

## **“Critical literacy helps wipe away the dirt on our glasses”: Towards an understanding of reading as ideological practice**

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*ABSTRACT: This paper reports on a qualitative teacher inquiry conducted in a tertiary, English-as-a-foreign-language classroom in Taiwan. The purpose of the study was, first, to implement a poststructuralist view of critical literacy that focuses not only on texts but also on the practice of reading as constructed and contested, and second, to examine the ways in which the students understand and practise this view of texts and reading. Findings reveal that the students were not only cognizant of the role of a text analyst but were also able to put this knowledge into practice. That is, they demonstrated an understanding as well as displayed the practice of the critical competence of reading. However, when later asked in more general terms of their conceptualisation of reading, the students did not immediately make the connection between reading practices and the critical literacy perspective, but insisted on an understanding of reading as mainly emotional and factual. These findings suggest that to understand reading as a critical practice requires a paradigm shift in emphasis from a view of reading as social practice to a view of reading as ideological practice. Pedagogically, a view of reading as ideological practice means placing emphasis on students' understanding of not only texts as constructed but also reading practices as constructed and contested. This also necessitates class discussions of why particular ways of reading have become the dominant and sometimes the only correct way of reading.*

*KEYWORDS: Critical literacy, poststructuralist theory, ideological practice.*

This paper reports on a study that explored the incorporation of critical literacy in a tertiary English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) classroom in Taiwan. Specifically, the purpose of the study was, first, to implement a poststructuralist view of critical literacy that focuses not only on texts but also on the practice of reading as constructed and contested, and second, to examine the ways in which students understand and practise this view of texts and reading. The research was guided by the following questions:

1. What are students' practices and understanding of critical literacy in relation to reading?
2. Consequently, how do students conceptualise the practice of reading?

In particular, this study worked with whole publications, namely, the course textbook and teen magazines that include a series of articles and, in the case of the latter, a series of articles, photos and advertisements. The study draws attention to the need for students to critically engage with whole publications that include multiple types of texts.

The next section discusses the poststructuralist understanding of critical literacy on which this study is based in relation to other critical literacy approaches and practices.

This is then followed by a discussion of why it is important for a critical literacy study in an EFL context to focus on whole publications, particularly the course textbook and teen magazines.

## **CRITICAL LITERACY APPROACHES AND PRACTICES**

As different theoretical orientations support different practices of critical literacy (Janks 2010), it is important to clarify the various approaches to critical literacy and their implementation as well as the framework on which this study is based. In particular, the study emphasises not only the critical understanding of texts as positioned and positioning but also the critical understanding of reading practices as ideologically constructed.

### **The Freirean approach**

Broadly defined, critical literacy is concerned with the purpose and possibility of education in general, and language and literacy education in particular, to promote social justice by helping students “recognize how language is affected by and affects social relations” (Behrman, 2006, p. 490). This definition draws attention to literacy as a social practice (Vasquez, Egawa, Harste & Thompson, 2004) that is implicated in power relations and contributes to social justice or inequality. As a result of its concern with language and literacy in relation to social justice, classroom implementation of critical literacy that draws from the Freirean approach places emphasis on the ability to read the word in order to facilitate reading the world. Thus, Lewison, Flint and Van Sluys (2002) explain critical literacy as encompassing the four dimensions of “disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on socio-political issues, and taking action and promoting social justice” (p. 382).

In these classrooms, critical literacy is a framework through which to examine social issues such as gender, class or race. For example, Chafel, Flint, Hammel, and Pomeroy (2007) made use of critical literacy to explore with their students the social issue of economic disadvantage. Foss (2002) examined with her students the privilege in their lives, the function of schools as an institution, and individuals’ subject positions as multiple and socially constructed. Young (2001) worked with four adolescent boys in a home-school setting to examine how masculinity both constructs and is constructed by written and spoken texts. Vasquez (2000) discussed with her kindergarten students the inequitable treatment of women in a poster depicting the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Because the Freirean approach draws attention to both reading the word and reading the world, it enables the examination of a multitude of social issues through the reading of a variety of texts, but such critical literacy practices often place less emphasis on the word (that is, texts) than the world (that is, social justice).

### **Critical Language Awareness**

Others follow from the tradition of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989, 1995) and take a critical language awareness (CLA) view of critical literacy. The CLA perspective also underscores reading as a social practice (Clark, 1995) and examines the constructedness of texts from these dimensions of analysis: description,

interpretation, and explanation. That is, a “*description* of the text,” an “*interpretation* of the interaction process, and their relationship to the text” and an “*explanation* of how the interaction process relates to the social action” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 11). In practice, many borrow from systemic functional grammar to examine the ideological positioning of texts by looking for a text’s ideational, interpersonal and textual meaning. In particular, Janks (1997) suggests looking for the following in a textual analysis:

1. lexicalisation;
2. patterns of transitivity;
3. the use of active and passive voice;
4. the use of nominalisation;
5. choices of mood;
6. choices of modality or polarity;
7. the thematic structure of the text;
8. the information focus;
9. cohesion devices. (p. 335)

A number of scholars have discussed the CLA framework and practices (Clark, 1995; Clark, Fairclough, Ivanic & Martin-Jones, 1990, 1991; Cots, 2006; Janks, 1991, 2005). Wallace (1992, 2003), most notably, systematically put into practice the CLA perspective in her work with EFL students. Wallace tends to explore a whole framework of critical analysis of texts rather than opting to focus on one aspect. Therefore, her students would look for a text’s ideational meaning (including participants, processes, circumstances, causation), interpersonal meaning (including person, mood, modality, adverbs, adjectives and nouns), and textual meaning (including semantic structure, overall organisation, theme and cohesion).

Although her implementation of this framework has proved successful, another perhaps less daunting approach might be to focus on a few linguistic features at a time. For example, Kamler (1994) and her students examined the lexical items, that is, content words such as nouns, adjectives verbs, and adverbs, of a newspaper article about a young female athlete. They explored “how women are textually represented” (p. 132) by identifying the lexical items associated with the major participants in the article, namely, a female athlete and her male counterparts. Their analysis focused on how discourses are made up of a “network of wordings...rather than individual words” (p. 132). As these examples illustrate, the CLA view of critical literacy calls for a detailed and intensive examination of the linguistic features of texts in order to deconstruct the power relations imbued and the ideological assumptions involved. As such, CLA lends itself to shorter pieces of texts and can be less viable as a practice with whole publications.

