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JUNIOR TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES OF CRITICAL LITERACY

by

Kelly Winney

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
Through the Faculty of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Education at the
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the perspectives of critical literacy of five junior grades teachers. Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys' (2003) four dimensions of critical literacy provided a framework for examining teacher beliefs and practices. From questionnaires and in-depth interviews, this case study found that there are gaps in teachers' understanding, and teaching of critical literacy. These teachers teach students to disrupt the commonplace and examine multiple viewpoints, but they do not include focus on sociopolitical issues and action oriented strategies that promote social justice .

The findings from this case study suggest that teachers need more information to develop their understanding of what critical literacy is and how it might be taught in junior classrooms.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

General Statement of the Problem

Learning to read is one of the greatest accomplishments students experience in elementary school. Most students in the junior grades have already had some experience with reading and writing. They can decode and comprehend as demonstrated by their expressive reading aloud and their answers to questions about the elements of fiction and non-fiction texts. They can communicate their ideas in a variety of writing forms using conventions appropriately. Is this enough for them to function as literate individuals in today's world? Current thinking about literacy suggests that no, this is not enough. Students today need more than these functional skills, they need to understand the power of literature and engage with texts from a critical perspective (Luke & Freebody, 1999).

Paulo Friere introduced educators to the idea of critical literacy in the 1970's. He explained that teaching critical literacy involves teaching the "readings of the world", understanding what words mean and how they are used as tools in institutions, societies, and cultures. This requires recognizing that being literate can be as deceiving as it is enlightening.

Critical literacy instruction requires teachers to acknowledge that the teaching of literacy is not neutral. Teachers make decisions about how to shape the attitudes of students as they encounter the wide variety of texts that make up our information rich society. If teachers know about critical literacy and decide that critical literacy skills are important for their students to develop, then their literacy programs will encourage students to engage with texts from a critical perspective.

My own journey with critical literacy began in 2003 when I was a participant in a qualitative research study that examined how drama can influence teachers' critical literacy practices. As I started to understand what critical literacy was, my ideas about literacy instruction changed. I saw many examples of how the lack of critical literacy in my junior program was disempowering students. For example, I became aware of how important it was for me to include critical literacy practice in my junior language arts program, and I started to do just that. The research project I was involved in at the time offered some support for implementing critical literacy and included professional readings, the use of social issues texts, instructional strategies, and opportunities to discuss critical literacy practices with other teachers. However, when the research was completed, it was difficult to find support for the implementation of critical literacy. The Reading Specialist Part One course that I had completed did not include any mention of critical literacy, the Masters level courses I had taken did not mention critical literacy, and none of my fellow colleagues had heard of critical literacy.

However, there is a lot of research to support the use of critical literacy in classrooms and the idea of critical literacy being a part of junior classroom programs in Ontario is gaining popularity. The (2004) Expert Panel Report document to support Ontario Junior grade teachers stressed the importance of critical literacy in Junior Language Arts programs. The Ministry of Education is supporting the implementation of critical literacy and other instructional strategies by preparing and funding professional development opportunities for junior teachers across Ontario. Junior teachers are being increasingly exposed to the principles and practices of critical literacy in the hope that it

will be a part of junior literacy instruction. Do teachers understand critical literacy? Is it being practiced in junior classrooms?

This study explores junior teachers' perspectives of critical literacy. It will examine teachers' understandings of critical literacy and how they are practicing critical literacy in their junior classrooms. I believe that the findings of this study will be helpful to those who are supporting teachers in their endeavors to improve literacy instruction. It will arm them with valuable knowledge of where teachers are in their adoption of critical literacy. Also, the teachers in the study will be involved in reflection on how they are incorporating critical literacy in their programs. This reflection may allow them to identify ways in which they can modify or improve their literacy instruction. Perhaps, like me, they will be inspired to make critical literacy a central part of their classroom program, or even conduct their own research on critical literacy.

Definitions of Terms

Critical Literacy: A dynamic process that examines power relationships, acknowledges that all texts are biased, and encourages readers to explore alternative perspectives and take action (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004).

Dimensions of Critical Literacy: Four interrelated dimensions that have been synthesized from ideas that have appeared in the research and professional literature on critical literacy over the last 30 years. This includes (1) disrupting the commonplace, (2) interrogating multiple perspectives, (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (4) taking action and promoting social justice (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002).

Junior Teacher: A research participant currently employed to teach a grade four, five, or six class.

Junior Student: A student in grade four, five, or six.

Teachers' Perspectives of Critical Literacy: Participants' understandings and practices with critical literacy.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Influences on Current Practice

Some of the researchers whose work influences today's literacy instruction include Piaget (1969), Vygotsky (1978), Rosenblatt (1978), Atwell (1987), and Graves (1994).

Piaget's (1969) constructivist framework for learning explained that children construct knowledge from their own experience. He said that when children experience something new, they try to assimilate the new knowledge into their existing schemas of the world. Learning is making connections between what the learner already knows and new information. Instruction involves recognizing what knowledge students bring to a learning situation and supporting students as they make connections.

Vygotsky's (1978) concluded that learning occurs through social interaction and that learners need scaffolded support to acquire new skills and knowledge. For educators, this meant that instruction must include different levels of support for students. As students became more able with new skills, less support was given until students were able to perform the new skill independently. Also, in order for teachers to know how much support was necessary, they must be aware of students' abilities at all times. Educators must undertake regular assessment to determine what students' needs were.

Rosenblatt's (1978) reader response theory, or transactional theory, claimed that meaning is constructed from the transaction between the reader and the text in the context of the reader's background knowledge, experience, and world view. There was not a

universal truth to be uncovered in a text, but that every reader interprets texts in different ways because of their prior knowledge.

Atwell (1987, 1998) and Graves (1994) argued for literacy instruction to be conducted in a workshop style environment rich with print and conversations about texts. Their approach to instruction valued student choice about what to read and write and how to respond, implicit instruction through short mini lessons about the craft of reading and writing, and class time for students to practice their literacy skills.

Theories of Critical Literacy

Paulo Friere was the first to suggest that literacy should be viewed from a critical stance. Friere (1983) argued that reading is much more than decoding language – it is preceded and intertwined with knowledge of the world. He believed that readers should go beyond simply passively accepting the information presented in texts. Readers should not only read and understand the word, but read the world and understand the texts' purpose to avoid being manipulated by it. Reading the world would enable critically aware readers to comprehend beyond the literal level and to think about what authors are trying to convey in their messages and how they are communicating those messages. Reading from this critical perspective would require readers to analyze and evaluate texts, meaningfully question their origin and purpose, and take action by representing alternative perspectives.

Gee (1987) also argued that readers must have the capacity to think about the relationship between language and power, that literacy is inherently a social practice. His discourse theory suggested that we all belong to several discourses that instruct us on how to behave so others will recognize us (as a teacher, a female, a mother, a golfer,

etc.). A person's primary discourse comes from their primary socialization with their family (or immediate social contacts), and its culture. Secondary discourses are the uses of language that involve social institutions beyond the primary socialization group (such as schools, workplaces, stores, businesses, churches, etc.). Gee defines literacy as the control of secondary uses of language, or secondary discourses. He proposed that in order to be literate, children must be exposed to a variety of alternative primary and secondary discourses so that they improve their ability to critique their primary discourses and secondary discourses, including the dominant discourse.

In 1990, Freebody and Luke introduced a model for literacy that included, but was not limited to, critical literacy skills. They argued that a successful reader in society needed to develop the ability to adopt four related roles: code breaker; text participant; text user; and text analyst. They claimed that most teachers and researchers in the area of literacy would agree with their four resources model regarding the necessity of these four roles in descriptions of successful reading, however, the profession was divided regarding the sequencing of these roles and the degree of explicit instruction required at the teaching of each stage. In 1997, Luke and Freebody further developed their model and explained that as a social practice, reading should be seen as a non-neutral form of cultural practice that positions readers and obscures as much as it illuminates. They argued that in the 21st century, readers would need to be able to challenge the assumptions embedded in texts, as well as the assumptions that they, as culturally indoctrinated beings, brought to the text. Questions about who is telling the story, who benefits from the story, and whose voices are left out of the story invite students to

interrogate the systems of meaning that operate both consciously and unconsciously in text, and in society.

Until 1999, research had looked at the role of each of the four categories of the four resources model individually. Luke and Freebody (1999) found that Australian educators, teacher trainers and researchers had been debating approaches that promised to solve literacy problems. The four resources model shifted the focus from trying to find the right method of literacy instruction to examining the range of practices emphasized in one's reading program and covering and integrating the repertoire of textual practices required by individual communities. The authors contended that different approaches work differently with different communities of students, and effective teachers balanced their literacy programs with a combination of approaches.

At this time, Luke & Freebody (1999) made a change in the four resources model's terminology. To suggest that literacy roles are performed everyday in classroom and community contexts, and to represent the shift from the psychological, individual models of literacy to models that describe dynamic and fluid practices undertaken in social contexts. The term "practices" replaced the term "roles".

Working along similar trends, in 2002, Kaplan-Cadiero examined the ideologies of functional literacy, cultural literacy and progressive literacy that influenced educational practice in America. The results echoed Friere's argument and showed that each approach to literacy had weaknesses, but that functional and cultural literacy curricula approaches whose political ideologies have been revealed through critical engagement had the potential to demystify textual codes so that students who could read the word could also read the world and connect it with their own experiences and beliefs.

