Developing critical literacy

For many ESL teachers the practical implications and benefits to their learners of a critical literacy approach in the classroom remain unclear. This book begins with brief definitions of critical literacy and why it should be addressed in the ESL classroom. It then suggests practical ways in which this can be done, without neglecting possible problem areas. The eight chapters discuss classroom activity types, look at whether critical literacy is relevant to all text types, explore teachers’ own ideological assumptions, and consider the issues of the relevance of linguistic ability. They also deal with the role of linguistic analysis in critical literacy and look at how to introduce learners successfully to critical activities. The book consists of a brief overview of current theory followed by strategies and practical suggestions from practising teachers. It will be useful to ESL teachers as well as to trainers running professional development courses.

The Professional Development Collection consists of short, practical books on teaching topics drawn from recent research projects. Its aim is to help teachers keep up to date with specific areas of classroom practice by drawing together research, theory and practice. Other books in the series include: Monitoring learner progress, Teaching disparate learner groups and Using technology in the classroom.

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Developing critical literacy

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Introduction to the series

This book is part of a series that draws on recent research projects conducted in the Australian adult ESL context. The aim of the series is to explore some of the research findings from these projects and some of the general literature in the area in order to suggest implications for classroom practice. Thus, the series attempts to draw together research, theory and practice in a way that is accessible to practising teachers.

The focus in this book is on the teaching of critical literacy. The concept of critical literacy gained currency during the 1980s and 1990s, but for many ESL teachers it is not yet clear what a critical literacy approach means in practice. Many of the examples in this book are drawn from recent action research (Burns and Hood 1998) conducted by teachers who were attempting to explore this approach in their classrooms.

The main body of the book summarises the principal findings of the research in point form, then offers practical suggestions for activities that will help teachers to examine the issues for themselves in their own classrooms. The findings and the suggestions are supported, and in some cases expanded upon, by quotations from the research papers themselves. For ease of reading, the supporting quotations appear on the left-hand pages, opposite the findings or suggestions to which they are addressed. However, the right and left-hand pages are equally important elements in the discussion and both contribute towards a fuller understanding of teaching critical literacy.

At the back of the book there is a list of references from which quotations have been taken and another list containing other relevant texts. Together these two lists provide a broad overview of the current research in the area of critical literacy.
Part of the difficulty in teasing out the meaning of the term ‘critical literacy’ lies in the different interpretations given to it in the literature. These differences relate to:

- the different theoretical bases drawn upon
- the histories of the different educational sectors the term is applied to
- the extent to which it is seen as relating to language and text, or more broadly to total pedagogy
- the extent to which learners should be encouraged towards social or political action.

For some, the concept of critical literacy derives mainly from the work of critical discourse theorists and their recognition that language is not a neutral commodity. For others, notions of critical literacy have their beginnings in genre theory and systemic functional linguistics, and a belief that a knowledge of the language and the text choices we make to achieve certain social purposes is useful to language learners. For still others, critical literacy theory emerges from the Freirean notion of empowerment and/or related feminist ideologies. For many researchers, several, or indeed all, of these different theoretical foundations are significant in forming their particular notions of critical literacy.

In the adult literacy field ‘critical literacy’ is very much linked with that field’s traditional philosophies - the empowerment of students and the alleviation of disadvantage. It is in writings from the adult literacy field that we more often find ‘critical literacy’ linked with all-encompassing terms such as ‘critical pedagogy’ and ‘critical practice’.

In the field of adult ESL the term is used in a way that connects it much more directly to the study of language and text. The term is most often used in relation to reading, with ‘critical language awareness’ used to refer to the broader notion applied to all four macroskills.

The extracts on the left hand page are from a number of writers in the area and reflect some of the differences in concept.
DEVELOPING CRITICAL LITERACY

INTRODUCTION

Why do we need to address the issue of developing critical literacy?

