Critical literacy in teaching and research

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Abstract
This article explains Janks’ (2010) interdependent framework for critical literacy education, how it was developed and how it can be applied. The explanation focuses on each part of the framework: power, identity/diversity, access and design/redesign and it provides an argument for their interdependence. The framework is then applied to three illustrative case studies all of which relate to critical literacy education. The first relates to curriculum, the second to pedagogy and the third to research.

Keywords: Critical literacy, Mexican American Studies, literacy pedagogy, literacy research, power, access, identity, diversity, design, redesign, critical literacy framework

Introduction
This article sets out to explain my interdependent framework for critical literacy education to readers of Education Inquiry who may not have encountered it in the literature (Janks, 2000; Janks, 2010). This framework includes four dimensions: power, diversity, access and design/redesign distilled from a careful reading of the literature in a range of related areas as they pertain to education – anti-racism, whiteness, feminism, post-colonialism, sexual orientation, critical linguistics, critical pedagogy, socio-cultural and critical approaches to literacy and critical discourse analysis. While the dimensions themselves are not new, what is new is the theorisation of their interdependence. This was achieved by considering the effects of focusing on any one of these dimensions without any one of the other dimensions. For example, in simple terms what does a pedagogical approach that takes power seriously but fails to consider questions of access, or diversity, or possibilities for redesign look like? The theorisation is summarised in Table 1.

The article begins by explaining why critical literacy matters. This is followed by three illustrative cases, each of which is read using my interdependent model as an analytical lens. The first case explores a curriculum intervention; the second racialised identity politics in South Africa translated into critical literacy materials, and the third the conceptualisation of a research project.

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Why critical literacy matters

At the beginning of October 2012, *Time* featured an article by former US President Bill Clinton which starts from the premise that the world is more interdependent than ever. Elsewhere (Janks, 2005), I have used the theory known as the “butterfly effect” as a metaphor for this interdependence. In essence, the meteorologist Edward Lorenz argued that a single flap of a butterfly’s wings in Brazil could set off a tornado in Texas (1972) and he invited us, by way of extension, to consider the effects of our own more powerful species on the world.

According to Clinton, the world has three big challenges to face: inequality, instability and sustainability. How each of us and each of our governments acts in relation to these challenges has consequences for everyone, everywhere. Like Lorenz, who argues that “if the flap of a butterfly’s wings can be instrumental in generating a tornado, it can equally well be instrumental in preventing a tornado” (Lorenz, 1972), Clinton is optimistic and his article goes on to describe socially transformative projects and innovations around the globe.

Table 1 The interdependent model of critical literacy

| Power without access | This maintains the exclusionary force of powerful discourses and powerful practices. |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Power without diversity | Power without diversity loses the ruptures that produce contestation and change. |
| Power without design or redesign | The deconstruction of powerful texts and practices, without reconstruction or redesign, removes human agency. |
| Access without power | Access without a theory of power leads to the naturalisation of powerful discourses without an understanding of how these powerful forms came to be powerful. |
| Access without diversity | This fails to recognise that difference fundamentally affects who gets access to what and who can benefit from this access. History, identity and value are implicated in access. |
| Access without design or redesign | This maintains and reifies dominant forms without considering how they can be transformed. |
| Diversity without power | This leads to a celebration of diversity without any recognition that difference is structured in dominance and that not all discourses/genres/languages/literacies are equally powerful. |
| Diversity without access | Diversity without access to powerful forms of language ghettoises students. |
| Diversity without design or redesign | Diversity provides the means, the ideas, the alternative perspectives for reconstruction and transformation. Without design, the potential that diversity offers is not realised. |
| Design/redesign without power | Designs or redesigns that lack power are unable to effect change. |
| Design/redesign without access | This runs the risk of whatever is designed remaining on the margins. |
| Design/redesign without diversity | This privileges dominant forms and fails to use the design resources provided by difference. |
As educators and researchers, not philanthropists, the questions for us to consider are: How can education contribute to a world in which our students at all levels of education become agents for change? How can we produce students who can contribute to greater equity, who can respect difference and live in harmony with others, and who can play a part in protecting the environment? The different disciplines that make up the field of education will have different answers to these questions. My answers flow from a critical literacy perspective which, although rooted in language and literacy education, has the potential for application across the school curriculum and in research more broadly.