Critical Literacy Promoting Readers as Text Analysts

In 1997, Comber & Kamler conducted a study that explored the idea of critical literacy with attention to what this concept might mean for developing classroom practice. Up until that time, in the US and Australia teachers' voices had been absent from academic debates surrounding the development of critical literacy skills. In this study, lessons were transcribed from two Australian classrooms, one composite class with students aged 5-8, the other composite class with students in grades five, six, and seven. Through the transcripts of these lessons, different pedagogies for critical literacy were presented. It was argued that while theorists continued to debate the definition of critical literacy, educators must share their versions of critical literacy as it exists in their classrooms.

Following this study, Comber and Kamler wrote an article that documented how critical literacies are negotiated and constructed in everyday classroom talk. They argued that teachers beginning to explore questions of language use and power relations promote the technique of problematising or politicizing the text. Furthermore, students don't simply admire the writer's craft, but are invited to ask questions about the versions of realities being presented in a book. Through this study and the documentation that followed (eg. Comber & Kamler, 1997), teachers' voices entered the debate on the preferred versions of critical literacy. Accordingly, these documents indicated that classroom critical literacy required readers to be text-analysts.

In 1999, Leland, Harste, Ociepka, Lewison, and Vasquez introduced texts sets for classroom use to provide a framework for teachers introducing a critical literacy curriculum. These books aimed to build students' awareness of how systems of meaning

and power affected people and the lives they led. There were five criteria developed for selecting the books. 1. They don't make difference invisible but rather explore what differences make a difference. 2. They enrich our understanding of history and life by giving voice to those who have traditionally been silenced or marginalized. 3 They show how people can begin to take action on important social issues. 4. They explore the dominant systems of meaning that operate in our society to position people and groups of people. 5. They help us question why certain groups are positioned as "others". The authors found a mixed reaction to the texts among teachers who used them in their classrooms. Some teachers claimed that the texts would be good vehicles for promoting classroom discussions, while others rejected the need for critical conversations at all. The teachers who resisted these books argued that their schools didn't have social problems, therefore, the authors claimed that the resistance of these teachers confirmed that people often the messages that they are looking for in texts. This raises the question of how teachers' perspectives of critical literacy translate into classroom practice. In classrooms where teachers were reading and discussing critical books, the researchers observed students acting as text analysts and in two classrooms there was a movement toward social action. The books invited talk around specific topics and also functioned holistically through honoring diversity and promoted learning for individuals as well as for society. This article introduced the idea that critical literacy was more than just analyzing the text, but also actively promoted social justice.

In her own classroom, Vasquez (2000) realized the importance of examining how classroom practice empowers and disempowers students, and affects students' literacy. It was suggested that in classrooms, children are only able to speak from the perspectives

that are offered by the discourses that have been made available to them, such as critical literacy discourses or discourses of powerlessness. In one case, a student was given access to a particular discourse where he is powerless, so he learned that the right way is the teacher's way and his way of making meaning was sacrificed for the sake of conformity and control. In the other case, a student was given access to a discourse that gave her access to a particular way of talking about a text, and she was positioned as someone who has access to power, and could make a difference. These two case studies revealed how particular teaching practices produce particular forms of literacy, knowledge, and power and highlighted the need for critical literacy.

Leland & Harste (2000) explored ways to support teachers to take a more critical approach in their classrooms. Part of their work focused on identifying children's books that were particularly useful for starting and sustaining critical conversations in classrooms. These books helped students to be aware of how systems of meaning are located in power and affect people's lives. They argued that critical conversations that arise from these books are crucial to the existence of a democracy involving mutual inquiry, collaboration and compromise. Teachers who were using texts that promote critical conversations were challenging the status quo and asking for change. They helped students understand the political capital that is inherent in language.

Marino & Hansen (2001) directed their research towards classroom teachers and offered them a framework to begin classroom conversations on critical literacy. Their argument echoed Luke and Freebody's earlier idea that a balanced curriculum involves four essential components: learning language; learning about language; learning through language and learning to use language to critique. They found that while not every

literary engagement needed to involve all four components, teachers should make sure that all components are addressed. Then, the authors explained a six session format for book discussions developed by a classroom teacher which they encouraged teachers to use. This format begins with reading a text aloud with lots of interruptions for student response and questions. In the next session, the teacher leads the class in a picture walk through the book, then groups of students discuss and complete a response sheet that asks students to reflect on what they felt was important to remember about the text, what questions they still had, and possible writing topics they might consider as a result of reading this text. The teacher then compiles the questions from all of the groups on a single sheet. In the third session, different groupings of students meet to discuss the questions generated by the class, and determine which questions generated the most discussion. The fourth session involved a whole class meeting to discuss the questions that generated much conversation. In the fifth session, the class decides how they will represent their thinking about the text on their class learning wall. In the final session the students write a couple pages in their writer's notebooks about the writing topics they generated during the second session. These topics may be returned to at a later date for writing projects. These authors also reviewed five books that they had found to be full of potential to start conversations in the classroom.

O'Brien (2001) reflected on how critical literacy practices were used in her classroom. In this article the term 'critical literacy' was replaced with 'taking a critical stance toward literacy' because O'Brien argued that critical literacy is a way of thinking, and not simply a set of exercises that can be introduced into any classroom. Using the term 'taking a critical stance toward literacy' reminded educators of the fact that teaching

itself is a deliberately political act where one takes a stand. This term also emphasized the fact that there are unpredictable, uncertain possibilities that unfold during critical work. The first step towards critical literacy was to introduce texts that challenged the stereotypical role of women and girls in texts. In one lesson, the author modeled the thoughts of a reader that challenged the obvious interpretation of the text and explored alternative perspectives. In another lesson students independently evaluated Mothers' Day flyers for the range of messages within the texts. The author suggested that there was no formula for doing critical literacy, but that a critical stance provided a space for discussing and challenging texts.

Green (2001) argued that before critical literacy can occur within the classroom, students need the opportunity to engage in meaningful use of literacy. They need to use literacy in ways that related to their interests and needs so that there is a basis for critical discussion and reflection of texts as they related to individuals in the classroom.

Comber (2002) conducted a study in which he explored how critical literacy might increase children's investments in schooling. After examining a series of case studies, Comber concluded that elementary and pre-elementary teachers needed to expand their idea of what constitutes school literacies in order that children's resources can actually be allowed into the classrooms. The participants in Comber's study successfully incorporated texts from popular culture to improve students' critical literacy skills across genres. Students' interests and needs were important starting points for critical literacy discussions.

Lewison, Leland, Flint, & Moller (2002) gave four reasons for engaging in critical conversations around social issues. 1. Their observations of classrooms where these

conversations are taking place revealed high levels of intellectual engagement among students. 2. Social issues/contemporary realistic fiction books were not the only controversial books used in classrooms. Some seemingly innocent literature carried controversial political and social messages. 3. Using these books in the classroom was an avenue for moving away from a curriculum of consensus and conformity toward one that valued diversity and difference. Students' questions and wonderings became the starting place for curriculum. 4. Using social issues books and encouraging critical conversations provided an avenue for building a strong history/social studies curriculum. While they found many reasons for using realistic historical and contemporary fiction with children, they recognized the difficulty teachers faced when selecting and using literature about controversial topics. In their examination of four accounts of teaching with controversial books, several patterns emerged. First, the books invited conversations to explore diversity and difference, to examine the everyday through new lenses, to see different perspectives, and to interrogate sociopolitical practices. Second, from kindergarten through to college classrooms, inquiry was an important support for teaching with these books. Through inquiry, students brought their life texts into the classroom.

Critical Literacy Promoting Social Justice

Comber, Thomson, & Wells (2001) argued that school versions of critical literacy had tended to emphasize the importance of text-analysis and critical reading practices, whereas curriculum that focused on critical social action and textual production was often reserved for adult or workplace domains. They studied socioeconomically disadvantaged children's acquisition of school literacies and how teachers negotiated critical literacies and explored notions of social power with elementary children in a high

poverty area. In this case study one teacher and her grade 2/3 classroom of students undertook a literacy and social action project. First teacher asked questions that invited students to make evaluations about their personal, local, and global worlds, then imagine what might be changed, and consider whether young people have the power to change things. The students voiced concerns and possibilities for changes in their neighbourhood through drawings depicting what angered and worried them, and what they would do if they had three wishes. The teacher reworked her curriculum so that students could actively research the issues that they had raised in their discussions, drawings and writing. The students created proposals for a neighbourhood improvement plan that included regular lighting, regular trees, pathways, parks, and road drains. The students' products were sent to project officers and council members involved with the upkeep and changes to the local area. They invited council members to come to their classroom to respond to their questions and concerns. The students also investigated the school budget and researched which plant and trees might be grown in different locations and considered the advantages and drawbacks to planting trees. This project involved a complex set of literate practices and taught children about the power and possibilities for local civic action. Critical literacy that involved local action also involved imagination, interrogation of the way things are, and design of how things might be otherwise.

Powell, Cantrell, & Adams (2001) described a case study of a grade four class in Kentucky that saved a local mountain from coal mining. Initially, they set out to learn about a local issue as part of a critical literacy classroom project. There had been an ongoing struggle for the local population to have control over their land and resources which typically are controlled by coal companies and large corporations. The teacher's

and students' aim was to learn about the issue so that they could address it from a position of knowledge, rather than ignorance. The students began their project by researching the impact of strip mining on the natural environment. They interviewed people who benefited from local strip mining as well as those who opposed it, and they realized that many local families depended economically on strip mining. They visited Black Mountain and researched the effects of mining at lower and higher altitudes. They collected and tested water samples from the area and found that many water sources had been contaminated by the strip mining at higher altitudes. Their findings led to their decision to fight to preserve Black Mountain. Their fight involved meeting with mining company officials, submitting a ten page proposal to the Department of Surface Reclamation and Enforcement urging the Department to consider alternatives to strip mining, and presenting their findings to the legislature's joint committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources. Student interest and subsequent involvement in this project led to Black Mountain being saved from development. The students learned that their words had the power to effect change. This case study shows what can be accomplished when educators take seriously the importance of literacy for promoting democracy in a multicultural society.

