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Critical Literacies: Priorities and Practices in EFL and EAP Programs
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Ramanathan (2002) notes that critical thinking is a pervasive notion in EAP. As covered in freshman composition textbooks, however, it is often vague and limited in its scope. Following is a useful comparison Ramanathan (p. 92) develops from Canagarajah:

Critical Thinking	**Critical Pedagogy**
monological thinking	dialogical thinking
asocial/mentalistic	socially grounded
objective/instrumental	self-reflexive
dispassionate	ethical
neutral	politically engaged
rationalistic	multimodal
universal/transcendental	context-bound
leads to understanding	leads to change

"To be critical…" A useful quote from Allan Luke:
     To be critical is to call up for scrutiny, whether through embodied action or discourse practice, the rules of exchange within a social field. To do so requires an analytic move to self-position oneself as Other even in a market or field that might not necessarily construe or structurally position one as Other…. This doubling and positioning of the self from dominant text and discourse can be cognate, analytic, expository, and hypothetical, and it can, indeed, be already lived, narrated, embodied, and experienced" (Luke, 2004: 26)

My spin on Luke…
     To be critical, following Luke, is to take up a notion of *agency* that is both introspective and action-oriented in that social transformation (in schools, communities, or nation-states) requires critical self-reflection. In order to "read the word and the world" (cf. Freire) we must also read ourselves and distance ourselves from common sense beliefs and language practices that sustain social injustices. This "distancing" can and must utilize diverse techniques and text-types—a reflection of the different ways that individuals experience and are subjected to "common sense" (i.e., dominant social and academic discourses). The need for diversity is also a reflection of a complex world increasingly shaped by the logic of images, multimedia and hypermedia (the Internet). Though "distancing" can be accomplished in many ways, there are no guarantees or fail-proof methods to follow. In this respect, critical literacies create space for the agency of others. They do not determine if or how that agency will be realized.

Conceptual Underpinnings for CL:
- The primary unit of analysis is the "subject in discourse" mediated through texts and literacy practices
- Identities are created (and contested) in literacy practices and not just displayed
- Literacies are viewed as "ideological" or "discursive": Privileged texts/meanings are not "natural" but reflect social, cultural, and institutional arrangements and hierarchies. Social groups determine which forms of communication/information and cognitive processing are "basic", "functional", "creative," or "essential" for economic development.
- Literacies are dynamic, "sites of struggle". As a result, "critical work must always be on the move" (Pennycook, 2001, p.100)

Pedagogical Priorities
- Against transmission-oriented, "one-size-fits-all" teaching
- Instead: Post-methods (cf. Kumaravadivelu), context-sensitive pedagogies, bricolage—used to act on experience, embodiment, common sense, desire, hope, and the imagination
- Politics of "voice" (inclusion of minority texts/literacy practices) insufficient on its own: lacks an explicit focus on the production and reception of powerful texts and genres
- Politics of "access" (learning/modeling powerful texts and genres) insufficient on its own: presumes disciplinary stability and textual uniformity
- Instead: Critical negotiation ("contact zone" pedagogies); micro-macro strategies that combine text-analytic tools (CDA) and awareness of global, national and institutional discourses (Canagarajah, 2004)

