

# Critical Literacy

- Gender and Literacy
- The Construction of gender
- Critical Literacy
- Applications for teachers as gender research
- Applications for students
- Some resources

*Jeremy Ludowyke*

*Principal Melbourne High School*

*Australia*

One day there was a girl called Kathleen. She found a pot of gold. It was a useful pot. A genie came out of it. The genie said, "You have three wishes".

"I wish I had the prettiest dress in the whole world".

"I wish I had long blonde hair".

"I wish I was a Princess in a castle".

She got her three wishes and then she was happy. The next day she got married to a handsome Prince and they lived happily ever after.

9-10 Year Old

*B. Dwyer: Construction of narrative in a Grade 3 Classroom*

Ace is going for a walk in the forest. Suddenly the Cobra planes start firing. Ace runs for cover. He tells the Boss.

Deep goes diving. He blows up the Cobra's underwater base. Ace calls Complex. He says "I'm on my way." They go into the Cobra's house. Ace and Complex go to the Cobra's base and get into a plane. They find a Cobra plane. They shot it down.

They shoot the Cobra base. Metalhead touched metal. He blew it up.

9-10 Year Old

*B. Dwyer: Construction of narrative in a Grade 3 Classroom*

*“English as a subject is not too bad because it seems to be essential for getting a job so it must be important”.*

*“It’s a bit confusing at times because there is no real answer to things. The answer could be a variety of things, you’re never really wrong. Books are all about feelings and they’re never action or interesting”.*

*“English is more suited to girls, boys like sport, heavy stuff but girl’s personalities are more suited to English”*

*“I find English hard, there are no set rules. It’s hard for me to express myself on paper so I don’t do as well as I do in other subjects. It isn’t like Maths where you have rules on how to do things and where there are right and wrong answers. You have to write about what you feel and that is what I don’t like”.*

*“ I don’t like English...it’s not the way guys think...I hope you aren’t offended by this but most guys who like English are faggots.”*

**W. Martino (1995)**

**in Browne & Fletcher  
Boys in Schools**

*“The English composition of many boys is clumsy and painful to the verge of illiteracy and they are unable to grasp a line of argument or assimilate or criticize the contents of a book.*

*To be bad at English seems to be regarded by both teachers and boys as a natural defect”*

Headmaster of Rugby School UK

Newbolt Report: The Teaching of English 1921

# Traditional Gender Binaries

## Dominant Masculinities

## Preferred Femininities

Rational

Emotional

Independent

Dependent

Competitive

Co-operative

Aggressive

Passive

Dominant

Submissive

Strong

Weak

# Social Construction of Gender

- . Behaviour is subject to agency and choice
- . Gender patterns vary over cultures/time
- . Dominant forms are culturally embedded
- . Individuals can resist or comply with these
- . Domains of cultural identity interweave:  
Class    Ethnicity    Sexual Preference

Derived from post-structuralist theory

**Name a person or character you see as a Hero**

Sports Stars  
Shane Warne  
Neo (Matrix)  
Terminator  
Bill Clinton

Spice Girls  
Lara Croft  
Pop Stars  
Sports Stars  
Supermodels

90 13-14 Year Olds 1999

**What words would you use to describe these Heroes ?**

Tough  
Strong  
Powerful  
Indestructible  
Rich  
**Boys**

Successful  
Strong  
Famous  
Skilful  
Attractive  
**Girls**

Tough  
Strong  
Powerful  
Indestructible  
Rich

### Dominant Masculinities

Rational  
Independent  
Competitive  
Aggressive  
Dominant  
Strong

Successful  
Strong  
Famous  
Skilful  
Attractive

### Preferred Femininities

Emotional  
Dependent  
Co-operative  
Passive  
Submissive  
Weak

# What words would describe the dark side about being these Heroes ?

Tough  
Strong  
Powerful  
Indestructible  
Rich

Alone  
Violent  
Unhappy  
Pressured  
Few friends

# What is Critical Literacy

- . 'The author is dead' R. Barthes (1967)
- . Texts do not have a fixed meaning
- . Readers construct their own meaning of a text
- . As many readings of a text as readers
- . Readings depend on the 'position' of the reader
- . Alternate readings should be explored
- . How a text is read will vary across cultures/time
- . All cultural artefacts are 'texts'

Same origins as constructivist and inquiry learning theory

# Goals of Critical Literacy

- Encourage students to recognise their active agency in constructing meaning from text.
- To reflect on how their perspective influences the way they read a text
- To recognise and question the unstated intentions of the author
- To explore alternative readings of the text

