

## **A review of critical literacy beliefs and practices of English language learners and teachers**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Critical literacy has been studied extensively for the four decades since the 1980s in varied contexts of schooling, vocational, higher and adult education in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. However, the application of critical literacy in countries whose native language is not English seems to have become evident only at the beginning of the 21st century, with empirical studies being conducted on the critical literacy beliefs and practices of English language learners (ELL) and teachers. This review first defines critical literacy in terms of both critical text and critical pedagogy. This review then identifies common theoretical frameworks and pedagogical foci in recent research involving secondary and tertiary ELLs. It highlights the possibilities and challenges experienced by both ELL students and teachers as they practise critical literacy in English language classrooms. Finally, this review gives recommendations for future studies on critical literacy that can strengthen the English language learning curriculum and enhance our understanding of the competing interests present in the teaching and learning of English.

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*University of Sydney Papers in TESOL*, 10, 29-56.

©2015 ISSN: 1834-4712 (Online)

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been increasing attention given to critical literacy in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). This article provides an overview of critical literacy in two parts. The first part introduces the various definitions of critical literacy, its theoretical models and pedagogical practices as reflected in studies conducted in English-speaking countries. The second part reviews recent empirical studies conducted in TESOL contexts. Such a review of critical literacy studies in TESOL is especially significant for teachers who are interested in examining the workings of power in texts, literacy and cultural practices. By reviewing studies on how English language learners and teachers have experienced the implications of critical literacy, teachers may better appreciate the importance of examining the politics involved in language and literacy education.

## WHAT IS CRITICAL LITERACY?

Critical literacy focuses on the connection between literacy and power (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993a). It does not subscribe to the notion of reading and writing skills as autonomous, technical, neutral, and universal (Searle, 1993), but rather regards literacy as “the process of becoming conscious of one’s experience as historically constructed within specific power relations” (Anderson & Irvine, 1993, p. 82). The roots of critical literacy may be traced to Paolo Friere (1972), who gave literacy a socio-political dimension. Through a problem-posing pedagogy, Freire taught Brazilian and Chilean peasants how to read by introducing them to vocabularies that were meaningful to their daily experiences. Using words as a stimulus, Freire engaged them in critical reflection on the oppressive realities around them, how they could free themselves from this oppression and transform their worlds. Freire found that the peasants were able to retain these words in their vocabulary after they had been led to a critical consciousness of their situation.

For Freire, reading and writing skills are facilitated by an exploration of the causes and effects of learners’ lived realities, and

are potential tools for social transformation. Such a socio-political perspective on literacy led to the critical literacy movement, which has since become a major theoretical, ideological, and pedagogical construct (Cadeiro-Kaplan & Smith, 2002). It appears from research, however, that this movement follows neither a unified theoretical perspective nor a unified pedagogical approach (Behrman, 2006; Pandya & Avila, 2014). Instead, as a theory, critical literacy is commonly associated with two major branches of inquiry: critical text analysis, and critical pedagogy (Luke, 2011).

### **Critical text analysis**

The critical text analysis model, predominantly used in Australia (Luke, 2012; Morgan, 1997), draws inspiration from poststructuralist and postmodern theories. These theories regard texts as not having fixed meanings intended by authors, but rather as having meanings that are multiple, changing, contradictory, and influenced by other texts (Bull & Anstey, 2005). Critical text analysis assumes that no text is neutral and that, therefore, texts are always informed by authorial bias (Janks, 2010). Its aim is to equip individuals with a heightened awareness of how semiotic elements in texts reveal messages that impose authors' ideologies, create and maintain social hierarchies, or marginalise certain groups (Lankshear, 1994). Common pedagogical practices of critical text analysis include analysing authors' intentions and ideologies, reconstructing or challenging them, and exploring multiple perspectives.

A key feature of critical literacy is the examination of the politics behind the creation of texts. This can be examined by identifying the writer's purpose, the assumptions and factors shaping an author's points of view (Cervetti, Pardales, & Damico, 2001), and the possible economic, political, and social interests that a writer purportedly upholds (Shor, 1999). In critical literacy, readers examine authors' beliefs held at the time the text was created (Beck, 2005), and how readers may be manipulated to accept these beliefs through language, images, layout, and other textual features contained therein (Alford, 2001). In this process, dominant patterns of power and

authority are exposed that may otherwise have gone unnoticed and may have been passively accepted if the texts were taken at face value (Burnett & Merchant, 2011).