How can "distancing" be accomplished in classrooms?
- Re-frame stories: Link personal experiences to social power relations
  - Vandrick's (1999) narrative inquiry—"the colonial legacy of ESL"
  - Wihak (2004) exploring teaching experiences w/ the Inuit (i.e., white privilege)
  - Pavlenko (2003) autobiographical assignments to enhance NNS teachers' sense of intercultural, bilingual expertise
- Juxtapose texts: Subverting/de-mystifying received wisdom
  - Problem-pose texts through teacher talk (Dyson, 2001; Wallace, 2001), oppositional readings
  - Pluralize disciplinary knowledge
    - Benesch (1998): Anorexia as gendered and socialized—linked to impossible images of feminine beauty—and not simply an individualized pathology (cf. psychology)
  - Pluralize dominant cultural codes and historical representations
    - Kubota (2001): Teaching world Englishes to NS students
    - Brito, Lima, Auerbach (2004): A Cape Verdean participatory curriculum
    - Thompson (2002): Contrasting aboriginal/non-aboriginal histories
    - Roberts, et al. (2001): students as ethnographers
  - Use other media /multimedia/embodied texts
    - Theatre/performed ethnography (Goldstein, 2003; Nelson, 2002)
    - Popular culture and visual media (Corbett, 2004; Kress, 2003; Mackie, 2003; Norton & Vanderheyden, 2004; Young, 2002)
    - Identity as text/pedagogy (Morgan, 2004; Stein, 2004)
    - Rap & hip hop (Ibrahim, 2002)
- Encourage students' understanding of power and discourse
  - Speak openly of systemic forms of discrimination (racism, sexism, homophobia, etc.) in institutions
  - Take students' resistance seriously; support/integrate their concerns and oppositional texts in syllabus design (Goldstein, 2003).
- Integrate postcolonial perspectives on EIL and globalization, particularly in TEFL/EFL contexts (Clarke, forthcoming; Edge, 2006; Luk & Lin, 2007)
  - Analyze and critique centre-based methods and materials based on local practices (e.g. Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Hu, 2002; Sonaiya, 2002)
  - Examine cultural biases in Western-based critical literacies (Bowers & Apffel-Marglin, 2005); design locally-relevant alternatives.

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Content-Based English for Academic Purposes Course: *Language and Public Life* (LNG 2000, Ryerson Polytechnic University), *English in Use* (ESL 2000, York University).

Conceptual Underpinnings (Morgan, forthcoming):
Following Benesch's (2001) critical EAP, the course is explicitly grounded in its institutional context and the multivariate language needs of L2 learners. Conventional EAP writing skills (i.e., documentation, paragraph development, writing mechanics) are featured prominently—but not as discrete skills to be mastered *prior* to social research. Instead, the syllabus for *Language and Public Life* is based on a notion of cognitive academic language learning, identity negotiation and critical social inquiry as inter-animating, co-developing processes (Cummins, 2001).

Course Description:
Language is not neutral or objective. It is often framed by cultural and institutional perspectives; language represents, creates, and reflects social perspectives of the world, of reality. Along with the importance of agencies like schools and businesses, the sophisticated technologies of media and communication networks affect and reflect the way we talk and write to each other and the ways we see the world (Hunter & Morgan, 2001, p. 102).

Assignments: 1. Comparing two print ads (500-750 words) 2. Analysis of a public language event (group oral presentation) 3. Major research essay on a social issue or recent current event (1200-1500 words) (prior small assignments: annotated bibliography; analysis of a related website).

RESOURCES: Developing a "Metalanguage" (see Appendix)
Videos: Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media, Killing us Softly 3, Pack of Lies.
Key Articles: Birk & Birk, Lutz, Parenti, Janks, Rutherford (see references).
Other Resources: library workshop (essay research, using search engines); list of alternative websites (see below).

MAJOR ESSAY
Rationale for Internet: Media concentration, "info-tainment", and creeping censorship.
Selected Student Essay: Douglas: Toronto media and the 2008 Olympic bid.

COURSE HANDOUT
Canadian Based Websites for Research on Media and/or Social Issues
1) Flipside: An alternative daily newspaper: www.Flipside.org
2) Straightgoods: Canadians informing Canadians: www.straightgoods.com
3) Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives: www.policyalternatives.ca
4) Newswatch Canada: http://newswatch.cprost.sfu.ca
5) Council of Canadians: www.canadians.org
6) PAR-L: A Canadian Electronic Feminist Network: www.unb.ca/PAR-L
7) Citizens on the Web: www.interlog.com/~cjazz
8) Adbusters: www.adbusters.org
9) Rabble: The News for the Rest of Us: http://rabble.ca
10) Tao Organization: http://www.tao.ca/

American/International Media Research Sites
1) Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting: www.fair.org
2) Greenpeace Environmental Organization: www.greenpeace.org
3) Pacifica Organization (Democracy Now Radio): www.pacifica.org
4) Institute for Global Communication: www.igc.org
5) Z Magazine: www.zmag.org/ZNET.htm
6) Guerilla News Network: www.guerrillanews.com
7) Independent Media Center: http://www.indynews.org
8 CorpWatch: http://www.corpwatch.org/
9 Project Censored: Tracking the news that didn't make the news: www.projectcensored.org/

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APPENDIX

<u>**ENCOURAGING OPPOSITIONAL READINGS:**</u>
<u>**DEVELOPING A METALANGUAGE**</u>
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Conceptual underpinnings (Morgan, forthcoming):

One major course challenge involves the selection, combination and sequencing of instructional materials. Specifically, students need analytical and descriptive tools—a *metalanguage*—with which to identify, abstract, interpret and critique meanings across various informational domains. At the same time, and as a reflection of the diverse L1 literacy experiences in any EAP setting, an instructional metalanguage should be "flexible and open ended. It should be seen as a tool kit for working on semiotic activities, not as a formalism to be applied to them" (New London Group, 1996, p. 77).