Morrell (2003) argued that critical literacy educators had focused on the critical consumption of dominant texts, and they should be changing their focus from consumption to production. The author introduced the notion of Critical Textual Production (CTP), suggesting that critical writing be part of high school curriculum. A case study of West Coast University's critical research and writing seminar found that student participants acquired many of the needed skills for academic advancement,

professional membership, and civic engagement. The data suggested that students enjoyed their experience with the course and were inspired to continue to work for social change.

Text Analyzing and Promoting Social Justice

Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys (2002) found a relationship between critical literacy as text analyzing and critical literacy as promoting social justice. They examined the understandings and classroom practices of two groups of teachers: 5 newcomers, who didn't know what a critical literacy curriculum might look like; and 2 novices, who had some prior background with critical literacy. The four dimensions of critical literacy (as defined by Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys, 2002) – disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple perspectives, focusing socio-political issues, and taking a stand toward social justice – provided a framework for the researchers to examine teacher beliefs and practices and to distinguish ways in which teachers conceptualized and enacted critical literacy. These dimensions enabled the researchers to see where teachers were most comfortable initiating critical literacy, and how their practices changed over time. The researchers found that there was much published writing on how teachers with a sophisticated understanding of critical literacy practiced, so they focused their study on the practices of teachers new to critical literacy. Data sources used to aid in understanding the issues that faced newcomers and novices when they began implementing critical literacy practices included pre-workshop questionnaires, post-workshop evaluations, teacher authored progress reports, workshop field notes, transcripts of study group sessions, classroom observation field notes, student artifacts, and transcripts of student literature circle discussion. They found that newcomers to

critical literacy pedagogy focused their practice mostly within the dimension of disrupting commonplace beliefs. With novices, they saw more opportunities for children to interrogate multiple perspectives and focus on sociopolitical issues. Novices to critical literacy encouraged students to move beyond personal connections and challenged them to better understand the ways in which larger sociopolitical structures position people in the world. The support mechanisms, especially the workshops and study groups, were found to be effective to all teachers' evolving visions of critical literacy and how it might be implemented in classrooms. The subjects requested more time for conversations and reflection after each workshop session, more book discussions, and the ability to view and discuss videotapes of peers as they implemented critical pedagogy in their classrooms.

Leland & Harste (2003) reviewed their earlier arguments that children of the 21st century need to do more than just read and respond to text. Students needed to understand how language works, how to find and question the cultural story being told, and how to act on their opinions. Having conversations about social practices was not enough, students needed to be invited to think about how they are going to position themselves in the world. This included changing what they say, and how they act. It was suggested that critical literacy was a necessary component of all literacy programs for students of all ages. They also identified and reviewed books that could be used by teachers for critical discussions in classrooms. These titles were selected according to the authors' five criteria for critical literacy books. They warned that some educators might think that using the books in a critical manner is dangerous because it could change the social practice of how reading is taught and schooling is conducted. However, the authors

argued that if books are not discussed critically, then the business of building a critically literate conscience is stopped dead in its tracks. The book list was meant to support teachers in opening up space in their classroom for the development of a very different literate being. The question of whether or not this being was critically literate depended on the social practices with which teachers surrounded these books.

Harste (2003) also argued that students learned more about literacy on the streets than they did in the classroom because literacy programs in the past had focused on meaning making and phonics. Studying language in terms of what work it does and how it does it had been left out, as had opportunities to inquire into problems of personal and social relevance to learners. Students in the 21st century needed to be critically literate if they were to understand and use language to make meaning and to position themselves in the world in democratically thoughtful and equitable ways.

Implications for Educators

Giroux (1993) suggested that critical literacy was based in the pedagogical practices of educators. Teachers offer students knowledge, skills, and values that they will need in order to critically negotiate and transform the world in which they live. In order to practice critical literacy, educators must acknowledge the moral and political implications at work in the selected representations, skills, social relations, and values they offer to students. Their decisions about this content presuppose particular histories and ways of being in the world. Giroux argued that as a first step towards critical literacy teachers must be reflective and aware of their own beliefs about the world.

Apol (1998) agreed that the starting point for helping students to be critically literate is for teachers themselves to be critically literate. They must be able to experience

texts with the ability to distance themselves in order to recognize and evaluate the values and hidden messages within the text.

In 2004, McLaughlin and DeVogd published a practical guide for teaching from a critical perspective. They described the theoretical underpinnings of critical literacy and presented the research-based principles. They suggested strategies for critical literacy lessons, and provided lesson plans using these strategies. The lessons focused on challenging the text, exploring identities, and seeing beyond the bias.

The research suggests that critical literacy is an important component of any language arts curriculum. The (2004) Expert Panel Report document to support Ontario Junior grades teachers stressed the importance of critical literacy in Ontario Schools' Junior Language Arts programs. However, since there has been no research to show what Ontario Junior teachers know about critical literacy and how they are incorporating critical literacy in their classrooms, this seems an obvious next step for critical literacy education research in Ontario.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Methodology

This is a qualitative research study. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) define qualitative research as having five features: naturalistic; descriptive data; concern with process; inductive; and meaning. This research includes the features that define qualitative research. It is naturalistic to the extent that I participated in natural conversations with teachers who were my colleagues and I collected data on location, in the teachers' classrooms whenever possible. The data is descriptive, taking the form of words, not numbers. This research is concerned with process because it focuses on how teachers are developing their perspectives of critical literacy. It is inductive because it was through the exploration of this topic that important facets emerged. Finally, it is also interested in meaning, or how teachers make sense of critical literacy including details about their assumptions, feelings, and experiences through teachers' own accounts.

The purpose of this case study is to discover junior teachers' perspectives of critical literacy through analysis of their accounts of what critical literacy means to them, and how they engage in critical literacy practices in their junior classrooms. A case study is a detailed examination of one particular setting, a single participant, or one particular event (Stake, 2004). Case studies facilitate the investigation of complex social phenomena. Case studies are a particularly appealing design for applied fields of study such as education (Bogdan & Bilken, 2003). In this research, case study is the most appropriate choice because it will result in a rich account of how junior teachers perceive critical literacy and critical literacy instruction.

Selection Process

57 junior literacy lead teacher participants were asked to complete an initial questionnaire regarding their understanding of and experiences with critical literacy (Appendix C). Their role as junior literacy lead teachers meant that they had been selected by their principals to participate in this Southwestern Ontario school board's workshops on junior literacy instruction and they were recognized as junior literacy resources within their schools. It is unknown what criteria the principals used to select the literacy lead teacher for their school. The questionnaires and consent forms were mailed to the junior literacy lead teachers courtesy of their principals, and were returned by mail, to myself, over the following few weeks.

The questionnaire was designed so that responses to it could be used to categorize teachers as newcomers to critical literacy practices, novices, or experienced with teaching critical literacy based on how their understandings and practices with critical literacy compared to Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys' (2002) four dimensions of critical literacy. Due to the small sample size I was planning to employ purposeful sampling as described by Denzin and Lincoln (1994) and Stake (2005), to select two teachers from each category so they could be interviewed to uncover how these teachers view critical literacy and how they use it in their junior classrooms. The 17 questionnaires I received revealed that no teachers were novices or experienced in critical literacy, but that many teachers were completely unfamiliar with the concept or were newcomers to critical literacy. 12 teachers were not willing to participate in in-depth interviews. They described critical literacy as a new concept for them, and were unsure which of their practices might be in line with it. Five teachers indicated that they were willing to participate in in-depth

interviews about critical literacy. Two of these teachers were unfamiliar with critical literacy. These teachers stated that they had “no idea” and were “unsure at this time”, and claimed that they did not use any critical literacy practices in their classrooms. Since these two teachers had no ideas about critical literacy, it was not necessary to interview them to determine their perspectives, however, the other three teachers who had agreed to participate in interviews were newcomers to critical literacy practices and could help me to understand how newcomers perceive and practice critical literacy in their junior classrooms. From the 57 questionnaires, three teachers were newcomers to critical literacy and were willing to participate in in-depth interviews. I had hoped to interview at least five teachers so I looked elsewhere to find two more participants.

At that time I was attending a Reading Part II course. The course was run at a local university for teachers interested in pursuing professional development to become leaders in the area of literacy instruction. I decided to send the questionnaire to the three teachers who taught in junior grades classrooms and were enrolled with me in a Reading Part II course. The concept of critical literacy and critical literacy practices had been addressed in our course and so I knew that these teachers had some ideas about critical literacy. One of these teachers had undertaken an action research project with critical literacy and would be a perfect candidate to participate in the in-depth interviews. Two of these teachers’ responses showed that they were newcomers to critical literacy. They had some understanding of the concept of critical literacy and one was using critical literacy practices in her classrooms. The teacher who was practicing more critical literacy could have a different perspective of critical literacy because she was different from the other teachers who had agreed to participate in the study. She taught in the county, whereas the

other participants taught in the city, and she had many more years of experience teaching than the other teacher participants. I decided to interview two teachers from the Reading Part II course, the experienced teacher and the teacher who had undertaken the action research to give me a total of five teacher participants.

