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Editorial

Critical Pedagogy in Literary Education: Reading the Word to read the World

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The current special issue of JLE embodies Freire's goal of literacy/literary education: reading the word to read the world. The cornerstone of Critical Pedagogy lies undoubtedly in Paulo Freire's seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. (*Pedagogia do Oprimido*, 1968). Freire critiques traditional education models, which he terms the "banking model," in which teachers deposit knowledge into passive students. He advocates for a dialogic approach that transforms education into a collaborative process of inquiry. Freire's methods emphasize critical consciousness (*conscientização*), urging learners to question societal structures and their own roles within them. Aiming to empower minds through dialogue and reflection, Critical Pedagogy sees literature as more than an artistic endeavor; it is a medium through which societies interrogate their values, challenge injustices, and envision alternate realities. In the realm of education, how literature is taught can either reinforce systems of oppression or act as a transformative tool for liberation. Critical Pedagogy provides a compelling framework for rethinking literary education. This approach not only democratizes the classroom but also empowers students to become agents of social change.

In the context of literary education, Freire's ideas challenge us to go beyond the mere analysis of texts as isolated works of art. Instead, literature becomes a starting point for exploring power dynamics, historical contexts, and the lived experiences of marginalized groups. Freire's influence compels educators to see students not as empty vessels to be filled with canonical knowledge but as active participants in co-creating meaning.

Traditional literary education often focuses on mastering a fixed canon of "great works," usually authored by white, male, and Eurocentric writers. This approach, while valuable in some respects, can perpetuate cultural hegemony and marginalize voices from oppressed communities. Critical Pedagogy, by contrast, reimagines literary education as an inclusive and dynamic process, thinking of the literary classroom as a place for students to develop their critical consciousness, reading skills, and democratic ethos.

One significant aspect of this classroom transformation is the inclusion of diverse narratives. Feminist thinkers like Bell Hooks (1994), who extended Freire's principles, stress the importance of teaching literature that reflects the experiences of women, people of color, and other marginalized groups. Hooks underscores the value of creating classrooms that are sites of resistance and healing, where students can see their identities affirmed in the texts they read.

Similarly, Henry A. Giroux, another prominent figure in Critical Pedagogy, argues that literary education must interrogate the socio-political conditions under which texts are produced and consumed. Giroux's concept of "border pedagogy" (Giroux, 1991) encourages students to traverse cultural boundaries, fostering an understanding of global interconnectedness. In a literary context, this could mean juxtaposing canonical works with those that critique or reframe dominant narratives—pairing Shakespeare with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, for instance, or Emily Dickinson with Audre Lorde.

Another defining feature of Critical Pedagogy is its commitment to dialogue. In literary education, this involves fostering open-ended discussions that encourage students to question, critique, and reinterpret texts. Instead of authoritative lectures that dictate "correct" interpretations, educators act as facilitators, guiding students to develop their own insights. For example, when studying a dystopian novel like George Orwell's *1984*, a critical pedagogical approach might explore its themes of surveillance and authoritarianism in relation to contemporary issues such as data privacy and state control. Students could be invited to draw parallels between Orwell's dystopian society and their own lived realities, cultivating a deeper awareness of systemic oppression and their capacity to resist it.

This dialogic model also necessitates a shift in assessment methods. Instead of standardized tests that reward rote memorization, Critical Pedagogy favors reflective essays, group projects, and creative assignments that allow students to express their unique perspectives. By prioritizing process over

product, this approach values critical thinking and personal growth over rigid academic benchmarks. According to Johnson and Freedman (2005, p. 16), "when teachers decide to embrace critical pedagogy, they are choosing to adopt a questioning stance in their classrooms." Critical pedagogy advocates for the teaching of skills and strategies necessary to develop a critical/questioning attitude toward texts and the world. By addressing issues of social power, oppression, and aspects of class, race, and gender, Critical Pedagogy promotes student practices that foster active and engaged reading. Students are encouraged to seek meaning and question the ideologies inherent in the texts they read, standing outside the textually or professionally inscribed reading position to offer new interpretive perspectives.