<u>**Metalinguistic resources for *Language and Public Life*:**</u>

Videos (in order of presentation):

1) *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media* (Achbar & Wintonick, 1992). I use a short section describing Chomsky's "propaganda model" of mass media as way of introducing the course's underlying rationale

2) *Still Killing us Softly* (Kilbourne, 1987), or *Killing us Softly 3* (Jhaly, 2002). These videos analyze depictions of women in advertising and link these images to particular social consequences (e.g., eating disorders, violence against women, trivialization of women's participation in society).

3) *Pack of Lies: The Advertising of Tobacco* (Kilbourne & Pollay, 1992). This video provides analyses of cigarette ads that target adolescents. It is also strong in its analyses of how particular images act on identity formation, invoking desires for status and peer acceptance and linking these desires to "cool" self-images attained through smoking.

With their focus on visual images, their combination with print, and the social meanings invoked by this blend, the latter three videos have been especially useful for the first assignment on analyzing two advertisements. Study questions and critical prompts are provided for each video, and used to generate small and large group discussions after viewing. The videos are interspersed with the following course readings, which also influences how the videos are received and utilized.

Key Articles (in order of presentation):

1) *Selection, Slanting, and Charged Language* (Birk & Birk, 1995). This article provides examples (i.e., for 1st year EAP students) of how word order, choice of connectives and vocabulary can slant for or against our perceptions of an event or person.

2) *With These Words I Can Sell You Anything* (Lutz, 1995). This article is always popular, and Lutz's categories of "weasel words"—hollow, meaningless words that appear substantive but promise nothing (e.g., the qualifier *help* in phrases such as "helps reduce aging", "helps control dandruff")—are frequently employed in assignments.

3) *Methods of Misrepresentation* (pp. 213-227, from *Inventing Reality*, Parenti, 1986). Parenti's chapter is quite accessible and effective for critical readings of mass media. Analytical concepts such as "framing", "greying of reality"(i.e., the appearance that both sides of a conflict are equally responsible), and "unbalanced treatment" provide strong links between specific text-internal features (e.g., newspaper headlines, photographs, article placements, vocabulary choices) and their intended functions in respect to power relations in liberal, democratic societies, which makes this article an valuable complement to the video excerpt on Chomsky's propaganda model.

4) *A Critical Approach to the Teaching of Language* (Janks, 1991). Janks' article draws from a Hallidayan, systemic-functional approach to Critical Discourse Analysis. Some students find the article too formal and abstract. Others find it a revelation of sorts, in that seemingly familiar grammatical categories (e.g., passive voice, nominalizations, article system) are reconceptualized in an ideological framework—described it terms of how specific lexico-grammatical choices position readers and frame the reception of content.

For teacher's reference, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) is a challenging but insightful book that encourages readers to conceptualize visual structure and functionality in a way analogous to oral and written language—the realization of modality and transitivity through images, for example—also, from a Hallidayan perspective. Though probably too difficult for undergrad EAP students, it has helped my own metalinguistic development in respect to describing photographs, videos, and advertisements in class. A more accessible summary of Kress and van Leeuwen's work can be found in chapter 7 (Developing Visual Literacy) in Corbett's (2003) book, *An Intercultural Approach to English Language Teaching* (Multilingual Matters).

In addition, my own personal tool-kit for critical media literacy has been enhanced by Rutherford's (2000) *Endless Propaganda*, especially chapter 1's description of advertising properties (p. 10) and functions (pp. 13-16), as well as Danesi's (2000) *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics, Media and Communications,* Berger's (2005) *Media analysis techniques*, and Hill and Helmers' (Eds.) (2004) *Defining visual rhetorics* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates).