that grounds our thinking of the work in economies. Second is the work of Foucault, his genealogy of knowledge, and the social construction of our thinking. Third, critical theory and, specifically, thinkers like those of the Frankfurt School – Horkheimer, Adorno and their students, like Habermas, who brought a contemporary sensibility to Marx by introducing and integrating concepts of identity and social construction. Willinsky's general assertion is that critical literacy is philosophical in both its origin and in its day-to-day work, but that it is able to by-pass the most fundamental and contentious issues. He also warns against an approach of philosophical eclecticism in which the functional differences between thinkers are elided by a general invocation of their names "as brand," rather than engaging in their actual ideas. That is, we may be embracing contradicting ideas and perspectives in an effort to be inclusionary.

In *On (political) Commitment* Adorno writes, "An 'it shall be different' is hidden in even the most sublimated work of art" (Adorno, 1992, p. 93). Adorno argues here that, when a text addresses the reader, there is a "moment of accommodation to the world… [it] contains a secret complicity with those being addressed" (Adorno, 1992, p. 93). Texts are remade for each reader that comes to them, moulding himself or herself to the person who picks them up. This is exactly the issue that Willinsky is addressing: we can shoe-horn critical literacy into many different philosophical frameworks and, just as Adorno suggests, it will continue to address us (the reader), it will continue to produce and labour, but the meanings it produces will just reflect the input the reader brings with him/her. We risk turning critical literacy into a sponge that will drink up whatever we put it in. Adorno tells the story of the evolution of a work by the artist Paul Klee. The work started as a political caricature and, over the years, through different iterations, turned into a religious icon (of sorts) with no direct reference to the original comic or to the allusions that it made (Adorno, 1991). This artwork is able to address the reader as political, or as apolitical, completely depending on who stands in front of it and with what knowledge they bring with them.

Perhaps Willinsky is calling for caution and moderation because, if we keep painting over critical literacy with philosophy, we risk losing those originalities. Willinsky talks about how critical literacy is, at its heart, philosophical because it asks big questions and, although it avoids the "metaphysical" and other "foundational" ones, still a philosophical stance is necessary. With Adorno's idea in mind, we can select our stance, our input, accordingly and carefully and not risk a muddled, eclectic, approach. We decide how we want critical literacy to labour and, by choosing and articulating our philosophical stance, we can better communicate our "it shall be different" with the reader.

WILLINSKY: POLITICAL CONTEXT (CLICK HERE TO WATCH THE VIDEO ON YOUTUBE[4])

Willinsky sees the challenge presented by abstract ideas about identity, which are hard to access and which politics so often deals with. This challenge can be met with critical responses allowing abstract "sense" and "myth" to be broken open and addressed. He cites a Canadian tradition, in the work of Harold Innes and Marshal McLuhan, of this practice.

Marshall McLuhan's phrase, "the medium is the message," is so ubiquitous that it risks losing the meaning that brought him to fame; but his work and, specifically for this paper, how technology influences thought and culture, remains strong and somewhat prophetic. In McLuhan's early work, *The Gutenberg Galaxy,* he tracks how changes in technology changed culture, thought and identity in four epochs, Oral, Manuscript, Gutenberg and Electronic cultures.

In this portion of the interview Willinsky responds to the Political context of critical literacy and chooses to focus on the Canadian context. He lays out a more formal and conventional element in the work of Innes and McLuhan, but also a more practical element in the work of Aboriginal Canadians that were reacting to the Canadian tradition of deference to authority and fighting against it in their own ways. Aboriginal Canadians reacted historically through responses, like the Red River Rebellion and, contemporarily in responses like "Idle No More." Willinsky suggests that Pierre Elliot Trudeau made use of the power that McLuhan identified in his understanding of how media works and takes political power. Willinsky suggests that examples like Trudeau and Idle No More are points of access for teachers and students into critical media literacy. The outspokenness and divisiveness that Trudeau brought to Parliament Hill and the tangible outrage that Idle No More articulates give easier purchase for criticality than the current obfuscation of Prime Minster Harper.

McLuhan writes in a section of *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, addressing the production of Nationalism that, nationalism is dependent upon a fixed point of view that is embedded within print, perspective, and visualizations (McLuhan, 2011/1962). Although McLuhan, here, is talking about the actual technological innovations of the press and perspective drawing, he is pointing to the larger idea that a nation is derived from a claimed (or fixed) positionality. Willinsky is both talking about the possibilities that McLuhan opens in investigating literature and also the authority that the text has. McLuhan directly ties power to the technology. He is willing to make explicit connections like, "The citizen armies of Cromwell and Napoleon were the ideal manifestations of the new technology" (McLuhan, 2011/1962, p. 290). Willinsky, perhaps because of his more contemporary position, is able to talk about the Canadian myths that dwell in the media and how it takes actual manipulation of the media itself, as Trudeau did, to get access to those powerful political myths. Willinsky recognizes that the media is the "seat of power" in the Historical Context discussion but, here, he allows for manipulation and control of that seat through the

myths being produced by it, whereas McLuhan sees reproduction of the media in any power that it wields (McLuhan, 2011/1962).

The idea that the media has incredible political power seems elementary, but McLuhan demonstrates how locked in that power can be, particularly in terms of how mediums reproduce themselves by way of the power that flows through them. Willinsky wants to see this as an opportunity, a point of access to power relations through critical literacy. He is arguing that, if teachers and students are able to find, investigate and play with media and particular mediums, they can access (or at least trouble or better understand) the power that is held there. I think there is a call here to fight against the power that McLuhan articulates.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the interview, John Willinsky invokes numerous thinkers, historical figures, and events. These invocations are made by necessity, serving both as a short hand and as signifiers of cultural capital. Citations of people and events – both historical and contemporary – are accompanied by intended meanings, as well as the unintended. Although meanings appear through various semiotic mechanisms, I am less interested in those mechanisms and more interested in what happens when those citations are related back to the texts they came from. I believe that in placing texts from the thinkers that Willinsky cites next to his words and ideas, both can be more fully developed.

This paper sought to reveal some of the unintended meanings that exist alongside the ideas and contexts that Willinsky was navigating. Critical literacy demands that we bring texts into play – that we open them to the world. In this case, if we are to be critically engaged in this interview as a text, we have a duty to follow Willinsky's citations to their sources. In doing this critical work, we have an opportunity to identify meanings further to those that Willinsky explicitly intended.

NOTES

[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=gaP_NPXSw4g
[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=UDupCWV8lQs
[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=eC2ppJH5iC8
[4] https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=GzF4s6lhnK4

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AUSTEN KOECHER

8. HILARY JANKS

A Critical Annotated Bibliography

INTRODUCTION

Critical literacy is a Freirean project of “reading the world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987; cited in Luke, 2012) through the deconstruction of texts with a focus on power imbalances and social inequities. Hilary Janks, a South African teacher educator and scholar of critical literacy, has been active in the field of critical pedagogy for over two decades. Throughout her work, she asks important questions about the possibilities of critical literacy for student engagement and social change. In the South African context, her work presents a perspective on the use of critical literacy to dismantle discourses of racism, sexism, and xenophobia in the post-apartheid (or neo-apartheid) era. In this critical annotated bibliography, I examine Janks’s work and ask how her writing promotes social justice and equity through critical literacy and whether it can be applied to contexts outside of South Africa.

Maxine Greene argues that “to teach for social justice is to teach for enhanced perception and imaginative explorations, for the recognition of social wrongs, of sufferings, of pestilences wherever and whenever they arise” (cited in Zajda, Majhanovich, & Rust, 2007, p. 12). Critical literacy is considered an essential pedagogical tool for social justice education, along with other critical frameworks such as social action and personal reflection (Hackman, 2005). I posit that Janks’s work on critical literacy, which has proven to be applicable within the South African context, has implications for social justice pedagogy on a broader scale. This examination will offer new possibilities for the use of critical literacy in the development of students’ critical perspectives, and for the use of such perspectives as an impetus for social change, with a focus on the Canadian context.

In this annotated bibliography, I use Wordles[1] to visually explore the themes present in each of Janks’ works. A Wordle is a visual representation[2] of how many times a word is used in a piece of text. The larger the word in the image, the more commonly that word is found. The overall themes of the Wordles will be discussed in the conclusion.

As a note, to facilitate the discussion of these works as they have evolved over time, works by Janks and co-authors are presented in chronological order, not strictly in alphabetical order as is typical in annotated bibliographies that deal with multiple authors.

K. Cooper & S. M. Anwaruddin (Eds.), Student Voice, 105–116.
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Janks, H. (1999). Critical language awareness journals and student identities. *Language Awareness*, *8*(2), 111–122.

Figure 8.1. Image created with Wordle

In this article, Janks uses student journals as evidence of how student identities are constructed and changed as they progress through a graduate-level course in critical language awareness (CLA). Janks writes that CLA is based on the critical sociocultural notion of “all social practices [including language] being embedded in specific sociohistorical contexts” (p. 111). She notes that CLA focuses on the power of language and power over language. Janks found that, through the CLA journals, students built identities in five categories: as learners, practitioners, journal writers, conflicted identities, and threatened identities. Janks explores, with evidence from student journals, how each of these identities is constructed, questioned, and recreated through the learning of CLA and through the journal writing process itself.

This early work of Janks marks the beginning of her use of critical literacy topics for social examination. As compared to some of her later works, which deal more directly with equity for students, Janks uses critical language awareness as a lens for understanding teacher identity. Though this article does not explicitly deal with social justice, Janks interestingly demonstrates how teacher, not just student, identities can be compromised and put into question. Janks returns to her examination of teacher identity through a different lens in her 2002 article, “Critical literacy in South Africa: Possibilities and constraints in 2002,” which deals with teacher identities as constructed by teacher education course syllabi. In this article, rather than being constructed through outside influences, the identities being examined are those constructed through each student teacher’s own journaling activity.

Janks, H. (2000). Domination, access, diversity and design: A synthesis for critical literacy education. *Educational Review*, *52*(2), 175–186.

Figure 8.2. Image created with Wordle

In this article, Janks asserts that critical literacy education is only possible within a framework that recognizes the facets of domination, access, diversity, and design. Janks argues that an understanding of domination is implicit in critical discourse analysis, which "is used to understand how language works to position readers in the interests of power" (p. 176). She states that the question of access involves providing students with access to dominant language structures, without devaluing other languages and literacies.

Janks argues that diversity is important in terms of critical literacy because "The difference between discourses is a productive power" (p. 177). In other words, being involved in a variety of discourses offers subjects agency. Finally, Janks theorizes that design – the ability to use productive power – is integral to critical literacy as it provides the opportunity for readers to deconstruct and reconstruct texts. Though she suggests that some academic conversations attempt to separate these four facets of critical literacy, Janks uses three examples to demonstrate their interrelatedness, including a workshop for language teachers that asked them to critically analyze a series of advertisements. These included the experiences of two graduate students, one dyslexic and one who was learning English, who each felt the other had greater advantage; and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, which argued that "language in its many and varied forms, is the central element in ideology as power" (p. 183) and offered a variety of ways for people to tell their stories. Janks argues that these examples demonstrate the interconnectedness of domination, access, diversity, and design as tools for critical literacy.

This article of Janks explicitly deals with social justice, and asks how it can be furthered in a world of contradictions. Each component of the domination, access, diversity, and design paradigm is explicitly focused on achieving equity for students through critical literacy. Janks argues for a critical reading of each component of domination, access, diversity, and design, as to take any of these at face value and without question would be to undermine their efficacy in promoting social justice. Janks's questions of access is brought up again in her 2014 article, "Globalisation, diversity, and education: A South African perspective," in which she offers bilingual education as a way around the "access paradox" (p. 12).

Janks, H. (2001). Critical language awareness: Curriculum 2005 meets the TRC. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, *19*(3–4), 241–252.

Figure 8.3. Image created with Wordle

In this article, Janks uses the report of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to critique the critical language awareness component of Curriculum 2005, a South African curriculum document. Janks notes that Curriculum 2005 moves away from the historical norm of content-based curriculum to an outcomes-based curriculum that allows learners, formerly denied access to formal education, to quantify their learning outcomes. Janks's critique of the curriculum stems from its use of the term "critical," as in Specific Outcome 2 of the curriculum, which asks learners to "show critical awareness of language use" (p. 242). Janks argues that this use of the term "critical" does not ask learners to grapple with power relations. Through an analysis of the learning goals, Janks determines that "there is no understanding that all texts are positioned and work to position their readers and that an awareness of language can help one to understand the constructed and

constructive nature of all texts" (p. 243). Janks notes that the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission specifically investigated the importance of language as a tool of power that constitutes people and texts in particular ways. Given this positionality of language as productive, she argues, "… we need a more sophisticated understanding of CLA [critical language awareness] in education" (p. 250).

This article is the first in this series of Janks's work to bring a uniquely South African perspective to critical literacy and social justice, focusing on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its relation to South African curriculum. This article demonstrates the use of an equity lens in curriculum analysis and, indeed, demonstrates possibilities for the use of critical literacy pedagogy as a tool for social justice.

Prinsloo, M., & Janks, H. (2002). Critical literacy in South Africa: Possibilities and constraints in 2002. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, *1*(1), 20–38.

Figure 8.4. Image created with Wordle

In this article, Prinsloo and Janks examine curriculum documents used throughout the history of South Africa, with a focus on Curriculum 2005, the 1997 country-wide re-envisioning of South Africa's curriculum. The authors begin by revisiting Prinsloo's earlier study of teacher education syllabi for courses in English, Afrikaans, and isiZulu. The English syllabi emphasized personal development as a strategy for literacy, and constructed the "English literate subject… as worldly" (p. 24). The Afrikaans documents emphasized a scientific approach to literacy, "construct[ed] a sense of Afrikaner identity" (p. 25), and espoused a "defensive [Afrikaans] nationalism] (p. 26). Finally, the isiZulu syllabi construct the Bantu learner as "deficient" (p. 27) by placing them in a position of otherness and subordination to English and Afrikaans learners. The authors argue that Curriculum 2005, the first curriculum introduced in the post-apartheid era, changed the way differences between groups were constructed by "establish[ing] a single curriculum for all South

Africans and…introduc[ing] outcomes-based education" (p. 29). The learners of the new curriculum needed to be "critical" (p. 30), which the authors agreed was defined in the same sense used by critical literacy theorists. However, the desired outcomes expressed in the curriculum did not allow for critical literacy or critical thinking. The authors conclude by recommending three systemic changes: an understanding that pre-service teacher identity is constructed in part by the education they have received, an understanding of the language of instruction as advantaging and disadvantaging some students, and an understanding of some schools as lacking the basic resources needed for teaching and learning.

The changes recommended by Prinsloo and Janks in this article have implications for contexts outside of South Africa, including the Canadian context. Within Canada, there are many dimensions of the educational system that are impacted by language. Based on the authors' first recommendation and Prinsloo's methodology, a critical reading of teacher education syllabi in Canada might reveal a slew of information about how teachers are constructed in various contexts. How, for instance, are French-Canadian and English-Canadian teacher identities constructed in similar or different ways within teacher education? How are teachers of French Immersion, English programs, International or Heritage languages, Aboriginal languages, and other linguistically defined groups constructed within and through teacher education? This work has been done in other contexts, for instance with English-language teachers in international English as a second language contexts (Le Ha & Van Que, 2006; Trent, 2012), but work on Canadian teacher identity construction is lacking. Similarly, Prinsloo and Janks' second recommendation also has implications for the examination of diverse educational contexts such as Canadian urban centres. What languages are privileged in the educational system? What do students' home and community languages have to offer in terms of educational possibilities, and are these possibilities being used to their fullest potential? How are Aboriginal languages treated in the educational context? Each of these questions drawn from Prinsloo and Janks's work demonstrates the implications of their research for equity and social justice work in broader contexts.