### **The poststructuralist perspective**

The approach to critical literacy in this study draws mainly from the poststructuralist framework that places emphasis on textuality, that is, “the way texts work” (Misson & Morgan, 2006, p. ix). Practices that focus on the ideological nature of texts aim to deconstruct texts so as to make apparent how texts are both “positioned and positioning” (Janks, 2010, p. 61).

For example, Wilson (2001) examined with primary students the notion of texts as ideologically constructed. They focused on articles of music groups in popular magazines with the aim to illuminate “the choices writers face as they write, and the connection between the choices made and the possible manipulation of meanings for the reader” (p. 104). In such cases where textuality is the focus of critical literacy, scholars often suggest questions as angles through which to examine texts, such as these questions that Stevens and Bean (2007) propose:

- Who/what is represented in this text?
- Who/what is absent or not represented?
- What is the author trying to accomplish with this text?
- For whom was this text written?
- Who stands to benefit/be hurt from this text?
- How is language used in specific ways to convey ideas in this text?
- How do other texts/authors represent this idea?
- How could this text be rewritten to convey a different idea/representation? (p. 11)

A point often implied but seldom explicitly discussed in the poststructuralist view of critical literacy is that not only are texts constructed, but the practice of reading is also constructed. The latter point is included in Mellor and Patterson’s (2004) discussion of the three principles of poststructuralism:

- the conception of texts and readings as “made” or constructed;
- the idea that a piece of literature emerges not from a timeless, placeless zone but from a particular social context and that it is read in another context;
- the argument that texts and readings are never neutral. (p. 87)

Based on these principles, Mellor and Patterson suggest that poststructuralist critical literacy practices in the classroom should reflect these emphases:

1. Texts are sites for the construction of plural, often conflicting and contradictory meanings.
2. Texts (and readings) promote interested “versions of reality”.
3. Texts (and readings) are always partial – in the sense of being always fragmentary and never neutral.
4. Readers are constructed as meaning-makers by the readings or interpretations available to them.
5. Reading about characters as if they were real people is a learned way of reading. (p. 87)

The last statement, although drawing attention to literary and fictional texts in its explicit reference to “characters”, nevertheless applies to all texts in that it points out the poststructuralist understanding that any manner or method of reading, including both the critical and the non-critical, often described respectively as “reading against texts” and “reading with texts”, is ultimately a learned way rather than a natural way of reading.

## **ELT TEXTBOOKS AND POPULAR MAGAZINES**

This study focuses on two types of texts, a school-sanctioned text and teen magazines; the former in this case refers to the course textbook. The juxtaposition of these two types of texts is significant. As Stevens & Bean (2007) argue, the common association of critical literacy with popular and everyday texts such as magazines, newspapers, and advertisements “implicitly promotes school-sanctioned texts as bias-free or not in need of critical inquiry” (p. 7). Below I discuss why these types of texts merit a critical examination in the tertiary EFL classroom.

### **ELT Textbooks**

English-language teaching (ELT) textbooks have been extensively studied for their ideologies (for example, Heinrich, 2005; Lahdesmaki, 2009; Lee, 2009). The ELT textbook can be viewed as a distinct genre in and of itself that “includes a wide variety of text types, many of which have been previously published elsewhere” (Dendrinos, 1993, p. 315). These textbooks hold authority as presenting a model of the target language and its culture, most often Western urban culture (Dendrinos, 1993). Through such authority, ELT textbooks are able to promote “a vision of students as human capital” and “the discourses of developed free market Western economies” (Koosha & Taki, 2004, pp. 62-63). Baleghizadeh & Motahed (2010) argue that ELT textbooks are ideologically laden and it is pertinent that learners are made aware of the ideologies and their consequences. However, Giaschi (2000) observes that it is often difficult for English-language learners to challenge ELT textbooks, because of the dominant assumption that Western products and ideals are more progressive and advanced. Indeed, ELT materials as constructed discourses have been frequently researched, and the need for teachers to explore the ideological nature of ELT textbooks with students is also widely acknowledged, although still rarely practised in classrooms.

In the late 1980s, Prodromou (1988) observed that “globally designed” ELT textbooks, as a result of publishers’ ethnocentric and Anglo-centric worldviews, do not reflect either the socio-cultural realities of their users or their varieties of English. At the beginning of the 1990s, Pennycook (1994) observed that the increasingly dominant view of English as an international and neutral language has resulted in “the form of a new international content for ESL textbooks” (p. 177). Specifically, Brown (1990) found that ELT textbooks have shifted in content to a “westernised cosmopolitan culture” which people can easily “encounter[r] on television all over the world,” (p. 12), including topics on travelling, business and entertainment.

However, since the 2000s, discourses of multiculturalism have influenced ELT textbook production, and publishers have incorporated multicultural content in their selection of topics. As a result, aspects of cultures from different parts of the world are included. Even in portrayals of Western English speakers, people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds are included, and the Western world is no longer portrayed as belonging to white Anglo-Saxons. However, it is this diversity-embracing ideology that makes ELT textbooks a necessary focus of critical literacy. That is, because ELT textbooks appear progressively inclusive, it can be easily overlooked that, in fact, the social, historical, cultural and political dimensions of people and their cultures are seldom represented in all of their complexities.

Take as an example a popular internationally developed and distributed textbook, *Mosaic 2 Reading* (Wegmann & Knezevic, 2007), one of textbooks in the *Interactions/Mosaic Reading* series published by McGraw-Hill, which I previously used as the required text for an EFL course. In Part 2 of the chapter entitled “Art and Entertainment”, there is a long and a short passage respectively on Chicano poetry and Jackie Chan, the latter a famous Hong Kong actor/entertainer who has found success in Hollywood. The chapter presented Chicano poetry and Jackie Chan as an integral part of American culture. Such a representation seems to make the textbook multicultural, yet a critical reading of both pieces reveal that in the former, conflicts between Chicano culture/people and Caucasian culture/people are presented as something of the past, and Caucasian culture/people are presented as unconditionally and completely accepting of Chicano people/culture. In the latter, Jackie Chan’s increasing appearance in Hollywood movies is presented as a logical step from his success as a movie star in Hong Kong, and his transition into the American film business is depicted as effortless. This passage, through the story of Jackie Chan, constructs the view that even non-citizens of the United States can share and realise the American dream.

