

MULTICULTURAL RESOURCE CENTER

A collaborative project of Saint Paul Public Schools Office of Educational Equity and the East Metro Integration District

"The Problem Solver"
Nail Fetis h from Congo



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Critical Literacy

Critical literacy practices grew out of the social justice pedagogy of Brazilian educator and theorist Paulo Freire. It is not a specific curriculum, but a methodology that is organic and co-created by teachers and students.

Critical literacy can foster social justice by allowing students to recognize how language is affected by and affects social relations. Among the aims of critical literacy are to have students examine the power relationships inherent in language use, recognize that language is not neutral, and confront their own values in the production and reception of language. It raises the questions such as "Whose story is this?", "Who benefit's from the story?" and "What voices are not being heard?"

Reading is one aspect of Critical Literacy. Books serve as a form of socialization that conveys society's deepest hopes, fears, expectations, and demands. The majority of children's literature presents children with society's overt and covert values and often explains and justifies what is generally considered appropriate patterns of behavior and beliefs. No book is neutral, this is especially important to acknowledge when working with young children, where the power relationship between the author and the reader is strongest. Without a conscious effort to deconstruct power relationships in books, teachers unwittingly contribute to the oppression and marginalization of people based on race, class, gender, or other differences.

The intention behind engaging in a critical literacy process is not to remove favorite books from our collections, but to examine them with new eyes while still enjoying them. Movement towards a surface multicultural representation in books, readers and other textbooks often satisfy the need to appear to be addressing diversity without actually addressing the systems of oppression that are in place. Without critical discussion, stereotypes easily form. Without deeper analysis of power relationships, students can't see the different voices, and will see all experiences as extensions or mirrors of their own.

Critical Literacy is not only about reading. It had broad implications for writing as well, especially writer's workshop. The creation of counter texts is a key practice of critical literacy. Writers' notebooks are a tool for noticing the world, and how students are taught to keep these notebooks influences the sorts of things they pay attention to. A teacher can broaden the categories students attend to and record by drawing students' attention to critical incidents and social issues—times when someone is treated unfairly; when someone abuses power, when the writer realizes that other people live differently; times when the writer feel anger, pity, compassion, sympathy, towards individuals or for members of particular groups; when he has an idea for something he could do with others to make the world a better place. In other words, teachers can more often and more clearly support thinking that considers others in the writer's immediate environment and in the writer's social world (Bomer and Bomer, *For a Better World*, 2001).

The above is just a brief overview of the theory and application of this methodology . If you are interested in learning more about critical literacy, check out some of the resources in this issue or join us for our Critical Literacy Institute this summer.

MRC Steering Committee

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It is so exciting to have a variety of hands-on resources and materials available to use in the classrooms. The staff is very helpful and I always leave feeling the MRC has made a difference in my lesson and has supported me in that particular lesson or unit.

Being able to bring these amazing "artifacts" into our classroom to share and study in order to enhance our learning is truly amazing. To have these hands on materials in the classroom is simply amazing. To let the children work with the artifacts throughout a unit of study is simply awesome. They are so excited to learn more!

The MRC helps me continue my learning journey through professional development. It helps me teach my students by providing a more culturally relevant classroom by providing me with materials and resources that are so scarce in our district. It helps me reach out to staff and get them interested in using the MRC-ones who have never thought to use it or have known it is there for us to use.

Exciting Events Coming Up @ the MRC

FREE MRC SUMMER WORKSHOP—Critical Literacy: Reading and Writing the Word and The World will be offered at the MRC from August 17 through 20, 9 am to 3 pm each day. Participants in this class will explore critical literacy pedagogy and resources, focusing specifically on how to transform readers' and writers' workshops to have a critical literacy lens. You need not be a language arts teacher to participate in this course. We will discuss ways to incorporate Critical Literacy across the disciplines. An overview of the resources available through the MRC and how to access and integrate these resources into the curriculum will also be reviewed. The afternoons will be spent applying the morning's work through transforming existing curricula to have Critical Literacy focus. Come with a topic, lesson, or unit you would like to transform to have a Critical Literacy focus during the afternoons. For more information regarding this opportunity and how to earn graduate credit at a reduced rate, visit our website or contact the MRC.

Look for our 2009-2010 Professional Development calendar and registration information on our website in August!

New Resources...

The MRC has just purchased multiple copies (sets of 40) of the following professional development titles. These resources would be great for building-wide book discussions or Professional Learning Communities. They will be available for check out in July. If you have recommendations for other titles related to Multicultural Education, Social Justice, or Cultural Proficiency that you think we should have in similar sets, please let us know!

White Like Me by Tim Wise

Courageous Conversations About Race by Glenn Singleton

Silent Racism: How Well-Meaning White People Perpetuate the Racial Divide by Barbara Trepagnier

Can We Talk about Race? by Beverly Daniels Tatum

Everyday Anti-Racism by Mica Pollock

Rethinking Multicultural Education by Wayne Au

Other People's Children by Lisa Delpit

Learn More About Critical Literacy Online...

<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/4437> This article outlines the history and theory of critical literacy and details its application in the classroom.

<http://www.clippodcast.com/> Critical Literacy in Practice is a site with numerous podcasts allowing you to see how to apply critical literacy in your classroom and more.

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3614/is_200204/ai_n9044733/ Article, "The Critical Literacy Process: Guidelines for Examining Books" focuses on using Critical Literacy methodologies in reading.

<http://www.reading.org> The International Reading Association has numerous articles online related to Critical Literacy. If you are not a member, you can access these articles free through the databases (ELM) available online through your public library.

<http://ncte2008.ning.com/group/criticalliteracyinpractice> Join this NING to discuss critical literacy with colleagues online. Moderated by Vivian Vasquez!