In the context of teaching literature, Critical Pedagogy involves analyzing texts not only for their literary qualities but also for their social, cultural, and political implications. It encourages students to question and critique dominant narratives in literature, as well as the power dynamics embedded within them. Key components of Critical Pedagogy in teaching literature include:

1. **Interrogating Power Structures:** Critical pedagogy prompts students to examine how power operates within literary texts, considering how certain voices are privileged or marginalized.
2. **Promoting Critical Thinking:** Students are urged to analyze texts from multiple perspectives, taking into account how social, historical, and cultural factors shape meaning.
3. **Fostering Empowerment:** Critical pedagogy aims to empower students to become active agents in their learning and in society. This involves encouraging them to voice their interpretations and perspectives, even if they diverge from traditional readings.
4. **Connecting Literature to Social Justice:** Critical pedagogy often seeks to link literary study with broader social justice issues, prompting students to explore themes such as inequality, discrimination, and resistance within texts.

Overall, Critical Pedagogy in teaching literature aims to cultivate critical consciousness, empathy, and a sense of social responsibility among students, empowering them to become active participants in shaping a more just and equitable society.

Implementing Critical Pedagogy in literary education is not without challenges. Resistance from traditionalists who view the canon as sacrosanct, institutional constraints, and the politicization of curricula can all hinder progress. Moreover, fostering genuine dialogue requires educators to navigate sensitive topics and address power imbalances within the classroom. However, these challenges also present opportunities for growth. Freire himself viewed education as an inherently political act, urging teachers to embrace their role as change-makers. By integrating critical pedagogy into literary

education, educators can cultivate a generation of readers who are not only literate but also critically engaged citizens.

At its core, Critical Pedagogy seeks to bridge the gap between education and liberation. In literary education, this means transforming the classroom into a space where students are encouraged to question the status quo, imagine alternatives, and take collective action. By embracing the principles of Critical Pedagogy educators can ensure that literature remains a vital tool for understanding and reshaping the world.

The words of Freire resonate powerfully in this endeavor: “Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity, or it becomes the practice of freedom.” (Freire, 2018, p.81). Let us choose the latter path, using literary education not to reinforce hierarchies but to dismantle them—one text, one dialogue, and one classroom at a time.

With this background, the current issue of the *Journal of Literary Education* has sought to compose a monograph with contributions to deepen our understanding of how literature teaching / literary education and Critical Pedagogy are interwoven, creating discourses that invigorate the teaching of literary texts and at the same time empower the students as readers and future active citizens. It might also be considered an initiative for both students and educators to read, discuss, and explore literature inside the classroom through the lens of Freire and other Critical pedagogy scholars to create meaningful ways of engaging with literature.

The articles included in the monograph section of this issue approach Critical Pedagogy from different perspectives.

Allen et al. open the monograph section with *Exploring the Value of Picturebooks: Enhancing Literacy Development and Content Exploration through a Three-Lens Approach*. This article introduces a three-lens approach to using picturebooks as powerful educational tools across age groups and disciplines. By applying content-area, readerly, and writerly lenses, educators can leverage picturebooks to deepen content exploration, enhance reading skills, and inspire creative writing. Using *Ada’s Violin* as an example, the authors demonstrate how picturebooks engage students with complex subjects while fostering literacy and creativity. The article also offers practical guidance on selecting high-quality picturebooks that align with curriculum standards and resonate with students' cultural and emotional experiences.

Dimos Chloptsioudis with *The Literary Canon in Creative Writing through the perspective of the Critical Model*, explores the relationship between creative writing and the literary canon. It examines whether

the canon can serve as both a source of knowledge and a space for experimentation, positioning Creative Writing as a vital public discourse that addresses pressing political and social issues. Emphasizing workshop poetics, the authors propose a new inclusive pedagogic model that connects canonical criticism, genre theory, and creative writing to foster experimental projects. This approach not only challenges established norms but also invites diverse perspectives, offering a promising and transformative future for the field of creative writing.

With *Jump Around or Sit Still and Read: Physical Activity and Reading in Primary School*, Arvola et al introduce an innovative perspective about Literary education. This study examines the relationships between physical activity, reading comprehension, and reading attitudes in two grade 4 classes (50 students, ages 10–11) without interventions. Results showed a weak negative correlation between physical activity and reading comprehension, as well as a more negative attitude toward reading among highly active students. Physical activity was linked to lower enjoyment of traditional silent reading but higher enjoyment of reading on electronic screens.