Essentially, critical literacy is about enabling young people to read both the word and the world in relation to power, identity, difference and access to knowledge, skills, tools and resources. It is also about writing and rewriting the world: it is about design and re-design. Critical literacy, from its inception in the work of Paulo Freire (1972), linked literacy to a politics of self-empowerment and an ethics of care.

If learning to read and write is to constitute an act of knowing, the learners must assume from the beginning the role of creative subjects. It is not a matter of memorizing and repeating given syllables and phrases, but rather of reflecting critically on the process of reading and writing itself, and on the profound significance of language. ... The human word is more than mere vocabulary – it is word-and-action. The cognitive dimensions of the literacy process must include the relationships of men [and women] with their world (1972b, 29).

A critical approach recognises that language produces us as particular kinds of human subjects and that words are not innocent, but instead work to position us. Likewise, it recognises that our world – geographically, environmentally, politically and socially – is not neutral or natural. It has been formed by history and shaped by humanity. For a graphic example, one has only to look at a satellite photograph of Earth to see a world without borders. Because both the word and the world embody human choice, it becomes possible to choose differently and to effect change. What has been constructed can be deconstructed and reconstructed. Again in the words of Freire:

To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to its namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming. Men are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection. ... It is in speaking their word that men transform the world by naming it, dialogue imposes itself as the way in which men achieve significance as men (1972a: 61).

This ability to problematise the wor(l)d – the word in the world – in order to remake it is what I have called the redesign cycle (Janks, 2010). See Figure 1.
I turn now to the three illustrative cases.

1 The case of Mexican American Studies in Arizona

Some subjects in school curricula are constructed as more important than others either because students are required to take or pass them or because they are more valued for admission to institutions of higher education. Mathematics is a good example (Sfard, 2012; Kim et al., 2012). It is precisely because there is no equal access to such dominant subjects that they can be used as a dividing practice to determine who obtains further access to opportunity and who is excluded. Sfard’s work (2012) questions the dominant status of Mathematics.

Access to the standard variety of a country’s dominant language is another example of how power works. Bourdieu (1991) draws our attention to the fact that, while the education system fails to provide students from subordinated classes with knowledge of and access to the dominant language, it succeeds in teaching them recognition (misrecognition) of its value and legitimacy (p. 62). This simultaneously enhances the status of the language and structures its exclusivity which, together with the under-valuation of students’ own languages, reproduces the students’ subordinated positioning and reduces their sense of their own self-worth.

Would this process of reproduction change if schools were serious about diversity, inclusion and access? Mexican American Studies offered in the Tucson School District of Arizona suggest that it would. In constructing this programme, teachers took students’ ethnic identities seriously: their funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) were
valued; US history included perspectives from below; and literature was chosen with regard to minority experiences. The evidence suggests that:

Latino students, historically behind in standardized tests and graduation rates, can catch up with the rest of the student population and emerge from school with a sense of who they are and what their people ... have [contributed], and are still contributing to America, and a deep belief in serving and uniting our communities toward building a stronger nation (http://saveethnicstudies.org/our_story.shtml, downloaded 11 October 2012).

When I observed Mexican American Studies classes at a high school in Tuscon, I found the students to be highly engaged and articulate. They could identify with the literature they were studying and their contributions to the discussion were mature and interesting. Because the programme makes space in the curriculum for the discourses that these students inhabit, school was no longer an alienating experience. Here we see power working to include diversity and in the process to produce higher graduation rates and access to education for Latinos.

This programme exemplifies many of the principles of critical literacy. The texts studied encourage students to examine the conditions of possibility of their lives and, in Freirean terms, to read the word and the world in order to change it. During apartheid, one of the moves we made was to include South African literature in the curriculum in order to invite class discussion on life under apartheid for the majority of the population. We taught what came to be known as people’s history which challenged the colonial and apartheid versions of history that appeared in the history textbooks approved for use in school. Edward Said’s (1995) Orientalism was seen as a landmark text that enabled us to recognise colonial constructions of colonised people in our own context. We used post-colonial theory to provide alternative readings of canonical texts, including Shakespeare. Martin Orkin, one of my colleagues at the time, wrote a book entitled Shakespeare against Apartheid (1987) which epitomises this orientation to literature. In a post-colonial reading of The Tempest, Caliban becomes the archetypal colonial subject, dispossessed of his land and his language and enslaved by Prospero, the colonial master, who takes it upon himself to civilise this “noble savage”. In teaching young people to question existing power relations and to examine the ways in which language works to serve the interests of some at the expense of others, critical pedagogies are designed to expose and address social inequalities. With this social justice agenda and its aim to produce students who see themselves as agents of change, critical literacy is meant to be transformative. It is not surprising therefore that oppressive regimes experience it as subversive.