Janks, H., & Adegoke, R. (2011). District nine and constructions of the other: Implications for heterogeneous classrooms. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, *10*(2), 39–48.

In this article, Janks uses the experience of one of her teacher education students, an analysis of media representations of African countries, and the film *District Nine* to discuss the "us/them" discourse that acts as a barrier to culturally responsive pedagogy. Janks begins by recounting the experience of Rosaline, one of her students, in being left out of class groupings due to her status as a foreign (Nigerian) African. Janks theorizes about this experience, writing, "the rejection she feels is painful;

Figure 8.5. Image created with Wordle

her ability to learn from the course is threatened" (p. 40). Next, Janks examines a media research project that this same student later undertook, concluding that "the representation of foreign Africa and Africans [in South African newspapers] is 'systematically negative'" (p. 42). Finally, Janks uses the film *District Nine*, which is a fictional documentary about aliens living in Johannesburg, to critique apartheid and post-apartheid conceptions of "us and them" (p. 47). Janks discusses how a description of the aliens in the film "starts with their strange appearance, moves to the assumption of their criminality and finally the [aliens] are constructed as other and dangerous, as a threat that must be expunged" (p. 44). Janks uses these three examples to demonstrate the xenophobia that exists in South African culture, and offers a final question: "What is lost by our refusal to engage with those who are different from us?" (p. 48).

In this article, Janks removes herself from an analysis of critical literacy pedagogy to engage in the process of critical literacy more directly. In her examples, the analyses of South African newspapers and the film *District Nine*, Janks engages with the texts in a critical way to come to conclusions about xenophobia in South Africa. Though she touches briefly on the implications of xenophobia (or what she terms the "us/them" discourse) for culturally responsive pedagogy, this article focuses more strongly on the analysis of texts as an exemplar of critical literacy in practice. This article could be used as a starting point for teacher practitioners' own critical literacy work and analysis of the factors that affect the learning possibilities in their classrooms, or as a model of how critical literacy work can be done in classrooms with students.

Janks, H. (2012). The importance of critical literacy. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, *11*(1), 150–163.

Figure 8.6. Image created with Wordle

In this article, Janks uses two textual examples to demonstrate the ongoing need for critical literacy. First, she analyzes the 2010 World Press photo award-winning portrait of Bibi Aisha, an Afghan woman whose nose was cut off by her husband after she attempted to run away. Janks questions the photograph and its use on the cover of *Time* magazine, asking, "How does the photograph use and reproduce discourses of youth and women's beauty to make its point?" (p. 154). She demonstrates the difference between the photograph's intended purpose as a portrait showing Aisha's beauty, and its use on the cover of *Time* magazine, which Janks argues constructs Aisha "as an iconic victim of the Afghan-other, with the US as the defender against barbarism" (p. 154).

Janks argues that the use of the photograph on the *Time* magazine cover reflects a process of Orientalism, through its use as a mechanism for Westerners to intellectually process (and generalize) Afghan lives. Orientalism, as defined by Said (1978), involves representations of the Orient by the Occident, and the thought process that allows conclusions to be drawn from the distinctions between the two. This magazine cover is both a depiction of an Afghan girl and a means for Time readers to conceive of Afghanistan and its people.

As a second example of the need for critical literacy, Janks refers to an article in *Critical Geography*, which demonstrates how cartographic representations of a fictitious mountain range in West Africa changed over time, as attitudes towards the region developed. Each of these examples, Janks argues, demonstrates that critical literacy, and especially critique, or "the ability to recognise that the interests of texts do not always coincide with the interests of all and that they are open to reconstruction" (p. 159), has ongoing implications and uses.

This text has immediate implications for critical literacy pedagogy and student engagement. Though, in this article, Janks engages in critical literacy herself, through her analysis of these two visual texts, the underlying message is that critical literacy is useful in contexts as common as media analysis and is, thus, an important skill with which students should engage. My initial critique of this article, that Janks engages in critical literacy and espouses its importance without delivering concrete suggestions for how to engage students in the process of critical literacy, was placated though her 2014 article, "Critical literacy's ongoing importance for education," which deals more directly with possibilities for student engagement in critical literacy.

Janks, H. (2014). Critical literacy's ongoing importance for education. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *57*(5), 349–356.

Figure 8.7. Image created with Wordle

In this article, Janks argues that critical literacy is relevant in the context of education because "different times and different places have their own inequities and iniquities that merit critical interrogation and intervention" (p. 349). Janks argues that, in practice, critical literacy education in a classroom setting requires five moves from teachers: to connect students' lives to the larger world context, to understand "what students will need to know and where they can find the information" (p. 350), to determine how the social order is represented in texts, to realize who is advantaged and who is disadvantaged through textual representation and, finally, to posit and

effect positive change. Janks uses the example of a radio advertisement, which calls on South African listeners to conserve water, as an illustration of the process of doing critical literacy in a classroom. Janks uses the five ways educators are called upon in critical literacy work to demonstrate how the topic of water conservation can be read with a critical lens. She concludes by arguing that this "approach to literacy education… is willing to examine relations of power" (p. 355) and access to resources, and allows students to learn to contribute to a more just social world.

Here, Janks explicitly names the themes of equity and social justice, which often run implicitly through her body of work on critical literacy. This move is important because it goes beyond calls for critical literacy as a source of critical thinking and student engagement to a direct call to action for social change. Indeed, for students to acquire critical thinking and reasoning skills is important, but here Janks names the action that is the second step in critical literacy: once the world is read through critical literacy to be unjust, learners have the social obligation to effect change on that injustice.

Janks, H. (2014). Globalisation, diversity, and education: A South African perspective. *The Educational Forum*, *78*(1), 8–25.

Figure 8.8. Image created with Wordle

In this article, Janks argues for an understanding of literacy as a socially situated skillset, rather than the cognitive skills-based approach that she argues the South African curriculum takes. Janks begins by examining the educational terrain in South Africa, arguing that, as a result of globalization in the post-apartheid era, students with less access to capital resources (i.e., mostly Black students) still have poorer education and poorer educational outcomes. Janks argues that South African education is failing in its need to prepare students for the global world. Janks notes

that, due to a history of African-language education being used to exclude Black children from society, many parents are loath to enroll their children in an African-language education, opting for English-language instruction instead. Janks suggests that an investment in English-language instruction poses an "access paradox," meaning, "if you provide more people with access to the dominant variety of the dominant language, you contribute to perpetuating and increasing its dominance. If… you deny students access, you perpetuate their marginalisation in a society that continues to recognise this language as a mark of distinction" (p. 12). Janks states that the access paradox can be avoided through bilingual education which, at once, provides access to the dominant English language without further marginalizing African languages. Janks concludes with an analysis of the 2011 South African Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement (CAPS), which she claims treats "literacy as a single unitary phenomenon that is made up of a set of technical and cognitive skills" (p. 17), rather than "recogniz[ing] that like language varieties, literacies are multiple, varied, and socially situated" (p. 17).

Interestingly, given Janks' comparison of English, Afrikaans, and isiZulu teacher education in her 2002 article, "Critical literacy in South Africa: Possibilities and constraints in 2002," the question is raised why Janks did not return to Afrikaans education as separate from the "African languages" she discusses in this piece, instead choosing to focus on English as the dominant medium of education and African languages as the threatened, marginalized media. Afrikaans's unique position as an African language that has its roots outside of the African continent does not become a factor in her argument.

One possibility for applying this concept of the access paradox to the Canadian context lies in the use of Aboriginal languages in educational contexts. There are some initiatives in Ontario, especially in northern schools on or close to reserves, to officially include Aboriginal languages in the curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Calls that such programs either involve too much Aboriginal language education, or that students should be taught using Aboriginal languages entirely, can be evaluated through the lens of the access paradox. On one end of the spectrum, an English-language education might provide learners access to the dominant (English-language) culture. On the other end of the spectrum, denying learners an Aboriginal-language education further marginalizes the languages and denies the language the service of the learners who might continue to use it. Janks's possibility of a truly bilingual education offers promises conferred by neither unilingual option. As such, the implications of Janks's work once again may expand beyond the South African context and can be applied more broadly.

CONCLUSION

Janks's work offers new perspectives on critical literacy, its use in educational contexts, and its implications for social change. Outside of the South African context, in which Janks bases most of her work, her arguments have salience

that reach far beyond South African borders to learners around the world. Janks's work on critical literacy can also serve as a foundation for social justice work in education in Canada, from providing new pedagogical frameworks to facilitating the critical deconstruction of curriculum and teacher education. Each of these examples demonstrates the value and global relevance of her work.

Throughout the series of articles discussed here, the Wordles demonstrate that the most predominant words Janks uses have remained fairly stable. Over time, the language she uses to discuss critical literacy has not fundamentally changed. Words such as "language," "critical," and "literacy," which were prevalent in Janks's earlier works, are still present in her later works. This is despite Janks's overall shift from using "critical language awareness" to "critical literacy" as her major interpretive project of education. A future project to compile a Wordle of Janks's entire body of work, and to pick out the most prevalent words overall, would be a compelling way to evaluate the major themes from this author's career.

NOTES

[1] http://www.wordle.net

[2] Regretfully, at this point the Wordles can only be presented as a visual aid, and cannot be made accessible by screen-readers and other devices. A future project to provide such access might involve the use of tables of word prevalence or other formats which can be read by screen readers.

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9. AN ANALYSIS OF THE ONTARIO CURRICULUM GRADE 10

The Creation of a Productive and Submissive Populous

INTRODUCTION

The Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum for grade ten students includes a compulsory English course in either the "Academic" or "Applied" stream. Both of these courses include a unit on "Media Studies." While the curriculum does include lessons named "Critical Literacy," critical literacy is presented in such a way that it has little potential to help facilitate the development of students' critical consciousness and projects of critical analysis (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Rather, the Media Studies curriculum works to produce students who have the potential to become productive, uncritical members of a capitalist society, as it helps students obtain the skills necessary for jobs in mass media and advertising. There is little room in the curriculum for students or teachers to problematize the way the media spreads messages that serve those in power or the structures that allow such messages to penetrate the populous. The curriculum does not consider the way the media is a venue for the spread of propaganda, the most powerful tool of control in a democratic society (Olson & Faigley, 1991). This is achieved by focusing the curriculum on conventions, skills and techniques necessary to obtain employment in corporately controlled media and analyses of media that is devoid of meaningful critical literacy.

THE ONTARIO CURRICULUM GRADE 10 ENGLISH GLOSSARY

The Ontario grade ten English curriculum includes a glossary, which defines some terms used in the curriculum document. These terms have been selected and presented below to help structure this curriculum analysis. Glossary definitions that support the conventions, skills and techniques of media studies, and facilitate the production of a workforce prepared to contribute to the capitalist economy, include "media conventions and techniques," "creative thinking," "critical literacy," "critical analysis," "media literacy" and "stereotypes" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, pp. 110–120).

The curriculum glossary defines "media conventions and techniques" as,

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> …the means of producing particular effects using voice, images, and sound to support the messages or themes in a text. Examples include the use of: colour, voice-over narration, animation, simulation, variations in camera angles or distance, fading in and out of sounds or images, hot links and navigation buttons on a website, live action, special effects, variations in volume, variations in speed or pace, motion, flashbacks, collages, dialogue, variations in size and type of lettering or size of images, sequencing of sounds and images, symbols, speech, music, background sounds, sound effects, dialects and accents, silence, narration, graphics, logos, props (e.g., costumes, furnishings), aspects of design and layout, credits, details of sponsorship, animation. (p. 115)

These conventions and techniques form the basis of much of the Media Studies curriculum. Proficiency in these skills seems to be valued far above any critical literacy endeavours.

PRODUCING PRODUCTIVE MEMBERS OF SOCIETY

Skills and Techniques

The curriculum asks students to "evaluate texts." An invitation to evaluate texts might provide students with an opportunity to engage in a critical reading of the media in question. However, the curriculum seems merely concerned with how effectively the intended message is conveyed. It asks students to, "evaluate how effectively information, ideas, issues, and opinions, are communicated in media texts, including increasingly complex texts, and decide whether the texts achieve their intended purpose (e.g., determine whether they get more information about a news story from a TV clip or a newspaper report)" (p. 80). This entails creating efficient media, with messages designed to reproduce the ideals and values of the dominant elite. These messages must be clear and concise so that they can fit within structures conducive to advertising. For instance, a television show like *Desperate Housewives* displays various gendered stereotypes that support patriarchy. The program is presented in short segments so that television commercials can be inserted at regular intervals. Women are represented as domestic and responsible for housework. Any corresponding advertisements featuring women using cleaning products are supported by the television content. The Media Studies curriculum's focus on effective and efficient media suggests students are being primed to be proficient in sending messages through mass media and advertising so that they can get jobs that will help maintain the structures of mass media.

Noam Chomsky reveals the importance of concision in corporate media. He believes he is not invited to be interviewed on television because he "lacks concision" (Olson & Faigley, 1991, p. 15). Not only does concision ensure programming does not interfere with commercial breaks, it also "imposes conformism in a very deep way" as short segments do not allow for the introduction of unfamiliar ideas. Rather, short segments can only accommodate the repetition of conventional platitudes.

Anything unconventional will "sound very strange" because short segments do not allow time for explanation. This is a "propaganda function" because it allows one to repeat conventional platitudes but not to introduce any new ideas that will require explanation (p. 15). This leaves little room for critical thought or creating change.

Students are directly asked to "explain how a variety of production, marketing, and distribution factors influence the media industry (e.g., suggest reasons why a film company is using the marketing strategies revealed on its website to market a specific new release…)" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 81). Through this exploration of marketing, students are asked to recognize how companies use these advertising strategies to their advantage so that students can apply this knowledge in future jobs. Marketing and, thus, profit are positioned as invariably linked to media; in this case, films. The curriculum does not problematize or even ask students to analyze this issue. Rather, students are poised to apply these advertising techniques in future work and thus become productive members of a capitalist society. Similarly, the curriculum asks teachers to teach students to "describe a variety of strategies they used in interpreting and creating media texts, explain which ones they found most helpful, and identify appropriate steps they can take to improve as media interpreters and producers" (p. 82). The corresponding teacher prompt asks, "How did analyzing an effective running-shoe ad help you in creating your own ad for the same product?" (p. 82). Tellingly, while the question could be interpreted in a variety of ways – for instance, students could describe strategies they used to improve the clarity of a documentary narration script – the use of an advertising example in the teacher prompt guides teachers toward maintaining the strength of a capitalist society. Again, advertising appears to be an essential part of media production. It appears as though media is entirely about creating effective content for the purpose of attracting audiences and advertisements.

As Chomsky explains, advertising is what drives the media industry. In the newspaper business, newspaper sales alone do not create enough profit to sustain the business. Advertisers are needed to create profit and sustain the paper. Newspapers that do not use advertising, even those that are highly respected with large audiences, are marginalized or even rendered extinct without advertising (Olson & Faigley, 1991, pp. 266–267). Advertising's "free market" system does not create a neutrality but, rather, gives control to advertisers (p. 267). Advertisers are patrons to media corporations and thus become "'normative reference organizations' whose requirements and demands the media must accommodate if they are to succeed" (p. 268). Advertisers often refuse to support those they consider ideological enemies, such as working-class newspapers. Criticisms of corporate activities are often disciplined or disallowed. Advertisers prefer television to be light entertainment, conducive to consumerism (Olson & Faigley, 1991, p. 269). Unfortunately, achieving an understanding of this system is not a part of the Media Studies curriculum. Further, students are not asked to critically analyze the system or its power structures.