At this stage I realized I would be unable to determine how teachers who were experienced with teaching critical literacy perceived critical literacy because all the teachers who had completed the questionnaires were unfamiliar or were newcomers to critical literacy. I decided to change the purpose of my sample selection and interview five teachers who were newcomers to critical literacy practices to uncover their perspectives and practices with critical literacy.

Participants

The teacher participants came from a variety of teaching backgrounds. They represent a variety of years of teaching experience, location of teaching experience, gender, and age. The information about them came from data revealed in the interviews.

Andrew¹ has been teaching for five years and has taught in both the primary and junior divisions with this Windsor school board. He is involved in his school community through coaching school teams, assisting with the breakfast program, running the school recycling program, and he is a junior literacy lead teacher. He values the relationships he has with students and claims that taking time to talk to students and making them feel important promotes enthusiasm for learning in the classroom.

Bill has fifteen years of experience in both kindergarten and junior classrooms. His current school is small and parents and teachers are very involved in school activities. Bill coaches soccer, runs basketball and volleyball tournaments, organizes staff events, and orders stock for the school. He is also a junior literacy lead teacher. He believes that his role as a teacher is to promote respect, responsibility and resourcefulness. He aims to give students the skills they need to be self-sufficient.

Carrie has been teaching for six years at the same school in different junior grades. Her school is comprised of students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, many of whom are new immigrants to Canada and speak English as a second language. A lot of these students live in poverty, which she says, affects how they work, and speak, and

¹ Pseudonyms are used to protect the identities of the teachers who participated. Participants' identities are protected so that the information collected about them does not embarrass or harm them in any way (Bodgan & Bilken, 2003).

their philosophies. This view of students is supported by Kozol's (1991) text where he explains that the percentage of students at risk of failure is highest in urban schools, where conditions of poverty also are prevalent. Carrie is aware of the special needs of her working class students. Carrie is the chair of the junior division and sits on several committees (literacy, social studies, anti-bullying, the new school building). She believes that every student can learn, teachers just need to find the key to unlock their potential.

Donna has been teaching for 28 years. She began her career teaching English to new Canadians at a local college. Since then, she has coordinated an adult literacy program for the county, taught French, and has taught in primary and junior classrooms for the past ten years. Donna has coached sports teams in the past, and now runs the public speaking competition and volunteers for the United Way. Her students live in the county and many come from a variety of Mediterranean backgrounds (Portuguese, Lebanese, Italian, etc.). Donna believes that students need to feel good about themselves, and be confident to ask questions.

Marie has been teaching for four years at the junior level. She runs a Young Authors group, organizes school wide events (Family Math Night, Writing Week, Play Day, Heritage Week, Geography Challenge, Fitweek), and is a member of the school's long range planning committee. Her students have a wide variety of learning abilities and come from diverse cultural backgrounds. Marie believes that it is important to build a relationship of trust with students. If this is established right from the start, everything flows from there.

The Interviews

I approached the five teachers by phone to confirm their agreement to participate in an interview and to set up an interview time and place. Four of the interviews took place in the teachers' classrooms at the end of the school day. One of the interviews took place in the evening after one of the classes for the Reading Part II course in the home of a colleague. The participants completed interview and audio consent forms as required by the Research Ethics Board.

During the interviews I wanted the participants to share their ideas about critical literacy in their junior classrooms. I wanted the participants to share what they were doing in their classrooms to promote the four dimensions of critical literacy (Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2002). I assumed that the terminology of critical literacy was new to these teachers, and so they themselves might not recognize components of critical literacy that they were practicing. I wanted to have some prompts for our discussions in case these teachers needed guidance to identify how they were using critical literacy. For instance, they might not be able to describe how they use critical literacy practices, but they may be able to describe how they encourage their students to look at multiple perspectives in a text. I used a list of interview questions as a guide for our discussions (Appendix B), and I asked related questions when clarification was required, and some of my interview questions were not asked because they had been made redundant by participants' previous responses.

The interviews each took about one half hour. After the five interviews were complete, I sent the tapes to a transcriber. Transcripts and cassette tapes were marked

with numbers for confidentiality purposes, yet at the same time, to indicate the participants.

Data Analysis

For purposes of data analysis all of the interviews were transcribed in full. These transcriptions were read through to re-familiarize myself with the data. I then reviewed the transcripts again to code teachers' comments as they related to each of the four categories that relate to the four dimensions of critical literacy as described by Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys, 2002:

1. Disrupting the commonplace
2. Interrogating multiple perspectives
3. Focusing on sociopolitical issues
4. Taking a stand/promoting social justice

For instance, when Bill said that he “encourage(s) students to think, think, think about the implications of the ideas in the text”; I coded this comment as Disrupting the Commonplace because it fits with Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys' (2002) description of this dimension. Marie's comment that she reads social issues books “because they give students an appreciation for the reality of our world, or what life can be like in other parts of the world,” was coded as a Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues comment because in my opinion it was in line with Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys' (2002) description.

I used the collection of comments in each category to create summary tables of the statements made by each participant under the four dimensions of critical literacy. Because I was interested in examining both teachers' beginning practices with critical literacy, and also their understanding of critical literacy, I also created a table to summarize participants' understanding of critical literacy.

These five summary tables (Appendix A) guided my writing about how teachers begin with critical literacy in their junior classrooms. The four dimensions of critical literacy outlined by Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) provided a framework for me to analyze how junior teachers perceive critical literacy. I made frequent reference back to the transcripts to ensure that each comment was attributed to the teacher who made the statement.

I also examined each teacher's literacy program, as they described it, to see how it puts different categories of literacy on offer. Freebody and Luke (1990) describe four categories of literacy: code breaker (how do I crack this?), text participant (what does this mean?), text user (what do I do within this, here and now?), and text analyst (what does all this do to me?). Any literacy instruction program, from kindergarten to adult learning classes or at any points in between, should include explicit and systematic learning of these four roles. This study focused on how teachers address the role of text analyst but, throughout my analysis, I noticed that different teachers emphasized different roles in both their understanding and practices with critical literacy.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Understandings of Critical Literacy

Critical literacy has been described in many different ways by many different literacy educators and researchers. Lewison, Flint and Van Sluys (2003) reviewed the definitions of critical literacy that have appeared in professional literature and research and synthesized these into four dimensions: disrupting the commonplace; interrogating multiple viewpoints; focusing on sociopolitical issues; and taking action and promoting social justice. These four dimensions do not stand alone – they are interrelated.

More recently, the Ontario Ministry of Education's document *Literacy for Learning: The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy in Grades 4 to 6 in Ontario*, explains that critical literacy challenges the reader to look beyond the literal message, to read between the lines, to observe what is present and what is missing, and to reflect on the context and the way the author constructed the text to influence the reader, going beyond conventional critical thinking because it involves issues of fairness, equity, and social justice (2004). This description of critical literacy includes the four dimensions outlined by Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys.

The responses to the initial questionnaires sent to teachers revealed that many junior teachers are unaware of critical literacy. When asked about their understanding of critical literacy, most teachers replied that they did not know about this concept, they had not heard it before, or they had only recently heard the term but could not describe what it meant. Only a few teachers were able to describe their understanding of critical literacy in the initial questionnaire.

During the interviews, teachers explained that my questionnaire had been one of the first times they had heard about critical literacy but that they had been prompted to find out more and had found further information in the Ministry of Education's document released during the course of this study. Since the initial questionnaire, their understanding of critical literacy had increased due to careful examination of the document and participation in workshops that included critical literacy. However, the teacher participants were quick to state that they were only just beginning to see how critical literacy could fit into their junior language arts programs. They said that some of what they were already doing in their classrooms was teaching critical literacy skills. They also said that as they understood more about critical literacy through professional readings and workshops, they were discovering new ways to include it in their junior literacy program.

Through coding and analyzing teachers' comments, it was evident that these teachers' understandings of critical literacy involved three main components: reading between the lines, questioning, and forming opinions.

Reading Between The Lines

The teachers' descriptions of critical literacy included the ability to "read between the lines" of text. This involved reading to understand at a deeper level, drawing inferences about the meaning, and making assumptions about the message. Andrew explained that critical reading meant to go beyond understanding the text literally and be able to make inferences about the action and the message. Bill said it involved being critical of the text. Donna said it involved deciphering the hidden message of the author, identifying their point of view. This was also described by Marie as "digging deep in the

text at what is being said and what is not being said to uncover the author's message, looking at what the author is really trying to say and what they are trying to convey."

McLaughlin and DeVoodg (2004) include this idea in their description of critical literacy as well. They claim that critically aware readers see beyond the literal level of the text. The ability to read between the lines is an important first step for readers' inquiries about texts. When they can look beyond the literal level of the text, they can frame questions to challenge the text.

Questioning

Many teachers also mentioned questioning the text in their descriptions of critical literacy. Andrew described the questioning as asking, "Who is the author writing this for?" and Donna described the questioning as asking, "What is the author's prejudice? What is their colouring of the world in their eyes?" Marie acknowledged that questioning while reading was important, but said that it is imperative to ask the right questions, the difficult questions.

Questioning can promote different types of literacy skills. Some questions encourage students to remember and retell parts of the text. Some questions encourage students to show their comprehension at a literal level. Questions that promote critical literacy are different. They are open-ended to encourage discussion. They challenge the author's ideas and ways of writing. These questions get readers to go beyond an initial reaction to a text (Bogdan, 1990) and spend time considering what the multiple perspectives of the ideas might be, how the text supports or disrupts assumptions and stereotypes, and how the text positions the reader in their world.

The Ministry's (2004) *Literacy for Learning* document suggests using the following questions, from Luke, O'Brien & Comber, 2001) for critical literacy in the junior grades.