Thus, instead of the success of the Mexican American programme being promoted as a national model for the education of ethnic minorities, Arizona passed new laws that enabled the State’s attorney general to rule Mexican American Studies illegal. His findings are available on the Internet. Thereafter, state officials went to the schools to confiscate books used in the programme. These included Freire’s Pedagogy of the
Oppressed, Rethinking Columbus (a post-colonial, critical literacy resource book) and The Tempest by William Shakespeare. These draconian measures suggest that it is precisely because the Mexican American Studies programme succeeded in its endeavour to empower minority students that the State of Arizona considered it a threat to conservative Americans.

The case of Mexican American Studies is an excellent topic for a critical literacy classroom enquiry for a number of reasons. First, a wide range of differently positioned texts is available on the Internet including, amongst others, newspaper reports, film and YouTube videos and legal documents. After analysing this material critically, students can discuss which positions they support and why. Secondly, students can connect this case to their particular local context: they can research their own curricula to establish whose knowledges are privileged and whose are excluded. They can investigate whether or not this contributes to alienation from school amongst their peers. Thirdly, students investigate what makes a text subversive, where and when, by studying the texts that were confiscated in Arizona. They can read The Tempest to work out why it was banned; they can use the texts in Rethinking Columbus as models for re-writing the history of indigenous people in their own countries; they can bring ‘subversive’ texts that are freely available in the public domain to class to consider how to judge whether these texts are subversive or not. Finally, following their investigations, students can work out what action to take. Do they, for example, want to support the fight for ethnic studies in the USA and, if so, how? Or would they prefer to make suggestions for how to make their own school more inclusive of diversity?

How students engage with this case or similar ones could be the subject of research. The main question pertaining to enquiries about the exercise of power is: whose interests are served? Or, put differently: who benefits and who is disadvantaged? Unpacking the interests at work in this case is a good starting point for an investigation of how power works in our own educational contexts. It is not an accident that Mexican American Studies was banned in the State that introduced the ‘show me your papers’ clause into its Immigration Law. This clause entitles law enforcement authorities to demand anyone whom they suspect of being in the USA illegally to produce their immigration papers. Their suspicions are undoubtedly likely to be tied to racial stereotyping. The racism that underpins these laws is unstated but nevertheless clear, as it is in the discourse of conservative America more generally.

This case enables me to flesh out the interdependent model for critical literacy education with concrete examples. These are summarised in Table 2.
Table 2: The model applied to Mexican American Studies

| Power without diversity | Large numbers of Mexican American students in the Tucson School District created the need for a diversified curriculum. The District introduces an ethnic studies programme which the State of Arizona closes down. |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Power without access    | Using State power to shut Mexican American Studies down removes students’ portal to access and success.                                                                                       |
| Power without (re)design| Teachers use their power to design a programme that engages Latino students and improves their academic performance. The State uses power to ban the re-designed curriculum, removing agency from the students and the teachers. |
| Access without power    | The State of Arizona wants to give students access to education without allowing them to contest what is included in the curriculum, what is excluded and whose interests this serves. |
| Access without diversity| History, identity and value are implicated in access. In Arizona, the diverse backgrounds of the students were excluded when the courts closed Ethnic Studies programmes down for Mexican American students. These programmes were specifically designed to enable epistemological access. |
| Access without (re)design| The curriculum is not open to revision. Only dominant texts and interpretations are permissible.                                                                                          |
| Diversity without power | The funds of knowledge that students bring with them to school are not valued or given status in the curriculum.                                                                           |
| Diversity without access| Programmes that increase the participation of minority students and give them access to graduation and college are constructed as deviant.                                                        |
| Diversity without (re)design (re)Design without power | Mexican Americans are assimilated into schools without institutional redesign.                                                                                                                    |
| (re)Design without power | The Mexican American Studies programme has no power against the State.                                                                                                                        |
| Design without diversity | Curricula are designs for learning that, as in the State of Arizona, often ignore the diversity of the learners for whom they are designed.                                                        |