In the following passage from the curriculum the examples are, again, about advertisements. It states,

> …evaluate how effectively information, ideas, issues, and opinions are communicated in both simple and complex media texts and decide whether the texts achieve their intended purpose (e.g., determine which of two competing firms' advertisements for a similar product is more persuasive, and explain why; assess the importance of a catchy jingle or a memorable mascot to the success of a television commercial). Teacher prompt: "Have you ever seen a TV commercial where the sound was more important than the picture for communicating key ideas about a product? Was it effective? Why or why not?" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 80)

Students are asked to determine why advertisements are effective but to what end? There is nothing critical about these questions. Rather, students are asked to uncritically analyze advertisements to determine how they are effective so that they can become successful producers of advertisements. This section on evaluating texts also contains a passage that is used throughout the Media Studies curriculum document. It asks students to evaluate "both simple and complex media texts." This begs the question, what makes a text simple or complex? Who decides what is simple and what is complex? Is this a value judgement? What does it say about people who do not engage with supposedly "complex" texts? However, there is no invitation in the curriculum for students to ask these questions.

For Hilary Janks, everything can be a text. Janks explains, "the word 'reading,' although initially tied to reading verbal texts, has been applied metaphorically to other modes of encoding meaning. So one can 'read' film, clothing, gestures, pictures, photographs, bodies and so on" (Janks, 2010, p. 18). With this expansion of "text" in mind, it seems it is not the text that is simple or complex but, rather, our reading of that text. For instance, a plain white t-shirt from the Gap may seem like quite a simple text. However, one can engage in a rich reading of that text and the power involved. One might consider who owns the Gap, how much wealth they have, how they treat their retail shop employees, where the clothing is made, how well clothing manufactures are treated in Gap factories, who buys such an item, what does it say about their identity, what is her relationship to the owner of the Gap and the manufacturers of the t-shirt, etc.

Creativity

The curriculum glossary defines creative thinking as, "The process of thinking about ideas or situations in inventive and unusual ways in order to understand them better and respond to them in a new and constructive manner. Students think creatively in all subject areas when they imagine, invent, alter, or improve a concept or product" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 110). This definition's focus on the improvement of products frames creativity as a practical tool for bettering corporate media and advertisements for the purpose of financial profit. These values are enforced in the curriculum, but not explicitly. Rather, the curriculum seems to

determine that very few students will become creative innovators who will develop new ideas. Most will be required to utilize conventions that are already accepted by the media industry, as they are already known to carry out the goals of media corporations. Students are, therefore, not asked to use creativity. Instead, they are asked to utilize conventions that will serve the goals of the establishment more efficiently.

The absence of creativity in the curriculum is exemplified when students are asked to "select a media form to suit the topic, purpose, and audience for a media text they plan to create, and explain why it is an appropriate choice (…explain why a series of stamps would be an appropriate way to celebrate people who have made significant contributions to Canada)" (p. 96). The stamp example is certainly a conventional choice, but what makes it more "appropriate" than, for instance, a street art project depicting contributions to Canada? Stamps ensure that the Canadian government is involved in determining who qualifies as a significant contributor to Canada. Any controversial figures or individuals who are, perhaps, critical of the Canadian government can be excluded. Stamps are designed by a small group of individuals, yet are supposed to represent the interests of a vast country. In contrast, street art is a more accessible medium. It is inexpensive and reaches many people. Students could have a role in creating street art dedicated to showcasing who they believe are valuable contributors to Canada. They can express themselves creatively through street art and share their ideas with others. However, the curriculum, as it is designed, does not help students see this kind of creative, "subversive" possibility.

The curriculum asks students to "identify several different conventions and/or techniques appropriate to a media form they plan to use, and explain how these will help them communicate meaning (e.g., brochure conventions/techniques: a list of frequently asked questions [FAQs]; contact details for related resource persons and organizations)" (p. 97). A teacher prompt asks, "What are some conventions used to create suspense in a ghost story told by a campfire? What conventions and techniques might be used to create suspense in a short film version of the same story?" (p. 97). Again, students are asked to use "appropriate" conventions for the purpose of producing efficient media. Efficiency in media is economic, as a short, clear and concise message is less expensive to produce and conveys messages quickly so that there is time for commercials to bookend the content. Creativity is abandoned in favour of economically valuable convention.

Ominously, these two examples of "creativity" in the curriculum come from the "applied" stream. It seems the authors intend to limit or discipline the creativity of "at risk," disruptive students who do not conform to the "academic" expectations of the school institution. In a discussion of the potential of creative writing programs, Chomsky states, "getting people to wrestle with complex ideas and to find ways of expressing them ought to be at the heart of the writing program" (Olson & Faigley, 1991, p. 29). In this discussion he reveals the potentially close and valuable relationship between creativity and critical thinking. The applied stream diminishes the possibility for both creativity and critical thinking. Chomsky explains the goal of

these limitations. Students and professionals who are obedient and do not question get rewarded, while those who refuse to do things they do not agree with are labeled "behaviour problems" and might be otherwise disciplined – for instance, disobedient students are sent to a psychologist, kept back a grade, kicked out of school, etc. (pp. 19–20). In this case, disobedient students are filtered into the "applied" stream of Media Studies where limitations are placed on their creativity and critical thinking. The people who succeed, such as the "academic" stream Media Studies students, are those who uphold the structures of society "or at least are neutral with respect to them" (p. 20). Perhaps, like some in the academic stream, submissive students, might be allowed to exercise some creativity because institutional powers know that this creativity will be carried out within the confines of its glossary definition, for the purpose of "improve[ing] a concept or product" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 110).

THE PRIMACY OF THE OSSLT

The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), also a feature of the grade 10 program, seems to hang over the Media Literacy curriculum. Students are reminded of the supposed importance of traditional literacy skills, necessary for success on the OSSLT, when they are asked to "explain how their skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing help them interpret and produce media texts (e.g., the ability to write up a procedure can help them organize and present information clearly in a public service announcement)" (p. 97). The "at risk," that is at risk of not passing the OSSLT but also generally at risk because of "class, race, ethnicity, gender, community circumstances, language, ability," etc., students who tend to fill applied English classrooms are subtly told that they must conform to the expectations of the OSSLT, not only to graduate but to get a good job (Kearns, 2011, p. 115).

Further, students are asked to "produce media texts for several different purposes and audiences, using appropriate forms, conventions, and techniques (e.g., a brochure for students outlining how to be successful on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test [OSSLT])" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 97). This is also part of the applied stream curriculum. These "at risk" students are, again, reminded of the importance of success on the OSSLT. Those who do not pass the OSSLT are marginalized, as they are considered illiterate and thus incapable of becoming productive members of society. They are not as obedient, submissive, and productive as those who pass the OSSLT (Kearns, 2011, p. 125; Olson & Faigley, 1991, pp. 19–20).

ANALYSIS VERSUS CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Uncritical Analysis

The glossary defines both critical literacy and critical thinking (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, pp. 110–111). In the definition of "critical literacy," noncontroversial

words like “fairness” and “equity” are used instead of, perhaps, power and oppression (pp. 110–111). Likewise, in the definition of “critical thinking,” words like “examining” and “interpreting” are used rather than, perhaps, deconstructing or challenging. In both examples, the former words are acceptable and common in a liberal democracy, whereas the latter words would be considered dangerous as they are more disruptive and urge one to think critically and create change. Chomsky states, “in a more free and more democratic society, it becomes very dangerous if people start thinking because if they start thinking they might start doing, and you don’t have the police to control them” (Olson & Faigley, 1991, p. 24). For Janks, critical analysis is always related to issues of power:

> [Critical thinking] no longer only means reasoned analysis based on an examination of evidence and argument. Here it is used to signal analysis that seeks to uncover the social interests at work, to ascertain what is at stake in textual and social practices. Who benefits? Who is disadvantaged? In short, it signals a focus on power, on the ways in which meanings are ‘mobilized in the defence of domination’. (Janks, 2010, pp. 12–13)

The curriculum’s definition of “media literacy” states it is “an informed and critical understanding of the nature of the media, the techniques used by them, and the impact of these techniques. The ability to understand and use the mass media in an active, critical way” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 115). It also includes a definition of

> …media literacy, five key concepts of. For the purposes of this document, the five key concepts of media literacy are: 1. All media are constructions. 2. The media contain beliefs and value messages. 3. Each person interprets messages differently. 4. The media have special interests (commercial, ideological, political). 5. Each medium has its own language, style, form, techniques, conventions, and aesthetics. (p. 115)

Regardless of any critical potential in these definitions, the Media Studies curriculum rarely attempts to engage students in any critical analysis. For instance, only one of fourteen sections in the academic Media Studies curriculum makes mention of critical literacy (p. 53). The term “critical analysis” is not used at all in either steam’s curriculum. Revealingly, neither of the two streams’ stated “overall expectations” mentions critical thinking skills as an expected result (pp. 80, 95).

The “Critical Literacy” lesson of the academic Media Studies curriculum states that students will,

> …identify the perspectives and/or biases evident in media texts, including increasingly complex texts, and comment on any questions they may raise about beliefs, values, identity, and power (e.g., explain the perspectives evident in the covers of a selection of novels featured in the school’s English program; comment on the point of view evident in a television news story,

> identifying other possible points of view; analyse the text and images in a major department store's website to identify groups and occupations that are represented and those that are nowhere evident). (pp. 80–81)

The teacher prompt asks, "Based on the book's cover, who do you think is its target audience? What elements make you think that?" "What does this bumper sticker tell us about the car's owner?" (p. 81). Following a reading of Janks, the word that stands out most in this section is "power." However, while power is mentioned, it is not followed with any valuable support to aid students in engaging in determining how power functions or even what it means. For instance, what are the implications of power in the examples mentioned? If a television news station relies on advertisements to gain profit and features commercials for sugary cereal, what will happen if the station airs programs containing views that are critical of sugary cereal? What does it mean if the station does not challenge sugary cereal? This is the first and last time power is mentioned in the academic Media Studies curriculum and it does little to help students critically analyze "power."

"What does this bumper sticker tell us about the car's owner" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 81)? This question seems to prompt answers regarding the individual car owner. It probably will not bring up issues of "beliefs, values, identity, and power" (p. 80). A politically charged bumper sticker might do more but, still, will only go as far toward issues of power as the teacher allows it to go. A teacher who is not well versed in critical literacy might not help students get into issues of power, even with a bumper sticker that easily facilitates this task. The teacher may deliberately select a bumper sticker that does not bring out controversial issues easily out of fear of discussing these issues. The curriculum should ensure that these discussions arise and that teachers are prepared to facilitate potentially difficult discussions.

For Chomsky, "ninety-nine percent of good teaching is getting people interested in the task or problem and providing them with a rich enough environment in which they can begin to pursue what they find interesting in a constructive way" (Olson & Faigley, 1991, p. 29). It requires teachers to be "interested in it [themselves], being interested in the people [they] are teaching, and learning from the experience [themselves]. In that kind of environment, something good happens" (p. 29). This means that teachers must be prepared to grow, change and learn from the experience rather than avoid potentially difficult discussions.

"Analyze the text and images in a major department store's website to identify groups and occupations that are represented and those that are nowhere evident" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 81). This is probably the most valuable prompt toward engaging in critical literacy. However, it should do more to help students take a strong stance against potentially marginalizing texts. The example could explicitly ask about the kinds of people who are excluded, based on categories of oppression such as, race, ability, gender, sexuality, etc. These issues might come out in discussions based on this question as it is written in the curriculum, but it asks

the students to take the risk of bringing up these potentially uncomfortable issues. The teachers do not have to take risks if they do not want to do so. As in the previous bumper sticker example, the teacher can avoid difficult, challenging discussions. Regardless of discussions that may or may not ensue or the choices teachers make, this curriculum does not provide adequate support for teachers in the event that tensions arise in the classroom.

The curriculum asks students to "produce media texts for a variety of purposes and audiences, using appropriate forms, conventions, and techniques (e.g…a commercial promoting the contributions of Aboriginal people)" (p. 81). Implied in this assignment is an assumption that any acknowledgement of Aboriginal contributions is good. However, a critical reading of such commercials interrogates these assumptions. Critical literacy would approach this task differently and might ask, "Who are you? Why would you be making a commercial promoting the contributions of Aboriginal people?" Who has the right to do this? Would you be speaking for a group that you do not really have the right to speak for, and can they speak for themselves? What makes something a contribution? Who was the recipient of these contributions, Canada? If you create media like this, what will it mean? Who will it serve? What about Aboriginal activists who are critical of what the Canadian government has done to Aboriginal communities? Do their contributions get included?

Students are expected to "explain how media texts, including increasingly complex texts, are created to suit particular purposes and audiences" (p. 80). A teacher prompt asks, "Why might early-evening TV news broadcasts feature more local news than late-evening TV news broadcasts?" (p. 80). This seems to prompt students to recognize programming produced for gendered audiences and gendered time slots. For instance, the local news features more heavily earlier because women are supposedly domestic, home earlier in the day and prefer local news, which relates more closely to the domestic sphere. Men return home from work later and supposedly prefer the more serious, worldly, late evening news broadcast. However, the curriculum does not ask students to engage in a critical analysis of such gendered programming. Without critical analysis, students and teachers may actually reproduce normative gender discourses. For instance, students might respond by stating that men are naturally smarter and more involved in the broader society while women are naturally domestic and more concerned with local issues like community events and local weather. Without guidance, students may never uncover the way gendered programming allows networks to sell particular products to a gendered audience (Meehan, 2001, p. 317). The maintenance of gender norms in programming, for instance, allows a local news feature on mothers in the community, who organized a successful school bake sale, to maintain the notion that women should work in the home and spend spare time doing work that does not significantly leave the domestic sphere.

Meehan (2001) address these issues in her work. She states, "television is structured to discriminate against anyone outside the commodity audience of white, 18- to 34-year-old, heterosexual, English-speaking, upscale men" (p. 320).

Maintaining this kind of ideology ultimately upholds a capitalist system "which profit[s] from disparities in income and oppressive social relations" (p. 320).

Stereotypes

The glossary defines "stereotype" as, "an image of a particular type of person or thing that has become fixed through being widely held. Stereotypes are usually conventional, formulaic, and oversimplified" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 118). While the definition does make a small attempt to problematize stereotypes, it seems to suggest that stereotypes are problematic merely because they are too simple. It does not mention the power involved in the use of stereotypes or the marginalization that can occur from their use. A teacher prompt asks students, "Why might it be difficult to design a text that strongly appeals to teenagers but is also of interest to their parents?" (p. 96). This task might result in students turning to stereotypes in an attempt to capture the essence of a group that is, in fact, too large to identify so simply. What would happen if the question asked students to design an advertisement that appeals to a Chinese audience? Would students look to Chinese stereotypes? Without a clear presentation of the marginalizing effects of stereotypes in the curriculum, students may reproduce the problematic stereotypes they learn from TV and movies.