The same textbook offers another example of why it is imperative for EFL students to engage critically with ELT textbooks. In a chapter entitled Language and Learning, the two passages, respectively entitled “English as a Universal Language” and “Mongolians Learn to Say ‘Progress’ in English”, discuss how English is used worldwide in different fields and for multiple purposes, and how different countries across Asia and the Middle East are making efforts to improve the citizenry’s English-language proficiency, including giving English semi-official status and striving for national bilingualism in English and mother-tongue languages. The chapter also includes a short passage of 95 words that functions as a prompt to engage in students in an oral discussion. The passage, entitled “Attack on English,” delineates how the French Cultural Minister promoted a law for some English words in the French vocabulary to be replaced by their French equivalent. However, the passage concludes, the French Constitutional Congress ruled that such a law is in violation of the French people’s freedom of expression. In the first example, that the title singles out the word “progress” as an example what the Mongolians learn to say in English clearly expresses the author’s/publisher’s views of the level of development of Mongolia and how English can aid in its evolution. In addition, that the French resistance to the hegemonic power of English is described as an “attack” on English also explicitly signifies the author’s/publisher’s views of the legitimacy of the dominance of English in the world.

These two examples demonstrate that EFL learners face a particular set of issues in that they are not only learning the English language from the textbooks but also learning about how English-speaking people view the world and how they view English-language learners and what English-language learners need to know about the Western/American cultures.

### **Popular magazines**

Critical literacy educators have often worked with popular magazines as vehicles through which to explore the construction of gender positioning in society. For example, Kempe (1993) and her students examined women’s and men’s portrayals in popular magazines, including the reasons behind and the consequences of the

depictions. Her students worked in groups and “cut out pictures, words and phrases and placed these on posters” (p. 311) to aid their discussion. In a home-school setting, Young (2000) used two articles from a sports magazine to explore gender representation with four young boys. They also examined textual features of various advertisements, pictures and articles, found in both popular teen magazines and newspapers, for their portrayal of masculinities and femininities. Thus, popular magazines serve as a powerful source of language and images for the discussion of gender discourse.

However, with the exception of Wilson (2001), popular magazines, despite their ever-skillful juxtapositioning of articles, photos, advertisements and even quizzes, are seldom the centre of analysis for the constructedness of texts. Stories, including modern, folklore and fairytales, have been the main source of discussion for the ideological nature of texts. In addition, despite their crafty juxtapositioning of an assortment of text types that can serve as a prime example of textuality, the magazine as a whole publication, that is, an entire issue of a magazine, has rarely been viewed as an object of exploration for the ideological construction of texts. This will be elaborated in a later section.

Popular magazines, teen magazines in particular, need to be scrutinised, not only for their gender positioning, but also for their ideological assumptions of what it means to be a teenager. Teen magazines, with their focus on providing access to ways of emulating teen pop stars, not only in their appearance but also behaviour (for example, teen idols’ experiences in detention), family relations (for example, how teen idols deal with parents’ divorce or parental disapproval of their monetary wastefulness) and relationship patterns (for example, what happens when two teen girl idols who are best friends both fall for the same teen boy idol), pose particular threats to adolescents’ psycho-social development. Thus, teen magazines necessitate a poststructuralist critical literacy discussion because, as a prominent source of world view in many adolescents’ and young adults’ lives, these texts represent critical instances where “power relations are established and negotiated,” and can serve to “play major parts in building and reproducing social structures” (Luke, O’Brien & Comber, 2001, p. 113).

### **ELT textbooks and popular magazines in Taiwan**

Primary and secondary EFL education in Taiwan utilizes locally developed textbooks, while English-language courses at the tertiary level rely mostly on internationally developed materials. Heinrich (2005) argues that ELT textbooks are “the most tangible representation of ideology” as they provide “instruction about nation, culture, tradition, customs, history, ethics, citizens, minorities, foreigners, cities, countryside, family, etc. and their interrelation with language” (pp. 214-215). Therefore, it is crucial for tertiary students in Taiwan to be critically aware of ELT textbooks as positioned and positioning, that is, constructed by publishers with their own purposes and worldviews (including their views on English-language learning and English-language learners) and functioning to manipulate the textbook users’ understanding of their place in the world and themselves as English-language learners.

Popular fashion-beauty magazines in Taiwan fall into three categories. There are the translated versions of western fashion magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle*, and *Vogue*, although the non-translated versions of these magazines can also be found.

There are also the fashion magazines directly imported from Japan (that is, not translated). They contain large numbers of photos that portray different fashion styles; thus, the content of these magazines are accessible even to people who cannot read Japanese. A third type is the beauty magazine produced locally that mainly provide beauty tips and information on beauty products. The first type of popular magazine such as *Cosmopolitan* provides more variety in terms of content, including not only topics on fashion and sometimes beauty but also celebrity gossip and portraits as well as occasionally essays on a variety of topics.

The focus of this study is Western teen magazines. They are most similar to the first type of fashion-beauty magazines such as *Elle*, but are focused on teen idols in both the film and music industries. There are no magazines produced in Taiwan that are similar to these Western teen magazines, but the focus of these magazines on teen idols and teen relationships makes these magazines relevant to university students in Taiwan. Taiwanese college students not only watch Hollywood movies and listen to Western pop music, but also follow celebrity news on the worldwide web and local newspapers. Teen magazines, therefore, provide materials that are of interest to the participants in this study.

### **Whole publications versus single pieces**

In addition to the simultaneous emphasis on both school-sanctioned and popular culture texts, this research draws attention to the study of whole publications (that is, a course textbook and an issue of a magazine) rather than the study of single pieces of texts, such as one newspaper article, one magazine article, one science chapter, or one story. In many classroom studies of critical literacy, it is the common practice to juxtapose single pieces of texts from multiple sources as a way to examine their constructedness.

Working with a single text affords the advantages of a focused and controlled discussion. However, working with a single text fails to acknowledge that as readers, we approach and derive our understanding of texts most often in relation to the whole publication, although often quickly browsing through. And even when we read only one piece of text out of a whole publication, the decision to read that particular piece is more often based on the publication as a whole than choosing the one text devoid of contextual information or influences. In addition, focusing on single pieces of texts can fail to demonstrate to students that even though single pieces of texts are ideologically laden in and of themselves, the whole publication as a combination of several pieces of texts is another ideological entity, perhaps even more forceful. For example, Anna Wintour, the editor-in-chief of *Vogue*, discussed her vision for the magazine at the beginning of her tenure: “There’s a new kind of woman out there. She’s interested in business and money. She doesn’t have time to shop anymore. She wants to know what and why and where and how” (Anna Wintour Biography, 2011). This vision is then conveyed in each issue of the magazine as a combination of articles, photos, and advertisements rather than in a single article or a single photo.