<http://readwritethink.org> Lesson plans on this NCTE site developed around critical literacy pedagogy. Type "critical literacy" in the search bar.

Check It Out...Resources on Critical Literacy Available at the MRC

Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males: Closing the Achievement Gap by Alfred W. Tatum. Tatum bridges the connections among theory, instruction, and professional development to create a roadmap for better literacy achievement. He presents practical suggestions for providing reading strategy instruction and assessment that is explicit, meaningful, and culturally responsive, as well as guidelines for selecting and discussing nonfiction and fiction texts with black males.

For a Better World: Reading and Writing for Social Action by Randy & Katherine Bomer. Provides advice to teachers on how to lead students to recognize social themes in their reading, and describes a process for teaching students to write for social action.

Negotiating Critical Literacies with Young Children by Vivian Maria Vasquez. Presents a collection of strategies to demonstrate how to create an integrated critical literacy curriculum that covers specific social and cultural issues and themes for early childhood (pre-K to grade 3).

Immigrant Students and Literacy: Reading, Writing, and Remembering by Gerald Campano. This powerful book demonstrates how culturally responsive teaching can make learning come alive. Drawing on his experience as a fifth-grade teacher in a multiethnic school where children spoke over 14 different home languages, the author reveals how he created a language arts curriculum from the students' own rich cultural resources, narratives, and identities.

Writing for a Change: Boosting Literacy and Learning Through Social Action by Kristina Berdan. Book celebrating and demonstrating practical social action approaches that support children and young people to make change happen in their schools, in their communities,

Writing in Rhythm: Spoken Word Poetry in Urban Classrooms by Maisha T. Fisher. This dynamic book examines how literacy learning can be expanded and redefined using the medium of spoken word poetry. The author tells the story of a passionate Language Arts teacher and his work with The Power Writers, an after-school writing community of Latino and African American students. Featuring rich portraits of literacy in action, this book introduces teaching practices for fostering peer support, generating new vocabulary, discussing issues of Standard American English, and using personal experiences as literary inspiration.

Reading, Writing, and Rising Up: Teaching About Social Justice and the Power of the Written Word by Linda Christensen. A practical, inspirational book offering essays, lesson plans, and a remarkable collection of student writing, all rooted in an unwavering focus on language arts teaching for justice.

Stirring Up Justice: Writing and Reading to Change the World by Jessica Singer. Presents a practical reading and writing instructional guide for creating a social-justice-centered curriculum with ready-to-use handouts as well as useful lists of suggested resources, examples of student writing, reflections, and final projects.

Critical Literacy as Resistance: Teaching for Social Justice Across the Secondary Curriculum edited by Laraine Wallowitz. This book documents the experiences of scholars and teachers who have successfully bridged theory and practice by applying critical literacy into their respective content areas. The authors spell out the difference between critical thinking and critical literacy, then show how to write and implement curriculum that incorporates diverse texts and multiple literacies in all content areas (including world language), and includes the voices of students as they confront issues of race, class, gender, and power.

Critical Literacy and Writer's Workshop: Bringing Purpose and Passion to Student Writing by Lee Heffernan. This book shows upper elementary-grade teachers how incorporating critical literacy into writer's workshop will take their students' writing to the next level.

Author Lee Heffernan shares her story of a yearlong project that changed the type of writing that third-grade students produced as they learned to bridge their personal lives and social issues through social-narrative writing. This critical literacy approach to writer's workshop allows students to question multiple viewpoints, explore sociopolitical issues, and take action to promote social justice.

Literacy: Reading the Word & the World by Paulo Freire & Donaldo Macedo. Freire and Macedo analyze the connection between literacy and politics according to whether it produces existing social relations, or introduces a new set of cultural practices that promote democratic and emancipatory change.

Browse our on-line catalog to discover more great resources for your classroom!

<http://mylibrary.spps.org>

Multicultural Resource Center

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Saint Paul
Public Schools



About the Multicultural Resource Center...

Multicultural education is a progressive approach for transforming education that holistically critiques and addresses current shortcomings, failings, and discriminatory practices in education. It is grounded in ideals of social justice, education equity, and a dedication to facilitating educational experiences in which all students reach their full potential as learners and as socially aware and active beings, locally, nationally, and globally. Multicultural education acknowledges that schools are essential to laying the foundation for the transformation of society and the elimination of oppression and injustice. ~Paul Gorski (<http://www.edchange.org>)

The Multicultural Resource Center (MRC) facilitates access, for teachers, to the necessary tools to infuse learning experiences with Multicultural Education. The MRC is part library, part museum, mostly a place where educators can come to build their capacity in working with diverse students and find resources to support this new capacity.

The goal of the MRC is to promote the creation of equitable learning environments infused with multiple, authentic viewpoints that confront the norming of whiteness. Through curricular support, lending out materials to support such an environment, and providing modeling through class visits and staff development opportunities, social change will occur. Please explore our website to gain a better understanding of the MRC's various roles.

Browsing Hours...Stop On By!

Interdistrict Partnership Coach.....

SUMMER HOURS:

Beginning June 8th, the MRC will be open for browsing and check-out, Mondays through Thursdays, 8 am to 4 pm. The coordinator will be in on Tuesdays and Thursdays for consultations. We will resume our regular check out hours after Labor Day.

Check our website for policies and procedures for reserving the MRC for meetings and/or school groups.

Thanks to the many SPPS teachers who participated in Interdistrict Classroom Partnerships, trainings, and workshops with the EMID suburban districts. Please let my office know if you are interested in continuing with or creating an Interdistrict Partnership for the next school year so we can get the materials to you.

You can contact me with questions at stephen.severance@spps.org or 651.487.7363.

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