Students are expected to:

> …describe several different strategies they used in interpreting and creating media texts, explain which ones they found most helpful, and identify several specific steps they can take to improve as media interpreters and producers (e.g., explain how the ability to identify various kinds of stereotypes in ads – of families, teenagers, Aboriginal people, religious groups – helped them to create their own ads without stereotypes). (p. 97)

Here, the curriculum assumes it has been successful in teaching students to create media free from stereotypes. However, thus far, the curriculum has not only failed to adequately problematize stereotypes, it also provided opportunities for students to reproduce stereotypes. How can students be expected to produce "their own ads without stereotypes" based on what they have been taught? Further, students have been taught to apply the conventions and techniques already accepted by corporate media. The curriculum does not acknowledge the fact that stereotypes are used freely in advertisements because they convey messages quickly, efficiently and thus economically (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996, p. 241). Why would the Media Studies curriculum, which aims to prepare students for employment in the media industry, have students completely abandon stereotypes when they are an integral part of media business? If students obtain employment in the media industry, they may be expected to use stereotypes because they lead to profit. The curriculum should help students do a critical reading of stereotypes and power so that they can move toward making positive change rather than become part of the system.

Positioning Students

The critical literacy section of the applied stream Media Studies curriculum states, "identify the perspectives and/or biases evident in both simple and complex media texts and comment on any questions they may raise about beliefs, values, identity, and power (e.g., identify beliefs or values revealed in examples of graffiti…identify examples in media texts of Aboriginal images that have become stereotyped)" (p. 96). The teacher prompt asks, "What social or economic perspectives are rarely represented in graffiti?" (p. 96). While the academic stream's corresponding lesson used the example of novels read in school, the applied curriculum uses examples about graffiti. It seems the curriculum is using stereotypes to determine who the students are in each stream. The use of graffiti, a component of Hip Hop culture, suggests the Ministry of Education racializes the applied students and believes they have little interest in reading traditional, written texts (Williams, 2009, p. 1). This positions applied students as racialized, and assumes they will not be as successful as academic students. They are pushed into fulfilling roles in society that do not require traditional literacy skills.

TWO CRITICAL LITERACY PROJECTS

Rather than create a new lesson or project for infusing the curriculum with critical literacies, I will reflect upon two critical literacy projects, which I found valuable during my time at OISE.

Radio Program

I produced a radio program for the course, Education and Media/Popular Culture. This assignment asks students to create a radio program dedicated to creating a platform for voices or issues that are under-represented, misrepresented, or not addressed at all in mainstream media. One of the primary goals of the assignment is to subvert mainstream media by sharing the voices of marginalized people in society. Students are given the opportunity to problematize the messages of mainstream media as well as create positive change by using their privilege and access to radio to challenge mainstream media through producing material that allows the radio audience to engage critically.

My partner and I chose to interview individuals who have been in conflict with the law, all of whom have been incarcerated. It was a life-changing experience from start to finish. We had the privilege of listening to some incredible stories that challenge popular assumptions about people who have been in conflict with the law. However, we also learned much from the process, as a whole. For instance, we learned that many people who have been in conflict with the law are eager to share their stories, as they often feel that they, as individuals and as a group, have been misrepresented and stereotyped, largely due to media portrayals. One interviewee had given an

interview to the media in the past and felt the message he was trying to convey was twisted and used to support those in power. Some wished to dispel notions about the prevalence of drug use among people who have been in conflict with the law, while others wanted to be clear that they accepted responsibility for their actions, are creating positive change in their lives and do not expect help from society. We also learned that, despite the desire to take part in interviews, marginalization of this population could make it challenging for some of these individuals to keep interview appointments. One individual had to cancel at the last minute to deal with housing challenges. Another had trouble keeping appointments because, as a convicted criminal, he has trouble securing legal employment and had to deal with a conflict with an employer over an under-the-table payment for his labour.

During interviews, many of our assumptions about this population were dispelled. For instance, I had assumed many of these individuals would not have positive, supportive relationships in their lives. However, many interviewees described the incredible, resilient, loving relationships that they have maintained despite challenges. One interviewee described a relationship he shares with the mother of a friend who died. During his twenty-eight years of incarceration in the United States, he called her regularly. They supported each other and helped each other deal with the loss. When he returned to Canada, she invited him to live with her until he was ready to secure his own home. He is one of the few individuals we interviewed who has secured regular employment since his release. He credits his ability to create the life he wants for himself to his relationship with his friend's mother. All interviewees, having experienced the prison system, offered thoughtful critique of the system and its marginalizing effects. I did not expect to meet such intelligent, critically aware individuals. I also assumed that interviewees would have so much trouble dealing with troubles in their own lives that they would not have the physical or emotional energy to help others. However, most interviewees were adamant that one of their main aims in participating in the interviews was to reach and help others in similar situations. One interviewee, despite his own trouble with addiction, owns a small business where he employs others with addiction problems because he knows how difficult it can be to find employment as an addict with a criminal record.

Contrary to the limited "creative thinking" potential of the grade 10 English Media Studies curriculum, the radio editing process allowed us to exercise our creativity. We had to determine which segments to include and how to arrange them in a way that we believed honoured the interviewees, an extremely difficult task, as we had hours of interesting audio to condense into a ten-minute radio program. We had to decide which segments would convey the messages of the interviewees best, while respecting their voices. We had to select music to complement and honour the tone of the interviews. We, as first time editors, had to balance the creative and technical aspects of editing so that our end result was polished and professional enough to attract audiences so that we could expose these underrepresented voices to the public. We thus developed our technical skills, not for the capital gain of mainstream media, but to engage in critical literacy.

The course instructor designed the radio program as a way of allowing students to do critical media literacy. The medium of radio was selected because, while in privileged North American culture, radio can seem like a dying medium, it is actually one of the most popular and most accessible mediums in the world. It is inexpensive for both producers and listeners. It is accessible to those who cannot read or write and even those who cannot see (McLeish, 1999, pp. 1–4). The course instructor posts student radio programs online, selects some programs for air on CIUT 89.5 Toronto and arranges for programs to air on a Bulgarian radio station. I hope, as do our interviewees, that our program will create positive change in the world, even if just by helping the public see people who have been in conflict with the law in ways that challenge normative discourses.

Paulo Freire and Youth Cultural Action

During another course, I had the opportunity to do a group presentation on Youth, Cultural Action and Healing. We engaged the class in a series of activities that blend Freirean critical pedagogy and youth cultural action (Freire, 1998, p. 489). Many of these activities involved creativity and the arts. They allowed the group to tap into creative and emotional forms of communication that are not usually welcomed in institutional curriculum. These activities included Columbian hypnosis, an "ice breaker" activity that prepares the group to use their bodies in unfamiliar ways and challenges traditional forms of literacy. We engaged in a group "cypher session," inspired by the spontaneous and creative Hip Hop cypher, during which we determined Freirean generative themes upon which to base other activities (Williams, 2009, p. 9). We used our generative themes as inspiration for a Theatre of the Oppressed activity, image theatre, in which we used our bodies to create sculptures that depict oppression and help each other transform our sculptures into more hopeful images (Maritz & Coetzee, 2012, p. 137). Next, we discussed other possibilities for ways to use Theatre of the Oppressed with young people. We considered the potential of a student written, directed and preformed play and spoken word projects. Moving on from Theatre of the Oppressed, we considered the powerful messages present in Hip Hop lyrics and, together, we analyze some examples. Finally, we take what we learned from the workshop and considered what action we would take next. We depicted our answers creatively, through visual art, in a group graffiti mural.

One of our aims was to expose the group to the vast potential of Hip Hop as a form of youth cultural action. Often, academics and educators seem reluctant to allow students to bring Hip Hop culture into the classroom. Hip Hop is seen as violent and misogynistic. However, the negative side of Hip Hop is a product of corporate mass media. Despite its co-option into corporate power structures, Hip Hop's origins are steeped in critical consciousness and the uplifting of oppressed, racialized young people (Williams, 2009, pp. 1–2, 5; Williams, 2008, pp. 71, 73–74). It can be reclaimed by youth as a medium for the communication of critical thought and utilized as part of the fight for emancipation. This presentation was meaningful

for me because engaging with it gives me hope for my work and my ability to inspire others to engage in cultural action.

What these projects have in common is that they allowed me to engage in critical readings of the world and respond to the oppression I detect in creative ways. The Grade 10 Media Studies curriculum does not find ways to do this. I will remember these projects as some of the highlights of my time at OISE. They were the times when I felt most empowered and able to create change in the world. They motivate me to continue to seek ways of making positive change. I can envision possibilities for using strategies like these with my students in the future.

CONCLUSION

The grade ten Media Studies curriculum is designed to teach technical skills that are needed to contribute to the economy and distract the worker from critical thinking, which does not produce anything for the economy and may lead to resistance. Conventions are given preference over creativity for the purpose of economy. This can include reproducing negative representations of already marginalized groups. Stereotypes are used to position students who do not conform to the demands of the education system. The curriculum avoids any clear messages about the links between media and power. Teachers can bring out issues of media and power but are not required to introduce these critical ideas. The curriculum provides little support for teachers who might want to take such risks.

The values of The Ontario Grade 10 English Media Studies Curriculum are those of a capitalist democracy. The curriculum aims to create a productive workforce that will contribute to the economy in ways that benefit those in power and keeps them in power. It is designed to give the illusion of engaging students in critical literacy but actually provides little opportunity for students to consider issues of power and critique the oppressive system in which they exist.

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SAMANTHA M. LESKA

10. REIMAGINING CURRICULUM

Engaging Students in Critical Literacy

INTRODUCTION

When I think about critical literacy, I always think back to a definition of critical literacy that Linda Christensen gave in her article, *Critical literacy: Teaching reading, writing, and outrage* (1999). In the article, she writes, "Critical literacy does explore the social and historical framework. It moves beyond a description of society and into an interrogation of it," (p. 56). For me, critical literacy is always about interrogating, deconstructing, and examining texts, so that we can uncover the power within the texts. In order to do critical literacy well, we must always question the status quo, and not accept anything at face value. It is only once we've gained an awareness of this power that we can begin to make changes. Hilary Janks speaks about the importance of change and social action when she defines critical literacy. Janks writes, "Critical literacy education focuses specifically on the role of language as a social practice and examines the role played by text and discourse in maintaining or transforming these orders. The understanding and awareness that practices can be transformed opens up possibilities, however small, for social action" (Janks, 2014, p. 349). Without the knowledge or awareness of the power that texts have over our discourses, we have no ability or opportunity to change or transform our society.

For me, the goal of education is to enable students to take action by teaching them how to be critical of the world around them. Unfortunately, it does not seem like many educational systems share this same goal. In an age of standardization, the institution of education is more focused on testing student "skills" than on encouraging students to think about and transform their worlds. Cooper and White write about this shift in educational focus that comes with standardization. They write, "We have moved from the dream of developing creative and enthusiastic problem-solvers to creating an army of compliant and obedient workers. Schools, thus, have begun to (re)focus on basic skills and knowledge and on accountability through standardized tests" (White & Cooper, 2015, p. 38). This standardization comes at a time when we need students to question more than ever. With the

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globalization of our world, and the advancement in technologies, students are being inundated with texts that they must sift through to determine whether those texts can be trusted. If we do not teach students to pick apart texts and decide what they are being told and sold, then we should expect to be living in the same world generations from now. It is up to today's students and their teachers to take action and change the power dynamics in society so that our world can hopefully grow more equitable one day at a time.

Now that I have established what I see as the importance of critical literacy, I would like to turn and look at some newly designed curriculum that recently came out of the New Haven Public School District, where I used to teach in New Haven, Connecticut. After years of poorly designed curriculum, the NHPS district decided to fund the rewriting and redesign of their high school English curriculum. While I see major improvements in the curriculum, and even opportunities for students to do some critical literacy, I think the curriculum still struggles to require students to challenge the power relations within society, and fails to ask students to take any action based on their critical exploration of texts.

In the next portion of this paper, I wish to look at and critique one unit and performance task in this new curriculum, and suggest ways that it can be altered using critical literacy. I will build on some of the foundational ideas and questions in the curriculum and create two lessons and a performance task that engages students in a process of critical literacy. Through this process, I hope that I can inspire other teachers to re-imagine how they could tweak their own curriculum documents so they will be able to engage their students in critical literacy, and hopefully inspire students to create social change and transform their worlds.

CURRICULUM CRITIQUE: EXPLORING THE "AMERICAN EXPERIENCE"

Paulo Freire says, "Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world,"(Freire, 1987, p. 8). In this now infamous line, Freire captures the essence of critical literacy. In order to read the word on the page you have to read the world—meaning you have to understand the context of the world in order to understand the dynamics and power of the words on the page. In turn, when you read the word you gain a greater awareness of how the world is being represented and, therefore, you are also reading or discovering something about the world you did not know before.

In order to engage students in critical literacy, we have to have them read the world and the word. This means we must immerse students in a process of deconstructing power relations in the texts they examine in and outside of class. By doing this, students will be able to develop a stronger sense of consciousness, and with this consciousness they will no longer be able to take the world at face value. Students will be able to challenge, and not just accept, the status quo.

Subject / Grade	ELA 11-12
Unit Title	The American Experience
Suggested Pacing	8 Weeks

Unit Questions

Essential Questions	Possible Supporting Questions
• What is America? • What is the American Dream? • What do Americans value?	• Is there a shared American experience? • Who defines the American Dream? • Can the American Dream be redefined? • Who defines what Americans value? • What binds us together as Americans?

Enduring Understandings

Students will understand that:

- That American identity is dynamic
- That America is in an ongoing conversation with the past
- That young Americans have a place, and can have a voice, in that conversation
- That there is a tension between group and individual needs pattern of American culture has focused alternately on the primacy of the group and the primacy of the individual needs

Background for the Teacher

Rationale

Whereas the units in the 9-10 ELA curriculum band focus on the self and his/her perception of the world, the 11-12 units invite students to explore the nature of their relationship to the world as members of society whose choices and behavior have a real impact on their world. Thus, the curriculum encourages students to move from considering who they are to considering who they are as individuals with responsibilities as well as rights. What does it mean to be an individual in society? What are the individual's responsibilities to the world as well as his/her rights? How does one engage the world critically? What happens when one does? Further, how does being a critical thinker help the individual as a citizen with rights and responsibilities to become an engaged member of a dynamic society, one that is in an ongoing conversation with the past and continuously reflecting on and debating its values? How does the individual come to see him or herself as a stakeholder in the shaping of this world?

This unit will ask students to consider foundational American documents and speeches alongside foundational works of literature by authors from a range of ethnic backgrounds as they explore what it means to be American. Both the historical documents and the literary works are essential components of this unit.

Figure 10.1. American experience unit

Above is an excerpt of the American Experience Unit from the new NHPS curriculum (New Haven Public Schools, 2014). This unit is to be used in 11th and 12th grade English classrooms across the New Haven Public School district. At the beginning of this unit, the designers engage teachers in a series of questions that they can use in their classrooms to help students explore the American experience. While some of these questions lend themselves well to deconstructing power relations, I find that, overall, the background information and questions that are provided to teachers fall short of requiring students to deconstruct power relations.

For example, one of the essential questions is: "What is the American Dream?" (New Haven Public Schools, 2014). This question alone assumes that all the people living in America have the same dream. It asks students to discover and explore what everyone is striving for. It does not take into consideration that America is a country of people from places all over the world that hold many different values. It assumes that all Americans have similar values, dreams, and identities. Once a student has

defined the "American Dream" according to recommended texts, their questioning stops.

In the "Possible Supporting Questions" section, the question, "Who defines the American Dream?" (New Haven Public Schools, 2014) is a question that begins to invite students to examine a text for the underlying power relations. For example, if students read Thomas Jefferson's "Declaration of Independence" and discover that this one white man is defining what it means to be an American for the rest of its citizens, then they can begin to pick apart the power in that. For example, while Thomas Jefferson was a founding father and is regarded as a great man, he was also a slave owner. He relied on the free work of slaves to keep up his famous Monticello plantation. In one correspondence with a friend who was suffering financially, he even advised that he "should have invested in negroes" (Wiencek, 2012, p. 3). When students begin to discover this darker side of Jefferson, they can begin to read more meaning into the "Declaration of Independence." Students may begin to understand that this declaration of independence meant independence and freedom for white, land-owning men. As they develop greater knowledge of the people (such as Jefferson) who helped shape the culture of the United States, they can start to understand how and why that group of people (white, land-owning men) is still most privileged today.