- What is the topic? How is it being presented? What themes and discourses are being presented?
- Who is writing to whom? Whose positions are being expressed? Whose voices and positions are not being expressed?
- What is the text trying to do to you?
- What other ways are there of writing about the topic?
- What wasn't said about the topic? Why?

In this study, three of the five teachers' descriptions of questioning show that they are using questions, such as these that will lead to effective critical literacy skills. The other two teachers focused their questioning on comprehension of the text. They reported using questions that encouraged students to retell ideas from the text, make connections to themselves, and describe how they felt or what they thought about the text.

Forming Opinions

These teachers also explained that critical literacy involved considering your own opinion as you read. Donna explained that as readers identify the author's point of view, they must remember that it does not mean you must adopt it, "decipher the author's message, but it doesn't mean you have to be like them (the author)". Bill and Andrew also explain that students must form their own opinions about what they read, and that teachers must often ask their students, "what do you think?" These teachers' practices

show that they know that reading critically requires readers to consider what is being said by an author in light of their own understanding of the world.

This aspect of critical literacy is in line with considering multiple perspectives which will be discussed later. Readers must be able to understand texts both from their own perspectives and from alternative perspectives simultaneously.

The teachers' descriptions include important facets of critical literacy, but each of their understandings seemed limited to critical thinking about texts. They understand that critical literacy involves careful examination and questioning of texts, but they do not understand that critical literacy involves linking their examination and questions to ideas of equity, fairness, and power that exist in all texts. This lack of understanding about some of the critical components of critical literacy also affected how these teachers practiced critical literacy in their junior classrooms.

Disrupting the Commonplace

One of the four dimensions of critical literacy outlined by Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) is disrupting the commonplace. This involves seeing the world through new lenses, critiquing, and being able to perceive and consider how texts influence readers. Here, readers look at widely accepted notions in a new way. This might include reading texts that present a different view of the world, or challenging common practices.

McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) provide Ramadan, the Islamic holiday, as an example of disrupting the commonplace. *Celebrating Ramadan* by Diana Hoyt-Goldsmith disrupts most North American students' understanding of religious holidays, which is often limited to Christmas and Hanukkah. This text describes Ibraheem, a New Jersey boy and how his Islamic holiday is a time of peace and harmony for Muslims. At a time where there is war in the Middle East, reading this text disrupts the notion that people in the Middle East don't believe in peace.

In my own grade five classroom I tried to disrupt students' notion of boys being more capable of physical work than girls. When the school secretary asked me to send two boys to the office to collect some boxes, I asked the students to consider why she had asked for two boys. The secretary's request was a common occurrence and supported the notion that boys were in some way more capable of moving boxes than girls. By questioning the request, we were disrupting the commonplace. The discussion that followed this event included students questioning the implications of the secretary's request and analyzing how this event might influence students' notions of gender. Researchers have described several important facets of this dimension including

interrogating texts, developing a language for critiquing, analyzing how language influences identity, and examining popular culture and media in the classroom (Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2003).

Interrogating Texts

Luke and Freebody (1997) argue that critical literacy involves interrogating texts by asking questions such as, “How is this text trying to position me?” In order for students to interrogate texts, they must understand the power relationship between the reader and the author. The author has the power to determine the topic and the treatment of ideas in the text, however, the reader has the power to question their perspective. For instance, if a class is reading a newspaper article about putting security cameras into public schools, they recognize that the author has the right to present his or her argument on the topic. Readers also recognize that they have the right to question the author’s perspective, engaging in reflection over whose perspectives are missing or discounted in the text and what these missing perspectives might be. Interrogating involves questioning the author’s perspective to make room for alternative perspectives.

The teachers in this study described many ways in which they practice interrogating texts in their junior classrooms. They ask, “Who is writing this? Why are they writing this? What is the author really trying to say? What is their prejudice? What is their point of view?” Marie explained that by asking questions that encourage higher level thinking about texts, she is modeling how to question texts. She posed questions for readers to consider on a chart in the classroom that students used to direct their discussion and written responses to texts. This encouraged her students to interrogate texts as they read and she was pleased that her grade four students were asking these questions

independently as they read and were commenting on how they had interrogated texts in their reading responses.

Developing the Language of Critique

Critical literacy involves developing the language of critique and hope (Shannon, 1995). This requires readers to not accept others' definitions of the world and decisions about how to behave, but to question the ideas presented in texts, and engage in the resulting complex discussions. Dialogue is more than conversation, and it cannot lead to some determined end. Dialogues are genuine, open exchanges among students and teachers that are centered on helping to illuminate their realities, to make sense of their world. Dialogue processes can lead to the development of a language of critique, which also embraces hope. Asking questions and participating in discussions requires readers to believe that thoughtful consideration leads to change. The discussion promotes imagining what alternatives might be possible. Critical discussions of text contribute to an understanding of the connections between one's own life, and the social structure, and to believe that change in one's life, the lives of others, and in society are possible as well as desirable. Developing the language of critique, then, requires a question-centered approach and an extended dialogue to literacy teaching.

The questions that students ask lead them to critique the values and behaviors that texts attempt to impose on them. Two of the teachers interviewed were beginning to practice this in their classrooms. Andrew talked about how he and his students examined how advertisements had been constructed to influence readers and viewers. He offered an example in which after studying the effects of cigarettes on the human body, the students were directed by the teacher to identify how magazine ads attempted to promote

cigarettes as “cool” and “fun” to influence young people and encourage them to try smoking. The teacher asked the students questions such as why the person in the ad looked the way they did, and what was left out of the ad. These questions led to a discussion that allowed students and teacher to consider how their own knowledge of smoking compared to the ideas presented in the text. Their discussion required students and teacher to call upon their own expertise and values in this area to share and clarify their thoughts about this issue.

Following this lesson, the students then looked at other magazine advertisements with a new awareness of how they might have been constructed to influence readers. Previous lessons on symbolism and slogans contributed to students’ questions and discussions about how the text attempted to influence readers. Experience with looking for what was missing from the text, and encouragement from the teacher promoted the students to ask questions about how the effects of smoking were never included in the ads. In later lessons they explained how ads for athletic footwear implied that anyone who wears a particular brand will be a faster and stronger athlete. These students had developed their language of critique through questioning and discussions, and transferred their understanding to look at advertising in general with a critical eye.

In Marie’s class students had been critiquing picture books that she read aloud to develop the language of critique and hope through questions and discussions. Based on students’ own experiences and values, they disagreed or agreed with the author and justified their responses. Marie’s strategy of introducing critical literacy practices through read alouds and whole class discussions is recommended as an effective instructional approach to critical literacy for junior grade students (Ontario Ministry of Education,

2004). The class discussion gave students an opportunity to develop and clarify their understandings within a social situation that exposed them to the opinions of others. Marie effectively introduced the language of critique to her students through questioning and discussion. She began by providing students with questions to critique the text which led to whole class discussions. When they had access to the language of critique and hope, students began critiquing each other's ideas. In class discussions they effectively debated ideas using language such as, "I agree with what Anika is saying because..." or "I disagree with Abdula's comment because..." Marie continued to encourage her students to question the unquestioned definitions and ideas of their peers so that they could engage in discussions together that would help students negotiate issues in their world. Students here were disrupting the commonplace. They were critiquing texts and classroom comments that previously had gone unquestioned.

Examining Authors' Language Use and Language Choice

Language shapes identity, constructs cultural discourses, and supports or disrupts the status quo (Gee 1987). Disrupting the commonplace involves studying language to see how it does this. It requires readers to understand that texts are not neutral, but that they represent particular views and contain bias. Some teachers discussed how they examined the way that language was used masterfully by authors, poets, and advertisers to sway readers and viewers. Marie talked about encouraging her students to see how they were being "brainwashed" by texts. For example, when they discussed what the author of *The Wretched Stone*, Chris Van Allsburg, was really saying they examined how the words and pictures were used to convince readers that television, computers, and videogames are damaging to humans' ability to think. Marie spent a few days discussing

how symbolism worked, that sometimes objects were used in a text to mean something else. She asked students to consider what the stone in the story might be a symbol of. Marie had students identify exact words that were used to describe the stone that were a perfect description of a television or computer screen. She questioned students about what the author's message might be, and the students discussed that the message was that television and computers were bad for people. The students also identified how the pictures of sailors turning into apes implied that the sailors had been going through reverse evolution because of their exposure to the stone. This teacher taught her students to identify how language and images are constructed to influence the readers.

In one Language Arts lesson, Andrew used newspaper articles with his junior students to examine how the language used in the description of a hockey game supported the local team. He used articles from both the Detroit and Toronto newspapers that reported on a hockey game between the two cities' teams. The students compared the articles by looking for differences in how the game was described by reporters. They found numerous examples of how language was used to influence the reader to believe that their team had made the better effort.

Both Marie and Andrew were beginning to incorporate a close examination of how language influences readers into their classroom reading programs. However, their examinations of texts rarely looked deeply at how language influences cultural discourses or identity.

Texts carry the ideologies and belief systems of the authors that in turn are evident in the articulations of race, gender, socioeconomic status, and religion evident in many of the texts we encounter. Authors subtly make decisions about words that cause

readers to be sympathetic to the author's position. The choices an author makes regarding how certain peoples are depicted in a text reflect his/her ideological biases. For instance, in *Souder* by William Armstrong, when the boy had played with the latch of the gate at the big house (where the white land owner lived) until someone called out from the house to get away from the front of the house. Here, racism is expressed in that whites are presented as better than blacks and that it was improper for a black boy to be playing in a white person's front yard. This ideology may not be visible unless readers take a critical stance and consider the meaning of the activities presented and also that of the phrase. By examining language in light of the ideology of the author, students become aware not only of how author's can position them personally, but how their words can influence culture and identity.

