Alford,J. (2001) **Critical literacy and second language learning in the mainstream classroom: an elusive nexus? Pp. 127-139. In P. Singh and E. McWilliam (eds),** *Designing Educational Researchs: Theories, Methods and Practices.* **Flaxton, Australia: Post Pressed.**

Critical literacy and second language learning in the mainstream classroom: an elusive nexus?

Abstract:

Critical Literacy (CL) is now a core component of Queensland secondary school English programs. These programs are delivered to a significant number of students from Non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) whose linguistic and cultural resources are diverse and not necessarily representative of mainstream high school *cultural capital* (Bourdieu 1990). In response to the current emphasis on CL, it is vital for English as a Second Language (ESL) educators to identify the points of contention as well as the possibilities for promoting critical engagement with texts with adolescent ESL learners and to seek to create pedagogy that reflects the critical needs and capacities of these learners. This paper outlines the version of CL in secondary schools as theorised by a number of Australian researchers; discusses the relevance and importance of CL to NESB learners and finally raises a number of issues that need resolving if such learners are to be provided with a well-rounded literacy education amid contemporary Australian social relations and textual practice.

Implicit in developing pedagogies that produce high-level intellectual outcomes is the ability to interrogate texts and produce written expository genres based on critical inquiry. Many educators would agree that it is problematic for English as a Second Language (ESL) students with limited English linguistic and cultural resources to engage in and express such critique in subject English. However these capacities are becoming increasingly expected of ESL students in mainstream secondary schools as outcomes of new syllabus directives. If Critical Literacy (CL) is one of the necessary components of being fully literate (Freebody and Luke 1990), then ESL educators are ethically obliged to seek ways of enabling all students to be critically literate. This paper will deliberate the seemingly elusive nexus between promoting a critical view of literate practice and the demands of second language learning in secondary schools. To do so, the paper presents a brief discussion of the version of CL in high schools, the relevance of CL to ESL learners and reflections on five key problematic areas: mainstreaming policy, time, resistance and submission to text, default genre pedagogy, and background knowledge.

Defining CL in the secondary school context:

Literacy is now seen as a set of practices of literate behaviours representing multiple abilities with which to engage a multi-media saturated environment (Freebody and Luke 1990, Luke 1996,

Luke, Comber & O'Brien 1994, Moje et al 2000). Approaches to literacy that focus solely on cognitive processes, linguistic knowledge and skills are considered insufficient for what they omit from the learning process - namely exposé of the conditions of production and interpretation of texts. Elaborating on a discourse view of literacy, Freebody and Luke (1990) propose that being literate involves more than decoding and passively absorbing text. Rather, readers (viewers and hearers) need to engage actively with text at various levels: to 'crack the code' or interpret the symbols and words used; ascertain what the text 'means' propositionally and ideologically; decide what social use the text can perform and fourthly, determine how they are being positioned, constructed and influenced as readers. Mastery of each of these roles is necessary for a learner to become fully fluent. Conceptualisation of language and literacy teaching and associated ESL pedagogy has, to date, allowed for significant adherence to the first three roles to the point where Queensland ESL educators could be seen to be leaders in the field. However, with the introduction of the critical dimension to literacy teaching and required outcomes, ESL educators are finding the interface between language teaching as traditionally practiced and critical approaches to literacy education problematical. Essential to any discussion of this problem is a definition of what CL means and also how it is manifest in the context of high school literacy education at present.

CL is a contested term in contested theoretical and pedagogical terrain. As a core component of the Queensland English curriculum, CL refers to the fourth of these levels of literate practice: the ability to be a text analyst: to investigate "the cultural and ideological assumptions that underwrite texts" (Morgan 1997:1). The various representations of reality in texts and the interpretations of such are the main foci of inquiry in CL pedagogy through the 'interrogation' of texts. 'Portable' critical literacy tools for textual interrogation include questions such as: who wrote the text and for what purpose/audience? what material or economic interests were served in its production? how are the participants named and shaped? who does it exclude? how is the reader positioned? (Burns and Hood 1998, Lohrey 1998, Luke, Comber & O'Brien 1994, Wajnryb 2000, Morgan 1997) Kamler (1994) also provides tools such as *lexical classifications* to identify how the language choices of the text construct particular versions of the world and how participants and readers are positioned in this construction. The focus in this approach is "on what language does; on how it functions as both a mode of action and a mode of representation" (Kamler 1994:131). Critical literacy, then, is concerned with identifying and deconstructing *the conditions of production* - the institutional, discursive agendas and agents behind and at work in texts- and also *the conditions of interpretation* - the speculation about other standpoints and