While some of these questions begin to invite students to engage in conversations that reveal the power dynamics of these "foundational" American texts, the curriculum guide does not specify that students look at the context of the documents or explore the power in who wrote the documents, why they were writing them, or who they were representing or excluding in their work. For example, in the background, the curriculum says, "Thus, the curriculum encourages students to move from considering who they are to considering who they are as individuals with responsibilities as well as rights" (New Haven Public Schools, 2014). This statement suggests that students consider themselves, and their roles and responsibilities. However, they are never in any of the essential questions or other background information asked to examine how these "foundational" texts position them as individuals and determine what their rights and responsibilities look like. After all, literacy is contextual, and you can only understand the importance and meaning of a text if you understand its context. As Lankshear and Knobel (2003) say, "Literacies are bound up with social, institutional and cultural relationships, and can only be understood when they are situated within their social, cultural, and historical contexts" (p. 8), situating a text is of crucial importance in critical literacy. If students do not know who is writing the text, where the ideas are coming from, who the text is directed at, or who it does and does not represent, then students will never understand their position in relation to the text and society. They will never understand how the word also constructs their worlds. If we, as teachers, do not invite students in understanding the context, or the "world" of these texts, how can we expect them to critically deconstruct the "word" on the page and not take what is being said at face value? (Freire, 1987). How can students become "engaged

member(s) of a dynamic society" if they have not explored how society constructs them as individuals?

When talking about critical literacy, Linda Christensen says, "…students must use the tools of critical literacy to dismantle the half-truths, inaccuracies and lies that strangle their conceptions about themselves and others. They must use the tools of critical literacy to expose, to talk back to, to remedy any act of injustice or intolerance that they witness" (Christensen, 1999, p. 55). In this unit, while students are asked to explore the American Dream and American values, and become critical thinkers by exploring what these dreams and values are, the curriculum falls short of asking them to "dismantle the half-truths." Students are not being directly asked to challenge or talk back to these foundational texts. The curriculum asks students to critically analyze the meaning of these texts without asking them to expose the injustice or intolerance that is inherent within the texts. If students begin to understand that these foundational texts privilege one type of person and one point of view, they could start to understand the current inequities in their lives, and where the mindsets that produce these inequities come from. Students would have the opportunity to challenge because they have an awareness of the power these texts carry. They would be reading the world and the word and back again.

CURRICULUM CRITIQUE: ARGUING WITH A LENS

In many classrooms, my former classroom included, countless numbers of the assessments that we give as teachers are inauthentic. As an English teacher, I had students write papers or have discussions about a theme, a question, a piece of literature, or a combination of all three. While these assessments may have assessed the students' abilities to organize their writing, or clearly argue a perspective, the assessment was never engaging or transformative. In education, students always need to be assessed and their skills need to be assigned a number and a ranking and, as a result, many teachers (including myself) design activities and papers and tests that we believe will best assess these skills. However, many teachers also realize that these assessments leave something to be desired. Most of the time, these assessments do not engage students because they have nothing to do with students' lives, their identities, or what they care about. The students who always excel on these normative assessments continue to excel, and the ones who are always disconnected from this work continue to be disconnected and they perform poorly as a result.

Gerald Campano perfectly describes this tension that teachers face when he discusses the first and second classroom in his book *Immigrant Students and Literacy: Reading, Writing, and Remembering* (2007). In it he writes:

> I realized that I had been teaching in two classrooms: a *first* mandated classroom and a *second* classroom that occurs during the margins and in between periods of the school day. In the first classroom are the time and energy spent on mandated tasks of which teachers are becoming all too

> familiar – basil instruction, testing, test preparation, and codified teaching strategies that focus on the transmission of discrete skills. The second classroom runs parallel to, and is sometimes in the shadow of, the official, first classroom. It is an alternative pedagogical space. It develops organically by following the students' leads, interests, desires, forms of cultural expression, and especially stories. (pp. 39–40)

The first mandated classroom that Campano discusses is the one that most teachers experience. It is the pressure of the mandated classroom and curriculum documents that lead teachers to create assessments that are disconnected from students' lives. While teaching students discrete skills is an important part of teaching, it is not the only part of teaching. There is also a second space or a second classroom where teachers engage students in the learning process by allowing them to freely explore information, their passions, and themselves so as to become engaged in a process of learning. In his book, Campano discusses that students inevitably learn the most in this second classroom because the second classroom is the most relevant to their lives.

In critical literacy, it is important to have students participate in work that has some relevance to their lives but, as Janks suggests, it is also important for students to make change with the new information they've unpacked. Janks says, "It [critical literacy] takes us beyond deconstructing or problematizing the world by inviting students to intervene in ways that makes a positive difference. Education has a responsibility to develop students' sense of agency" (Janks, 2014, p. 254). As educators, we need to imagine ways to teach students skills, but we also need to teach them how to deconstruct power in texts, and develop a sense of agency so they can take action once they have been confronted with these inequities and power imbalances.

When I went back and looked at the "performance task" option for this 11th and 12th grade English unit, I looked to see if it would be relevant to students' lives, and I looked to see if it called upon the students to take action or to transform their worlds. Below is an excerpt of this performance task from the NHPS curriculum and, while it may ask students to engage in deconstructing some texts, it fails to connect this information back to students' lives and it fails to call students to action (New Haven Public Schools, 2014).

First, it asks students to argue with a lens, which is described as a nonfiction text that will help them better "engage with the question and the literary text in a sophisticated and meaningful way" (New Haven Public Schools, 2014). In the example that is provided in the task description, using a lens seems to ask students to deconstruct the literary text using a text that will better inform the reader of the story's context. As an example, the curriculum says you could look at historical documents or texts that would reveal the stereotypes given to African Americans so students could determine whether *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was a racist text or a text that attempted to speak back to those racial stereotypes of the time. In this way, the nonfiction text that is being used as a lens gives students another way

Grade	11-12		
Type of Task	☒ Argument ☐ Explanatory/informational ☐ Narrative	☐ Literary analysis ☐ Rhetorical analysis ☒ Comparative analysis ☐ Research	☐ Speaking & listening ☒ Processed writing ☐ Timed writing
Performance Task Title	Arguing With a Lens (Argumentative Writing)		
Suggested Timing	1 week		
Task Overview			

Task Description

In this task, students will draw on a nonfiction text to articulate competing interpretations of a literary work before writing an argumentative essay supporting of one of these interpretations over the other. Students will have studied both the nonfiction text and the literary work together in class, and they will have multiple class periods to plan, draft, and revise their work.

This essay should be focused on an interpretive question that lies at the heart of the literature studied in the unit, and the nonfiction text(s) should help students engage with the question and the literary text in a sophisticated and meaningful way. For example, there is ongoing debate as to whether The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is a racist book that should be banned from schools. In order to more meaningfully engage with this question, students might read about common historical stereotypes of African Americans. Doing so could help them identify a range of possible interpretations. Reading through this lens, they might argue that the novel is racist because it conforms to the historical racial stereotypes they studied. Reading against this interpretation, they might argue that the novel is not racist because Jim exists as a fully developed character that transcends historical racial stereotypes. After having identified each of these competing interpretations, students would choose to support one or the other in their essay.

Demonstrated Learning

In this task, students will demonstrate their ability to trace the development of ideas and terms in a nonfiction text. This might mean tracing the development of an argument, if the nonfiction text is making one, or it might mean tracing the development of ideas and terms, such as the stereotypes mentioned earlier. They will also demonstrate their ability to synthesize and apply their knowledge by using their research to argue about a work of literature.

Students will also demonstrate their ability to organize and frame a sophisticated argument of their own. This task assesses their ability to make use of common structures that often shape arguments about literature. By pushing them to incorporate a nonfiction text, this task also assesses students' ability to make knowledgeable and sophisticated arguments of their own and support their claims with valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Figure 10.2. Performance task

to look at the character Jim, and the way he is portrayed as an African American in the novel. Students are asked to consider how Twain uses language to depict Jim, and why it is that Jim is depicted in this manner.

While this task, and the example they give in the task begins to engage students in the work of critical literacy by asking them to use context to better understand the depiction of a marginalized character, the task stops there. The curriculum asks students to engage in critical literacy because it helps assess "comparative analysis, argument writing, and processed writing" (New Haven Public Schools, 2014). In the section about demonstrated learning, it only references skill-based learning such as "tracing the development of an argument, framing an argument of their own, and make knowledgeable and sophisticated claims arguments of their own and support their claims with valid reasoning and relevant and sophisticated evidence" (New Haven Public Schools, 2014). While skills such as making an argument of their own using valid reasoning are important skills when doing critical literacy, learning and

doing critical literacy is about so much more than making an argument. Even though there are discussions of stereotypes, which can be highly relatable to a high school audience, present in the task, the curriculum does not ask students to engage with stereotypes on a personal level. They are certainly not going to take action to push back against stereotypes if the only way they engage in a discussion of power and stereotypes is in a book that was set in the late 1800s.

In order for this curriculum to improve, it has to better represent the students it seeks to engage. It has to get them thinking about themselves. When professor Valerie Kinloch talks about critical literacy, she brings up the importance of talking about representation in stories or texts. She says, "I think about issues of representation: How do people get represented in these stories? How do people make sense of who they are in relation to other people? Whose voices are heard and whose voices are not heard?" (Cooper & White, 2014, VT 2:50). For Kinloch, when people or students engage in critical literacy they do not stop after they analyze how people get represented in stories. This performance task asks students to stop once they see how Jim is represented in the text (New Haven Public Schools, 2014). They can write all day about how Jim is appears to be stereotyped and how the book is therefore racist, or they could write all day about how Jim appears to be stereotyped, but is actually a strong character and therefore the text is not racist; but at the end of it all, students will still walk away asking: so what? What does that help students understand about how they are represented in texts or by other people? How does that help them challenge the stereotypes such as the notion their voices do not matter because they are young? In order for this curriculum to be strengthened, it needs to take these ideas that are present in the texts students read, connect them to students' lives, and teach students how to speak up against the negative ways people are being portrayed in the world.

REIMAGINING THE CURRICULUM: LESSONS AND ASSESSMENT

In this next section, I will reimagine or redesign some of the curriculum I have introduced earlier in this paper. By doing this, I am participating in what Hilary Janks refers to as the "redesign cycle," which is pictured below. Janks writes, "In this cycle, deconstruction (that is, critique) sits between design and redesign" (Janks, 2012, p. 153). Now that I have deconstructed and critiqued this newly designed curriculum, I wish to redesign or reimagine what this curriculum could look like if it challenged students to more directly question and deconstruct the power dynamics within texts, connected the content and ideas back to students' lives and, finally, required students to take action based on their new knowledge.

In order to do this, I will design two lessons and a final assessment that will engage students in the themes and ideas of the curriculum, but will take a critical literacy approach to what already exits. It is my hope in doing this that other teachers can look at existing curriculum they've been given that does not call for critical literacy, but tweak the ideas in the curriculum so that students can spend more time engaging with material in a critical way that also connects learning to their lives.

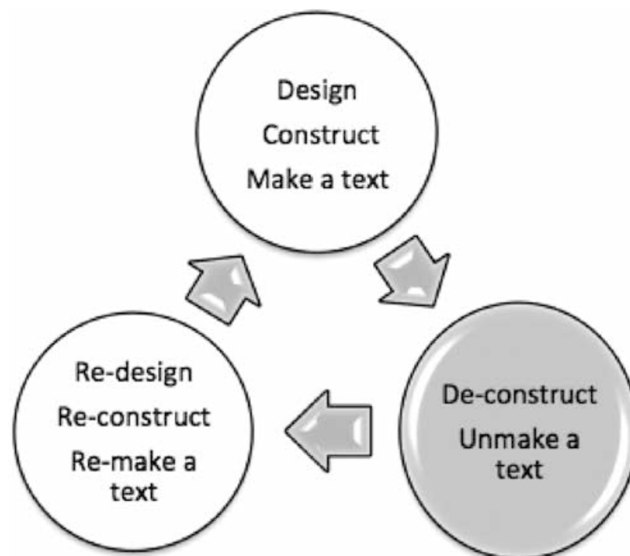

Figure 10.3. The redesign cycle

REIMAGINED UNIT: THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

I will use the book, *Warriors Don't Cry*, by Melba Pattillo Beals (2007) as the main literary text that students will engage with in these lessons and final assessment. In addition to this book, I will use Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" as the framing text for the unit.

Essential Questions

- Who defines what it means to be an American?
- Do all people experience being American in the same way? Do we have the same dreams, values, and experiences?

Enduring Understandings

- Although we may consider people living in America to be equal, some people enjoy more rights and privileges than others as a result of our laws and the country's history of oppression.
- Not all Americans share the same lived experience, and we must acknowledge the differences in order to create a more equitable society.
- Literature helps us better understand ourselves, our societies, and other people by immersing us in narratives about others' lived experiences.

Analysis

In the original unit, I found both the questions and understandings to be very open-ended and vague. I think in order to engage both teachers and students in critical literacy, there needs to be more direct references to power and experience in the questions and understandings that frame a unit. In order to frame the unit, I tweaked a question that I thought was already strong, "Who defines what it means to be American?" This directly asks students to examine who has the power to define a cultural experience. When they read the novel and the framing text, they can begin to see who has historically had the advantage of defining, and how these definitions benefitted some Americans over others.

In my second question, instead of asking students what values or dreams all Americans have, I ask students if all Americans have the same experiences. I question whether these values and dreams are the same. I believe this question asks students to examine power relations in American society. It does not assume that all people are the same, but rather it asks students to pick apart individual experiences of people and characters. It gives students an opportunity to see how different people experience being an American, and therefore requires them to examine how or why these experiences are different or the same. While some of the other, more vague questions ("What is the American Dream? What do Americans value?") could get students thinking in this way, it does not require it. My hope is that, by more explicitly calling on students to look at the differences in the American experience, they will begin to better understand the power that shapes these experiences.

I took a very similar approach to the understandings as well. While I could have engaged students in the understanding that "America is in an ongoing conversation with the past," I thought that was a vague understanding. I think the past is important because it helps us better understand the inequities that still exist in our society. So, I thought I would create an understanding that helped students see this connection more directly. That led me to create this understanding, "Although we may consider people living in America to be equal, some people enjoy more rights and privileges than others as a result of our laws and the country's history of oppression." When I was creating the other two understandings, I tried to do the same thing. I wanted students to better understand that not all experiences are the same, and that the experiences of others can help teach them more about themselves and their world. In critical literacy, it is important that students see the connection to their own lives. Therefore, it is important that there are understandings that make the content relevant to their lives.

Lesson 1: Who are you?

Standard: RI.11-12.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Understanding

- People do not always see us as we see ourselves, and others are constantly positioning us, especially those who hold more power than we do.
- In order to have a strong analysis, it is important to cite textual evidence that supports your analysis and inferences.

Homework: Read Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" for today's class.