Examining Popular Culture and Media

Both Shannon (1995) and Vasquez (2000) encourage teachers to include popular culture and media in the classroom program for both pleasure and to analyze how people are positioned and constructed by television, video games, comics, toys, etc. If we are to prepare students to be critically literate in today's world, we must expose them to a variety of texts including an abundance of texts that they will, and already do, interact with daily. It is these texts that students must be able to severely question and make connections to. If our students can decode and comprehend these 21st century texts, but do not possess the critical literacy skills to be aware of how they are being positioned by these texts, they could be easily manipulated by what they read. In a sense, they would be defenseless in a world where they are surrounded by powerful, manipulative messages.

They must have practice questioning, discussing, analyzing, and acting on the messages in these texts.

These teachers use popular culture and media in their classrooms as topics for discussion, but none reported analyzing them to see how people are positioned. Three of these five teachers described how they use popular culture and media in the classroom. Marie described how she uses popular quotes as a way to promote daily discussions. She also collects newspaper articles and photographs to use in many subject areas. Andrew uses newspaper articles, magazines, and posters in his classroom program. Bill brings news items that he thinks are of interest to his students into the classroom for discussion. He recently presented an article about a school in the United States that gave students a restricted number of bathroom passes each month. When the students had used them up, they couldn't leave the classroom. Bill's students discussed this bathroom pass idea; they shared their opinions orally and then wrote about their own views.

These teachers view disrupting the commonplace as a dimension of critical literacy that they have started to teach, but they would like to improve. Their descriptions of their practices indicate that they are beginning to support their students to interrogate texts, develop the language of critique, examine language, and examine popular culture and media. They practice disrupting the ideas they encounter. However, these practices come short of disrupting generally accepted notions of identity, culture, and supporting the status quo. They do not recognize or question the ideologies that are found in texts. It seems that here teachers themselves are not critically literate. Their comments show that they do not recognize how their own positions simply accept texts' ideas of the world. In order for teachers to really be teaching disrupting the commonplace, they must go further

than questioning the author's message. They must recognize and question how issues of race, gender, socioeconomic status, religion, etc. are presented within texts.

Interrogating Multiple Perspectives

This dimension of critical literacy requires readers to imagine standing in the shoes of others (Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2002). Readers need to understand experiences and texts multiple perspectives. Some texts lend themselves well to teaching readers how to be aware of different perspectives within a text. For instance, Anthony Brown's *Voices in the Park* tells the story of a trip to the park from four different characters' perspectives allowing the reader to see how the characters' descriptions differ from each other. When two dogs meet in the park, the older lady describes how some mongrel of a dog inappropriately sniffed her dog, while a young girl describes how the older lady got really up tight about the dogs sniffing each other. Books written from several characters' perspectives make the different viewpoints of an event or issue obvious to readers. However, critical literacy involves seeing the different perspectives, even when they are not presented explicitly by the author. This means readers must consider what other characters in the text might be thinking or feeling, even when their thoughts are not presented by the author. When readers interrogate multiple perspectives, they can see the perspectives that are missing.

Teachers interviewed in this study reported that they were practicing this dimension of critical literacy in two ways: they examined multiple and contradictory perspectives that existed in texts; and they also considered what perspectives of the text might be missing.

Multiple and Contradictory Perspectives

Reflecting on multiple and contradictory perspectives is an important component of critical literacy (Leland & Harste, 2000). Readers must call on their own experiences and understanding of the world to be able to see the complicated picture of what is presented in texts. Instead of simply accepting the view presented to them by the author, critical readers must allow themselves to imagine what other viewpoints there are, or might be.

The teachers' descriptions of their classroom practices indicate that all of them are engaging regularly in this element of critical literacy. Encouraging students to consider the perspectives that exist in the text is a routine practice for these teachers. They ask students to imagine themselves in texts to get them to see the characters' perspectives. Andrew discussed reading *Crash*, a novel that addresses the issue of bullying, and examining the different characters' viewpoints of bullying situations. Bill encourages his students to consider how the characters think differently about events. He asks students to give their own opinion about something, and then questions them, "but what if you were this character, then what would you think?" Similarly, Marie encourages perspective taking by reading texts that introduce students to different ways of life in other parts of the world. She says that by putting students in the position of a character, they can relate that viewpoint to their own experiences. Donna says she encourages her students to step out of themselves to see someone else's point of view.

These teachers work with texts which have multiple, contradictory viewpoints that can be seen by students. They examine the differing perspectives that exist in the texts they encounter. Andrew's class used the hockey game articles mentioned before to see how different texts were constructed to look at an event from different perspectives.

Donna talked about how she uses characters' viewpoints to discuss perspectives of gender roles. When her class read, *The Summer of Riley*, they came across characters who disagreed about whether or not a girl could make a good friend to a boy. For Donna, this became an excellent opportunity to explore multiple perspectives and to hear students' views on the subject. Bill regularly shares examples of how daily life is different in other parts of the world. He wants his students to understand that their idea of "weird" is perfectly normal for others and that these others might consider their Canadian ways "weird". This is one instance where a teacher was teaching his students to apply their text analyzing skills to issues of diversity and social difference. Bill is encouraging his students to develop a world view that goes beyond their own local experiences.

Interrogating multiple perspectives also involves examining the viewpoints that are not presented in the text. This means students should be taught to consider other perspectives not been presented by the author. Harste (1999) explains that critical literacy is paying attention to and seeking out the voices of those who have been silenced or marginalized. This practice of critical literacy was not practiced regularly by these teachers. Only one teacher, Marie, described how she asked her students, "Who else might have an opinion about this and what might it be?" She also reported encouraging her students to disagree with the viewpoint presented in a text and modeled for her students how she disagreed with what an author was saying. By disagreeing with the author, the students had to consider a perspective that had not been presented. This was beyond simply sharing their view of the text when it was in opposition to the text because Marie explained that several students were "arguing for the sake of arguing" and expressing points of view that were not necessarily their own.

One area of concern that emerged here was that while teachers said that they encouraged their students to examine multiple viewpoints, they also shared what they wanted the students to see. In examining the viewpoints of gender roles, Donna wanted her students to see that the roles imposed by society did not have to be followed; girls and boys could be friends. Bill wanted his students to realize how lucky they were. He often shared examples with his students of the hardships of less privileged students and gave the example of how his students began playing instruments in their grade five music program, but at other schools students had to wait until they were in grade seven. This is a concern because the idea of examining multiple perspectives is to realize that there is no “right” answer, and these teachers were expecting a “right” answer from their students. While the ideologies that these teachers were exposing their students to are in line with what I perceive to be part of social justice (gender equity, understanding poverty and privilege), these teachers did not point out to their students that they had brought their own world views into the lessons.

The teachers are bringing their own politics into the classroom without acknowledging that they are doing this. Teaching is a political action. The decisions teachers make about material and how to present it is laden with their own views of the world. McDaniel (2004) summarized current thought that challenges traditional schooling because students are prompted to look for the “right” answer and interpretations of a text as defined by a teacher or curriculum guide. This instills in students a habit of privileging institutional beliefs and devaluing their own reactions and opinions (Apol, 1998). In order to avoid this, teachers must present their own views as yet another way of viewing the world.

The dimension of critical literacy that interrogates multiple perspectives is being taught by these teachers well. Three of the five teachers reported that interrogating multiple perspectives was an area of strength for them. Two teachers reported that it was an area for improvement. Four of the five teachers practiced examining multiple and contradictory perspectives regularly in their classroom program and one teacher also included considering alternate perspectives in her literacy program.

Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues

In this dimension of critical literacy readers step outside of personal responses and interrogate how sociopolitical systems and power relationships shape perspectives, responses, and actions. They use literacy to engage in the politics of daily life, and understand the relationship between language and power (Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys). These teachers' descriptions of their practice in this area focus on one area, using texts to promote discussions and awareness of sociopolitical issues.

Promoting Sociopolitical Issues through Texts

Lewison, Flint and Van Sluys' description of focusing on sociopolitical issues is more encompassing than simply reading issues books; however, they do acknowledge that using social issues texts is a good place for teachers who are newcomers to critical literacy to begin (2002). In the interviews, using texts that involve social issues was reported as being done in four of the five teachers' classrooms. Andrew said that he read newspaper articles with his class that had issues that his students were interested in. Marie read many picture books that contained social issues and shared articles and news stories about individuals who were protesting inequity. She said she read social issues texts to familiarize her students with issues of power and injustice, and to give students ideas about what is happening in the world. Donna said that in her class, sociopolitical issues were discussed when they came to her or students' attention in all subject areas. She said she would like her students to be more interested in social issues. Bill said that he read books and articles that have social issues in them (*Hatchet*, *Maniac McGee*, *Loser*, newspaper and magazine articles). He encourages his students to identify

situations that are “unfair”. His class debated several of the government’s decisions this past year regarding issues that related to human rights.

One teacher said that she has not focused on sociopolitical issues. Carrie explained that she does agree with the description of this dimension of critical literacy. She said that because most of her students are new immigrants and/or learning English as their second language, that they really understand the relationship between language and power. She acknowledged that while she hasn’t included this dimension of critical literacy in her classroom literacy program at this point, it is something that would be important for her students to learn. Critical literacy has the potential to really flourish in Carrie’s classroom, yet she has not practiced it. Her interview comments show that she is practicing very little critical literacy, and so her voice has been missing from the findings of how teachers are using critical literacy in their classrooms. Carrie’s understanding of critical literacy is incomplete and I believe that her misunderstanding has influenced both her interview comments and her classroom practices with critical literacy.