2. The case of The Spear in South Africa

Because texts are always positioned and positioning, it is impossible to give a neutral account of any case. In the case of Mexican American Studies I made no attempt to disguise my own position: it should be clear that I support the programme and find the actions of the State of Arizona to be unconscionable. *The Spear* is the title of a painting and, in this case, I will try to be more circumspect by limiting myself to the ‘facts’, in the first instance. This is not to suggest that the choice of facts and their sequencing are neutral.
**The Spear: some of the ‘facts’**

- South African law recognises polygamy as traditional law.
- President Jacob Zuma has five wives and an estimated 20 children.
- Zuma has an estimated 13 children out of wedlock.
- The number of wives and children a man has is seen as a sign of wealth and status in traditional African communities.
- Some critics of Zuma believe that his sexual behaviour is patriarchal/immoral.
- Before becoming President, Zuma was tried for rape and acquitted.
- In 2012, the artist Brett Murray exhibited a satirical poster entitled *The Spear*. Copying the pose of Lenin in a famous pop-art image, Murray shows exposed genitals and a face that could be Zuma’s.
- The painting was sold for ZAR 136,000 (about USD 18,000).
- Other images in the exhibition are critical of Zuma’s government and his party, the ANC.
- Many Africans, including Zuma, believe that showing a person’s genitals is ‘against African culture’.
- Other Africans disagree.
- The ANC takes the issue to court. They want the picture to be taken down and for *City Press*, a newspaper marketed to African readers, to remove the image from its website.
- They argue that the painting violates Zuma’s right to human dignity.
- *City Press* refuses to remove the image, claiming the right to freedom of expression. The paper later agrees to remove the image.
- The owner of the gallery where the painting was shown supported the artist’s right to freedom of expression and argued that art can and should challenge the ideas of society.
- A professor of art says this painting is a symbolic image of gendered power not a portrait of Zuma or his actual genitals.
- Murray is accused of racism and cultural insensitivity.
- The painting goes viral on the Internet.
- Two men deface the work of art, one with black paint, the other with red paint.
- The gallery agrees to take the painting down.
- Zuma’s allies portray Zuma as a victim of white norms and white racism (Janks, in press).

This case is interesting, first, because it pits two rights enshrined in the South African constitution against one another: the right to freedom of expression and the right to human dignity. Second, it is interesting because it involves a clash of values inscribed in different discourses. Finally, it is interesting because of the ways in which it is linked to the politics of the past and the future.
To begin, let us assume for the moment that the painting is a representation of Zuma and that it does violate his right to dignity. This assumption raises a number of critical questions. Is the right to human dignity more important than the right of the artist to freedom of expression? How would one adjudicate between these rights? Should public figures be regarded as fair game for critics and satirists? Is there a line that should not be crossed? How do we know when the line has been crossed? How do we weigh a person’s right to privacy against the public’s right to know? These conflicts of rights suggest that the answers to the kinds of ethical questions that underpin concepts of social justice are not simple or obvious. Because discussions about ethics, fairness, discourse and identity, values and action are central to critical literacy pedagogy, they educate students to carefully examine the possible social effects of different positions.

The point of contention regarding the painting rests on the visual depiction of Zuma’s genitals. There is evidence to suggest that part of the controversy was fuelled by different practices of reading art. Some viewers interpreted the painting literally as showing the President’s actual genitals, rather than as a symbolic representation. Many viewers read the painting in isolation, separating it from the context of its exhibition in a collection of paintings overtly critical of the ANC government and leadership. Some commentators saw the disagreements over the painting as a clash between African culture and white culture, thus racialising the conflict. From this standpoint, the depiction of genitals is constructed as insensitive to the norms of ‘African culture’. Others saw the clash as one of values instantiated in different discourses, one liberal and the other conservative (Jansen, 2012). According to this view, liberal discourse values criticism and protest as the mainstay of democracy and is open to the different forms this might take, whereas conservative discourse upholds traditional and religious values, which do not include the public display of a phallus. Who has access to which discourse and which discourse prevails are important critical literacy questions. As in the case of Mexican American Studies, the legal apparatus was harnessed as an instrument of power.