## METHODOLOGY

### The Context

As this study was conducted in Taiwan, this section provides a brief background of the status of English in Taiwan and the situation of English as a foreign language education. As a result of globalisation in general and the discourse of internationalisation in particular, English is understood to play an integral role in the economic and political development of the nation. The perceived significance of English has been reflected in education as occupying more hours and weight in the school curriculum and taught as a subject at an increasingly younger age and grade level. This has been enthusiastically embraced by the majority of the citizenry, although language scholars have criticised the lack of comparative attention to indigenous languages such as Taiwanese and Hakka. The high value placed on English proficiency by the general citizenry has led some to describe learning English as a “whole-nation movement” (Chern, 2002, p. 104), perhaps best evidenced by the rapidly growing number of privately owned, bilingual Chinese-English kindergartens in response to their high demand by parents, who are eager for their children to begin learning English from as young an age as possible.

Textbooks occupy a central place in English education in Taiwan. At the primary and secondary levels, schools choose textbooks that have been locally developed following the mandated curriculum standards, which have been mainly based on communicative language teaching principles since around the start of the previous decade (Chern, 2002). In universities, instructors enjoy autonomy in developing and selecting materials, but most opt for internationally developed and distributed materials as course texts. As English-language education has become a major business worldwide, university instructors in Taiwan are presented with a multitude of textbooks for all language skills and proficiency levels, most often from large publishing corporations such as Compass Publishing, McGraw-Hill and Thomson Heinle.

### The course and the participants

The study was a qualitative teacher inquiry (Fecho & Allen, 2003; Goswami, Lewis, Rutherford & Waff, 2009) conducted in the spring 2010 semester in a university freshman, general English course in Taiwan. The researcher is a faculty member of the university and was also the instructor of the course in which this study was conducted. Tertiary students in Taiwan are required to take at least 6 credits of foreign language courses (Chern, 2002), and English is the most commonly offered. In this university, students are required to take 4 credits of general English courses in their freshman year and 2 credits of sophomore English. The freshman general English course is a year-long course (including a fall semester and a spring semester each lasting 18 weeks), and students are assigned to one of the four proficiency levels (that is, beginning, intermediate, high-intermediate and advanced) based on a proficiency exam administered by the university before the start of the academic year. Reading is the main focus of the university’s freshman general English course, although the other skills of listening, speaking and writing are also emphasised.

This research was conducted in an advanced level course. There were 19 students, 3 males and 16 females, all of whom were humanity majors. Classes met for a two-hour

period every week. I chose as the course textbook an internationally developed and distributed text entitled *Reading for the Real World 3* (Graber, Babcock & Gagiano, 2009), the fourth level in the series. I found the textbook appropriate for the course in terms of its level of difficulty as well as the range of topics included. It covers a wide range of topics (in the form of 12 units), and each unit includes two reading articles (in the form of two chapters). This suited my goal for the students to read articles across a variety of subject matter. Also, in each chapter, in addition to the main article, there is a shorter passage of “supplementary reading” that either provides additional information on the topic or discusses the topic from another viewpoint. My choice of the textbook was based on considerations for students’ English-language development, and the focus of critical literacy did not factor into my decision, as I believe that any and every text, popular or school-sanctioned, needs to be read critically (Stevens & Bean, 2007), an understanding that I also sought to demonstrate to the students.

Aligning with the guidelines of the university’s freshman general English course to develop students’ four language skills while focusing on reading, the midterm and final exams were mainly based on the course textbook and included sections on vocabulary and reading comprehension. For the final exam, in addition to the previously mentioned sections, I incorporated a section of essay questions that asked the students to reflect on their understanding of critical literacy.

For the purposes of this paper, I focus my discussion on aspects of the course involving critical literacy, as it is the focus of this qualitative teacher inquiry. The students’ developing understanding of the critical literacy perspective was as much a part of the course goal as it was the focus of the research. That is, as a language educator, I cannot in good conscience exclude a critical stance in my English-language classes, even if it means complicating my teaching and furthering my workload. As a critical scholar, it is also my imperative to explore the implications of my practice for the development of theory. It was with both these aims in mind that I conducted this inquiry.

### **The research**

I had already introduced critical literacy in fall 2009, the first semester of the year-long course. We had worked on critically reading single pieces of texts, including fairytales and non-fiction articles that I felt were ideologically apparent and better allowed the students to explore the constructedness of texts. I sought to develop students’ understanding that texts are often “carefully crafted” with the aim to “entice us to...buy into a particular political ideology or social practice” (Stevens & Bean, 2007, p. xi).

In spring, 2010, the semester on which this paper is focused, our work with critical literacy progressed from single pieces of texts to whole publications, specifically, the course textbook and teen magazines, the latter including those published in the United States (that is, *BOP*, *GL*, *Seventeen*, *Teen Vogue*, and *Tiger Beat*) and the United Kingdom (that is, *Bliss*).

***The course textbook***

I asked the students to first write about any thoughts they had on any aspect of the textbook in a “free writing piece”. After submitting their writing, we worked on activities aimed at exploring the worldview presented by the textbook. The students began by looking for information on the authors and publisher before searching for information that alludes to the principles based on which the textbook was compiled. Unlike most of ELT textbooks, that only summarise the sections included in each chapter or unit, this textbook does, on the back cover, provide a brief rationale of its aims.

There is a section of bullet points that list the features of the textbook and a short paragraph above the list of bullet points. The latter reads:

Reading for *the Real World* Second Edition is a four-book series designed for high school and university students who are seeking to improve their fluency and comprehension skills in English. All reading passages have been revised and updated to include *current issues*. The *wide range of* topics presented in each book will appeal to students with *diverse interests* while exposing language learners to useful vocabulary items commonly encountered in academic readings from *various fields*. Each reading within the Reading for the Real World series is also accompanied by exercises designed to encourage students to explore the reading topics through speaking, writing, and vocabulary activities. [italics added]

I then asked the students to reflect on the intentions of the authors/publisher in their choice of these phrases: the *real world*, *current issues*, *wide range of topics*, *diverse interests*, and *various fields*. The students then considered these phrases in relation to 1) the themes (that is, unit titles) in the textbook, 2) how the themes are represented (that is, article titles), and 3) who or what the focus is in each of the themes (units) and its representation (articles).