Four of these teachers have used social issues texts in their classrooms to focus on sociopolitical issues, but this is only a start. The next step would be to interrogate how sociopolitical systems and power relationships shape perceptions, responses, and actions. I have previously referred to how these teachers’ practice with critical literacy does not include teaching how texts influence identity. In this dimension, again, this is not being included in teachers’ descriptions of their practice. All five teachers claim that this is a dimension of critical literacy that they would like to improve.

Taking Action and Promoting Social Justice

In this dimension of critical literacy readers use language to exercise power to change their world, and to question injustice. They engage in praxis, reflecting and acting upon their world in order to transform it (Friere, 1970). The teachers in this study practice this dimension in two ways: they engage their students in recognizing inequity in their world; and they take action. The other three dimensions of critical literacy involve analysis and discussion, but this dimension of critical literacy is where readers turn their analysis into action.

Recognizing Inequity

Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys (2002) explain that one cannot take informed action against oppression or promote social justice without expanded understandings of the inequity in our world. The teachers who were interviewed reported that their students were interested in several issues involving inequity. When asked about the issues their students were interested in, several came immediately to every teacher's mind. All teachers said that bullying was an important issue for their students. Andrew said that his students had brought up situations of discrimination and racism. After they had read *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976) by M. Taylor, they expressed an interest in learning more about racism and the Underground Railroad so they conducted research projects to understand more about what had happened. Bill's students expressed an interest in issues of fairness, friendship, sports, videogames, and parental pressures. Carrie said her students were interested in issues regarding being an outsider, poverty, family, identity, and community. Donna's students were interested in ethnicity, gender, and self-image. Marie's students brought up many issues including divorce, war, the holocaust, racism,

ethnicity, and fairness. In all these classrooms teachers were encouraging students to identify social issues and situations of inequity in their world.

Taking Action

The challenge of critical literacy is to adopt practices that will not only open up new possibilities but will also begin to deal with taking action (O'Brien, 2001). The students in these teachers' classrooms engaged in action to promote justice and fairness in their world. Bullying was an important issue in all these classes so it is not surprising that three teachers shared how their students were involved in anti-bullying campaigns. Students wrote and presented plays to educate their peers about the problems with bullying and how to stop bullies. They created signs and posters about bullying, and volunteered as bullying monitors in the playground. In Bill's classroom students had discussed the importance of how people treat each other. He had them write their own guidebooks called, *A Kid's Guide to Friendship* in which they promoted their ideas of fairness, honesty, and loyalty that weren't always present in their classroom.

In Marie's class the students read texts about the hardships facing children living in poverty and then collected gifts to donate to less fortunate children around the world. The students also read about Terry Fox and other individuals who were taking action to promote change in the world. She said that her students may not be taking action often at this point, but that by discussing the possibilities that exist for individuals to make a difference, and sharing examples of others who do, the foundation is laid for these students to begin.

In all of these teachers' classrooms, students were recognizing inequity and taking action. Only one teacher of the five identified this dimension of critical literacy as an area

of strength. These teachers see that there are many other opportunities for students to be involved in identifying inequity and promoting social justice, and acknowledge that while they have started to do this, they would like to do more.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Over the past year there has been an increase in support for junior language arts programs from both the Ontario Ministry of Education and the local school board. The Ministry has published a report that sets out a framework to ensure that all students in grades 4 through 6 publicly funded schools in Ontario receive the strategic instruction that current research supports is necessary for student achievement. They have also provided professional development opportunities in the area of literacy instruction, which includes critical literacy, to all junior teachers in the province. The local school board has formally identified junior literacy lead teachers in all of their schools who develop and share their expertise with their colleagues to support literacy in their school community.

Critical literacy has been identified as an important component of junior literacy instruction. The Ministry document (2004) indicates that critical literacy should become a regular part of classroom practice. The local school board recognizes that teachers need support to accomplish this.

The school board is attempting to support its junior teachers in many literacy instructional strategies, including critical literacy. This is being attempted through workshops and literature for each junior literacy lead teacher, and by hiring a junior language arts support team of three teachers to model instructional strategies in every junior classroom, conference with individual teachers, and lead junior division meetings about junior literacy. The junior literacy lead teachers involved in the workshops have spent time discussing Luke and Freebody's (1990) roles of the literate learner, and ways that these roles can be supported in the junior classroom. Teachers have engaged in

activities that teach students to be text analysts. They have viewed a commercial that promotes protection of our oceans, identified the intended message, and considered alternative perspectives. They have read a short description of students skipping school in role as parents, thieves, real estate agents, and police officers to examine multiple perspectives of the text. These activities imply that critical literacy involves identifying the author's message, and considering alternate viewpoints. If this is what teachers understand critical literacy to be, their definitions will be incomplete. So far, critical literacy has been presented as one of the four roles of the literate learner. Teachers have been explicitly told that text analyzers apply higher order thinking skills that help understanding and deconstruct the author's message, analyze ideas, information and perspectives in texts, engage in critical literacy/inquiry, and recognize bias, omission, and multiple perspectives.

Many of the teachers who responded to the questionnaire in this study reported that they had no understanding of critical literacy. The lead teachers who participated in the interviews understand critical literacy to be reading between the lines, questioning texts, and forming personal opinions through the discussion of texts. What is missing from these teachers' understanding of critical literacy is the idea that texts are biased and represent the author's ideology. Readers need to be cognizant of the assumptions and biases that are embedded in the text, how texts position readers, and whose interests are being served by how the text is written. These teachers do not seem to understand that this is an important component of critical literacy.

Junior teachers who participated in this study report that they are beginning to practice critical literacy, as they understand it. They are teaching their students to

question and discuss the ideas presented in texts, to see different perspectives of events and issues, to recognize ways that authors construct texts to position readers.

None of the teachers reported that critical literacy was something they had added to their literacy program, rather their understanding of critical literacy meant that they looked at things they were already doing, and realized that the way they currently taught literacy included some critical literacy practices. Critical literacy instruction was a way of looking at texts, not an instructional strategy or literacy program. As teachers' knowledge of critical literacy increased, they recognized ways in which they were already teaching their students to be critically literate, and they saw possibilities for future teaching.

What is missing from these junior teachers' practice with critical literacy is teaching students that texts can serve to empower certain groups of people. Students are being taught to recognize that the message presented in the text is the author's, and that there are other perspectives to consider. However, they are rarely looking at the messages that shape identity within texts. They are not teaching students to be critical of how groups of people are portrayed in texts and question the stereotypical roles for gender, race, age, ethnic group, or religion. Teachers do not understand that this is an essential part of being critically literate, and so they did not report how they do this in their classrooms. This may be because teachers continue to focus their reading instruction on Rosenblatt's (1978) reader response theory that values comprehension and thinking about how texts connect to personal experiences and other texts, but not how they represent and influence our ideas about the world. This could also be because the definition of critical literacy these teachers have been given does not include careful examination of how groups of people are positioned by texts.

If the school board wants its students to be critically literate, they must be sure their teachers have a thorough understanding of what critical literacy is. Teachers need more information about critical literacy and what it looks like in junior classrooms. There is a junior literacy support network in place right now that could facilitate this. The first step, however, would be for junior teachers themselves to be critically literate. McDaniel (2004) argued that teachers need to realize that an approach to critical literacy will be ineffective if they do not embrace the philosophical underpinnings.

Before my experience as a participant in a research study three years ago, I myself did not know about critical literacy. Yet, when I understood what it was, I began to realize how important it was for me, as a teacher, to guide my students to becoming critically literate. Today, critical literacy of junior grade students is the goal of the Ministry of Education and this Windsor school board. If teachers are to teach these students to be critically literate, they need know more about critical literacy.

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APPENDICES

A. Summary Tables

Table 1: Summary by Participant of Disrupting the Commonplace

Participant	Comments
Andrew	Reread texts for different purposes Directly teach students to read between the lines Ask students to form and share their own opinions Question the author (who is he writing this for?) and the author's message Ask open-ended questions, encourage students to ask open-ended questions Examine the bias in newspaper articles (different cities coverage of a hockey game) Examine how advertisements are constructed to influence readers and viewers (cigarettes, sports drinks, footwear, etc.) Students create their own texts to influence others Self Evaluated as an area for improvement
Bill	Asks open-ended questions about texts Reads texts with issues that students have opinions about Encourage students to think, think, think about the implications of the ideas in the text Look at everyday things in different ways, talking about how things would look from other perspectives, or how things have changed over time Challenge their opinions by playing devil's advocate ('what would you think if you were this person') Encourage students to understand that 'the past' isn't the only other perspective because they typically say that something happened in the past if it is different from their own experience Self Evaluated as an area of strength
Carrie	Acknowledge that literacy is everywhere, the computer, math, social studies, science, and it exists as a variety of texts Encourage reading with a 'cultural I' by understanding that all texts were written from a perspective Ask 'who is writing this, why are they writing this, how has it come from their own experiences'
Donna	Use students' ideas about characters to problematize and ask, 'what does that mean to you?' Look at texts to identify the hidden message Ask questions: 'where does this author come from, what is their prejudice, what is the colouring of the world in their eyes, what is their point of view' Recognize that texts are a person's point of view
Marie	Introduce students to different ways of looking at a story Show students that there is more to a text than just reading it, look closer and dig deep Read non-fiction texts with events that are different from the experiences of the students Read texts with social issues and get students thinking about other ways to look at the situation Ask the right questions to get students thinking, reading between the lines so that they start to ask these questions too Encourage students to critique what each other say too Ask: 'what is the author really trying to say, what is the author trying to convey, what is the author not saying in what we're reading' Be aware of how you are being brainwashed