Finally, the case is interesting in relation to politics. It is important to understand the feelings aroused by the painting in relation to South Africa’s colonial and apartheid past. This history produced discourses of the black body as unclean, sexually unruly, primitively naked and thus dangerous. Fear of the racial Other was targeted at the body. Consequently, black bodies were exposed, examined, measured, civilised, exhibited, punished and in the process dehumanised. Many viewers experienced the painting’s continuity with this past as offensive. Analysts argue that, given this history, Zuma supporters in the ANC were able to frame the painting as a racist attack on the President and to use the emotions this unleashed to mobilise populist support for him as part of their political strategy to secure him a second term of office (Robins, 2012).

This case lies at the intersection of design/redesign, diversity, power and access. (This is summarised in Table 3). The case centres on *The Spear*, a product of artistic
design intended as social and political critique. Two men defaced the work of art and, in painting over it, redesigned it. The design is controversial and has become a flashpoint for unresolved racial tensions. Whether the divided response to the painting is construed as a clash of discourses, values, traditions, class or of education, race is constructed as the main fault line of difference and is recruited to defend the black man ‘denigrated’ by a white artist. Access to practices associated with the production and consumption of art is reserved for elites. In addition, many South Africans continue to live in racially separate discourse communities with little understanding of what it means to inhabit the discourses of other South Africans. This is further compounded by the inability of most white South Africans to speak an African language. South Africa remains a divided society. Although the issue of access rarely surfaces in the debate, who gets access to what and who decides affects our ability to address either difference or inequality which lie at the heart of this controversy. The inevitable result is a struggle in which “discourse is the power to be seized” (Foucault, 1970). At stake are questions of who gets control over the discourses of art and of culture, whose rights prevail, whose identities are validated, whose values become hegemonic, what is the role of the law, what is the future of the black body and, at a more mundane level, who is elected as President?

The case is already the subject of social and political research; there is further scope for critical discourse analysis, critical visual analysis and an approach to critical literacy pedagogy that explores the interdependence of relations of power, access, identity and difference together with the role of design and redesign in social transformation. Their intersection is shown in Table 3.

Students in other countries might enjoy investigating viewers’ responses to The Spear in their own context or the unflattering depiction of local public figures or public figures elsewhere. There is a wide range of material pertaining to this case on the Internet; particularly useful are Google images that relate to The Spear and

| Design        | The painting, the defacement as a redesign, the ANC’s design of the populist response, the exhibition as a whole, the designs of verbal and visual texts on the Internet in response to the painting |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Diversity     | The response to the painting divides in relation to how viewers’ identity investments are recruited by how the debate is positioned. Differences in race, discourse, values and history are used to account for and to structure viewers’ responses. |
| Access        | Who has access to which discourses and which identity positions affect the controversy and the positions viewers are able to inhabit.                                                                  |
| Power         | Power is at stake in the struggle over whose meanings, identity, values and culture prevail.                                                                                                            |
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the collection of articles and commentaries published by Amandla at http://www.amandlapublishers.co.za/special-features/the-spear-and-freedom-of-expression.

3. The case of Mobile Literacies

The foundation of critical literacy is literacy itself and South Africa has consistently failed to produce literate students. To be fully literate, students need to be able to decode print and visual material; they need to be able to interact with a text, take meaning from the text and bring meaning to the text; they need to use literacy for a wide range of social purposes and to master the genres needed to accomplish these purposes; in addition, they need to be able to read critically, to question the interests at work in texts and to evaluate their likely social effects (Freebody and Luke, 1990). While some of our learners in elementary school can decode, few can read for meaning or interact with what they read. Literacy is not used widely in many communities and critical literacy is not even on the horizon.

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) is an international systemic evaluation of literacy in home language. In 2006, 45 education systems in 40 countries participated. Most countries tested children in Grade 4. South African children in two grades, Grade 4 and Grade 5, were tested; at both levels South Africa’s score was the lowest. While the test is not entirely suitable for South African children, as it is a mother tongue test and many of the students take the test in the language of elementary school enliteration (Janks, 2011), there is clear evidence that children do not read for meaning and are unable to assume the role of a ‘participant’ (Freebody and Luke, 1990) in relation to working with a text. This is confirmed by the Annual National Assessment (ANA) scores for literacy. Other research (Hendricks, 2006) suggests that not enough attention is paid to writing in classrooms and that instruction tends to concentrate on the mechanics: handwriting and spelling (Dixon, 2011).