positions (Luke, Comber and O'Brien 1994). Accordingly, CL is based on the theoretical assumption that texts do not possess meaning only because of inherent linguistic features. They are generated and maintained by discursive formations, each with its own particular ideology and way of controlling power (Foucault 1970 in Kumaravedivelu 1999). Texts are not just descriptive, factual, propositional or performative phenomena; they are also ideological, bearing particular uses of language that not only arise out of an ideology or social practice but also help to constitute or shape it (Foucault 1972, Gee 1996, Luke 1994, Lankshear 1994, McDonnell 1986, Fairclough 1992, Weedon 1987).

The position on CL adopted by syllabus documents governing high school instruction in Queensland secondary schools does not promote a 'full-blown" commitment to the social action outcomes of other versions of CL (See Fairclough 1992). Rather, largely due to its institutional endorsement, it advocates a less contentious, 'diluted' version concentrating on textual intermediacy: "the deconstruction, construction, reconstruction and explication of texts, focusing on ways in which discourses shape and are shaped by individuals in cultural and social institutions" (Senior English Trial Pilot Syllabus Nov. 1999:9). Work programs (unit, lesson and assessment outlines drawn from the syllabus) indicate commitment to the fundamentals of a critical approach in statements such as: "Deconstruction shows that no text has a single, stable, 'correct' meaning" (Robinson & Elsden 2000). Four reading positions are suggested as a means of interrogating the ways in which authors represent, and readers interpret, "reality": dominant/invited/author-centred (ie the author's intention); world-centred (resistant or *other's* positions); reader-centred (the individual reader's response/meaning-making) and text-centred (images, metaphors, lexical choices that represent a version of reality - See Kamler 1994, Luke Comber & O'Brien 1994, Burns and Hood 1998, Lohrey 1998, and Wajnryb 2000). This resistant approach to text is evidence of the concern many educators have for young people navigating a coercive text-saturated environment within which they must function. In a culture where texts are designed to manipulate, sell to and mould the thinking of a population, it is now considered to be an abrogation of the responsibility of educators of the next generation to NOT promote critically literate approaches to the reading and viewing and hearing of texts (Elkins and Luke 1999).

Relevance/importance of CL to second language (L2) learners

CL is a particularly significant issue in relation to school students whose background is different to the mainstream. By their very nature, 'transmission' models of literacy exclude students' experiences and interpretations and therefore might not fully evoke the range of cultural experience typical of many multicultural classrooms. In drawing on the experiences and interpretations of the learners, CL is more learner-centred and thereby, considering the proportion of minority ethnic groups represented in Queensland schools (up to 30% in many metropolitan centres), more multicultural in its orientation (May 1994). One of the aims of second language learning (L2) classes that incorporate CL is to make use of the resources of multicultural groups to share varied perceptions on the ways in which texts are socially produced and interpreted (Wallace 1995). Broadly speaking, CL can therefore be seen as compatible with current multicultural perspectives on education. The implications of this western cultural orientation will be explored later.

Critical Literacy, then, is seen by many as having a significant role to play in locating ESL learners as more central to the literacy learning experience, as opposed to marginalised learners who simply need to be brought to a position to equally match their mainstream classroom counterparts. While ESL learners need knowledge of and access to powerful language and text types, they frequently arrive, as young adults, with a completely different set of social and cultural practices that cannot be discounted or removed and replaced with those of the new host culture. (Related issues surrounding genre instruction and alternative social practices will be discussed more fully later). The notion of the Non-English speaking background (NESB) learner having a unique contribution to make to the literacy arena is very significant to this discussion. L2 learners, very diverse in nature, bring a range of linguistic and critical abilities to any classroom learning episode. Instead of being depicted as a learner with a series of deficits to be compensated for, the L2 learner's 'reader position' can be utilised to the advantage of all in the process of becoming analytically literate (McLaughlin 1994, Wallace 1992b, Alford 2001). With the guidance of a skilled teacher, critical literacy translates easily to a foreign language classroom, whereby culture at work can be identified through the interrogation of text (Carr 1999). It is easier to "pull out patterns and relationships, discern investments, ideologies and power relations which structure our making of meaning" (Carr 1994:150) if the linguistic system is not our own (Carr 1994, 1999, Wallace 1992b, 1995). In fact, Wallace (1995) has coined the term 'overhearer's advantage' to describe this phenomena, meaning the edge the ESL learner has

in being better able to deconstruct texts which are familiar to students from the host culture. This edge is borne of their very distance from the target culture and language.   Perhaps, for once, the NESB learner's *lack* of congruence with the dominant culture gives them the upper hand.

