

Critical literacy

Critical literacy is an instructional approach, stemming from Marxist **critical pedagogy**, that advocates the adoption of “critical” perspectives toward text. Critical literacy encourages readers to actively analyze texts and offers strategies for what proponents describe as uncovering underlying messages. There are several different theoretical perspectives on critical literacy that have produced different pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning. All of these approaches share the basic premise that literacy requires the literate consumers of text to adopt a critical and questioning approach.

According to proponents of critical literacy, the practice is not simply a means of attaining literacy in the sense of improving the ability to decode words, **syntax**, etc. In fact, the ability to read words on paper is not necessarily required in order to engage in a critical discussion of “texts,” which can include television, movies, web pages, music, art and other means of expression. The important thing is being able to have a discussion with others about the different meanings a text might have and teaching the potentially critically literate learner how to think flexibly about it.

Critical literacy^[1] has become a popular approach to teaching English to students in some English speaking-countries,^[2] including Canada, Australia,^[3] New Zealand, and the UK.

For **post-structuralist** practitioners of critical literacy, the definition of this literacy practice can be quite malleable, but usually involves a search for **discourses** and reasons why certain discourses are included or left out of a text.

Two major theoretical perspectives within the field of critical literacy are the Neo-Marxist/Freirean and the Australian. These approaches overlap in many ways and they do not necessarily represent competing views, but they do approach the subject matter differently.

1 Neo-Marxist/Freirean

Critical literacy practices grew out of the social justice pedagogy of Brazilian educator and theorist Paulo Freire, as first described in *Education as the Practice of Freedom* published in 1967 and his most famous book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, published in 1968. Freirean critical literacy is conceived as a means of empowering disempowered populations against oppression and coercion, frequently seen as enacted by corporate and/or government entities. Freirean critical literacy starts with the desire to

balance social inequities and address societal problems caused by abuse of power. It proceeds from this philosophical basis to examine, analyze, and deconstruct texts.

This perspective is reflected in the works of Peter McLaren, Henry Giroux, and Jean Anyon, among many others. The Freirean perspective on critical literacy is strongly represented in **critical pedagogy**.

Other philosophical approaches to critical literacy, while sharing many of the ideas of Neo-Marxist/Freirean critical literacy, may be viewed as a less overtly politicized expansion on these ideas. Critical literacy helps teachers as well as students to explore the relationship between theoretical framework and its practical implications.

2 See also

3 References

- [1] Hagood, M. (2002). “Critical literacy for whom?”, *Reading Research and Instruction*, 41, 247-264.
- [2] Cadeiro-Kaplan, K. (2002) Literacy ideologies: Critically engaging the language arts curriculum. *Language Arts*, 79, 372-381
- [3] Sinfield, Ivor., Hawkins, Lise (2006). " CRITICAL LITERACY: Policy and Practice.", ". *Orbit* 36: 27.

4 Further reading

Lankshear, C. & McLaren, P. (Eds.) (1993). *Critical literacy: Radical and postmodernist perspectives*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Luke, C. (1995). Media and cultural studies. In P. Freebody, S. Muspratt, & A. Luke (Eds.). *Constructing critical literacies*. Crosskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

New London Group. (1996). A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66, 1.

5 External links

- **IRA Critical Literacy Resources** - The International Reading Association index page for critical literacy resources.

- [Critical Literacy NZ](#) describes critical literacy in New Zealand, which, in line with [Australia](#), is beginning to adopt this practice
- [Critical Literacy Guide for teachers in the Australian state of Tasmania](#).
- [Read-Write-Think Lesson Plan](#)

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6.1 Text

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