In Gauteng, the province in which I work, the Department of Education has a new initiative, the Gauteng Primary Language and Mathematics Strategy (GPLMS) in poor performing schools. This is essentially a scripted programme for teachers, which:

is informed by a Simple Literacy Approach. Drawing on the extensive research over the past twenty years, the Simple Literacy Approach is premised on the assumption of the importance of both ‘decoding’ and ‘comprehension’, -- word recognition processes and language cognition processes. This is sometimes referred to as a balanced approach, combining phonics and whole language (Gauteng Department of Education, March 2010).

It is as yet too early to gauge the results of this programme.

I would argue that there are two potential weaknesses in this strategy. The first is that the programme is a strictly controlled regime that dictates exactly what is to happen in each minute of each lesson, allowing little if any time for teachers to stop for children
who do not grasp what is necessary in the time allowed. The programme allows very little room for teachers’ professional judgement and indeed this is one of the purposes of the tight scripting. Second, the approach pays no attention to the actual literacy practices in the communities from which the children and the teachers come where there is little leisure reading and most reading is related to work, school or religious practices. There are few books and libraries are rare. There is also very little print material available in African languages so reading tends to be associated with reading English. Generally there is even less writing, with one exception – text messaging.

This practice is widespread and even poor families have mobile phones. There is 95% mobile phone penetration across households in South Africa. Texting is the main means of communication between people separated by distance. Because it is cheaper than calling and is not dependent on the other person being available, this is one domain in which literacy is preferred over oracy. While people often lack confidence to write in more formal settings, texting is an un-policed language zone. People are free to code-switch, use made-up spellings, abbreviate, invent their own codes and develop their own communicative conventions. It is a safe space for writing.

Using a socio-cultural orientation to the development of literacy, “The Mobile Literacies Project” the research project that I am currently co-directing with James Stiles and Barry Dwolatsky, aims to improve students’ literacy using the iPod touch. The iPod touch is like an iPhone except that you cannot use it to make phone calls and it is more affordable. It is Internet-enabled and can be used to produce all kinds of texts: notes, text messages, email, books, slide presentations, videos, photographs, drawings, mind maps or poems. In addition, there is a multitude of resources that can be downloaded: applications, easy readers, material for use across the curriculum, games, songs with karaoke-style words, grammar and spelling activities, vocabulary-building challenges and so on, many of which are free or inexpensive. A lot of these are specifically designed to entice users – they are colourful, modern, easy to follow, have built-in scaffolding and gradually advancing levels.

Mobile phone technology was chosen specifically because it builds on existing community literacy practices. Mobile phones are desirable objects that are also familiar. The iPod touch has a touch screen and a QWERTY keyboard. It enables the production of multi-modal, visual-verbal texts. This choice of the mobile phone technology takes diversity seriously and recognises that different communities use literacy for different purposes. Situated along the continuum from speech to writing it provides a starting point for literacy that does not assume a book culture. It also takes account of community aspirations. Mobile phones are coveted possessions and status symbols. Communities denied access to landlines embraced mobile phones, which then became objects of value. Because users can customise them for their own purposes, they also become markers of identity. Children become interested in them from an early age probably because they see adults using them constantly. Young people quickly become adept at using them and learn from one another. Often adults
turn to them for help, thus reversing traditional age-related norms about who can be more knowledgeable.

But diversity is not enough. If mobile phones are simply used as a delivery device for traditional curriculum material, the novelty is likely to wear off. One needs to build on the practices that link mobile phone use to identity. Students must be able to customise them and use them for their own purposes. They must be given more control over what they choose to read and write than is usual in South African schools and they must be given access to real audiences. If students are to want to read and write, they have to discover that they can use literacy for their own purposes and to follow their own interests.

The project sets only one condition. Every time a child uses the iPod touch they have to write something. Reading or listening has to connect to writing. They can choose to write out the words of a song (self-selected dictation); they can choose to play a game and post a review online or write a report on their progress (genres of reviews and reports); they can explore the application *Weird Facts* and by using this as a model find and create their own weird fact for their peers by doing research on the Internet (modelling); they can write a script for a video and then make the video (scripting); they can write questions for an interview, record the interview and send an email giving an account of what they learned. They can take photographs and make vocabulary picture books for their siblings in isiZulu (such books do not exist in African languages). The can write their autobiographies using images gleaned from the Internet and photographs that they take. They can do research on their favourite musician and produce a poster explaining his or her prowess.