Hence, there are advantages in being bicultural in relation to critical literacy events. Bicultural students are able to speak, read and write narrative, images and characterisation from positions of experience outside the mainstream - either vicariously through their extended family's experience or through their own first-hand knowledge (Jetnikoff 1997). This is a valuable dimension of CL in terms of how it can position NESB learners away from the 'edges' of literacy education experience   (Clark 1995, Moje et al. 2000). Opportunities for ESL educators to create pedagogical space for learners to articulate this 'upper hand' are clearly available within this conceptual approach to literacy.   By drawing on their interpretation of the text and on their reader positions, the teacher can centralise their voice in classroom practice. In so doing, the teacher can do two things: a./ encourage the examination of language both as [social] practice and as a site for cultural struggle; and b./ create a means by which to emancipate minority language speakers from a position of subordination, always subject to the dominant standard language of the curriculum (Macedo in Courts 1991)   This ideal pedagogical thrust as outlined above, however, seems to be eluding many ESL educators in the current structures and pedagogical climate governing ESL instruction delivery in Queensland. If Freebody and Luke's (1990) model of the four roles of literate practice does in fact represent what fluent text participants do, then to continue to limit ESL instruction to the first three roles, ignoring the forth (the critical analyst) makes ESL instruction incomplete and potentially disadvantageous to L2 learners. In approaching literacy critically, however, a number of issues surrounding its implementation with NESB learners need to be examined and pedagogically resolved.

The problematic nexus between CL and ESL learning in the mainstream:

Despite some agreement amongst educators that CL is potentially valuable for NESB learners, making use of a CL approach to texts poses substantial conundrums for adolescent L2 learners and their mainstream educators. Five key areas have been selected for discussion to highlight where the dilemma is located and to suggest why this may be so.

1. Mainstreaming NESB/ESL learners

ESL students were originally mainstreamed in the mid-1980s as a way of strengthening multi-culturalism and ESL policy. By bringing welfare and educational servicing needs from the margins to the core of social institutions like schools, the state ensured that the mainstream took more responsibility for NESB learner needs (Davison 2001). Despite its intention to further the cause of 'integration', in reality it resulted in promoting 'assimilation', through the mainstream curriculum becoming the *de facto* ESL curriculum and ESL being seen as a methodology not a content area in its own right. It deferred to the mainstream through ESL specialists becoming technical support staff for mainstream subject matter (Davison 2001). While this was heralded as a success for language development for all students across the curriculum, the ESL agenda and profile has become subsumed by mainstream needs and direction. This is evident in a range of factors that affect ESL learners. These include reduced period of time in intensive language education (from 6-12 to 3- 6 months); reduced eligibility criteria for ESL support (eg. from 2 yrs to 12 months); benchmarking ESL students according to mainstream literacy standards (Hoddinott 1999; McKay 1999); growing multi-literacy demands in classroom practice (with limited linguistic and cultural resources in English).

NESB students are mainstreamed now, earlier and more fully than ever before. This gives rise to concerns about how these students engage with a critical approach to literacy at certain levels of linguistic and cultural competence.   This concern suggests students may not have acquired the linguistic and cultural competence necessary for *demonstrating* such critical interrogation of texts (Curriculum Corporation 1994). According to the ESL Scales descriptors of what learners are capable of at each level, it is not until level 'six' that students exhibit mastery over the kind of language that is expected in critical response. [1.] The *overhearer's advantage* is often not heard because of the linguistic demands of the mainstream classroom and assessment tasks (often too challenging for level 4 students in Yr 11), and with the emphasis on written rather than oral expression of critique. Lankshear and Knobel (1998:3) warn that "we cannot produce critical readings and re-writings of specific texts without the necessary operational capacities for accessing those texts and for framing and communicating our critical response". Clearly, newly arrived immigrant students, due to limited exposure to Australian culturally generated discursive arrangements and the texts they inhere and produce, are not fully equipped to undertake CL. Yet the curriculum demands this engagement.