Critical literacy encourages students to challenge what Bourke (2008) terms as the “rule of text: the perception that a text is authoritative and final, and an underlying belief that suppresses the reader’s license to challenge, question, deconstruct or rewrite the assumptions, beliefs, ideologies, concepts embedded, implicitly or not, within the perspective of the text” (p. 309). Critical literacy educators provide students with the opportunity to question, resist, and reconstruct textual representations that do not correspond to their own identities (Gainer, 2010; Vasquez, Muise, Adamson, Hefferman, Chiola-Nakai, & Shear, 2003).

Critical literacy involves the exploration of multiple perspectives. This consideration of varied perspectives on a topic has been applied in the classroom using different approaches such as reading different versions of the same topic (Ciardiello, 2004), reading a story that reveals varying points of view (Clarke & Whitney, 2009), discussing the perspectives of people with different cultural backgrounds (Iyer, 2007), or identifying the dominant and silenced voices in a text (McDaniel, 2004). Listening to different perspectives does not necessarily mean changing or denying one’s stance on an issue (Alford, 2001) but rather leads to an awareness that “truth” is really a partial and limited perspective (Robinson, 2011), and that no single version of an event tells the entire story (Ciardiello, 2004). By engaging students in activities such as debates, rewriting texts from another perspective (Haydey, Kostiuik, & Phillips, 2007), role-plays, think-alouds, juxtaposing texts of varying viewpoints on the same topic, or raising critical questions, teachers guide learners to view an issue through different lenses, be more sympathetic to others in different situations, and enrich their reasoning abilities (Morgan & York, 2009). Moreover, although not all perspectives are equally powerful, exploring multiple viewpoints on an issue enables learners to realise that there are no easy answers to complex problems (Harste, 2008).

Early studies on critical literacy in English-speaking countries were focused on using language-based and printed texts as objects of analysis (Behrman, 2006; Lewison, Flint, & van Sluys, 2002). More recent empirical studies on critical literacy, however, involve using multi-modal texts as the centre of interpretation or design. These multimodal texts include picture books (Serafini, 2010), political cartoons (El Refaie & Horschelmann, 2010), graphic novels (Thomas, 2011), reality television shows (Miller, 2011), advertisements (Cuff & Statz, 2010), range of digital texts (Bowen & Whithaus, 2013), speech, gestures, clothing (Johnson & Vasudevan, 2012), or popular culture (Morrell, 2011). It appears that there is now an expanded definition of texts to accommodate the multimodal literacy practices of people in the 21st century (Mills, 2010; Walsh, 2011).

### **Critical pedagogy**

While critical text mainly uses printed or digital texts as means for ideology work, critical pedagogy, on the other hand, focuses on institutional policies and cultural/community practices as objects of critical analysis. The critical pedagogy model is more predominantly used in North and Latin America (Edelsky & Cherland, 2006; Luke, 2012) and is influenced by various theories such as Latin American philosophies of liberation, sociology of knowledge, the Frankfurt school of social critical theory, and neo-Marxist cultural criticism (Luke & Woods, 2009; McLaren, 1997). Generally, critical pedagogy aims to expose and resist oppressive forms of power operating within the school system and in the community expressed in issues such as sexism, patriarchy, elitism, and racism. It examines the political, economic, and social conditions that bring about the privileging of one discourse over others (Kincheloe, 2004). It provides opportunities for learners to participate in the design and implementation of educational policies and systems (Akbari, 2008), or for marginalised students to voice their struggles (Luke, 2012). The ultimate aim is, through education, to develop the critical consciousness of the individual and the institution, and the community's responsibility for social change (Giroux, 2007).

In the classroom, critical pedagogy is manifested concretely through discussing controversial issues, critiquing institutional policies and practices, and taking social action. Oxfam Development Education (2006) defines controversial issues as those that “have a political, social or personal impact, and arouse feeling and/or deal with questions of value or belief” (p. 2). Through a discussion of socio-political issues, educators help students in “seeing themselves within the larger historical, political, cultural, economic structures where student voices exist” (Cadeiro-Kaplan & Smith, 2002, p. 379). The students’ interests are thus sparked because the issues are relevant to their lives (Pescatore, 2007). Moreover, discussing complex issues gives students the opportunity to “clarify their emotions and values, and develop the skills of information-processing, reasoning, enquiry, creative thinking, and evaluation” (Oxfam Development Education, 2006). When students are led to discuss the problems in their own societies, they can then think of alternative ways to change the system where change is most needed (Akbari, 2008).