This research is based on several assumptions which need to be tested:

- Young people who *want* to read and write will learn how to do so.
- Students will choose to *read different content*: some will read about sport, others about fashion or about music. Some may find the world of plants fascinating, others might discover dinosaurs or investigate the stars.
- They will *read more* than if we tell them what to read.
- Students’ knowledge of and interest in the topic will result in better writing.
- They will find innovative ways to create texts for real audiences, made possible by the Internet.
- Authentic audiences will act as an incentive for students to perfect their texts.

These assumptions will be tested by two main research questions

1. Is it possible to create the desire for literacy and to increase its use?
2. Does this improve students’ reading and writing abilities?
Through focusing on text production, this research privileges **design and redesign** as the entry point to literacy. By encouraging students to make texts about things in the world that matter to them; by focusing on what they produce rather than on what they consume; by harnessing their creativity and by helping them share what they make with audiences of their own choosing, we will help them to understand what literacy is for. In doing so we give them the **power** to name their world.

This does not mean that reading will be ignored. Students will read their own texts and those of their classmates. In addition, they will read to obtain information and ideas for the texts they want to create. They will use reading to inform their writing. They may read information texts about their favourite soccer hero, to help explain his prowess or they might read poems to help them write their own. They will choose what to read in relation to their own purposes and these purposes will guide how they read. They can help one another to make sense of a text they want to understand or ask the teacher for help or they can read only as much of the text as they can manage. The more they read, the more they will be able to read and the more their vocabulary and writing ability will improve. According to acquisition theory, reading develops the ability to write in the same way that listening develops the ability to speak (Krashen, 1984). Here **access** is driven by students’ interests.

Choice and control are not just about **empower**ing students. They are fundamental aspects of literacy as a social practice and key to the ways in which people use mobile technologies. Literacy as a social rather than a school practice is quintessentially about using literacy for reasons that matter to the reader/writer. School literacy is decontextualised, repetitive and often serves as a demonstration of what skills one has learned. Too often literacy performance in school is only a form of “display” (Barnes, 1976). Practising scales endlessly has no meaning if you never have the opportunity to play or create music. Choice also caters for **diverse** interests and abilities.

Once it becomes possible for students to write for a public audience, it is an easy and necessary step for teachers to invite them to think about the effects their texts may have on others. Will they be hurtful? Who will they include and exclude? Is their text racist, homophobic or sexist? Does it assume that all children live in nuclear families with their biological mother and father? In making them critical analysts of their own texts, they will be quick to evaluate the texts they consume in relation to the standards they have been taught to set for themselves.

If the project does manage to entice students into literacy, their teacher who is following and guiding their progress will have a better grasp of who his or her students are and how to engage them further. Students’ identities will be given a place in the classroom.
At the end of the day, if this research makes literacy accessible by:

• using students’ diverse identity investments;
• embracing design as a creative form of expressing meanings that matter;
• giving students choice and control over what they read and write;
• providing access to mobile technologies of the future; and
• developing ethical considerations relating to text production and consumption

then it will serve as an example of critical literacy as both a pedagogical and a research practice.

In using power, access, diversity, design and redesign to describe and explain my framework, I am conscious of the fact that these can all be seen as reifications of actions. By working with real cases I have tried to flesh out the behaviours that enable us to empower ourselves, to access both material and symbolic goods, to fight for and enjoy difference and to see designing and redesigning as transformative acts rather than end states. As a practice, critical literacy is a way of being and doing in the world, underpinned by values that direct us regarding how to achieve a better life for all.

**Conclusion**

The three cases that I have used to make my interdependent model for critical literacy less abstract also help us to confront the challenges of our time named by Clinton: inequality, instability and sustainability. All of them confront inequality and differential access; all are concerned with identity and diversity and help us to recognise that understanding and respecting difference are necessary for social stability. All three cases increase our awareness of what is entailed in the struggle for fairness and a safer world. I could have used other cases in relation to sustainability (Comber and Nixon, 2005, 2008; Comber, Nixon, Loo and Cook, 2006; Comber, Thomson and Wells, 2001; Janks, 2003). What matters is that our students understand that small steps taken on “the long the road to freedom” (Mandela, 1994) can be as powerful as the flap of a butterfly’s wings.

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Notes

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3. These can be found at http://saveethnicstudies.org/assets/docs/the_opposition/Final_supplement_to_Open_Letter_to_Tucson.pdf
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