2. <u>Time is of the essence:</u>

Research conducted into critical literacy practice in ESL classrooms (as distinct from mainstream classrooms) indicates that one of the most important factors to ensure effective critical analysis is the amount of lead time. Time and effort is required by both teacher and students if meaningful engagement with texts is to occur. Such engagement includes "awareness of alphabet codes, comprehension of texts, recognition of the cultural significance of specific genres, the ability to construct well-formed and cohesive texts, and the ability to undertake reflexive and critical analysis of texts." (Hammond & Macken-Horarick 1999:531) The suggestion is that the longer the 'lead time' and the greater the opportunity for students to engage with texts at the *user* and *participant* level, the greater the chance of analytical or critical engagement. Importantly, these studies were of ESL students in separate, 'withdrawal' classes with specially trained ESL teachers. The full range of literate abilities, as proposed by Freebody and Luke (1990), must be demonstrated by ESL students - from *decoder to analyst* - in a very short space of time within the mainstream context.

Wallace (1995) reports that she spent a good deal of time developing a shared meta-language (about lexicon, syntax, voice, modality, verb moods, cohesive ties, discourses, genres) with her advanced NESB students before beginning critical investigation of texts (Wallace 1995). Such focus on *discourse-as-text* or the linguistic features and organisation of tangible instances of discourse, is a fundamental aspect of *critical language awareness* (CLA) training, as proposed by Fairclough (1992). This is also consistent with the emphasis on *systemic functional linguistics* (see Halliday 1994), the most fundamental theory of language that underpins current ESL instruction in Queensland and from which CLA is derived. Equally, one of the hallmarks of the Australian approach to CL is "its insistence on direct instruction in a sophisticated, technical language for talking about texts" (Luke 2000:11). While this has obvious advantages in learning language and deconstructing texts, it also has implications for newly arrived NESB learners whose knowledge of meta-language may be minimal or based on traditional grammar rather than on functional grammar, for example, Chinese speakers. Unfortunately, the luxury of time for such meta-language development is frequently not afforded to the mainstreamed ESL learner. Increasingly limited ESL support (due to mainstreaming) and rushed and demanding curriculum programming with largely text production outcomes, prohibits such engagement.

3.Text construction and assumptions : challenging genre pedagogy

As a result of the wide-spread and deep-seated genre approach to literacy and language instruction in Queensland, ESL learners have been equipped with tools to analyse texts for their generic and linguistic attributes, their social purposes and functions and to reproduce conventional text types. Whilst being conversant in the range of powerful socially agreed-upon genres is necessary to enable social participation, critical literacy advocates argue that in simply teaching technical skills and the 'genres of power', teachers run the risk of being assimilationist and complicitly reproductive of, rather than resistant to, established discursive forms (Manghubai 1993, Kumaravedivelu 1999, Luke 1996, Burns and Hood 1998).

A useful window into the significance of CL to L2 learners in the process of becoming literate in a second language is to analyse the roles L2 learners enact when they engage with various forms of literacy instruction. Within a genre approach to literacy (see Christie 1992), the L2 reader [viewer, hearer] can be likened to a "socially sensitive but disengaged grammarian; an acquiescent participant." (Wajnryb 2000:3). Within a CL approach, however, the learner is a non-acquiescent participant, who takes issue with the text and interrogates it for evidence of vested interests, power, positioning and struggle (Wajnryb 2000).

The debate between genre and critical literacy advocates is a lengthy and complicated one that cannot be done justice within the limits of this paper. (See Christie 1992, Luke 1995, 2000). Suffice to point out that certain scholars argue that it is necessary to balance a functional approach and a critical approach to literacy with L2 learners (Brown 1999, Burns and Hood 1998); others contend that control of various genres is vital before critical engagement is possible (Hammond and Macken-Horarick 1999). Conversely, Lee (cited in Muspratt et al. 1997:315) argues that the latter approach can lead to a 'pedagogy of deferral' where critical interpretation is put off in favour of mastery of socially generated generic forms. There appears to be a tendency for the latter to occur in mainstream high school ESL teaching where genre pedagogy is so firmly ingrained. Luke cautions that such an approach is based on the "logocentric assumption that mastery of powerful text types can lead to intellectual and cognitive development, educational achievement and credentials and enhanced social access and mobility" (Luke 1996:315). The algebra of literacy is not so simple. Furthermore, Luke argues strongly that owing to new work-place relations and citizenship issues in a 'knowledge nation', teachers should shape reading instruction differently in ESL contexts (Luke 1995). Thus, integrated content-and-language teaching that has characterized ESL instruction for the past decades, is presently under scrutiny