Activity 1

- Create an identity chart. Students will be given a piece of paper with two different coloured pens/markers. In the middle of the chart, they will write their name. With one color they will write down all the words or descriptors they would use to describe themselves. With the other color they will write down all the words or descriptors that other people have used to describe them, or that they feel people think about them. Students can write down memories or incidents that led them to write down words they think others would use to describe them.
- Debrief in small groups by discussing the following questions: Did the words you used match the words others used? Why or why not? How did the words others used make you feel? Are they accurate in your opinion? *Be careful when selecting groups for this debrief. Letting students choose their own groups may be best since they are being asked to share sensitive and personal information. Do not force a student to share if it makes them too uncomfortable.

Activity 2

- Introduce the idea that texts communicate ideas directly and indirectly about our world. In order to make a strong claim about a text or in order to critique a text, we must look at what is being said, who is saying it, and why they are saying it.
- First, have students skim through "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" that they read the previous night for homework. Students should look for words and phrases that best represent how King views himself and other African Americans and highlight those with the same color they used to represent themselves on their identity chart. Next, skim through the text and look for words and phrases that best represent how King believes other Americans see him and other African Americans with the same color they used to represent other people on their identity chart.
- In small groups, have students create an identity chart for Dr. King. Have students write down words that King believes best describes himself or other African Americans and have them use evidence from the text (a line, phrase or sentence)

that best supports their use of that word or descriptor. Then, using the other color, have students write down words or descriptors that best represent how King thinks other Americans view himself or other African Americans and have them use evidence from the text (a line, phrase or sentence) that best supports their use of that word or descriptor. Have each group cite at least two words or descriptors for each category. Have the small groups discuss the discrepancies between the descriptors and words they used. What does this tell you about the power dynamics of the time?

- Have each small group go around and share our 1–2 descriptors for each category as well as some of the discussion the small groups had.

Homework: (For tonight) On the class blog, write a post that responds to this question: Using evidence from the class activity in addition to any relevant evidence from your life or current news events: Do you think all Americans are treated equally in the United States? Who decides how we treat one another in the United States? Who benefits from this treatment?

Analysis

This lesson would ideally kick off the new unit. This lesson not only engages students in the skill work that is necessary for this unit, but it also begins to teach students about the concept of positioning in the world. It helps students better understand how power gets enacted by looking at their own lives, and the lives of Martin Luther King Jr. and other African Americans during the Civil Rights era. The first step in doing critical literacy is to begin to look at how power is constructed in our world. This lesson that starts the unit asks students to look at power, and would begin to engage students in a process of unpacking the power within texts ("Letter from a Birmingham Jail") and within their own lives.

The work of critical literacy is not only about deconstructing power, but it is about making students see the connection between the power that exists in texts and their lives. Janks notes that the first thing teachers must do when doing critical literacy is, "Make connections between something that is going on in the world and their students' lives," (Janks, 2014, p. 350). In this case, I would begin the unit asking students to see the connection between their life experiences and the experiences of King and other African Americans during the Civil Rights Era. From the start of the unit, students will see the relevance of what they are learning, and they will begin to develop a new mindset where they see texts not as neutral, but as embedded with power.

Lesson 2: The Experience of Integration

Standard: W.11-12. 4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Understanding

- Americans can experience the same event very differently based on how society positions them.
- In order to best represent an idea or opinion you have, you have to take into consideration to whom you are speaking, and what you wish to achieve when you are speaking with them.

Activity 2

- Select multiple passages from chapters 10–13 that express both how Melba and the other 8 of the Little Rock Nine experience the integration of Central High, and how the other white students/teachers/community members experience the integration of Central High.
- Have students work in small groups together to examine different excerpts, and have them think about the following questions: How do all these people act/react/fail to act to what is going on? How is the white community treated through all this? How is the African American community treated?
- After small groups mark up their texts and discuss these questions with one another, come together as a large group and share some of the small discussions.

Activity 2

- Give a mini-lesson on writing for a specific audience.
- Give students examples of writing that was written for different purposes: blogs, newspapers, journal entries, persuasive writing, news videos, etc.
- After examining the writing for different purposes, introduce the students' next task, which will be to inform their fellow students about their character's experience of integration using a recorded video.
- First, have students get together in their small groups for a few minutes and consider what they might need to take into consideration when they write out a short script to use for their video. Come together as a whole class, and create a list of things students should consider when writing and recording for their fellow classmates. Students should consider the length of their writing/recording, use of excerpts from the text, tone in the writing/recording, the knowledge their classmates have of the story already, etc.
- Then, give students time to write/draft the script for their video. For homework, students will take their script and use it to create a short video explaining their character's experience of integration. Each student can then upload their video to the class blog when they are finished. Students can also hand in the script they used in class the following day. Now all students in the class will have an archive of information about how their classmates see the experiences of different

characters. This can also serve as a great source of information for students' final papers and project.

Analysis

This next lesson would ideally take place toward the middle of the unit since this reading would also occur within the middle of the unit. I began this lesson thinking of ways to engage students in work that was similar to work they would do for their final performance task, so I asked them to examine the different experiences of characters in the book *Warriors Don't Cry* (2007). While each student is only focusing on the experience of one character or one section of the novel, their work together as a class will begin to reveal how differently people experience integration.

Once students finish their video recording, the entire class can watch the different presentations of each character and begin to compare experiences across the book. Once this comparison begins in class the next day, students will have the opportunity to explore the power behind these differences. For example, students might ask why the white students treated Melba and the other eight students so poorly. Or they might ask why some teachers ignored the harassment the Little Rock Nine students received. Or they might examine the reaction or seemingly little reaction the Little Rock Nine students had to the abuse they received in school. They would begin to explore why they had to react in this manner. Or they might explore why some white people stood up for the nine students, and what the implication of those actions might have been. In this lesson students will be able to compare the experiences of different characters to begin to see how different people are advantaged and disadvantaged throughout the process of integration. Students can begin to question why people are treated so differently within this educational system.

Also, do not be afraid to allow students to make connections to their own lives. If you have already been asking students to relate the novel to their own lives, they may organically begin to discuss the inequalities they experience in classrooms today. Make sure to allow students space to discuss these connections if they come up in discussion. By engaging in these questions and comparisons, students will be examining the power relations within this time period (and hopefully their lives too) and, therefore, they will be engaging in critical literacy. This lesson will also set students up well for examining the power relations that unfold within their own lives that they will begin to examine in their final task.

Performance Task: Arguing with a Lens Reimagined

Standards

RI.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

W.11-12.1 Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that logically sequences the claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

W.11-12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

L.11-12.3 Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Understandings

- Although we may consider people living in America to be equal, some people enjoy more rights and privileges than others as a result of our laws and the country's history of oppression.
- Not all Americans share the same lived experience, and we must acknowledge the differences in order to create a more equitable society.
- Literature helps us better understand ourselves, our societies, and other people by immersing us in narratives about others' lived experiences.

The Task

Write a persuasive essay exploring the question: Do all people experience being American in the same way? Do we share the same dreams, values and experiences? Using Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" as a framing text, and *Warriors Don't Cry* by Melba Pattillo Beals (2007) as the literary text.

Once these arguments have been written, the class should use their essays to collectively inform their experiences of being American. Together, the class will use their arguments and their own personal experiences of living in America to create a video exploring what it really looks like/feels like to be an American/living in America. Each student will be required to write his/her own short narrative that reflects their own experience living in America, as well as connections they can or cannot draw to Melba's or King's experiences that they have read about. Students will be responsible for recording their individual segments and, then, students will work together as a class to organize each video segment to create one larger piece. This one longer piece can then be displayed to the entire school, on youtube.com, or any other platform that students see fit. This will give students an opportunity to share their work with a real audience so that their analysis and experiences can hopefully help inform others about a more authentic American experience.

Analysis

This performance task section of the unit was by far the most difficult one to alter. As I mentioned earlier, Janks says the first step a teacher needs to take when engaging students in critical literacy is to make what students are learning relevant to their lives. However, this final task requires students to use a framing text to write about a literary work. The framing text must also be a "foundational American text" according to the curriculum. This leaves very little room for students to connect material to their own lives. Instead of having students stop at making an argument, I decided I would have them take the argument they make and relate it to their lives by creating a multimedia project that the entire class could participate in.

In this way, I am asking students to engage in critical literacy in two steps. First, I ask them to engage in deconstructing power relations by looking at King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" and Beals' *Warriors Don't Cry* to answer, "Do all people experience being American in the same way? Do we share the same dreams, values and experiences?" which requires students to address the power dynamics that unfold during the Civil Rights Movement and school integration, as represented in these two texts. Once students have analyzed the power dynamics and experiences within those texts, they will have the chance to relate those experiences to their own lives. This means they can begin to talk about their American experience, and how they relate their experience of living in this country to that of the characters within the novel.

Students could choose to discuss how their experience today is still very similar to some of the Little Rock Nine students. Or other students might discuss how they relate to the experiences of the privileged white people in the story, and could choose to discuss how they have or have not seen this dynamic change. Other students may discuss the sometimes oppressive experience of being a young adult in a school system that treats them like children. Or a female student can connect her own experience of being a young woman to the experience of the young women in the novel. The more time teachers spend allowing students to make connections between their lives and the book, throughout the unit, the stronger the connections that students make will be. It is important throughout the unit that students are given the opportunity to see connections to their own lives that even the teacher may not think of or understand at first. The second part of this task is quite open-ended and it leaves students with a lot of room to talk about power and their own lives in ways they think best represent their experience, while still engaging in a comparative analysis, as the curriculum task requires.

There is nothing in the curriculum mandating teachers to stop the task once students have completed an essay. Students will understand the comparative process in a deeper way once they have compared their own experiences to those of characters in the novel. As Pahl and Rowsell write, "Identity is potentially one of the most important ingredients of teaching and learning" (Pahl & Rowsell, 2012, p. 114). If identity is the most important ingredient in learning, then it is extremely important

that we provide students with opportunities to connect what they are learning to their own lives. Learning will inevitably sink in more deeply and stick with students for longer if they have related to it personally on some level. We cannot expect students to be motivated to change their worlds based on what we help teach them if they do not first understand how this information is relevant and meaningful in their lives. Hopefully, when students become more connected to their own identities (through their own narrative experiences), they will be more open and understanding of the nuances and fragility of others' identities (through the whole class narratives) and, therefore, begin to change how they interact with people who may seem so different from them.

While I may have added on to the task, there is a greater chance students will remember the arguments they made in this essay because they were also able to connect their argument to their own lived experiences and use their narratives to hopefully create a more inclusive idea of being an American.

CONCLUSION

After examining the New Haven Public Schools high school English curriculum, it seems to me that there are no explicit opportunities for teachers to engage students in the practice of critical literacy. While there are definitely questions and text suggestions within the curriculum that give teachers the space to engage students in critical literacy, that does not mean students will ever be exposed to critical literacy. I have demonstrated through this chapter how teachers could reimagine a given curriculum document so that it directly immerses students in critical literacy, but not all teachers are familiar with critical literacy. Even if teachers are familiar with critical literacy, it does not mean they will take the time to redesign a curriculum so that it reflects those principles, because redesigning the curriculum while still making sure it aligns with the original curriculum takes a great deal of time – time which many teachers do not have. If we do not make an effort to teach teachers about critical literacy and the importance of critical literacy, then there is no way for it to come alive in classrooms.

Unfortunately, I believe that the failure to teach students according to the principles of critical literacy will result in future generations of students who remain unquestioning of our larger society. The current injustices and inequities that exist will continue to exist because we have not taught people how to be critical of their world. In regards to equity and equality, Cooper and White write, "It has been contended that, if we were to act equitably by giving to those what they need in order to thrive, eventually all people would become equal" (White & Cooper, 2013, p. 43). Conclusions, like those of Cooper and White will never be understood if we do not provide people with a critical education. Many people do not understand that being equitable leads to equality. People think equality is all we need. It is not until we begin to teach students to unpack the power within texts that they will begin to

see that equality is not all it is cracked up to be. Critical literacy is a tool we can use to engage people in a process of questioning and deconstructing society.

It is my hope that, in writing this paper, I have shown other teachers that it is possible to teach students critical literacy even when it is not called for in the curriculum. There are ways of pushing back against the larger educational structures that fail to make changes to the curriculum that could propel students to become critical about their world. As a teacher, I know how inventive and imaginative my fellow teachers can be, and I have confidence that there will always be teachers and educators who are looking to redesign curriculum, their teaching, and their classrooms to better their students. Professor Jim Cummins writes, “Imagination is probably the greatest threat to established social orders, which is perhaps one of the major reasons why its use is rarely encouraged on the part of either teachers or students” (Cummins, 2005, p. 142). In order to change education, you must have an imagination that threatens the status quo. Even though this imagination may be discouraged, I see its presence all the time. There will always be educators who will imagine the scope of education differently, and it is this imagination that I believe will be the impetus for change within our classrooms, our students and hopefully, within our world as well.

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ROBERT E. WHITE

EPILOGUE

Revisiting Student Voice: Is Democracy Enough?

INTRODUCTION

When I was first introduced to the idea of a companion book to *Democracy and Its Discontents,* my first reaction was, "Of course, that makes perfect sense." While that volume traces the interaction between literacy and democracy, it represents particular perspectives drawn from our own experience and the experiences of renowned scholars and their engagement with critical literacy. Upon completing this earlier volume, we are left with some important viewpoints as to how those people, represented in that book, have come to view democracy in relation to critical literacy.

What is missing? Personally, I have always wondered about people's reactions to what they read. This new volume, *Student Voice,* accomplishes that. For the first time, students who have absorbed information from this book now have an opportunity to respond. At first, when the idea was proposed, I thought that getting superior student work to be presented in published form might be a tall order. However, much to my delight and surprise, and I am sure that the co-editors were also pleased, this task was very fruitful. These emerging scholars, who have agreed to have their words grace the pages of this volume have offered up some of their deepest and most personal thoughts, experiences and observations. In so doing, they have also contributed to our store of knowledge.

Knowledge. What is it, really? Knowledge is slippery, like a fish. It takes on many guises, some legitimate and others – not so much. For example, data, information and numerous assortments of facts and factoids frequently promenade as knowledge but knowledge has an interactive dimension to it that should never be ignored. Knowledge requires generating, and the generation of knowledge is a social activity. What I mean by this is that knowledge cannot arrive in a vacuum. It comes from elsewhere – from our interactions with others, our reading and manipulation of ideas, our reflections upon what we have learned and the intersections and patterns that we create and recognize as "new." This does not mean to imply that all knowledge is new knowledge for much of what we have already learned and valued as knowledge has been absorbed into our schema – our own personal way of looking at the world – our own personal paradigm, if you will.

In the pages that follow, I attempt to reflect upon the words of the students in connecting their thoughts to a larger backdrop – that of the world as a text. In order

K. Cooper & S. M. Anwaruddin (Eds.), Student Voice, 153–167.
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to read the word and to read the world, as Paulo Freire so aptly put it, one must experience and interact with both. Helene Cixous corroborates this view with the Derridian notion that there is nothing outside the text. If this is so, then it makes sense that the text of the world is the ultimate text, to be studied, pored over and, hopefully, understood. So, to begin, I offer my own reflections on this elegant volume, *Student Voice.*

IDENTITY WORK

Literacy has often been seen as a binary. Either one is literate, or not. However, such sharp divisions add little to our understanding of what it means to be literate in the 21st Century. Literacy has often been assumed by those who are literate to be a state of normalcy rather than a state of privilege. However, even privilege, or the lack thereof, is not a binary. There are subtleties involved. Anna Ignagni, in the first chapter, posits that literacy is not just one thing but is made up of a number of different abilities, understandings and experiences. Her view is that literacy is not a binary but exists along a continuum. Thus, literacy is relative. In today's society and, truthfully, in days gone by, literacy has been established and defined in increasingly complex ways. For example, literacy in 1950 looks very different than literacy in 2015. Perhaps this is testament to the fact that society is becoming ever more complex.