For example, Unit 9 is entitled “Sports & Fitness”. The two readings include two articles entitled “Athletes into Creatine” and “Scuba Safety”. In this case, the theme would be sports and fitness, and this theme is first represented by a discussion of the drug Creatine, its perceived benefits and possible side effects. In addition, the article includes information on Creatine’s lack of regulation by the United States Food and Drug Administration and the mention of a US professional baseball player, Mark McGuire, considered the most high-profile user of this supplement. The theme of sports and fitness is also represented by an article that discusses the possible dangers and safety precautions of the activity of scuba diving. No countries or persons are mentioned in relation to this activity, implying the activity as common throughout the world. Therefore, the focus of the broad and unspecified theme of sports and fitness turned out to be a drug used in the USA and safety issues associated with the popular activity of scuba diving. As a second example, In Unit 7, entitled “Language & Literature”, the two readings include an article entitled “Ever-Evolving English” and an article that is an excerpt from Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. In this case, the theme would be language and literature, and this theme is represented by the language, English, and the classic novel, *Pride and Prejudice*. Therefore, the focus of the broad and unspecified theme of language and literature turned out to be the English language and an English classic.

In addition to analysing the themes and their representation, I also asked students to read through the articles to identify the names and organisations mentioned in relation

to each of the topics. The students had to list their findings in a chart. Based on these findings, the students then reflected on the worldview presented in the textbook in what I called the “rethinking piece.” After submitting this writing, the students shared their thoughts with the class.

### *Teen magazines*

I first asked the students to write down any thoughts they had on any aspect of the magazine in a “free writing piece” before proceeding with activities aimed to examine the power relations assumed by and created in these texts. After submitting this writing, the students then worked in groups to analyse the contents of the articles and photos in a teen magazine. Each group was responsible for a different magazine. In relation to the articles, the students identified the themes (for example, fashion, beauty, and so on) and the topics included in each of the themes (for example, for the theme of fashion, topics may include the newest spring collection or fashion faux pas) as well as the number of pages allocated to each of the themes and topics. The students were also asked to identify the “main ideas” the photos. After this detailed reading of the magazines in groups, they shared their findings with the class. The students then reflected in the “rethinking pieces” their thoughts regarding the power relations that are assumed and created in these magazines. After submitting their writing, the students shared their thoughts with the class.

With both the textbooks and the teen magazines, the students first responded to the texts in a “free writing piece” before class activities that guided them to think critically about the texts’ constructedness. Afterwards, they then responded in the “rethinking piece” to the original aim of the textual deconstruction, respectively, the worldview presented by the textbook and the power relations assumed by and created in the teen magazines.

### **Data collection and analysis**

In addition to the free writing pieces and the rethinking pieces, data for this paper also include the essay question section of the final exam that asked the students to reflect on their understanding of critical literacy as relating to reading, as well as a final reflection paper in which they discussed their understanding of the practice of reading in more general terms. I also kept a researcher journal that documented each class implementation, my reflections afterwards, and my observations of students’ learning and progress throughout the year.

Each type of data was analysed for whether the students demonstrated a critical stance in their response. Then, the data were also examined across each of the two interrelated data types (that is, the free writing pieces and the thinking pieces, the rethinking pieces and the final exam essay questions, the essay questions and the reflection of reading practice) for patterns that emerged and shed light on students’ understanding and practices of critical literacy in particular and reading in general. The researcher journal served as a form of triangulation for the results from the data analysis of students’ practices and understanding of critical literacy and reading.

In the presentation of the findings, I provide examples from four students for detailed illustration and discussion. The students are quoted verbatim, as in most cases I did not feel that the minor grammatical mistakes interfered with an understanding of their writing. Any changes that I made to their quotes are indicated by square brackets.

Focusing on examples from four students affords some discussion of their responses through the whole semester across the various tasks, including two responses to each of the texts, a reflection of their understanding of critical literacy in relation to reading, and a reflection of their conceptualisation of the practice of reading in general. This allows the discussion of the findings to achieve continuity within each student. The discussion of findings would make less sense if examples were used from random students because the course work followed a logical progression.

In terms of which and the number of students' responses to include for focused illustration and discussion, the aim was to present the range and breadth of responses from all of the students by using the examples from a few. The responses of the four students, Chia-yu, Chung-ling, En-ping and Dong-hsiang, the first three females while the last a male, were selected with this consideration in mind. The names of the students are pseudonyms.

## CRITICAL LITERACY PRACTICES

The following discusses students' practices of critical literacy in relation to how they respond to the course textbook and the teen magazines in both the free writing pieces and the rethinking pieces.

### The course textbook

#### *Free writing pieces*

Although students had already been introduced to the critical literacy perspective of reading in the previous semester, most of them reflected on the textbook from the perspective of whether it is a useful, accessible and interesting vehicle of language learning. This can be expected, as it might be more difficult for students to engage critically with ELT textbooks than any other type of text because these textbooks are constructed as the model of the target language. For example, Dong-hsiang shared his thought that the textbook is “useful” because it “taught us not only lots of new words but also some information from all of the world.” He also observed that “the book does not mention about grammar questions that much.” En-ping reflected on the textbook as “difficult to read”, citing the reasons of “difficult words” and that the topics “seem to be more serious”. She nevertheless found the textbook positive because “it provides me with [many] kinds of information and knowledge”. She further speculated on the title, explaining that the textbook “wants to lead us to enter this ‘real world’, the society we live in,” and that “it opens the world to us”. Both these students considered the textbook as a source of language input and as a source of knowledge about the world. In terms of the latter, they were positioned by the title of the textbook as learners who benefit from the wisdom and expertise of the textbook in presenting the real world to them.

Other students were mindful of the course emphasis on critical literacy and made efforts to include some critical analysis of the text or of their own reading practices. For example, Chia-yu was critical of the genre of ELT textbooks in general. She argued that “part of the purpose of textbooks is to tell students what we should do and what we shouldn't [do].” She used an example from the course textbook: “The ‘deforestation’ article gives us some information about that, but the main point is to tell us we have to protect our earth.” It led her to conclude that “the whole book is a

cliché,” and that “the topics it talks about are not interesting enough; we read it only because of tests.” Rather than critically engaging with only this particular textbook, Chia-yu turned her critical gaze on how textbooks in general, often in obsolete ways, take up the positionality of themselves as the authority on the correct ways of being in the world and students as empty vessels into which there is the need to deposit knowledge. Chung-ling reflected on her own engagement with textbooks. She shared that

when reading textbooks, I’m confined to only studying for getting good grades or even memorising grammar patterns and vocabulary. I seldom have time or opportunities to question the authors or myself. I tend to believe almost everything I read unless it’s too outrageous or something against my belief.

Chung-ling considered the role of the textbook as a vehicle for language learning and a source of exam material as having constrained her view of it as that with which she can engage in critical dialogues.