Gina Doepker and Annamary Consalvo deal with the teachers' attitudes about children's literature in *Shaping Minds, Shifting Perspectives: Investigating the Evolution of Preservice Teachers' Attitudes Towards Children's Literature*. This study explored 44 undergraduate preservice teachers' (PSTs') evolving attitudes toward children's literature in a required course. Initially, many PSTs held negative views of certain genres, often rooted in their K-12 experiences. However, deliberate and strategic exposure led to greater appreciation and openness to using diverse children's literature in their teaching. The findings highlight the importance of teacher preparation programs in addressing PSTs' past negative experiences while fostering positive engagement with various genres.

Sing Cheung explores in *Towards a Post-anthropocentric Pedagogy: Children's Reading of Oliver Jeffers's This Moose Belongs to Me* the potential of children's literature to challenge anthropocentrism, the belief in human superiority over nonhumans, through a case study of two British child readers' responses to Oliver Jeffers's *This Moose Belongs to Me* (2012). Using reader-response theory, posthumanism, cognitive psychology, and children's literature studies, the study investigates how the book's depiction of human-animal interactions prompts children to critique the protagonist's superiority over the moose and recognize the animal's subjectivity. The findings suggest that children's fiction can destabilize human-animal hierarchies and promote a less anthropocentric worldview, offering a valuable tool for critical pedagogy.

In *Reading the World: Challenging Cultural Insideness in Swedish Upper Secondary Literature Education*, Björn Bradling and Ylva Lindberg authors examines how introducing transnational literature can challenge the insideness often reinforced in Swedish upper secondary L1 literature education. By

aligning with transformative learning goals in the curriculum, the research analyzes 28 student reflections on the impact of transnational short stories. Using Relph's (2016) categories of insideness and Mezirow's (1994; 2003; 2006) transformative learning theory, the study applies participatory research methods, including a focus group interview with school librarians. Thematic analysis of the data explores vicarious, empathetic, and existential insideness.

The miscellaneous section starts with *Folk culture in the digital age: Fairy tales and computer games. A literature review* by Rosy-Triantafyllia Angelaki. This article examines the evolving relationship between fairy tales and contemporary media, particularly video games, and their role in shaping cultural literacy. It explores how traditional folk narratives, including Grimm's fairy tales, are adapted and transformed through digital platforms, reflecting societal changes. The article reviews the intersection of fairy tales and video games, addressing the dichotomy between traditional and digital storytelling, and evaluates the relevance of Propp's morphology in game narratives. It offers insights into how these adaptations contribute to the ongoing evolution of folk traditions and their impact on modern audiences.

Who am I really? Contemporary Narratives of Migration as an Inspiration for Self-discovery by Justyna Zajac and Dorota Michulka present the results of a study on children's reception of Sarah Crossan's novel *The Weight of Water* (2012; 2019). The book follows the emotional and social maturation of Kasia, a girl from a Polish family affected by migration. Letters written by primary school pupils to Kasia, who faces family struggles and peer bullying, were analyzed. Our cognitive science research on literary reception reveals that the novel facilitates self-discovery for young readers while highlighting the experience of a transnational family. Kasia's story serves as a lens for understanding contemporary migrant identity and the cultural adaptation of a teenage girl.

The Poetic Language of Emojis: A Methodology for Teaching Poetry by Alejandro Arturo Martínez addresses the challenge of engaging students with poetry in the digital age, where traditional literary analysis often seems disconnected from students' everyday communication. The study introduces an innovative methodology that combines traditional poetic analysis with emoji-based interpretations, bridging the gap between poetry and digital communication. By focusing on *Poemojis* by Dante Tercero and a translation exercise of Gabriela Mistral's poetry into emojis, students explore the polysemic nature of emojis and their ability to convey complex poetic imagery. This approach enhances poetry's accessibility and relevance, offering a model for educators to engage contemporary students more effectively.

Finally, Nawal Krine et al. investigate in *Poetic manifestations of tragedy in the collection Eleven Planets by Mahmoud Darwish* the relationship between poetry and tragedy, often seen as having different

aims—poetry embodying beauty and tragedy focusing on sorrow and suffering. However, both elements intersect in the human experience of love, battle, and sorrow, transforming them into poetry. Focusing on Mahmoud Darwish’s *Eleven Planets* collection, the study looks at how tragedy is conveyed through spatial dimensions and poetic music. The conclusion reveals that Darwish uses modern poetic techniques to present tragedy in a melancholic yet poetic manner, integrating it into a symphony of human suffering. Tragedy in this collection acts as a cultural rhythm that echoes through various textual forms, from the title to the spatial and musical elements.

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