So, down with the binary and up with the continuum. However the definition of literacy is formulated, no matter how complex the definition becomes, there remain some constants. For example, it is the larger society that tends to define literacy, perhaps as a way to exclude those who are less literate than their more privileged societal counterparts. And, because literacy is no longer just one thing, the ability to read a text, but includes numeracy, oracy and technical expertise in today's world, there is a range of what can be considered "literate behaviour." The "definers" have established informal "norms" that position all members of society somewhere along that continuum between literacy and illiteracy. Those who fall outside of these norms, in fact below the least accepted level of literacy, are considered to be illiterate.

However, as previously noted, literacy is multi-variant. People may not be particularly fluent in their reading, or their writing, but are far along that continuum in other ways, particularly in terms of math or music or some of the other "intelligences" identified by Howard Gardner. These multiple intelligences represent, for me, the various faces of literacy that we frequently ignore, take for granted or devalue.

Even though Anna Ignagni's grandmother was considered by her society, and by those generations who came after her, to be illiterate, she showed through her work and through her astuteness that illiteracy is ephemeral. Let me offer an example from literature. In W. Somerset Maugham's beautiful short story called "The Verger," the caretaker of St. Peter's Church, Neville Square, was let go from his job of many years because he was "illiterate." The Verger, despondent and in desperate need of a smoke, noted that, along the way home, there were no tobacconists' shops. With his

meagre savings, the Verger purchased a tobacco store in order to make ends meet. He became very successful, as he was an astute businessman. In a few years, he had a number of stores and, one day, the manager of the bank asked how he had managed to become so successful. It was then that the Verger admitted that he could neither read nor write. The bank manager wondered what he could have become, had he been literate. The Verger replied that the answer to that question was very easy. He would have been the Verger at St. Peter's Church, Neville Square.

This story illustrates the irony attendant in many instances of so-called illiteracy. At issue is the fact that, for many of us, illiteracy is equated with "sub-standard" intellect. This could not be farther from the truth. Illiteracy needs to become equated with lack of access rather than lack of will or ability. Anna Ignagni points to this in her chapter, as her grandmother prevails in spite of not being able to read or write. This theme is reprised by her father, as he struggles to support his family with less than adequate literacy skills. This man shows us, through his daughter's words, that he is bright, articulate and resourceful, as was his mother before him. Of course, Anna's father wanted more for his daughters and, with a modicum of hilarity, introduces what he thinks to be a regime of good literacy practices within his own home. This points to the social, historical, economic and political factors that affect literacy and, hence, identity within our own cultural boundaries. As such, much of our work in understanding how to become more literate is rooted in who we are and the access we have to powerful literacy practices.

The fact that some of us do not have the same access as others illustrates a lack of equality in our society – a lack of equality that is systemic in society – that emanates from a lack of equity, the wisdom of providing people with what it is that they need in order to become as successful as those who take literacy for granted.

Critical literacy is closely connected to matters of existentialism. After all, what is the purpose of life? Is it to garner as much gold as one is able, is it to strive, to climb, to compete successfully against all odds, or could it be to attempt to leave this world in a little bit better shape than when we found it? How do we know? How can we tell? Who can we trust? In this world, where answers to such questions are anything but forthcoming, one may either lead a life of quiet desperation or embark on the "inward journey" of self-exploration, no matter what the cost. How does one go about discovering who they really are?

Perhaps it is less a matter of discovering who one really is than discovering who "those others" are. After all, T. S. Eliot's famous line from *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,* where Prufrock prepares "to meet the faces that you meet" resonated with entire generations, which presumably had some form of the same issue at heart. Is critical literacy of assistance in these circumstances? TL McMinn thinks so and, in her chapter on "practice identities," she employs technology to set up identities that may or may not be rejected by those with whom she endeavours to relate to. This technology acts as a barrier and as protection as she develops different personae in order to understand the limits that others bear with respect to sexual identity. At issue here is the idea of acceptance. This is an issue of social justice that extends far

beyond the limits of tolerance and indifference. Acceptance is, in some way, shape or form, celebration – a celebration of the "one" and of the "other." It is in this way that the tenets of existentialism and critical literacy coincide and intertwine.

This form of criticality is less about understanding and interrogating a text than it is about understanding and interrogating the text of the world – the text of life. In her own innovative way, TL McMinn has set up her research parameters. Perhaps her Research Question might be something like, "How much can I really be me in an otherwise hostile environment?" through conducting her research online, she comes to the conclusion that critical literacy is very much a part of identity work and vice versa. Identity work is at the heart of literacy and criticality.

PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES

John Willinsky is one of Canada's foremost educators. In his interview that was videotaped for inclusion in *Democracy and Its Discontents,* Professor Willinsky cites a number of philosophers to develop his ideas. Jeremy Powell employs a forensic lens and returns to the original works of many philosophers that Professor Willinsky cites. The list is long and includes such luminaries as John Willinsky, himself; Karl Marx; The Frankfurt School; Paulo Freire; Michel Foucault; Allan Luke; Northrop Frye; and Marshall McLuhan, not necessarily in that order.

First of all, John Willinsky is a Canadian-born academic who is now teaching at Stanford University's Graduate School of Education. He remains fiercely Canadian and offers much in the way of contextualizing the Canadian identity. He speaks to our legacy by drawing upon the work of international scholars as well as some of our own academics to describe critical literacy and its importance to schooling.

Canada can be viewed as a pro-socialist country. As such, the connection from the society to the schools is also of a more socialist bent. The idea that Marxism is a valid construct for explaining our culture may come as a surprise to some. However, Marx was taking about the inherent inequality of the accumulation of capital in the hands of some, while others have only their labour to sell. Even though Canada is a developed capitalist nation, there are undercurrents of social responsibility and social action that cannot be denied.

The Frankfurt School can also be credited with developing Canadian sensibilities. It was this group of (mostly) German ex-patriots, who developed the notion of critical thinking. They were quick to identify the ills of society, in general, but did not proceed with solutions to the inequities that they identified. Indeed, this would be a daunting task for any group. Solutions become the province of educators, and those who saw critical pedagogy as a way forward were quick to embrace it. This critical pedagogy is an umbrella term that includes critical literacy.

One such educator was Paulo Freire who, in his native Brazil, attempted to educate migrant farm workers by mobilizing them to address issues of inequity that were of immediate importance to them. Needless to say, Freire's work has influenced

educators around the globe. Educators find that they must adopt and adapt Freire's work to their own circumstances as any kind of educational reform must take into consideration the context within which the reform is being applied.

Michel Foucault's work in the identification and development of norms and the social construction of so many things in our society that we take for granted has enormous significance for the nature of education. In fact, the recognition of learning as being a social activity has changed the way that we tend to perform school. I remember, as a youngster in elementary school, helping another student with a math equation. (I wonder, now, how he ever got through school with me helping him in math.) We were both accused of cheating. While I can't recall the punishment for such cheating, I do remember wondering how helping out another human being could be considered so wrong. Nowadays, group activities, problem solving and work sessions all seem to require interaction from any number of students. This is a positive sign, as we now see the value in collaboration, at least in some areas of education.

It is this idea that Allan Luke takes up. He recognizes that education can be very hegemonic in nature. This brings us to the need for more anti-hegemonic strategies, such as critical literacy to help us question, hold those more powerful to account and to recognize the awesome responsibility that corporate, political and social organizations must shoulder in order to ensure a safe, just and equitable society. While the individual cannot do this alone, there is, as Allan Luke attests, a great number of very dedicated educators who are now doing critical literacy work, not only in Australia, but throughout the world.

One Canadian educator who deserves far more credit than he garners is Northrop Frye. Not only has his work in the field of literary criticism led to a re-envisioning of the way in which we view literature, specifically the work of William Blake, Northrop Frye was also a leading critical philosopher who noted that critique needs to have a framework that is located within a work of art rather than existing outside of that work. As such, by locating the framework of critique outside of the work being critiqued, this allows for an attitude of criticism rather than criticism itself. His notion of "intertextuality" has deep implications for the study of critical literacy in education. Frye believed that every liberal arts education should have, as a matter of course, a study of literary criticism in order to develop powers of observation and critique.

Another famed Canadian intellectual is Marshall McLuhan who developed the idea that the medium within which a message occurs has deep significance for the message itself. For instance, I have often witnessed miscommunication by people who assume that what they say via e-mail, for example, will be interpreted as intended. What is not realized is the fact that email, like any written word, does not have the benefit of contextualization, as perhaps a telephone conversation or a meeting in person may have.

These ideas, developed through exploring citations reveals innumerable ways that new understandings provide for educational practitioners and their practices.

HOME AND ABROAD

Whenever one speaks of social justice and equity, one cannot help but imply that the processes by which these twin concepts are achieved are, by their very nature, democratic. Social justice and equity cannot be legislated into existence, even though attempts have been made to do exactly that. This is nowhere more evident than in South Africa, where democracy was legislated into existence and apartheid was legislated out of existence. Of course the results were less than satisfactory. The journey that Hilary Janks has embarked upon and which has occupied her for decades bears testament to that.

Austen Koecher reprises Professor Janks's work through an annotated bibliography and uses a series of "Wordles" to visually highlight key words throughout the examination of this body of work. The research question concerns the ability of this work to promote social justice outside of the South African context. This is a deceptively simple point. On the surface, one might think, "Of course, why wouldn't it?" However, this is not as straightforward as it appears. Let me explain.

There is an old joke about psychiatrists and light bulbs that runs something like this, "How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb?" The answer is predictable but problematic. It is: "Only one psychiatrist is needed to change a light bulb, but the light bulb must want to change." This is exactly the way it is with relocating practices of social justice and equity from one context or culture to another.

While no one would argue that that our current system of democracy is superior to that found in South Africa at the moment, we share some major similarities. First of all, South Africa has been striving towards the ideal of true democratic representation for many years. Many parts of the country are clamouring for further democratic liberties. So are we. Although, our present North American context can be seen as a panacea of liberty and social justice, pockets of injustice remain, for the most part as functions of systemic and systematic discrimination. While our own system of representation is not as repressive as the current system in South Africa, it does serve to remind us of comments by Henry Giroux that no system of governance is ever democratic enough.

Here is an example. When one looks at demographics relating to unemployment, imprisonment or poverty, it is striking that the most commonly underemployed, impoverished and imprisoned people are people from ethnic backgrounds who are victimized by unequal access to the privileges that the rest of us enjoy and take for granted. Democracy works much better for those who are represented within the dominant culture.

Another point that this writer makes is that we can resent inequities and inequalities all we want but, unless we do something concrete about it, these injustices will continue. It continues to be fascinating and concerning that it always seems to be the children who are hurt the most. Unfortunately, so many of these injustices continue and, as the children grow, they grow up in situations that are detrimental to them,

their livelihoods and their families. As their children grow, the cycle repeats itself and injustice becomes an accepted way of life, since it has been experienced and shared by generations of people who continue to be marginalized by an otherwise indifferent society.

At the heart of all of this there are power differentials that are enshrined within the society by people who have much more privilege and who cannot see, or refuse to see, that others are being hurt by that which they refuse to share. Again, the old saying that, together, we are stronger, seems to apply only to those who see themselves as the same or similar. Thus, this simply does not apply to people whose skin is a different colour. This lack of shared power results in the systematic disempowerment of a group of people who quite simply wish to live in the same way that other members of the society, for whom democracy is more than a word, live.

A huge difference between South Africa And North America is the fact that the Black culture in South Africa represents the majority of people while, in North America, they remain a visible minority. This has huge implications for the relocation of democratic thinking from South Africa to North America. One may naturally think that it would be easy to develop workable solutions much more easily in North America because of the smaller numbers of marginalized people from all walks of life. However, the "economy of scale" works better for those in their country of origin because there are so many people who are marginalized by a dominant minority. This often leads to revolt and, in South Africa, it did. The result has been a lifting of some barriers to democratic thought and practice, but this has been only just enough and just in time to prevent more blood from being spilled.

North America has a very different ethos. Democracy may be on everyone's lips but it is not necessarily in everyone's hearts. Because we live in such a consumer driven society, those who do not have the credit, the cash or the will to spend, spend, spend – to buy in order to maintain a "vibrant economy" in order to be seen as good citizens – are ignored, excluded and, eventually marginalized. Essentially, they become marginalized by virtue of their inability to compete rather than being categorically marginalized as a result of skin colour.

What is needed in both regions is the will to embrace change. Our schools can begin to address this by recognizing, addressing and developing strategies to reduce exclusive practices. This is much easier in North America because all children are expected to attend school. This is more difficult in South Africa where the educational system is largely governed by private schools, where tuition is often an impediment to anything but the most rudimentary of educations. In both places, the various systems of governance must recognize the severity of the issue, the dangerousness of the situation and the undesirable implications for the future if this is not redressed. Like the light bulb, the systems of governance are going to have to want to change.

On the other side of the world, riding the crest of the globalization movement, English Language Training has become a worldwide phenomenon. However, like any reform, large-scale reform in particular, English Language Training is not without its challenges. Zhen Qui discusses, from personal experience some of the

issues that have appeared and also offers advice to teachers of English in Chinese schools. However, encouraging critical literacy in their classes may seem to some teachers as being an impossibility, given current teaching and learning conditions. However, such obstacles, as we see in that chapter, are not insurmountable.

English Language Teaching in China has often assumed the proportions of French Teaching in Canada in the past century. When I was learning French (unsuccessfully, even though I was born in Quebec), my teachers had a specific way of teaching. It was not conversational French that we learned. In fact, being taught in the way that was common in that day and age ensured that writing in French was also problematic. This was because students were expected to complete rote-learning activities. We know now that this way of teaching is not effective as it is really only a surface application. The information never seems to get below the surface of our brains because it is not manipulated, questioned, examined or developed. It is simply memorized and practice is in short supply.

One of the legacies that the Confucian and Buddhist traditions have granted the Chinese culture is the point that one should obey one's elders. This edict is as ancient as the core of Confucianism itself. Because older siblings, or parents, or grandparents have walked the face of the earth longer than the younger generation(s), it was believed, and for the most part rightly so, that the older generation's lived experiences provide them with wisdom. This wisdom was highly valued in an age when schooling, and the knowledge that was borne of schooling, was not so commonplace. As the wisdom of the elders became entrenched in that society, obedience to that wisdom and, hence, to the original owners of that wisdom became paramount. As time progressed and schooling became a major feature of most industrializing societies, a new order of educated people was created. However, some of the old ways, such as the obedience to the elders, continued to exist concurrently with the newer innovations within that society.

Although, at its inception, Confucianism was considered to be an ethical, social and political ideal, it later back-grounded the notion of humanism in favour of a stronger alignment with obedience to not only the gods but to the family and social harmony. This very notion stands in stark contrast to the practice of critical literacy, where students are encouraged to ask difficult questions, to question power and authority and to address issues of inequity and inequality. As such, the idea of critical literacy in China is at once encouraging and daunting due to these very ironies.

There is also the problem of timing, which brings into focus the idea of why one should learn English at all, let alone become critically literate in any language. While English is being taught in many schools across China, it is not universally supported. Even though the English language has emerged as the dominant language for medicine, science and technology, not to mention commerce, not everyone sees its importance. For example, many Chinese parents do not want their children to learn English. They want their children to learn the language of China's current trading partners – Cambodian, Thai and Vietnamese – rather than a language that they will never have an opportunity to use.