### ***Rethinking pieces***

In their rethinking pieces, students were able to respond critically to the different dimensions of the textbook’s worldview. Chia-yu suggested that the publisher’s presentation of the “real world” as consisting of mainly the Western world implies the publisher’s belief that the future of the world lies in the fate of the West. She observed that the various developments in the fields of science, technology and medicine mentioned in the textbook are discussed in relation to the efforts made by the Western world. Thus, the textbook expresses the view that it is the Western world which holds the key to the future of the human race. She explained that the topics discussed in the textbook

mainly put an emphasis on the present and the future. The society changes at every moment, and what we do now will have an important influence on the changes...the countries and the organisations mentioned in these articles are in large part Western. I believe the authors are telling us that they are only ones having the power to make the change.

Dong-hsiang made a similar point about how the United States and United Kingdom are presented as the “real world”. However, his discussion focused on the motivations of the publisher. He stated:

Since [countries] such as US or UK were mentioned so many times, it’s no doubt that the viewpoint of the author/publisher is quite narrow. I mean, they chose topics like technology, medicine, space, business, etc, it’s obvious that the author selected themes which his/her country is on a pioneering role. This would make us believe that the western world is always doing something helpful to the world.

Dong-hsiang was sceptical of the publisher’s aim in presenting the Western world in a positive light through selecting articles that mainly discuss the achievements of the US and the UK, two countries that the authors/publisher depicts as the “real world”.

En-Ping and Chung-ling examined the textbook in relation to the topics included. En-ping shared that the textbook presents “the worldview of more powerful and richer countries. Most of them are Western countries.” She explained, using the example of an article about Internet addiction in the unit on computer and technology, that “in

poorer countries, they won't have to worry about this issue because they even have few opportunities to use the Internet.” That is, the topics presented by the textbook as relevant in today's world are actually only relevant to the computer-dominated developed countries, most of them in the Western hemisphere. Chung-ling similarly examined how the issues discussed in the textbooks are ones that “only the rich countries are able to talk about,” using the example of an article about gene therapy in the unit on health and medicine. She questioned: “How could some poor Asian or African countries spend budget on researching gene-based work when their people are hungry or dying of diseases?” She also pointed to the geopolitics of the topics and their implications, stating that “the author didn't put much focus on regional issues” and that “the articles are mostly US-related or UK-related,” prompting her to comment that “maybe they think that is ‘real world’.”

To sum up, in considering the constructedness of the course textbook, the students mainly identified the textbook's presentation of the Western world in a positive light and its presentation of the western world as “the real world”.

## **Teen magazines**

### ***Free writing pieces***

The students were able to extend a greater degree of critical engagement with the teen magazines even prior to class discussions. In their free writing pieces, the students considered the ways in which these magazines promoted businesses, in terms of the business of promoting fashion, the business of making money, and the interdependence of celebrities, fashion products, and the magazine as a business. One student focused on the notion of the ideal reader, a concept that had been discussed in the previous semester.

Chia-yu drew attention to two aspects of the magazines: the major role of advertisements and the promotion of fashion. She pointed out that “this magazine is full of ads. The ads profits remain a big part of the income. How they sell the products between the lines is what we should think more about.” Chia-yu's appropriation of the critical literacy notion of “reading between the lines” to her critique of the magazines' practices of “sell[ing]...between the lines” is a prime example of her grasp of how textual practices are always positioning. She also observed that the magazines promote an ideology of fashion, pointing to these magazines as a part of the larger business of fashion:

This magazine is not selling the magazine itself but selling the idea of fashion. In those articles I read, including the article talking about bad girl or good girl or Hollywood star with eco-friendly idea, [the magazine] hide the main purpose in those articles that pursuing the fashion is the thing we have to do.

Dong-hsiang focused on the magazines as a financial institution built on the ideas of fashion. He explained: “The magazine shows girls the trend for fashion. And there's also information on the magazine telling the girls how to get it,” suggesting that the promotion of fashion is actually a business venture. He also considered that the magazine “promotes the idea that people need to make themselves look young and pretty, and that they should keep themselves informed of new fashions by buying the

magazines.” Therefore, the magazines, setting themselves up as the authority through which people can attain youth and beauty, inevitably and necessarily incur business.

Chung-ling similarly saw the magazines as a form of business, but commented on the power relations involved. She shared that the magazine “tells about the so called ‘latest fashions style’ and thus promotes some products. Besides, it focuses on any kind of information of celebrities.” Thus, “the magazine promotes the stars, uses the stars to promote some products and make the money for the magazine. It promotes the stars and then takes advantages of them.” She exhibited awareness of the intricately complex nature of power relations as multidimensional and multilateral in the ways in which institutions (for example, in the form of celebrities and the print media) both benefit from and are at the same time exploited by one another.

Finally, En-ping considered the magazines from the perspective of their intended audiences. She reflected that the ideal readers are those girls who submit to the materialistic views constructed by the magazines, of which she is not a member. She wrote: “The ideal readers of this magazine are those teenage girls who have enough money to buy these products in the magazine, or will save money (or whatever way they come up with) in order to buy these products.” She then distanced herself from that group of girls and explained her vision for the magazine:

The ideal magazine for me has to include the following elements: first, something real about the world (for example, latest news). Second, something related to fashion. Though I don’t usually spend a lot of time on dressing myself up, I still want to know the trend of fashion. Third, something interesting and exciting (just like the release of new movies, albums, and books).

Thus, En-ping constructed a version of herself that is at once overlapping but also separate from the ideal reader which the teen magazines construct. She saw herself as simultaneously worldly, fashion-wise and cultural. It is particularly interesting how she “talked back to” the magazines and allowed herself the same platform as the magazines. That is, she acknowledged the magazine’s entitlement to construct an ideal reader as much as she is justified to construct an ideal magazine. En-ping has moved beyond the mere deconstruction of a text to the “re-construction” and “re-vision” of a better possibility.

### ***Rethinking pieces***

In examining the power relations assumed by and created in these teen magazines, the students were able to move beyond the more general critique of these magazines as reinforcing one type of body shape and female subservience as the only desired and desirable female attribute.

Chung-ling examined the magazines’ promotion of themselves as the epistemological and ontological absolute and authority. That is, the magazines establish themselves as not only the authorities on the most up-to-date information on particular topics and issues, but they actually create and determine what those topics and issue are. Hence, the magazines hold the key to adolescent girls’ ways of being, involving mainly issues of peer acceptance and group status. She argued:

Magazines create a standard of beauty, you should obey these rules or you will be discussed by others. Moreover, you should follow some celebrity news or you will be

kicked out of friends’ chat! The magazine makes people, especially girls think there’s a key to keep up with fashion, which makes them popular. And the key is in the magazine. By reading it they can find confidence.