*Boys and Literacy: Curriculum Corp. (Australia) 2001*

- To apply critical skills to other cultural messages
- To foster a questioning ethical citizenship

# A Critical Literacy Unit Plan

- Immersion: Familiarisation with context/text
- Prediction: What would you expect to find?
- Deconstruction: Examine how meaning is constructed in the text
- Reconstruction: Reassemble in alternate form
- Reflection/Action: What is your view/reaction

## Dominant Masculinities

Rational  
Independent  
Competitive  
Aggressive  
Dominant  
Strong

## Preferred Femininities

Emotional  
Dependent  
Co-operative  
Passive  
Submissive  
Weak

## Semantic Analysis

Passive.....Active  
Smooth..... Rough  
Weak.....Strong

Sad..... Happy  
Slow..... Smart  
Bad.....Good

Word **School**

Active .....●..Passive

Rough.●.....Smooth

Strong.....●.. Weak

Happy.....●Sad

Smart .....●..Slow

Good .....●.Bad

**BOYS**

Word **School**

Active ..●.....Passive

Rough...●.....Smooth

Strong...●..... Weak

Happy...●..... Sad

Smart .●.....Slow

Good ...●.....Bad

**GIRLS**

Word **BOYS**

Active ●.....Passive

Rough●.....Smooth

Strong●..... Weak

Happy.....●... Sad

Smart●.....Slow

Good .....●Bad

**BOYS**

Word **BOYS**

Active ..●.....Passive

Rough..●.....Smooth

Strong...●..... Weak

Happy.....●.. Sad

Smart ....●.....Slow

Good .....●.....Bad

**GIRLS**

Word **GIRLS**

Active .....● Passive

Rough.....● Smooth

Strong.....● Weak

Happy●..... Sad

Smart●..... Slow

Good ●..... Bad

**BOYS**

Word **GIRLS**

Active ...●..... Passive

Rough....●... Smooth

Strong.●..... Weak

Happy.....●.. Sad

Smart .●..... Slow

Good ..●..... Bad

**GIRLS**

# Counter sexist Tales

## A cautionary tale

The Paper bag Princess

Princess Smartypants

## Resistant Readings

B. Davies (1989) *Frogs and Snails and Feminist Tales*

*Shards of Glass*

**Teacher:** You don't think the pirates were tough or mean?

**Derek:** Nuh

**Teacher:** Why not ?

**Derek:** I don't know. They were sissies you know, they didn't fart or slit anybody's throat or anything

**Teacher:** But did they need to slit anybody's throat in order to be....

**Stuart:** Yeah

**Teacher:** tough and mean ?

**Stuart:** Would've made the story interesting

**Teacher:** What do you think Derek?

**Derek:** It would have been better if they'd pulled out someone's liver (class laughs)

**B. Davies (1989) Frogs and Snails and Feminist tales.**

# Barbie and Ken Pirates

One day Ken was sailing along with Barbie when they saw another ship in the distance. Barbie said to Ken “What’s that?” Ken said “It’s some sort of ship, wait until it gets closer”. They found they were pirates. The pirates came on board and Ken got an axe. The pirate fired a warning shot. Ken put the axe down. They took Barbie hostage. Ken had a few beers. It was a set up. Ken worked for the pirates.

Three weeks later Ken came into Barbie’s room and said to Barbie “Lie down babe I’ve got a surprise for you”. So Barbie lay down. Ken pulled an axe from the wall. Barbie said “What are you going to do with that?” Ken said “I have to kill you” then he raised the axe and cut off Barbie’s head then arms then legs. Then they threw her head to the sharks and ate the rest of her for dinner.

10 Year Old Boy

B. Davies (1989)

Frogs and Snails and Feminist tales.

# The Altar of the Family

Michael Wilding (1972) *Aspects of the Dying Process*

David Murray feels he can't meet the expectations of his domineering father. He dislikes sport and hunting his father's passions and his mother forbids him to play with the other boys in the street.

On returning home one day his father finds David playing dolls with his younger sister and feeding a native possum at the window. In a wild temper he attacks David as a 'sissy' who will always be a failure.

That night, David takes his father's rifle and shoots the possum when it visits the house.