The world changes quickly, however, and, within a generation, the "small picture" thinking of learning the language of one's immediate trading partners can yield decided disadvantages as other neighbouring countries, possibly even including some of the current trading partners switch to the "big picture" global language of commerce. There is another concern regarding the Chinese language system that makes the learning of English an advantage. The Chinese language contains "logograms," which are not sounds represented by letters and combinations of letters, as in English, but are pictures of words, to put it very loosely. As such, there are thousands of these logograms which comprise the language and I suspect that, like any language it tends to become more complex as time marches on. After all, this is occurring with English, as with any living language. However, on the brighter side, many of the Chinese teachers who teach English are eager to learn about critical literacy and how to infuse it, along with the teaching of English, into the existing educational system.

When we observe how complex critical literacy endeavours can become, all we need to do is to look towards South Africa, where apartheid has been responsible for the elimination, subjugation and disempowerment of the majority of its citizenry. Great and noble efforts by many people who believe in equality through equity work have only just begun to dismantle the monolith of white supremacy in this proud nation. Through schooling, much fine work has been accomplished, but there is much more left to do. First of all, it is significant that huge numbers of people do not have access to the education that they so desperately require. In addition, there is an attitude of racial inferiority that is promulgated by the dominant culture. Both circumstances need to be challenged, analyzed and rectified.

In order to move South Africa from its current position to the democratic nation that it claims to be, the populace must embark on some sort of identity work. It is for those held in positions of servitude to question those powers that hold them thus. However, this cannot be accomplished without the help of societal institutions such as schools, churches and beyond. In addition, those who hold the reins of power must also question their own motivations, values and actions. Societal imbalance is not good for any society and it is sad to think that, while it is so obvious that, together, we are stronger, we are not particularly willing to share the power that we have – legitimate power or otherwise. It is extremely important that, for the sake of all and, ultimately, for ourselves, that we must proceed to embark upon that "inward journey" of self-reflection, self- identification and self-declaration.

While it is easy to speak of South Africa in these terms because it offers such a glaring example, there are plenty of other examples much closer to home. When Rosalie Griffith holds up a mirror to reveal how many of the themes of apartheid are played out within our own culture, she need go no farther than her own society. Her example takes a look at the recently established all Black school in Toronto, Canada.

This school was created in response to the established fact that Black students tend to not do as well in school as their White counterparts. In fact, the dropout rate among Black students, males in particular, is staggering. Add to this the fact that

this same demographic is overly represented in our penal institutions and in our inner city ghettos. It is disheartening, to say the least. And to what may we ascribe the reasons for this travesty? It is not related to moral turpitude, to lack of ability, or to any other reason except disempowerment. Here, in this society, the dawn of enlightenment has not yet given way to acceptance of all, for all, by all.

When the issue of the newly created school in Toronto was raised in class, many questions surfaced. Could a White student enroll? The answer was yes, but why would they want to? Could a non-Black teacher be hired to teach at this school? Again, yes, but the teacher would have to be able to provide culturally responsive or culturally relevant educational experiences. So you can see that, at the heart of these questions, the issue for those not invested in the school was the question of equality, not equity. However, for those invested in the school, it was a much different matter. Students were failing in the existing system and this was a way of taking a step sideways, to educate the students in ways that the students could recognize, to be sensitive to matters cultural and to allow students to return to the dominant culture schools when and if they felt ready. Thus, it was an attempt to be critically astute and to provide students with what it was that they needed in order to become successful citizens within a society that accepted them. Ironically, the first part of this last sentence is far more easily established than the last part. Even if the school is successful in leveling the inadequacies of the existing system of schooling by implementing a parallel system that is intended to be more critically nuanced, this school still exists at the margins of the larger society. So, the fault is not within the school, but within the society.

Schooling has the power to change this. However, as long as schools continue to replicate dominant culture values, norms and sensibilities, all attempts at creating empathic, sensitive and critical citizens will be in vain. What is needed is not another school so much as a society that is willing to be critical and to speak out and to challenge such injustices that promote one dominant culture at the expense of other, already marginalized groups of people who rightfully can claim subscription to the dominant society.

CURRICULUM AS LIVED

In another vein, what does it mean to engage critical literacy practices with students? Is it possible to work with young children to engage them in critical literacy pursuits? First of all, it depends on how we define critical literacy. Where are we putting the emphasis? Is it on the “critical” part or on the “literacy” part? Given a small amount of sensitivity, it is entirely likely that children in the “early years” will take to the exploration of issues of social justice, equity and equality with an ease that will astound us. After all, they, too, have had lived experiences that have empowered or denied them. They, too, have born witness to injustice, bullying, and zero-tolerance school policies that serve to intimidate, prevent and disable.

While children may not be in command of the vocabulary that adults enjoy, they are certainly able to recognize and comment on the critical part of literacy. As they grow, and gain in knowledge and schooling, they also tend to develop the literacy part of the equation. It is hoped that the final product is a balanced human being that is at once able to take care of him- or herself, while acting towards others in a way that s/he would like to be treated.

In this volume, Johana Beeharry notes that classroom practice and teacher expectations of students play a huge part in the success of any enterprise in any classroom, but are ever so much more important in the Early Years classrooms, simply because these youngsters are exploring a world that remains relatively new to them. Beginning with critical literacy is an important way for youngsters to begin to perceive the world in all its ragged glory and to develop that empathy that is so necessary for developing benevolence. It is about the ability to put oneself in another person's shoes, to walk a mile in those shoes and to be able to account the blisters, pebbles and other misfortunes of travellers along life's journey.

In returning to our classroom, assessment by their teachers and the place that the students hold individually in terms of their socio-cultural backgrounds also has an influence on how well students are able to become caring citizens and stewards of our dying planet. So, they are at once part and parcel of the experience they are undergoing. As we all are, these students also act and are acted upon. In a perfect world, their experiences should fashion them into the "ultimate citizen." However, they are also constrained by their own personal circumstances that, while unequal, may also create inequality. Through their schooling some children will be privileged with skills and abilities while others struggle with their own meagre gifts. Furthermore, this taken for granted difference among students is further exacerbated by the limitations or benefits that cultural capital has conferred upon them as a birthright. Add to this the role of gender, race, colour and creed, not to mention many other personal and limiting factors, and one can easily see that the role of the teacher is far from easy. Indeed, it is amazingly complex, as the Early Years teacher must respond to each and every one of these factors in order to encourage the maximum of critical literacy for each and every child. Current schooling and teaching practices, in the hands of thoughtful and caring teachers, can help tremendously in developing critical thought, values and behaviours that we would like to envision in each and every member of society.

In a corresponding chapter, Mirela Ciobanu speaks of mathematics as a subject that is held in reverence above most other subjects. This is a matter of utmost interest as, in so many schools across the nation and, presumably, around the world, mathematics instruction is one of the most often touted issues to appear on school improvement plans, along with literacy. This is an interesting state of affairs, because it seems that mathematics literacy is relatively evenly divided between those who are conversant with mathematical principles and those who struggle in vain to gain access to these concepts.

Unfortunately, mathematics is unlike most other subjects. It tends to follow a progression from basic principles, such as addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, to more and more abstract concepts, such as geometry, trigonometry and calculus. While most of us are content with basic mathematics principles in our everyday life, this should not mean that we are excluded from higher mathematics or from applied mathematics, as found in chemistry and physics.

So, here is the problem as I see it. The hard-working math teacher explains a concept to the students who are then expected to practice it until they become familiar with it and internalize the concept. In short, the successful student is able to manipulate or interact with the ideas until they become a part of that person's schema – that is to say, until the knowledge of how to resolve the problem is established. In this way, it is no different than any other form of knowledge acquisition.

But what happens to those who are not as adept in math? Typically, one of two things happens. The student, who is often marginalized as having sub-standard intelligence, is given more practice. This often occurs without the benefit of having the concept re-explained or explained in a different way so that students can understand the concept as it more closely relates to their own particular schematic view of the world. The futility of this reminds me of the trials of Sisyphus who, for all eternity, pushed a boulder up a hill only to have it crash back down upon him. This futility, among students, can result in boredom, frustration and disengagement. The second thing that often happens is the time element kicks in with the teacher apologizing profusely by saying, "I'm very sorry that you still don't understand this. However, I can't hold up the rest of the class for you. We simply have to move on." Since mathematics education has been set up as a progressive enterprise, the student who fails to "get it" can look forward to many more opportunities where his original inability to understand becomes amplified as the years wear on and the math becomes harder.

Solution? I believe so. I believe that we, as educators, must recognize that we are there for the students and not for the system. We must take the time to seek out the errant lambs that have gone astray, as in the Biblical parable. We must think more critically and not let the clock determine our next move. Also, we must recognize that, even though we measure outcomes as the only valid source of evaluation, the process is as important as the intended outcomes – more so, I would say.

Remembering that the Logical-Mathematical domain is one of Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences, as is the Linguistic domain, both mathematics and language have some striking similarities. For example, they are both considered to be important to the welfare of our students now and in the future. They are both literacies, as one of the capacities of a successfully literate person in the 21st century is functional literacy, oracy *and* numeracy. Hopefully, by viewing mathematics acquisition as a language, rather than as a skill, we can begin to adjust ways in which math is taught and, therefore, learned.

Transparency and trust in our schools are talked about much more than they are performed. Caileigh Lyn-Piluso captures this apparent contradiction in her topic

that includes an analysis of the Ontario curriculum with an eye to seeing just how deeply invested critical literacy experiences are within the Grade Ten curriculum. To the casual observer, taking a glance at the Ontario curriculum, and I would suggest that this is true of almost any curriculum anywhere in Canada, reveals that critical thinking and, indeed, critical literacy, are represented to some degree in the curricula. Being thus reassured, it is tempted to pass on to other topics of importance.

But wait! Let us be just a little bit more critical about the presence, or the lack thereof, of critical literacy in the Ontario curriculum. While it appears to be present, much of what is covered really only pays lip service to the issue and in no way attempts to make students truly literate in terms of becoming critical. Certainly, students are asked to examine various media formats, advertisements and documents, and are asked to discover what makes them work effectively, but nowhere are students asked to recognize the value of these artifacts. Instruction, through these curricular documents, is restricted to improving advertisements and promoting entrepreneurial activity, presumably in an effort to build a future generation of successful entrepreneurs who can take credit for developing a strong economy. The irony is that, by the time these young entrepreneurs are ready to take their place at the helm of industry, the world will have changed.

We will never be less globalized than we are at the moment. We are far more globalized now than we were even a decade ago. As we become more and more globalized, how will the concept of what is a country ever be sustained? Take the European Union for example. Here was a brave attempt for Europe to redefine itself as a zone that no longer needed to win wars to attest to its sovereignty. Numerous scholars such as Zygmunt Bauman and Manuel Castells have assured us that the very concept of what a country is will fall to the exigencies of globalization. The very spirit of competition that is being so carefully nurtured in our schools may prove redundant in the not too distant future.

That is what the problem is with the current curriculum. It promotes individualism and competition in order to develop citizen-consumers who are capable of successful neoliberal ventures. Critical literacy is merely a buzzword. Democracy is not far behind. What is required is the replacement of the smokescreens with the dedication to the development of true critical thinking, particularly critical literacy, in our schools.

In order to do this, teachers must be prepared to be challenged by their own students. When this occurs for the first time, it can be very disconcerting. It may even feel like an attack. However, teachers must remember that this is exactly what they were striving for. In the beginning, as students become accustomed to questioning themselves, their texts, and the world in which they live, it makes absolute sense that they will also question their teachers. It is the teachers who must learn to take this as an example of success. The student is practicing what has been taught. And, what better place to do it than in a safe classroom with a teacher who has cared enough to be transparent? It is a statement of trust and faith on the part of the student, who risks a great deal in terms of marks, relational matters and discipline.

But, if successful, this is only the beginning. The successfully critically literate student will go on to question authority in all walks of life. The student will question business practices, government, policies public and private. It does not make them a Mr. Hyde to society's Dr. Jekyll, but it does provide the student with a power that they have never before experienced. It allows students and later, active citizens, with the power to hold those in authority accountable.

To imbue the curriculum with tepid overtures relating to critical literacy implies that the policy makers are either largely ignorant as to what it is that needs to be accomplished, or that they are aware of what needs to be done within the society but are threatened by such grassroots accountability measures. In short, those in authority would sooner hold others accountable than be held accountable themselves. However, this is only the beginning. As Allan Luke notes, it really doesn't matter how the powers that be envision critical literacy, there is a whole cadre of teachers out there who are finding and will continue to find gaps and spaces within any curriculum within which they can begin to instill an appreciation for thinking and acting critically.

Samantha M. Leska follows this same vein, as she investigates a curriculum for New Haven, Connecticut. She engages students with the question of "What is the American Dream?" This is of huge importance because, unlike the Fathers of the great country that the United States of America has become, she does not assume that all students share that dream, or even the same dream as one another. This is of tremendous value, as it allows people to validate and value their own dreams.

While this is very democratic, it also carries with it the seeds of its own destruction. For example, many of the "Take back…" initiatives have met with a resounding defeat. On New York's Wall Street or Toronto's Bay Street, the results of this innovative "sit in" were less successful than originally imagined. This was because there were many agendas that were not particularly reconcilable. The groups that came together to hold corporations accountable did not have the same corporations in mind, nor did they have the same expectations. Thus, individualism became problematic as the inspired movement began to fizzle out.

Imagine the American Dream being subjected to such individualization. No longer would it be an instrument to galvanize people, public sentiment and collective action. Imagine a country where people thought for themselves, supported policies they believed in and chose to vote when there was something worthwhile to vote for. Indeed, this would be a country that would be very difficult to govern. While we may have some certain sympathy for such a state of affairs, critical thinking in general and critical literacy in particular, do not mean that the surrounding environment, society becomes anarchical.

Very likely, the opposite would occur. This is mere speculation at this point because there have been so few examples of a critically alert populace that it may only exist within our imaginations. A thoughtful, reasonable individual, who is able to discern verity among the foibles and half-truths through which we all meander on a daily basis, would more likely be given to more pro-social ways of addressing

change than by turning savage. In fact, if government and industry continue to attempt to hold out false hope and offer platitudes rather than meeting the needs of their clients, customers and constituents, sooner or later someone who is charismatic enough and desperate enough to fight for change will emerge. This does not mean to imply that the individual who becomes disenfranchised enough to want change actually knows what change to aim for. Without a critical background, how is one able to discern positive change from negative change, especially since our actions resound through time? By night, all cats are grey.

CONCLUSION

All that can be hoped for is that the thoughtful compilation that this volume represents will be useful to students yet to come. These chapters, of which this book is comprised, represent readers' reactions to the volume *Democracy and Its Discontents.* Their positions are unequivocal. They have chosen topics, which have a personal connection for them and they have pursued their thoughts to create practical discourses that entail action in order to achieve goals that they have set for themselves. Some of these goals are intensely personal; others are of a more general focus. Whichever direction the contributors to this volume are looking in, it is clear that, in order to embrace the positive gifts that critical literacy offers, one must begin with oneself.

To know who you are and what you stand for, to invent or re-invent standards, aspirations and goals requires a lot of introspection and coming to terms with who one is and what one stands for. Perhaps it is a little bit like operating on oneself without the benefit of anesthetic because making arrangements with yourself is identity work.

Once we know who we are, what we stand for and what our limits are, it is much easier to challenge systems of injustice and systems that tend to keep people subjugated for no apparent reason. Once this has become your stance, once you choose to take a stand, there is no recourse but to continue to move forward, collecting like minds as you go, fashioning justice and acceptance. It may be a dream at the moment, but Martin Luther King, Jr. also had a dream. May your dreams of justice, equity and peace find fertile ground in which to grow.