Dong-hsiang shared his observation of the magazines as constructing an adolescent world, the existence and survival of which is based entirely on the approval of the opposite sex: “The magazine cover many pages on how [women should] impression men or [how men should] impress women. It seems like everything we do concerning our outfits and looks is about attracting our opposite sex.” He drew attention to the magazines’ construction and promotion of adolescents as possessing as much value and worth as the opposite sex is willing to offer.

Chia-yu suggested that these magazines actually ascribe and confer more power to women than men. She explained: “I think in this kind of magazine women get more power than men. Women can decide what she want to wear, but men is only standing in good pose and do nothing. Women is predator and men is prey!” She saw these magazines as contributing to the reversal of the predator-prey roles as a result of their portrayal of women as possessing a multitude of choices in the presentation of herself and her selection of men while men are depicted as inert and inactive.

Finally, En-ping focused not on advertisements or aspects of the magazines relating to fashion, but on articles that provide relationship advice. She questioned the ways these articles position women as holding responsibility for the success, or rather, the failure of relationships, and consequently creating an imbalance of power in male-female relationships. She observed:

In this magazine, women are inferior to men. It is always women that have many problems in relation[ships] with men. The magazine tells women how to solve these problems and how to become an apple of men’s eyes. Thus it seems that it’s always women’s fault to do something wrong, so they have to convert themselves.

To sum up, in considering the power relations assumed by and created in the teen magazines, the students suggested a variety of angles through which to deconstruct the magazines, including the magazines as business ventures, the magazines’ positioning of themselves as authorities on adolescent lives, the magazines’ positioning of women and men as dependent on the other gender, the positioning of women as more powerful in terms of the choices available to them, and the positioning of men as more powerful in relationships wherein women are often at fault. Teen magazines, therefore, provide effective materials for the study of textuality in that they provide multiple points of entry for discussion.

### **Reflections of the classroom practice**

In this study, the students examined two types of texts as whole publications, the course textbook and teen magazines. While the students were mainly critical of this particular course textbook, they were able to critically engage with teen magazines as a genre rather than in relation to specific magazines. Therefore, although it was important for the purposes of this study for students to critically examine a school-sanctioned text (Stevens & Bean, 2007), in particular, the required text of the course,

a future direction might be for students to work with a number of ELT textbooks. As gleaned from students’ responses to the teen magazines, working with multiple texts from whole publications allows students to critically engage with the genre of a particular type of text. Even though it may be more appropriate for students to begin their critical reflections of ELT textbooks with the one they have used and are familiar with, a critical examination of multiple ELT textbooks as a genre can better assist the students in considering how the ELT publishing enterprise positions them as English-language learners through textbooks of different skills focus, including textbooks that focus not only on reading, but also speaking as well as listening and writing.

In relation to the students’ examination of teen magazines, not one observed or questioned how heterosexuality is naturalised and homosexuality is excluded. Or rather, some might have noticed, but did not feel comfortable pointing out this issue. I hesitated to draw students’ attention to this issue, as I was concerned that this may be a point of controversy that can result in the diversion of the class discussion from the constructedness of texts and into a debate about the socio-political implications of homosexuality. Upon reflection, however, I do feel that working with media texts, such as popular magazines, from an explicit critical perspective does necessitate a discussion of the naturalisation of heterosexuality and the silencing of homosexual perspectives in society. However, societal treatment of homosexuality is indeed a very broad topic that warrants more than a passing discussion in relation to teen magazines. Homosexuality and heterosexuality merit a unit of critical literacy study that examines their portrayal in different forms of media texts, including not only their depiction (or the lack thereof) in popular magazines but also debates about the legalization and consequences of homosexual marriages and parenthood, as well as how the issue of sexuality is treated in popular media (for example, in films such as *Boys Don’t Cry*, *Brokeback Mountain* and *Transamerica*, and in TV shows such as *Will and Grace* and *Modern Family*).

## CRITICAL LITERACY AND READING

The students were very “critically literate” in terms of interrogating the worldviews and the power relations in the textbook and the teen magazines. They also demonstrated a keen understanding of how critical literacy relates to reading, which I discuss below. However, when later asked in more general terms of their conceptualisation of reading, the students did not immediately make the connection between reading practices and the critical literacy perspective. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

The students mainly understood critical literacy as enabling readers to question an author’s underlying ideologies and purposes with a text and to avoid being positioned by the author and the text. For example, Chia-yu reflected on critical literacy as making apparent how texts aim to position readers: “Critical literacy helps wipe away the dirt [on] our glasses. We could understand what the author really means, what kind of thoughts they want us to receive via the article.” Similarly, Chung-ling made the connection between critical literacy and intellectual sovereignty:

It goes that “seeing is believing.” However, it should be rewrite as “seeing is not believing” when we read....The worldview of the author often affect readers’ thought of the world. If people can read critically, we would be able to think independently.

Along the same lines, Dong-hsiang explained that critical literacy guards against indoctrination. He stated that in order to prevent “being brainwashed or convinced too easily, we should all have the ability of critical literacy.” While these students brought to light the benefits of the critical literacy perspective as exposing how texts are positioning, En-ping underscored texts as also positioned. She reflected that critical literacy helped her to see that texts are often manipulated to suit the author’s purposes rather than as presenting the truth:

We should not be influenced easily [but] see if the author has the intention of being partial to only a certain aspect of whatever he/she writes about. Critical literacy enable me to look deeper into things, rather than just receive the correct message from the authors.

Freebody & Luke’s (1990) four reader roles, or later revised as four families of practices (Luke & Freebody, 1999) to place emphasis on reading as a social practice, suggest that a well-rounded reader or a wholesome reading practice necessarily comprises of not only coding, semantic, and pragmatic competence but also critical competence, that is, the ability to act as a text analyst. The students’ demonstration of their ability to critically engage with the two types of whole publications and their understanding of the critical literacy perspective in relation to reading suggest that they were not only cognisant of the role of a text analyst but were also able to put this knowledge into practice. It can be argued that these EFL students are successful readers who have demonstrated an understanding as well as displayed the practice of critical competence of reading.

## **THE PRACTICE OF READING**

This research explored not only students’ practices and understanding of critical literacy, but also how students conceptualise the practice of reading in general after a year of critical literacy instruction. Findings reveal that except for Dong-hsiang, the other students did not consider critical literacy as having implications for their everyday reading practices.