**Martino & Mellor(1995) : Gendered Fictions**

*“I wouldn’t call what David has with his father a relationship. In the eyes of his father David can do no right and is a failure. I totally disagree with David’s father and how he treats his son, calling him ‘a lily-livered poofter’ and putting him down but I agree with David’s father in the way he gets disappointed at David for playing with dolls and all. I don’t like David or his father because David plays with dolls and seems gay and because his father treats his family horribly”.*

*“This story deals with issues about society putting pressure on young people to conform to certain expectations. In this case the young boy David likes to do alternative things rather than what society says he should do. For example you’re a real man if you play sport and you’re a pansy if you play with dolls.*

*David’s father is the stereotyped Australian male who wants his son to do ‘manly’ things and because he doesn’t he puts his son down. Mr Murray is a violent insensitive and brutal man who forces his son to live up to macho expectations and this has terrible consequences for David. It is not only the possum that is sacrificed on the Altar of the Family”.*

*“David is a boy who wants to be free to have fun, but is restricted by his mother and her narrow minded prejudices. By doing this she turns David into a girl as the only person he can play with is his younger sister. I think that David is a bit of a sissy who tries to live up to what his father expects which is to be exactly like his father – big, proud, strong and honourable.*

*David wants to have a good relationship with his father but how can he be manly if he isn't allowed to go and play with other boys? So you could say that it is all David's mother's fault as she is the one who is restricting him in life.”*

**W. Martino (1995) in Browne & Fletcher: Boys in Schools**

# Emotional Vocabulary

How would David have felt after his father's outburst

Furious

Depressed

**ANGRY**

Enraged

Shocked

Distressed

Scared

Withdrawn

Humiliated



# Graphing Emotional Vocabulary



*“But he could not do as his father required. He turned his back and walked into the increasing heat of the day torn by this further proof of his unmanly incompetence; confirmed by the night’s events of his own sick cowardice with a gun, that firing it could not conceal; and carrying forever the guilt of having taken that life he could no longer bear the pain.*

*He ran down the garden path, tears scouring his face, an uncontrollable anger surging deep from within. In the emptiness of the still morning he knew he could never love his father and that he could never return to what had become for him a lie. He had no place in his father’s world and he would never return, never.”*

*“What are you doing !” his father shouted.*

*David turned suddenly to confront his father, staring at him with an almost uncontrollable fury. But he could say nothing. He turned slowly and made his way into the house, thinking only of the rifle that was kept in his parent’s bedroom.*

*He opened the cupboard slowly bringing the shiny rifle into full view, his father’s most prized possession, a symbol of manhood, a manhood which he knew was wrong.*

*He heard the backdoor slam and the sound of his father’s footsteps. He raised the rifle slowly”.*

# Take Control of the Skies

You're ambitious, you thrive on power and you want to be rich. Well here's your chance.

As the CEO of your own airline operation, negotiate around the globe. Aggressive competition, hijackings and strikes will strain your cool and threaten your corporation.

You're the CEO and you're in charge

*Electronic Gaming Monthly July 1993*

# Top Ten Damsels in Distress

You can't live with 'em, but there are some women you definitely can't live without!

So much so we are willing to endure anything to get the girl back and make the kidnappers pay big time. Here are ten babes that take a real man to get back

*Electronic Gaming Monthly July 1993*

# Resources

## Gender Theory

- R. Connell (1987) Gender and Power  
(2000) The Men and the Boys  
(2002) Gender

## Critical Literacy

- B. Davies (1989) Frogs and Snails and Feminist Tales  
W. Morgan (1997) Critical Literacy: readings and resources  
W. Martino Gendered Fictions (Amazon)  
Fac of Ed Uni of Western Ontario  
[wmartino@uwo.ca](mailto:wmartino@uwo.ca)

# Resources

Classroom Resources: Curriculum Corporation: [www.curriculum.edu.au](http://www.curriculum.edu.au)

Search by theme:

Critical literacy

M. Anstey & G. Bull

Teaching and Learning Multi-literacies

C. Ludwig

Why Wait: critical literacy in the early years

What's Hot: critical literacy in the middle years

K. Paterson

Differentiated Learning : diverse cultures literacies

T. Young

Happily ever after: using folk lit in middle years

Professional Development:

N. Alloway P. Gilbert

Boys and Literacy PD Kit 1997 (Curric Corp)

Success for Boys

Boys and Literacy [www.successforboys.edu.au](http://www.successforboys.edu.au)

Chalkface Press

B. Mellor (edit) (Amazon)

Changing Stories

Making Stories

Investigating Texts

Gendered Fictions