Part of critical literacy is looking at how pedagogical practices can perpetuate dominant ideologies. This may be evident by privileging some forms of knowledge and classroom discourses, and forcing students to comply with ideologies and social practices in the interest of class, race, or gender (McLaren, 2003). Shor (1999) maintains that one outstanding goal of critical literacy is to democratise education. The traditional class structure is anchored in the belief that teachers hold full authority to select course materials, accept and dismiss interpretations, and transmit their fully formed knowledge to students who act as passive recipients of information (Aukerman, 2012). The principle of shared authority in the classroom, in contrast, supports giving students freedom of choice in selecting texts and issues relevant to their lives (Kesler, 2011), or engaging students in a dialogue to enable them to be aware of their own viewpoints as well as those of others. Such valuing of students’ choices and voices allows them to explore their own identities, challenge dominant

discourses, and understand the complexities of institutional issues (Robinson, 2011).

McDaniel (2004) observes that the most “unusual” element of critical literacy is its emphasis on concrete response towards socio-political issues. Advocates of critical literacy have provided students with avenues to take social action, by protesting orally, writing to persons in authority (Vasquez *et al.*, 2003), writing to editors in newspapers, circulating flyers on an issue, participating in community service projects (Bender-Slack, 2010), conducting research to deepen understanding about an issue (Wolk, 2009), making documentaries about one’s cultural experiences (Comber, 2011), publishing findings in a local newspaper (Rashidi & Safari, 2011), or presenting insights through live performances (Lopez, 2011). These examples of classroom tasks that invite community involvement enable students to engage in both critique and action to bring about change in society.

## **REVIEW OF CRITICAL LITERACY STUDIES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING CONTEXTS**

Critical literacy has been studied extensively for four decades in varied educational contexts in English-speaking countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, United States, and the United Kingdom (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993b; Pandya & Avila, 2014; Simpson & Comber, 2001). However, the practice of critical literacy in English language learning contexts seems only to have become evident at the beginning of the 21st century, when the term “critical literacy” and affiliate concepts such as “critical language awareness”, “critical reading”, and “critical writing” began to be used in academic circles (Koon, 2001; Lin, 2000). This belated participation in the critical literacy discourse in contexts where English is taught as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) can be attributed to several factors (Haque, 2007).

First, the emphasis on English language learning may have contributed to a limited engagement with critical literacy. Crooks and Lehner (1998), for example, indicate that in ESL or EFL contexts, the

history of literacy courses being assigned to language or linguistics departments in universities or offered as units that are separate from academic programs has generally prevented literacy teachers from considering the development of students' critical literacy as part of their role. According to Crookes and Lehner (1998), "ESL/EFL teachers commonly see themselves as contributing to general welfare simply by helping people to communicate" (p. 320)—thus, professional learning programs for teachers have not encouraged them to focus on socio-political issues in their language classrooms.

Benesch (1993) and Pennycook (1997), on the other hand, attribute this de-emphasis on critical literacy to the pervasive "ideology of pragmatism" (Benesch, 2001, p. 370) and "discourse of neutrality" (Pennycook, 1997, p. 256) operating particularly in English for Academic Purposes (EAP). EAP teachers teach writing skills and cultural information that aim to enable students to successfully meet the academic expectations and standards set by the university. Benesch (1993) argues that the general non-interrogation of the power relations at work in the writing curriculum, style of academic genre, or choice of writing topics contributes to the maintenance of the accommodationist ideology, or the assimilation of ELLs in western literacy practices. This observation is further supported by Pennycook (1997), who reasons that this practice of pragmatism guiding research and teaching in the EAP context assumes that language and knowledge are neutral rather than social and cultural, and that academic institutions and language departments, in particular, are merely service providers rather than sites that reflect competing interests.