For Dong-hsiang, a critical literacy understanding and disposition complicated the previously simple act of reading:

I find reading quite a difficult job now because I don’t want to be influenced by the authors anymore! I can’t just passively accept everything others’ way or just simply see the words, I have to think more, consider more and question more. That is, I need to see through words so that I can see the world!

Dong-hsiang appropriated my explanation of critical literacy as “reading the word and the world” and understood the causal relationship of being able to deconstruct, or “see through” the words in order to see the world that has been built on these words. He has made the connection between critical literacy as an intellectual pursuit and himself as a reader in general.

The other students, however, maintained reading as emotional and factual rather than critical. En-ping appealed to the emotional:

Reading has always been one of the things I love doing in my spare time. I can experience others' lives every once in a while by reading novels. Also we may not be able to travel all around the world personally, but we can see the whole universe simply via reading.

Conversely, reading for Chia-yu is more of an efferent practice:

I think reading is a process that first our eyes scan the information, then we think of it, and finally we input it in our brain....To me, reading is a way to know things. I am able to get to know other people's thoughts, and choose the one I like and become my own opinion.

Chung-ling combined both aspects of reading in her understanding of her own practice. She explained:

Sometimes when I have problems, I find out the answers through reading. On the other [hand], reading makes me think about something I haven't thought carefully before. It's a kind of cycle, we read to solve our problems and we read to receive more questions for us to consider. After several times of reflecting ourselves through reading, we become smarter.

Therefore, it appears that even though the students were able to critically engage with texts as both positioned and positioning, it remains an understanding reserved for intellectual exercises in the classroom. Reading remains only emotional and factual in the students' real-life practices.

Following Rosenblatt's (2004) “Efferent-Aesthetic Continuum” of reading that describes and explains reading as including factual and emotional responses and purposes, McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004) suggest the critical stance as another component in the continuum of reading practices, that is, the efferent-aesthetic-critical continuum. However, although the critical aspect of the continuum was emphasised in the course, most of the students' understanding of reading practices included only the efferent and the aesthetic. Wilson, Devereux, Machen-Horarik and Trimmingham-Jack (2004) recount a different but similar phenomenon in their study. Although their students demonstrated potential as critical readers in a course that placed emphasis on critical engagement with texts, when the “scaffolding” in the form of the course was no longer present, students also ceased to read critically. They therefore argue for the necessity of prolonged engagement when developing critical literacy.

However, rather than explain the students' responses as a consequence of the lack of prolonged engagement with the critical literacy, Janks (2002) believes in the need to expand the theory of critical literacy. She posits that critical literacy as a rationalist theory “does not sufficiently address the non-rational investments that readers bring with them to texts and tasks” (p. 7), such as my students' desire to “see” the world through reading and their need for reading to serve a part of a problem-solving and stimulating cycle in their lives. Indeed, the critical stance is sometimes blind to other ways of being and ignores fundamental human desires and their impact on “identity investments” (Janks, 2010, p. 220). Therefore, Janks (2010) proposes that critical literacy needs to account for human desire, identification and also pleasure. Misson and Morgan (2006) similarly argue for considerations of the aesthetic in critical literacy.

The reminders by Janks (2010) and Misson and Morgan (2006) of the limits of the critical draw attention to Dong-hsiang's conceptualisation of reading practices that only discussed the critical aspect. His response is both satisfying and disturbing for me as a critical educator. It is satisfying to find that critical literacy has become his understanding of reading in general. However, it is also disturbing because in his response that excluded a discussion of other dimensions of reading such as the efferent and aesthetic, I find a possible example of Morgan's (1997) fear of critical literacy becoming the “educational orthodoxy” (p. 166) and gaining unreflective dominance. Critical literacy educators should take care to achieve a balance in emphasising the merits in both “reading with texts” and “reading against texts” so that the two practices are not understood as two incompatible ways of being.

However, Dong-hsiang was the only student whose understanding of reading showed considerations for the critical perspective. Therefore, the next section discusses the implications of the finding that most of the students conceptualise reading to involve only the efferent and the aesthetic.

## **READING AS AN IDEOLOGICAL PRACTICE**

McLaughlin and DeVoogd's (2004) proposal for the efferent-aesthetic-critical continuum of reading evokes for me Luke and Freebody's (1999) four reader roles that explain reading as a social practice involving the reader's competence as code breaker, text participant, text user and text analyst. Both these models point to the importance of reading as involving multiple practices, the combination and balance of which depend on the purpose and the context of reading. These models also point to critical competence as not an add-on but an integral part of reading practices. However, even though the students demonstrated an understanding of critical literacy and their ability as text analysts, they nevertheless did not conceptualise the practice of reading as simultaneously efferent, aesthetic and critical, but rather, almost all of them discussed reading only in terms of the efferent and aesthetic purposes. Based on these findings, I therefore argue for the poststructuralist view of critical literacy to place emphasis on literacy as not only a social practice but also an ideological practice.

Street (2003) states that literacy “is always contested...hence particular versions of it are always ‘ideological’, they are always rooted in a particular world-view and in a desire for that view of literacy to dominate and to marginalize others” (p. 78). Therefore, different approaches to reading are based on different ontological and epistemological assumptions, while non-critical ways of reading are the ideologically dominant and therefore naturalized manner of reading. And since the view of reading as efferent and aesthetic is ideologically dominant, the critical perspective cannot merely be understood as one dimension of reading, because this view renders it to marginalised status. Thus, to understand reading as a critical practice requires a paradigm shift in emphasis from a view of reading as social practice to a view of reading as an ideological practice, without which the critical practice of reading will remain an intellectual activity for the classroom, as this study has shown.

Pedagogically, a view of reading as ideological practice means placing emphasis on students' understanding of not only texts as constructed but also reading practices as constructed and contested, a view included but bracketed in Mellor and Patterson's

(2004) discussion of the poststructuralist view of critical literacy discussed earlier in this paper. Students should understand that different approaches to reading are based on different assumptions and produce different consequences, and none of the approaches are inherently better but certain approaches become dominant as a result of power relations. This also necessitates class discussions of why particular ways of reading have become the dominant and sometimes the only correct way of reading.

## CONCLUSION

Critical literacy practices in the classroom need to explore the ways in which the practice of reading itself is an ideological construct in addition to the focus on the constructed nature of texts. However, critical scholars and educators also need to be vigilant of whether their efforts to emphasise the critical dimension of reading as a traditionally marginalised practice is an ideological practice itself that perhaps renders human desire and identification as inconsequential and invisible.

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