‘Critical literacy’ is a relatively recent notion in the field of English language and literacy teaching. However, it is now becoming prominent in pedagogical approaches. It is included in most current definitions of literacy – where it is generally contrasted with ‘functional’ literacy – and is promoted as an essential skill in today’s world. We are urged to address critical literacy in our classrooms – as the following from Hammond et al demonstrates:

The aim of all literacy programs should be the development of a critical literacy where learners focus not just on the mechanics or content of written texts, but on the construction and the way that readers are positioned within the texts.

(Hammond et al 1992:12)

However, there are certain difficulties in attempting to develop critical literacy skills in the classroom. While it is not difficult to find theoretical and philosophical/political discussions of critical literacy, the term itself is interpreted in many different ways and is often discussed in very abstract terms. There are also a number of similar terms – such as critical pedagogy, critical practice, critical thinking, critical language awareness – and it is not always clear how these terms relate to ‘critical literacy’. The confusion about exactly what is meant by critical literacy is echoed in this teacher-researcher’s reflection:

Despite extensive reading and discussion with other members of the research group, my understanding [of critical literacy] was still quite hazy when the time came to begin, and my research question: ‘What changes do I need to make in my teaching to incorporate a critical literacy perspective?’ was as much a reflection of this as of my desire for involvement in the project to have practical outcomes.

(Reade – early draft for paper in Burns and Hood 1998)

In addition to the theoretical problem of definition, it is difficult to find examples of classroom practice that involve adult ESL learners. The examples that do exist generally relate to quite advanced learners of English. Some language teachers have begun addressing the issue of critical literacy in the classroom in a practical way – by action research. This book attempts to summarise these researchers’ experiences and to suggest ways for other teachers to continue the enquiry. The eight main issues that have been identified from the action research are listed on the contents page.

WHAT RESEARCHERS SAY

Under the heading of text analyst (what does all this mean to me?) we include an expanded notion of what has traditionally been called critical reading. Here we refer to an awareness of the fact that all texts are crafted objects, written by persons with particular dispositions or orientations to the information, regardless of how factual or neutral the products may attempt to be. We are arguing, therefore, for the necessary status of a role for the reader that involves conscious awareness of the language and idea systems that are brought into play when a text is used.

(Freebody and Luke 1990:13)

... reading does not just involve decoding the meanings in the text. Readers are often also deciding whether they agree with the content of the text and with the particular ideological positions or beliefs that the writer presents. In some texts the writer’s position, or values and beliefs, may be overt; that is, they may be expressed in an explicit or direct way. In other texts the writer’s position may be covert or implicit. The writer’s position may also extend to what is not said or is left out of the text, as well as what is actually expressed.

When we read in a way that involves taking into account the writer’s position, we are reading critically and we may or may not agree with the views expressed. We are involved in evaluating two things to do with what can be referred to as reader positioning – the way the writer is attempting to persuade us as readers and the degree to which we accept this position.

(Hood, Solomon and Burns 1996:5)
What Researchers Say

We … need to develop reading activities that help our students to:

- be aware of how particular language choices reflect values and set up particular power relations between the reader and the writer
- be aware of how their own values and experiences influence their reading of a particular text
- question what it is that they are reading.

(Hood, Solomon and Burns: 1990)

Typical pre-reading tasks ask students, for example, to ‘give their personal opinion’ about the topic. A more critical pre-reading task might be to think of why the topic has been selected in the first place … a typical while-reading task is to predict the continuing text. A critical while-reading task would be to consider a whole range of ways of continuing a text, not just the most probable ones.

(Wallace 1994:71)

[In the first text] … to fully appreciate the way language was working and what material interests might be behind its construction, it was essential to know that the text was a newspaper article reporting on information published in a book … Students were not told who had written the [second text], and it was essential to clarify this before the social purpose of the text could be clearly ascertained …

Thus the role of context (Where would you find this text?), so crucial in the examination of the first text, was a very minor, almost irrelevant, consideration in the second.

(Rice 1998:56, 58)

Classroom activity types

How can a critical element be incorporated into teaching?