The ideologies of pragmatism and neutrality in English language courses are manifest in class activities and resources that seem to generally view language learning as a cognitive activity (Abednia & Izadinia, 2013; Kumagai & Iwasaki, 2011). If the social dimension of language is acknowledged, this is generally practised in a narrow perspective with teachers merely drawing students' attention to "who is talking to whom about what" (Akbari, 2008, p. 278), rather than understanding the complexity of issues that both teachers and



students face. Such a neutral stance, according to Pennycook (1997), generally prevents teachers and students of EAP from engaging in the politics of language learning. In recent years, however, there seems to be an increase in empirical studies being conducted on views and practices of critical literacy by English language learners.

The following sections present a review of studies involving secondary and tertiary ELLs. These studies are organised according to Lankshear's (1994) classification of critical literacy practices: those that have a critical perspective on particular texts, those that analyse wider social practices mediated by the reading of texts, and those that aim to know literacies critically.

### **Critical studies of particular texts**

Critical studies of particular texts involve close reading to investigate how "language is deeply and inescapably bound up with producing, reproducing, and maintaining arrangements of power which are unequal" (Lankshear, 1994, p. 11). Critical text analysis appears to play a major part in critical literacy studies with ELLs as participants. Drawing mainly from theories and frameworks aligned with critical literacy, such as Luke and Freebody's Four Resources Model (1999), Lewison, Flint and Van Sluy's Four Dimensions of Critical Literacy (2002), Fairclough's Critical Language Awareness (1992) and Critical Discourse Analysis (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000), these studies report that college or university ELLs' critical literacy skills develop through the classroom application of such frameworks. For example, studies by Huang (2011a) and Kumagai and Iwasaki (2011) found that when students analysed authors' choice of words and themes in course textbooks or printed texts, the students exhibited critical responses by questioning the worldviews and power relations implied therein. Listening to multiple viewpoints on the same issue helped students expand their thinking (Huang, 2011b; Ko & Wang, 2013), and develop more liberated rather than conservative responses to issues (Ko, 2010). Moreover, the discussion of politically-laden picture books also enabled ELLs to connect the themes with their personal and socio-political lives (Hayik, 2011; Kuo, 2013). Overall, these

studies show that with proper support and scaffolding of learning, through teachers' selection of texts that relate with students' personal/cultural experiences, and explicit instruction on how to critically interrogate texts (Choo & Singha, 2011), ELLs are able to develop critical literacy.

### **Critical studies of wider social practices**

Critical studies of wider social practices involve the investigation of power structures evident in classroom procedures and discourses, institutional and national policies, and cultural practices (Lankshear, 1994). These studies have drawn from critical pedagogy (McLaren, 2003), social justice frameworks (Adams, Griffin, & Bell, 1997; Oakes & Lipton, 2003), and transformation theory (Mezirow, 2000) to study how students engage in dialogue and critique to change inequitable institutional and community practices. These studies indicate that collaborative meaning-making among students (Zyngier & Fialho, 2010), critical dialogue between students and teachers (Abednia & Izadinia, 2013; Kuo, 2013; Mazdaee & Maftoon, 2012), and exploration of students' lived realities (Camarrota, 2011; Rubina, 2014) lead to student engagement and language improvement.

The ability of the critical literacy approach to bring about transformation in students' perspectives and behaviour is exemplified in Wolfe (2010) and Lie's (2010) studies. Through their teacher's constant encouragement to discover implied ideologies in texts and to take action against unjust practices, Latino students in Wolfe's study changed their literacy practices from passive listening to active engagement in group discussions, and from writing fact-oriented compositions to critical social commentaries. Similarly, the Malaysian postgraduate student in Lie's study began to question and, subsequently, act on unjust policies in the bank that she worked at after studying critical language awareness (Fairclough, 1992) in class.

### **Critical studies of literacy practices**

Critical studies of literacy practices involve the investigation of such practices in particular communities (Heath, 1983), cross-cultural

comparisons of genre conventions (Wallace, 2003), or how languages, texts, and discourses serve the interests of powerful entities at the expense of marginalised groups (Lankshear, 1994). These studies commonly use theoretical frameworks that analyse learners' access to genres (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Janks, 2010), or design practices through the lens of Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal design theory (2006), or the New London Group's theory of multiliteracies (1996).

Recent studies in ELL contexts appear to focus on the types of critical writing produced by students. These studies generally indicate that tertiary English language learners' critical abilities improved when they were led towards a heightened awareness of their choice of words and were made to explore the complexity of an issue through research (Huang, 2013; Lo, 2010; Weninger & Kan, 2013).