Table 2: Summary by Participant of Interrogating Multiple Perspectives

Participant	Comments
Andrew	<p>Comparing Canadian and American newspaper articles of a hockey game</p> <p>Examining cigarette advertisements to see the viewpoints of cigarette companies compared to their recent learning about the health effects of smoking</p> <p>Examine the perspective of characters in <i>Crash</i> to see the viewpoints of individuals involved in bullying situations</p> <p>Self Evaluated as an area for improvement</p>
Bill	<p>Have students give their opinion about something, then play devil's advocate and ask them, 'but what if you were this person, then what would you think?'</p> <p>Talk about different ways to look at issues</p> <p>Talk about how things have changed over time</p> <p>Talk about different cultures and how their views and practices are different, how what you might consider "weird" and "gross" is normal to them</p> <p>Try to get these students to see how their perspective of the world is 'privileged'</p> <p>Self Evaluated as an area of strength</p>
Carrie	<p>Encourage students to connect to the text, 'have you ever had an experience like that?', 'have you ever felt like that character?'</p> <p>Self Evaluated as an area of strength</p>
Donna	<p>Discuss 'other people's' perspectives</p> <p>Discuss roles of men and women and how they might be different in a single parent household</p> <p>Examine the different perspectives of the characters in the texts</p> <p>Step out of themselves to see someone else's point of view</p> <p>Self Evaluated as an area for improvement</p>
Marie	<p>Getting them (students) to consider different ways of looking at the story</p> <p>Feeling somebody else's feelings</p> <p>Appreciate what life might be like in another world, in another place, to appreciate what we've got here</p> <p>Talk about the issues in the text and how we feel about those issues</p> <p>Ask, 'what would you do if you were this character?'</p> <p>Consider that there are other ways to look at this story, it is not just black and white</p> <p>Encourage students to disagree with the author or with each other to see the whole picture</p> <p>Putting the students in the position of the character, relate it to their own experiences</p> <p>Tell students to 'look at everything twice' because there may be another way to see these ideas, or you might see things the same way as they are presented, but understand that there is another way to see things</p> <p>Model for students how I might look at a text in another way</p> <p>Self Evaluated as an area of strength</p>

Table 3: Summary by Participant of Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues

Participant	Comments
Andrew	Read newspaper articles involving issues that are important to the students Share their own ideas about issues in a journal Self Evaluated as an area for improvement
Bill	Read books and articles that have issues in them (<i>Hatchet, Maniac McGee, Loser</i> , newspaper articles) Encouraging students to identify situations that are “unfair”, and discuss reasons for these decisions (government’s decisions and human rights issues) Journal ideas about social issues Wants students to see how their own viewpoints are from a privileged perspective Self Evaluated as an area for improvement
Carrie	Acknowledged that most of these students are not privileged and they understand the power of language because English is their second language Self Evaluated as an area for improvement
Donna	Examined the gender roles portrayed in a novel, <i>The Summer Of Riley</i> , and how society’s expectations influenced the characters Discussed how society imposes gender roles, expectations of boys and girls and how and when these roles are different (single parent households) Focuses on sociopolitical issues that emerge in all subject areas, but would like to encourage her students to care more about social issues Self Evaluated as an area of strength, and an area for improvement
Marie	Read social issues books to familiarize students with issues of power and injustice, give students an appreciation for the reality of our world, or what life can be like in other parts of our world Tell students not to be ‘brainwashed’ by texts by believing that they are true Share the true story of a boy who is protesting against child labour in third world countries and discuss how they are treated by major corporations like <i>Nike</i> Self Evaluated as an area for improvement

Table 4: Summary by Participant of Taking Action and Promoting Social Justice

Participant	Comments
Andrew	<p>Issues that are important to these students – bullying, discrimination, racism</p> <p>Read newspaper articles about their world and reflect on the ideas</p> <p>After reading a book about bullying, students engage in an anti-bullying campaign by making announcements and posting posters about tips and strategies to discourage bullying</p> <p>After reading <i>Roll Of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i>, students did their own research on the underground railroad and racism</p> <p>Self Evaluated as an area of strength</p>
Bill	<p>Issues that are important to these students – bullying, fairness, friends, videogames, sports, academics, parental pressures</p> <p>Read newspaper articles about their world and reflect on the ideas</p> <p>Using texts to touch on issues that are important to the students</p> <p>Promote identification of situations that are “not fair”, and understand the reasons for the decision, see the perspectives on the issue, examine the government’s decisions and the human rights part of it</p> <p>Talk about what is fair and what is unfair</p> <p>Students write <i>A Kid’s Guide To Friendship</i> to reflect and share ideas about making friends, keeping friends, and being good to each other</p> <p>Self Evaluated as an area for improvement</p>
Carrie	<p>Issues that are important to these students – learning a new language, being an outsider, poverty, family, being part of a community with similar backgrounds, identity</p> <p>Role play situations to demonstrate the need for, and promote character education (respect, fairness, honesty, etc)</p> <p>Make donations to support other people, to make things equitable</p> <p>Created and presented plays for the school about bullying because that is important to them, and they wanted to make a difference</p> <p>Self Evaluated as an area for improvement, but says that these students know that language is powerful</p>
Donna	<p>Issues that are important to these students – dating, ethnicity, self-image</p> <p>Students volunteer as bullying monitors in the playground</p> <p>Students identify situations where inequality exists</p>
Marie	<p>Issues that are important to these students- divorce, war, holocaust, racism, poverty, ethnicity, fairness,</p> <p>Collected items to donate to less fortunate children around the world (operation: shoebox)</p> <p>Discussed how children as young as 9 or 10 can make a difference (like the young boy who is protesting against child labour)</p> <p>Discussed how others (like Terry Fox) have made a difference</p> <p>Encouraged students to make a difference in their worlds by giving up videogames and television for a week and discussed what happened</p> <p>Says that students may not be doing anything yet, but that by discussing the possibilities for them to make a difference and sharing examples of others who do, the foundation is laid for them to begin</p>

Table 5: Summary by Participant of Understanding of Critical Literacy

Participant	Comments
Andrew	Teaching kids to read between the lines Forming their own opinions Questioning the author, who's he writing this for?
Bill	It is simply asking, 'what do you think?' Being critical
Carrie	The skills that students need to survive The building blocks of literacy Early reading strategies
Donna	Decipher the hidden message of the author Look at where (the author) comes from in life, What is their leaning? What is their prejudice? What is their colouring of the world in their eyes? Identify their point of view It doesn't mean you have to be like them (the author)
Marie	Asking the right questions Making them (the reader) look between the lines Realizing that there is more to a text than simply reading it Digging deep Looking at what the author is really trying to say, what they are trying to convey, and what the author is not saying in the text Asking questions when you read, the right questions

B. Questions to Guide Interview Discussions

How many years have you been teaching now?

Have you ever taught other grade levels or other schools?

How would you describe your philosophy of education, what do you believe about education?

Do you have any other roles in the school, coaching, committees?

Tell me about your students

What do you think students need to be literate, to succeed in the junior grades?

What activities do you use to promote this?

I'd like to hear about how you promote literacy in the classroom. Can you think of a book that you have used successfully to teach literacy skills? How do you teach with that book? What have you done (this year, last, some point in your career?)

What is your understanding of critical literacy?

So you see ways that you teach this book as promoting critical literacy skills? How?

What strategies do you use to encourage questioning the text, critical analysis?

What strategies do you use to encourage looking at different perspectives?

What strategies do you use to encourage students to connect the issues in the texts to their own lives?

Do you participate in activities to promote social justice, to make a difference in our world?

Have there been any opportunities for your students to take social action, to get involved in promoting fairness, equity?

What issues do you find that junior students are interested in exploring?

Some researchers have identified four dimensions of critical literacy:
Please read the explanations of these four dimensions.

Disrupting the commonplace – Here, readers see the “everyday” or common occurrences through new lenses. They consider new ways of looking at texts. They interrogate the

text, see how texts position them, and they regard existing knowledge as historical products.

Interrogating multiple perspectives – Here readers stand in the shoes of others. They understand texts from their own perspective and the viewpoints of others. They reflect on multiple and contradictory perspectives.

Focusing on sociopolitical issues – Here readers step outside of personal responses and interrogate how sociopolitical systems and power relationships shape perceptions, responses, and actions. They use literacy to engage in the politics of daily life, and understand the relationship between language and power.

Taking a stand/promoting social justice – Here readers use language to exercise power to change their world, and to question injustice. They engage in *praxis* – reflection and action upon their world in order to transform it.

Which dimension of critical literacy would you say is your strength?

Which dimension of critical literacy would you like to improve?

C: Initial Questionnaire

Questionnaire – Junior Teachers' Perspectives of Critical Literacy

Name

When did you first hear about critical literacy?

What is your current understanding of critical literacy?

What activities have you been using in your classroom that you consider to be demonstrative of critical literacy?

Would you be willing to participate in an interview?

Yes

No

VITA AUCTORIS

Kelly Winney was born in 1976 in Newmarket, Ontario. She graduated from Bracebridge and Muskoka Lakes Secondary School in 1994. From there she went on to the University of Windsor where she obtained an Hon. B.A. in Drama in Education in 1998. She completed her Diploma in Teaching at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. Kelly is currently teaching in Windsor, Ontario and is a candidate for the Master's degree in Education at the University of Windsor. She hopes to graduate in the fall of 2005.