Findings

- Critical approaches involve a shift from the common emphasis on finding the right answer to one where it is accepted that there are a range of interpretations, as long as reasons can be argued through.
- Critical approaches can include a focus on what reading actually is.
- A critical dimension to reading can be added to usual classroom practice by incorporating additional questions to the ones you usually ask in the pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading stages.
- A number of different question frameworks have been developed to use with any texts. These vary in wording and focus to some extent, but essentially cover the same focus areas. Examples of these appear in the ‘Suggestions for the classroom’ section which follows. Particular questions will be more relevant and interesting than others for particular texts.
... the most interesting question for discussion turned out to be the one related to whose interests the article served…This question prompted a discussion around a deeper level of understanding than had been reached in past discussions based on newspaper articles. It had the effect of revealing more clearly the writer’s position, uncovering the purpose behind the choice of the subject matter and the interests of the people at the centre of it. (Fraser 1998:54).

I … encouraged students to see that questions are as important as answers by asking them to generate their own questions of any text rather than reading to find the answers to given questions. (Wallace 1992:71)

In surveying reading behaviour and reading material in this way we began to discover … how much can be learned from both about social class membership, education, political views and … how much can be taken for granted assumptions about gender, class and race. (Wallace 1992:65)

I believe that for people to become broadly critically aware, and later critically literate, they need to become conscious not only of the assumptions and purpose of the ‘other’, speaker or writer, but of the assumptions that they themselves bring to a situation or text which affect their ability to interpret and therefore help or hinder their understanding in that context. (Eastman – early draft for paper in Burns and Hood 1998)

Suggestions for the classroom

> Below are questions from the frameworks from two different works. Use them as a guide to preparing a list of questions to suit your learner group.

From **Focus on reading:**
- What is the topic?
- Who is the intended audience?
- Why has it been written?
- What is the attitude of the writer towards the topic?
- How else could it have been written about?

(From Hood, Solomon and Burns 1996: 90-92).

From **Portable critical literacy strategies:**
- Where might you find this text? How can you tell?
- What is the topic?
- What is its purpose? (What is its genre?)
- To whom is it written?
- Who probably wrote it – What would their position be? In what institution?
- Why has this text been written? Are there any economic/material interests affecting why it has been written in the way it has?
- How does the language of the text help to achieve its purpose?
- What other ways of writing about the topic are there?
- What sort of ideal reader has this text constructed?

(Rice 1998:56)

> Select a text suitable for your learners and identify points where you might ask them to think of alternative ways to continue.

> Give learners a text and ask them to set the questions.

> Ask learners to discuss how topics would be dealt with in their own countries, but be sensitive to learner backgrounds and recent experiences.

*continued pg13*
One advantage that L2 readers may have is that they are not the text’s model readers ... [thus] they are in a position to bring fresh and legitimate interpretations to written texts. They are able to exploit their positions as outsiders. (Wallace 1992:68)

As consumers, as students or teachers, and as employees we are operating within institutional frameworks. The social and political values of these frameworks are seldom spoken about but nevertheless set up particular power relationships. We can help our learners to be more active participants in the situations they are in by helping them to be more aware of the implicit values. (Hood, Solomon and Burns 1996:91)

Give learners a text on a topic of interest and ask them to retell the story or opinion. Discuss the different retellings and the reasons for the differences. (Hood, Solomon and Burns 1996:90)

During this course my teaching became quite different from the way I had been teaching previously. For example:

> I provided vocabulary meanings from the context of the text in my efforts to focus the students on purpose and meaning. I used a matching activity prior to the reading itself in order to allow them to read for the broader purpose and not get ‘bogged down’ in the new words.

> I searched for special texts that would enable the learners to see explicit examples of writers giving opinions and trying to sway the readers. (Reade 1998:45)

Suggestions for the classroom

> Select a text suitable for your learners and prepare pre-reading questions that explore attitudes to the topic as well as knowledge of the topic.