from a critical theory perspective. Content –and- language teaching is said to replicate existing conditions rather than allow students to address particular needs and thereby transform the social environment in which their learning takes place (Ho 1993 in Davison 2001:78). Such a critical perspective is a new development in the discussion of ESL teaching its social impact requires further investigation (Davison 2001). It is pertinent to note that in Davison's seemingly definitive account of ESL instruction in Australia, negligible mention is made of a critical approach to literacy for ESL students in the mainstream. Its absence in such a current record, speaks volumes about how critical inquiry is perceived in mainstream ESL education despite critical approaches of various kinds being available to educators for many years. (see Cervetti et al. 2001 for a full account of the historical development of critical approaches to language education.)

<u>4. Cultures of learning and resistant/submissive reading.</u>

Resisting the power of print/images (Janks 1993, p.iii) is one of the hallmarks of CL and adopting a critical stance means ostensibly questioning the traditions and accepted practices of a culture and its history. While this may appear emancipatory to many teachers who work with critical literacy, to many L2 learners this is an inappropriate response to written text (Wallace 1995). The point is often made that being critically literate is not a matter of changing or denying a particular position, but one of considering multiple meanings and constructions of social identities and discourses (Moje 2000, Janks 1993, Morgan 1997). However, students from backgrounds other than English speaking ones have experienced their own culturally specific social interaction patterns that determine who can say what and to whom. Therefore these students may find it difficult, even an anathema, to adopt our culturally specific style of critique. Additionally, they may find it difficult *not* to position themselves alongside the ideological assumptions of the text, having experienced socialisation through another cultural and education system that actively requires and rewards memorisation and reproduction of culturally and historically endorsed texts and thought. It may be that such reproduction furthers the interests of some and not others (Fairclough 1992), but unless an L2 learner can see the value in resisting text in the first place, they may instead resist attempts to become critically literate and prefer a 'transmission/instructivist' style of literacy (Luke 1995) that is more aligned with their experience of the literate practices of their culture of origin (Pratt, Kelly and Wong 1999).

To illustrate this, Wallace suggests that over-deference to text is a general tendency amongst L2 learners (Wallace 1995:61). To learn to challenge the "obvious" ideological assumptions and

propositional knowledge in texts, requires explicit instruction and a process that takes into account language learning and acculturation (Wignell 1995, Clark 1995, Wallace 1995). What is 'obvious' to the student from an English-speaking culture and language background may not be so to the NESB learner. Clearly, this is not to say that the West has a monopoly on higher-order thinking and that non-Western cultures do not have a system of critique. In Hong-Kong Chinese culture, for example, critique is the domain of the Master, once mastery of the field has been established. This honour is bestowed after one's dues to the culturally and socially determined corpus of knowledge have been paid. (Pratt, Kelly & Wong 1999) By virtue of their age, an adolescent is in no position to do this. It would be unwise to assume that submission to text is normative amongst all non-English speaking students. Each student must be treated according to their specific culture of learning and personal orientation to the authority of texts. However, owing to differing conceptions of critical debate and reflection as well as disparate social relations in their cultures (plural) of origin, the manifestation of critical thinking used by ESL learners may be very different to that which is advocated in Queensland schools. The L2 learner in the mainstream, standing astride two cultures of learning, faces the daunting task of negotiating new multi-literate demands in the target culture and language, while trying to pay respect to a previously acquired culture of learning where submission to text may have been the preferred learner response.

The situation becomes more complicated when it is considered that ESL learners may in fact *want* to imbibe, rather than resist, the cultural capital [2.] that attends these obvious, dominant ideologies in texts. In addition, adolescent NESB learners, in the process of developing bi-cultural identity, have a tendency to conceal their intelligence and cultural perspectives and their resistance in an effort to appear less conspicuous. "The types of practices associated with revealing oneself, typical of many English and humanities classrooms, thus could be anathema to bi-cultural boys." (Jetnikoff 1997:1). ESL teachers are conscious of their adolescent students' need to 'blend in' and not be constructed as the 'other', which can make drawing out their interpretations problematic. Acquiescence becomes the default position for reasons other than simply deference to authoritative text.