Some research also studied the effects of integrating students' in-school with out-of-school literacy practices. Wu (2011), for example, investigated the effects of instant messaging (IM) on Taiwanese college students' construction of identities in their formal written discourses. The findings showed that using IM helped develop students' multi-literacies and fluency in English. In the same way, Black (2010) found that fan fiction and multimodal projects can be viable means for developing ELLs' print as well as critical literacy.

Also emerging in the literature in ELL contexts are studies that provide students with opportunities to design multimodal texts. Engaging in group multimodal projects enabled students to critically select from a wide ensemble of meaning-making modes that coherently conveyed their ideological stances (Archer, 2011; Lee, 2014; Tan, Bopry, & Libo, 2010).

Overall, these studies generally showed that the ELLs were able to distinguish the features of genres and practice their unique affordances through their compositions and designs. The researchers suggested that schools/universities provide opportunities for students to create relevant projects that creatively apply their out-of-school literacies and allow them to build on their social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

However, studies also revealed some challenges experienced by ELLs in practising critical literacy. These challenges include students' lack of deeper understanding and critical exploration of the socio-cultural issues in the texts (Park, 2011; Zyngier & Fialho, 2010), as well as learners' general tendency to accept authors' opinions and representations without question (Kaura & Sidhub, 2013). Also, although the students were able to identify the features of a particular genre, they were unable to critically interrogate the author's purpose in designing the text (Black, 2010) or features of discourses that maintain inequality (Weninger & Kan, 2013). This led Weninger and Kan to conclude that the curricular emphasis on English language as a tool for communication prevents students from critically interrogating language use.

Students also seem to have ambivalent attitudes toward critical literacy. Despite reporting that the critical literacy approach helped them develop critical thinking (Ko, 2010), students still mainly regarded reading as a means for information-gathering and entertainment and not for social critique (Huang, 2011a). They also expressed concern that critical literacy skills have nothing to do with language learning (Ko, 2010; Ko, 2013). They therefore favoured literacy activities that are print-based (Tan & McWilliam, 2009) and that teach reading for comprehension (Ko, 2010). Huang (2011b) thus advocates the need to structure English courses such that conventional literacy skills are not sacrificed in favour of critical literacy.

### **Studies of ELL teachers' perspectives on critical literacy**

More studies are also being conducted that focus on the perspectives of teachers of English language learners with regard to critical literacy. It appears that teachers share students' ambivalent attitudes toward critical literacy. On one hand, teachers expressed their appreciation of being exposed to critical literacy either as students in masters' programs, or as participants of action research. By engaging in a critical reflection with colleagues on power relations evident in texts, institutions, and the communities they belong to, teachers

began to gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of political issues, and feel empathy towards marginalised groups (DeMulder, Stribling, & Day, 2013). Exposure to critical pedagogies also inspired teachers to share their newfound educational philosophy to colleagues in their own workplaces and through academic conferences (Sangster, Stone, & Anderson, 2013). Especially noteworthy in these studies are the changes in the perspectives of Asian teachers regarding language learning after being introduced to critical literacy. Teachers advocated changing their pedagogy from a focus on language forms to one on comprehension of meaning (Ko, 2013; Ko & Wang, 2009), from strategy-based instruction to discussion of social issues, from personal to social action (Ko & Wang, 2009), from teacher-centred lecture to student-centred dialogue (Ko, 2013), and from decoding of printed texts to designing multimodal texts as a means of meaning-making (Tan *et al.*, 2010).

However, teachers also raised several concerns about the appropriateness and applicability of critical literacy because of a number of prevailing assumptions. For example, some teachers assume that students must first be proficient in print-based literacy before they can engage in critical multi-modal practices (Tan & McWilliam, 2009). There is also the common belief among teachers that younger and less academically-proficient students will struggle in critical literacy activities; this view therefore prevents them from engaging most ELL students in critical literacy practices (Curdt-Christiansen, 2010; Ko & Wang, 2009; Park, 2011). Evidence, however, shows that young learners (Bourke, 2008; Vasquez, 2004) and academically low-achieving students (Lee & Runyan, 2011; Rozansky & Agesen, 2010) are capable of being critical, if given the opportunity and if they have teachers' support.