> Adapt the following discussion questions to explore personal ‘literacy histories’ with your learners:

  - their first memories of reading (what, where, with whom?)
  - their favourite reading as a child and as an adult
  - the most important book/s or author/s in their lives
  - the main roles and purpose of reading in their lives (eg as a parent, professional, for pleasure, religious purposes etc).

> Have learners interview other people about these matters.

> Ask them to carry out simple family literacy surveys. (Wallace 1992:64–5)

Try these activities with your learners:

- Collect a range of reading material.
- Classify by categories (eg requests from charities, public information leaflets).
- When you have worked out five or six broad types, identify:
  - who produces them (eg public bodies, commercial enterprises, local authorities)
  - for whom they are produced
  - why the text was produced
  - whether it is relevant to you or not, and why.
- Choose one text from each category which particularly appeals to you, either because of its style or its content, and discuss with other members of the group. (Wallace 1992:66)
… texts cannot be understood as self-contained products. And yet in the foreign-language classroom that is frequently the assumption – the text is brought into the classroom, or is reproduced in the textbook, and is then treated to various forms of analysis or followed by exercises. Frequently, the text is shorn of authorship, date and source. It has no history. And yet how a text comes to take the form it does is part of the meaning of a text. (Wallace 1992: 67)

Initially, I spent a lot of time looking for ‘ideal’ texts which would illustrate precisely the points I wanted to make. However, on reflection I realised that critical literacy development should be part of normal reading activities, and learners should be able to look at any text with a critical eye. I therefore decided to use the same kind of texts as I did for my normal reading program. There were a couple of exceptions to this and these turned out to be the least successful. … In general it seemed that at this level relevance to the learners’ lives is the most important factor in the choice of text. (Perkins 1998:30, 36)

… the fact that all types of discourse are open in principle, and no doubt in fact, in our society to ideological investment, does not mean that all types of discourse are ideologically invested to the same degree. It should not be too difficult to show that advertising is in broad terms more heavily invested than the physical sciences. (Fairclough 1992:91)

Is critical literacy relevant to all texts and text types?

Findings

> Authentic texts seem to be the most useful texts for exploring criticality.

> It appears more useful in general to allow learner interest and need to be the deciding factor in the selection of texts, rather than the pursuit of critical literacy ‘teaching points’.

> There is debate about whether or not all texts are ideologically loaded. Some writers take the position that even the most innocuous seeming texts have an ideological element. Others believe that not all texts are loaded to the same extent.

> Texts and text types with clear ideological loading may be a useful starting point in dealing with criticality to show learners the sorts of issues and language you want to focus on. It is then possible to move on to texts and text types with more concealed assumptions and reader positioning.

> An awareness of intertextuality, or how texts relate to other texts and text types, is relevant to critical reading.
Choose texts for use in class as you would normally – that is, according to learner needs, interests and abilities.

Use some texts which have overt and explicit ideological loading, especially at the beginning, to help highlight the sort of features you want learners to focus on. Also use less overtly ideological texts.

Include less traditional text types such as cartoons, posters, graffiti and advertisements in your lessons.

Do not exclude texts which appear to be non-contentious.

Do not select or avoid texts on the basis of a certain attitude of your own to the content or on the basis of your knowledge of the topic.

Do activities that involve learners looking at a range of text types on the same theme or topic to highlight that writers have choices. Get students to bring in texts to add to the ones you select in order to ensure that there is a range of different positions covered.

Use some texts without details of author, readership and genre and ask learners to reconstruct them from the clues.

Give learners fragments from the middle of a text and then gradually give more to see at what point they can reconstruct likely author, readership and genre.

Suggestions for the classroom
In an age of manipulation, when our students are in dire need of critical strength to resist the continuing assaults of all the media, the worst thing we can do is to foster in them an attitude of reverence before texts. (Scholes 1985:61)

... it is important that, in placing an emphasis on literacy as situated social practice, we do not correspondingly background literacy as text. (Baynham 1990:34)

Why do learners need to be critically literate?
What about their other learning needs and interests?