5.Background knowledge and choice of texts

As it is for all learners, background knowledge is necessary for NESB learners to make sense of the propositional and intended meaning of texts (Nunan 1999, McKay & Scarino 1991, McKay 1993, Gibbons 1991). Background knowledge, as proposed by schema theory (Widdowson 1983), refers to the organised knowledge we carry around in our heads, constructed from previous experience and which acts as a guide to make sense of new encounters. As Nunan purports, "discourse comprehension is a process of utilising linguistic cues and background knowledge to reconstruct meaning" (Nunan 1999). This awareness has traditionally framed work around text analysis and reading classes with NESB learners and remains fundamental to a critical approach if the intended, invited version of reality is to be understood and explained by ESL learners. Critical literacy provides the hitherto barred possibility of reading other positions and for revealing the text's ideological assumptions. However, NESB learners still need to possess the background knowledge of the cultural and social backdrop and the intended meaning of texts for assessment purposes as well as for their general developing cultural and discursive competence. For the NESB learner, this knowledge cannot be assumed and involves activating and building upon existing schema (Richards 1990, McKay 1993, Nunan 1999, Gibbons 1991). Knowledge of the contexts and features of topics is useful in enabling learners to predict and anticipate the intended semantic and syntactic direction of texts (Richards 1990, Gibbons 1991).

Much of the published classroom research into using a CL approach to texts with NESB learners is, however, based on situations where students can self-select the text to interrogate (Wallace 1995, Burns and Hood 1998, Wajnryb 2000). This would naturally afford the student some sense of control over the topic of the text and therefore reflect their personal interest in the topic. Potentially, it would also reflect a degree of existing knowledge of the subject matter. In the mainstream secondary context, however, these opportunities are unusual and texts are frequently representative of established Western literature, for example, E.M Forster's *A Passage to India* (1936) and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) by Harper Lee. These texts could be considered a good starting point for CL in that they are obviously ideologically transparent, to the mainstream, in their intention (Eco 1992 in Wallace 1995), and are invested with sharply delineated power relations (Wallace 1995). This makes the analysis of the various discourses in such novels easier than other texts, but this is greatly enhanced, as with any second language learning episode, if some prior knowledge schema can be activated and brought to the task. Responsibility to 'build the field' (Derewianka 1991), previously the domain of the ESL specialist, increasingly lies with

the mainstream teacher. Mainstream educators will need to take responsibility to develop their own explicit awareness of the allegedly 'obvious' ideological content in texts when working with students who bring a different range of cultural resources to the learning process (Luke and Freebody 1990; Wallace 1992, 1995; Burns & Hood 1998; Brown 1999). In accordance with current principles of second language teaching and learning pedagogy, the field (including the ideological assumptions therein) must then be made explicit to the NESB learner and not assumed as a given (McKay and Scarino 1991, Gibbons 1991). It should not be assumed that this will occur in the mainstream classroom without the intervention of a trained ESL specialist or a mainstream teacher skilled in the knowledge of second language acquisition.

Conclusion

Literature and research in relation to the CL/ESL interface is dominated by discussions of adult learning. To date, there is little rigorous, published research in Australia from the perspective of adolescent NESB learners in mainstream secondary school classrooms. The relevance of CL to NESB learners, who form a significant proportion of the mainstream learner body, must be iteratively and meticulously considered. This group's need to "understand the social practices in which reading and writing are embedded" (Clark 1995:69) is no less urgent, and in fact is arguably *more* urgent than that of their mainstream school counterparts. Further rigorous research is required in order to compile a more complete depiction of NESB learners' critical engagement with texts in the school context and to make the pedagogical nexus between CL and ESL learning less elusive and more the art of the possible.

Endnotes:

1.These scales [Level 1 (beginner) to level 8 (native-speaker like)] are widely and frequently consulted by ESL teachers to locate NESB learners on a proficiency continuum. While they do not reflect a critical approach to literacy and language learning, they cannot be dismissed as they provide valuable insights into learner capabilities, based on teachers' observations. Rather, they need to be built upon to incorporate and reflect a more contemporary literacy agenda.

2.In presenting his theory of cultural reproduction, Bourdieu (1990) suggests that it is the social and cultural experiences (the *habitus)* of the middle class that are promoted as the valued cultural capital in schools. In doing so, according to Bourdieu, schools employ the cultural capital of the middle class as if all students have access to it. "This cultural capital is not explicitly made available to all pupils but is nevertheless implicitly demanded by the school via its definition of success; a definition which includes competence in language and culture of the dominant group" (Harker 1984). Those students who have already acquired the cultural capital of the middle class are therefore favoured over those who have not. (See also Bourdieu, Passeron & Martin 1994)

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