Although some teachers do acknowledge the importance of teaching critical literacy, several factors prevent them from applying this in their classrooms. First, the use of discreet point tests in their institution's literacy curriculum or national examinations implicitly devalues critical literacy (Curdt-Christiansen, 2010; Masuda, 2012; Tan *et al.*, 2010). Given this, teachers have preferred to give more

attention to students' English language proficiency (Ko & Wang, 2009; Masuda, 2012; Tan & Guo, 2009) and extraction of literal meaning in texts rather than their underlying implications (Curd-Christiansen, 2010). Critical literacy thus often becomes confined to the genre approach, whereby the focus is on helping students acquire competence in powerful academic discourses (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993). Also, while teachers in English-speaking countries do not consider resources and culture as inhibitors in the implementation of critical literacy, some teachers of English language learners appear to cite these as concerns (Ko, 2010; Kuo, 2009; Park, 2011). For example, some teachers consider the silence of students coming from non-western countries as an inhibitor to critical literacy, since this approach gives importance to students' voice (Hao, 2011).

As teachers have become more aware of their responsibility toward a more just and inclusive education through critical literacy, some ELL teachers have reevaluated the impact of their pedagogical practices. Teachers have become more sensitive to their use of control in the classroom (Jeyaraj & Harland, 2014), the extent to which they inhibit students' perspectives (Kubota, 2014), or their selection of safe topics for discussion, for fear of making students feel vulnerable (Bender-Slack, 2010). Teachers have also seemed reluctant to initiate changes in institutional practices because of their untenured status (Sangster *et al.*, 2013). Some have been concerned that introducing students to critical thought regarding institutional materials, policies, and practices would invite interrogation of the very system that institutions work hard to establish and use to educate students. As White (2009, p. 56) puts it, "Paradoxically, when charged with teaching students critical literacy, teachers should be wary of actually succeeding in the endeavor!"

## **FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

In the light of the current literature on critical literacy in TESOL contexts, there is a need to conduct more empirical research on critical literacy as well as to improve pedagogy in how English is taught through a critical lens.

In terms of research, there is a need for more studies that examine the factors at play in the dominance and marginalization of literacy practices in ELL contexts. For example, previous studies indicate that teachers of ELLs tend to show preference for conventional literacy practices because these are given greater emphasis in school curricula (Tan *et al.*, 2010; Tan & McWilliam, 2009; Valdes, 2004). More studies exploring the possibilities of alternative literacy practices thus need to be undertaken. In the technologically-driven world of the twenty-first century, language is no longer the only means by which meaning is interpreted and created (Unsworth, 2001). Kress (2000) asserts that if educators merely focus on the analysis and production of printed language, and exclude the multimodal texts prevalent in this digital age, they will disregard alternative communication modes favoured by certain cultures, and deny students the freedom to express themselves bodily, cognitively, and affectively. Studies on students' alternative literacy practices may also help reveal how learners combine various meaning-making modes to create ideological representations (Janks, 2012).

Aside from research, there is also a need to enhance language pedagogy to include critical literacy. For example, in TESOL contexts, English language learning seems to be more focused on using texts to direct students' attention to correct English structures and forms rather than to critically interrogate language/semiotic use (Lotherington & Jenson, 2011). More time may be needed for encouraging students to analyse how authors' choices of English words and structures reveal implied ideologies. Class activities that focus on detecting authors' biases based on word connotations and sentence structures instil in students that using appropriate language forms to promote equitable world views may be more important than being grammatically correct. Curriculum developers of English language courses thus need to incorporate critical literacy as an important objective in language learning.

Moreover, there may be a need for classroom activities that focus on using and designing texts as a means to critically interrogate inequitable practices. This type of pedagogy is needed especially

because in ELL contexts, English teachers tend to focus more on students' English grammatical competence and use of conventional literacy practices without giving much importance to critical multimodal interpretations and designs (Lotherington & Jenson, 2011). Perhaps instead of merely analysing the English forms and structures of decontextualized sentences, ELLs may benefit from spending more time in class discussing social issues and examining the implications of continuing or changing personal, institutional, and cultural practices.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This review set out to examine the different critical literacy practices of teachers and English language learners and their impacts on pedagogy. The review seems to suggest three major points. Firstly, with teachers' guidance towards explicit engagement with power relations in texts, English language learners are able to develop and enhance their critical literacy. This suggests that teachers should not underestimate the capabilities of English language learners in analysing texts using a critical perspective. When language lessons are coupled with discussions of power relations evident in texts or community issues, students may begin to be enlightened that language learning is not a neutral activity but is influenced by political, economic, and cultural factors working in the interests of power.