Findings

> A critical element seems useful and relevant to our learners’ literacy development. While there is a possibility that we may make students over-critical and assertive, it seems likely that ‘the general tendency, ... especially for L2 readers, is an over-deferent stance towards the text’ (Wallace 1992: 61).

> One reason for our learners to become more questioning readers in today’s world is the current proliferation of electronically transmitted text. Unresolved issues of ownership and copyright mean that it is difficult to identify who the authors of the information are, where the information comes from and how reliable it is.

> There is clearly a need to balance an emphasis on functional and ‘critical’ literacy. Learners, especially in the beginning stages of learning, may be more concerned about more conventional aspects of learning language. They also may have very specific and ‘down-to-earth’ goals – getting a job, getting a driver’s licence, helping their children with school work and so on.
WHAT RESEARCHERS say

The texts of everyday life are not innocuous, neutral texts requiring simple decoding and response. They are key moments where social identity and power relations are established and negotiated … the uncritical teaching of how to read and write the most simple, basic ‘functional’ text supports particular social relations and institutions. When we teach the job application uncritically, we teach one how to ‘be’ or ‘do’ the corporate identity, to see the world as an employee might, and so forth … Left uninterrupted, everyday texts play major parts in building and reproducing social structures.


Critical reading has not generally been encouraged in the EFL classroom … Students tend not to be invited to draw on their experiences of literacy, or to articulate their understanding of it as a social phenomenon. Reading has seen to be unproblematic as an activity, simply as what goes on when reader meets text. Texts have not generally been selected for their potential to challenge. They are more frequently seen as either vehicles for linguistic structure, as general interest material usually of a fairly safe, bland kind or as functional survival material for some groups of L2 learners who are given material such as forms or official letters, thus suggesting an assimilationist model of literacy – one which accepts rather than challenges the assumptions as to the future social and occupational roles of second language learners … In short, EFL students are often marginalised as readers; their goals in interacting with written texts are perceived to be primarily those of language learners.

(Wallace 1992:62)

Suggestions for the classroom

> Talk to your learners about:
  - critical literacy – demonstrate what you mean through a sample activity and discuss whether they are interested in this aspect of reading;
  - the texts you use – do they prefer to read authentic or non-authentic texts? Why? What do they feel about textbook texts? Do they think about whether they are authentic or not, adapted for English learners or not? How do they feel about reading provocative, contentious material?
Is there a danger that teachers might impose their own way of thinking on learners?

What if learners resist or see critical approaches as inappropriate?

**Findings**

> Some researchers question the cultural assumptions behind the emphasis on critical literacy.

> Some learners may be limited in how far they can develop critical literacy because of their different cultural backgrounds.

> It may also be that some learners will not want to engage in critical reading activities, seeing them as inappropriate, irrelevant or even threatening. It seems important for teachers to be conscious of these factors – to understand the difficulties learners may have and to permit them to resist the notion.

> More political interpretations of critical literacy have been criticised as being patronising to learners and making assumptions about learners’ perceptions of their marginalisation. Teachers need to be very aware of their own ideological stances and take care not to impose these on their learners.

> Teachers may need to re-examine practical aspects of classroom management and dynamics in order to encourage learners to express views that may differ from their own.
If we do want students to develop critical capacities, it seems to me that practice in adopting a critical ‘persona’ is a crucial element in the instruction. Classroom approaches need to orient themselves around the central notions of criticality on a regular basis … [and] need to incorporate critical questions that relate to assumptions inherent in the text … Such activities need to become frequently practised strategies in the classroom if they are to assist students to develop a level of critical thinking … (Rice 1998:60)

One group of learners, however, found the task difficult. The language was too complex and the activity itself was too abstract and removed from context for them as learners. (Perkins 1998:36)

We discussed how the questions [see ‘Portable critical literacy strategies’, p11] were like a series of doors that gained entry to the ‘black box’ of the text. At times some of these doors would be locked, only to be opened when certain others had been unlocked. Some students came up with the idea that, equally, the text was a labyrinth – only comprehensible once all the doors in the maze had been opened and that this had to be done in a certain sequence. These analogies seemed to assist students in the subsequent discussions about the role of the questions. (Rice 1998:56)

How can teachers avoid creating feelings of failure and confusion when introducing learners to critical activities?

Findings

> A critical approach needs to become a regular part of classroom practice, not simply a question of a few random activities done on an irregular basis with particular texts.

> It is useful to make learners aware that answers to questions which focus on ‘critical literacy’ are likely to be open-ended and to relate to each other.

> The wording of critical reading questions needs to be as concrete as possible. Language ability and cultural background may also need to be taken into account.

> You may need to provide more support to learners in the form of vocabulary, main ideas and so on, so that they can focus on ideological aspects.

> As with most classroom activities, learners who are more familiar with the concepts will play an important role in helping others in the group to develop cultural awareness.
Suggestions for the classroom

- Repeat questions/activities/discussion points over different lessons so that they become an automatic part of approaching a text.
- Give learners plenty of time to understand texts before asking them to engage in critical reading activities; for example, give text and/or activities out in one lesson and discuss them in the next, giving learners time to read through at home.
- Take it slowly, and do not try to introduce too many new concepts at the same time.
- Avoid numbering critical reading questions so that learners see them as interrelated, rather than sequential.
- Before setting written question activities, introduce detailed language analysis and more difficult concepts in general discussion.
- Embed difficult and new activities within enjoyable and immediately relevant activities.
- Integrate questions to develop critical literacy awareness into normal reading activities.
- Give opportunities for both independent reading and for group discussion, for in-class and out-of-class activities.

**What Researchers Say**

The repetition of similar analytical questions about reading in each lesson … meant that the learners began to answer the questions easily and routinely. (Perkins 1998:34)

I often felt that the learners and I were jumping into a task unprepared. In future … I will use the same kind of activities but provide more scaffolding. (Perkins 1998:37)

The one question that did cause problems was in the … section where learners were asked to analyse an aspect of the language used in the brochure. Even after talking it through, some of them were still unsure what I meant and we abandoned the question. I think that if I had raised the question in general class discussion rather than writing it on the worksheet for the learners to answer in groups, it would have been more successful. (Perkins 1998:31)

[The discussion had] a vigour which, in my experience, is never attained when learners seek simply to identify main points and information contained in a text. (Reade 1998:43)

[This] method of approaching texts … yielded very interesting discussions which tended not to be confrontational but were more academic in style with interpretations of texts being made and supported by evidence from the text. However, discussions were also more personal than most academic tutorials because when students gave their views on issues they drew very much on their life experience to illustrate their points. (Fraser 1998:54)
Is critical literacy only relevant to more advanced students?

What is possible with low-level learners?

**Findings**

- Critical reading will of necessity take different forms with different groups of learners because of their different levels of language and literacy awareness in their first language and in English.

- There are differing views on whether critical literacy approaches are possible or appropriate at lower levels of proficiency.

- Responding to questions focusing on cultural analysis may be difficult for learners at lower levels of proficiency.

- Oral activities focusing on different socio-cultural practices and the related language may be a way to begin teaching critical literacy to lower proficiency learners.
What Researchers Say

Most of the students believed that a critical approach to reading is a skill that they use in their first language, but that they lack confidence to use it in English, because of their gaps in vocabulary and their inexperience with both register and social norms in Australia.

(Reade 1998:45)

I had used journal writing in previous classes on many occasions as a method of providing writing fluency practice and reflection on learning. However, ... I began to think about using daily journal writing as a way to assist learners to reflect on social uses of language, particularly the language they read or heard in their activities outside the classroom ... My instructions to them were to feel free to write whatever they wished, but ... to also notice and write about:

- interesting words and language they read or heard on the bus or in the street or in shops
- confusing language
- things that people said and did in social environments such as parties, pubs, discos
- particular times they had difficulty talking with someone in a service situation such as a bank, shop, garage or child care centre.