This review also reveals that both English language teachers and learners seem to favour conventional literacy practices rather than critical literacy. If teachers and learners continue to believe that literacy merely entails reading words on a page and not critically analysing how those words shape identities and influence readers' perspectives, this will lead to a culture of acquiescence. English language learners need teachers who will guide them towards a deeper appreciation of the power of words and other meaning-making modes to enable them to change unjust policies and practices. Using the English classroom as a site to examine competing interests between groups and their effects on society is a concrete response to



Freire and Macedo's call to encourage learners to read the word as well as the world (1987).

Finally, this review suggests that there is a need for English language teachers to lead students toward a heightened awareness of the presence of power structures at work in the valorization and subordination of varied literacy practices. Such pedagogy will provide both English language learners and teachers with the opportunity to reflect on why certain literacy practices are valued over others. A critical literacy educator accommodates learners' varied modes of meaning-making to recognize their diverse skills and sense of identities. Thus, for educators who wish to respond to the literacy needs of the times, and teach learners about their responsibility toward building a just and humane society, critical literacy is worth teaching.

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In addition, students' development of literate practices includes an emphasis on critical literacy, which can be understood as a practice that assists students to understand the social nature of language and how texts position readers in relation to represented ideologies (Misson & Morgan, 2005). The role of language in English. Our understanding of the role and knowledge of language in developing literate practices continues to change overtime. Traditionally, the teaching of literacy and knowledge of language was considered the responsibility of English teachers (Medway, 2005). It is now commonly accepted that all curriculum specialists need to have knowledge of literacy and to draw on a range of literacy strategies to support students across the curriculum. Learner Autonomy: English Language Teachers' Beliefs and Practices. Simon Borg, School of Education, University of Leeds Saleh Al-Busaidi, The Language Centre, Sultan Qaboos University. ELT Research Paper 12'07. Learner Autonomy: English Language Teachers' Beliefs and Practices. Simon Borg, School of Education, University of Leeds Saleh Al-Busaidi, The Language Centre, Sultan Qaboos University. ISBN 978-0-86355-686-9. Saleh Salim Al-Busaidi is an Assistant Professor of English as a foreign language and Director of the Language Centre at Sultan Qaboos University, Oman. He has taught EFL since 1995. He has an MA in TEFL from the University of Exeter, UK and a PhD in curriculum studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA. This review first defines critical literacy in terms of both critical text and critical pedagogy. This review then identifies common theoretical frameworks and pedagogical foci in recent research involving secondary and tertiary ELLs. It highlights the possibilities and challenges experienced by both ELL students and teachers as they practise critical literacy in English language classrooms. By reviewing studies on how English language learners and teachers have experienced the implications of critical literacy, teachers may better appreciate the importance of examining the politics involved in language and literacy education. What is critical literacy? Critical literacy focuses on the connection between literacy and power (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993a). Chapter 3: Teachers' beliefs about literacy teaching. Chapter 4: Effective teachers of literacy in action. High quality literacy teaching demands high quality literacy teachers and any education system must attempt to maximise the expertise of teachers in teaching literacy. In order to direct improvements in the selection, training and professional development of teachers of literacy most profitably, a great deal can be learned from a study of those primary school teachers identified as effective in the teaching of literacy. From a review of the existing research literature on effective teachers in general and effective teachers of literacy in particular, a number of specific hypotheses were generated which our research then set out to test. The magazine for English language teachers. Resources. eBooks. Critical thinking has been a buzzword for some time now. In fact, judging by the research, it has been a buzzword for over a decade. The problem with buzz words is that, over time, they lose a lot of their original meaning and begin to stand for almost anything new or progressive. In addition, it has become an empty rallying cry ("We must teach critical thinking in English language teaching!") devoid of the very thinking it purports to support. Bloom's taxonomy is perhaps the most well-known example of critical thinking. It is an orderly, visually-pleasing representation of, as we have seen, quite a large concept " and this is perhaps one reason why it has held educational weight since the late 50s.