(Eastman 1998:26)

[I presented] a number of illustrations of social situations with empty speech bubbles in order to tease out the register, relationship and politeness issues, and to discuss cultural factors. Learners discussed in groups what they would say in each of the depicted situations. Suggestions were then pooled, analysed and discussed in terms of if, when, and with whom the utterances would be appropriate in English.

(Eastman 1998:25)

Suggestions for the classroom

- Take into account the different levels of critical language awareness that will be in any class and build on this awareness.
- Start learners writing in journals from very early on in their English language learning and deliberately direct some of this activity towards noting and commenting on social practices and language use that particularly strike them.
- Use activities with visuals and empty speech bubble situations and allow multiple interpretations.
- Allow students to use L1 in the classroom in activities about cultural practice and language use.
How can teachers focus learners on the language of the texts they read?

Do teachers/learners need to have a sound grasp of grammar to engage in critical literacy activities?

Findings

> Critical literacy involves at least some analysis of language. Speaking broadly it means giving the same attention to the language factors that convey relationship and attitude as that given to content, facts and events.

> There are different ways to approach language analysis in the context of critical reading. Functional grammar offers one way and some writers use frameworks which draw on this (eg Wallace 1992 and Clark 1995).
Suggestions for the classroom

> Use or adapt the following language framework (from Wallace 1992:78). Try it out on some texts yourself before using it in class. Have groups focus on different aspects of meaning.

**Field: Experiential meanings**
(How the writer describes what is going on)
- **participants:** What/who is talked about?
- **predicates:** How is X talked about (ie what adjectives or nouns collocate with X)?
  - What verbs (states, actions, mental processes) co-occur with X?
- **agency:** What/who initiates an action?

**Effect of the writer’s choices?**

**Tenor: Interpersonal meanings**
(How the writer indicates attitude to self, subject and reader.)
- **mood:** What mood is selected – affirmative? imperative? interrogative?
- **modality:** What kinds of modal verbs are selected?
- **person:** What personal pronouns are selected?
  - How does the writer refer to self, subjects and reader?

**Effect of the writer’s choices?**

**Mode: Textual meanings**
(How the content of the text is organised)
- **theme:** What information is selected for first position?
- **voice:** When is active or passive voice selected?
- **cohesive relations:** What kinds of connectors are used?

**Effect of the writer’s choices?**
Is critical literacy only about reading?

Findings

> It seems likely that the critical awareness that learners develop in reading will have relevance in their writing also. It seems less clear, however, just how they can use their increased critical awareness to develop their writing skills; for example:

– Do we encourage learners to use what they know to position the reader as they want to and to convey meanings in the way that suits their purposes – just as other writers do?
– Do we encourage learners not to make certain ideological assumptions when they construct text – about gender, race and class and so on?

> Turning the focus on to what to do with critical awareness in writing brings us back to questions about the assumptions behind teaching critical reading (see above).

> Critical skills are also relevant to spoken language situations. Clearly, speakers make the same sorts of language and content choices when they speak as when they write, and for the same ideologically invested purposes. The activities outlined in this booklet are likely to be as useful in listening activities – especially in relation to media contexts.

> Clearly, speaking, listening, and writing activities as well as reading are considered a part of the critical literacy program by those writers who urge teachers to encourage their learners to take action in response to their critical reading – for example by writing letters to editors and other authors of texts, doing further research about institutions and so on.
Suggestions for the classroom

> When preparing to teach your students about a particular context of language use – either spoken or written – routinely include as part of your preparation a consideration of:
  
  – the critical language awareness relevant to operating in that context (e.g., power relationships: the way these are manifested and the strategies to deal with these);
  
  – whether or not your students are able to make use of such notions;
  
  – how you might introduce these notions in the classroom.
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