"THEY'LL GROW UP AND BE ADULTS WANTING TO TAKE CARE OF OUR ENVIRONMENT": THE STORY OF JAN AND CRITICAL LITERACY

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Two university professors and 11 urban school faculty collaborated on a professional development (PD) effort focused on critical literacy to explore literacy practices aimed to reshape definitions of literacy that involved questioning power relationships concerning the environment and social justice.

We examined the journey of a veteran teacher, Jan. We found that 1) small, carefully planned PD, considering the specific context of the school, *did* influence her practices toward leading critical conversations concerning the environment and social justice, and 2) that she juxtaposed teaching practices and concepts of critical literacy with school and district initiatives having different theoretical frames.

This is a story of Jan, a teacher leader in an urban school that engaged in a small professional development project focusing on critical literacy.

Jan was involved in a professional development (PD) effort that used a process called Teach Reflect Teach as a tool within the PD to encourage teachers to explore new literacy practices that were aimed to reshape definitions of literacy that involved questioning power relationships concerning environmental and social justice. We see the story of Jan as offering what first steps for teachers can look like, and what needs to be considered in PD introducing teachers to critical literacy that is about new possibilities for practice but also on clarity of thinking that informs practice.

The School

In the PD effort Author 1 and author 2 worked with 10 first through third grade teachers and one literacy coach to showcase how critical literacy (CL) could potentially engage urban primary grade children. Teacher demographics included one of Hispanic origin, one African American, and one Asian American; the rest were White as were Author 1 and 2, two university leaders. The teachers had taught for eight years or more. All volunteered to participate and received graduate credit and a small stipend.

Grant school has many students who are at different levels of English as a Second Language (ESL). There are actually 24 different first languages represented by children attending this school. Two teachers in our project were ESL teachers: one teacher was bi-lingual and taught Hispanic children who could speak very little English and one had children from Somalia in his classroom.

We learned another characteristic of Grant School: this school changed from a middle school to a K-8 school a year before the beginning of our project. The primary grade teachers in our project recently transitioned from teaching middle grades to teaching primary grades. We see this as a huge transition.

We also learned that Grant School used

Direct Instruction (DI) by SRA to teach reading and Jan said that DI "taught her students to read". Jan and the other teachers in the program described DI as a prescriptive, scripted reading program, taught to homogeneously grouped children in whole groups for explicit reading instruction. We speculate that their affinity for DI stemmed from a need for guidance in transitioning from middle school teaching to primary grade teaching.

Jan, a Veteran Teacher

This article examines the journey taken by Jan who took part in the entire 2½ years of the project. Jan is the Language Arts chair at Grant School and a leader in the school. She is in favor of using DI to teach language arts and previously had been involved in writing grants to a local bank to provide materials for DI implementation at Grant School. At the time of the program she had taught 18 years, 7 at a parochial school before joining the staff of Grant. Jan had taught at Grant for 11 years, 10 of them teaching 7th and 8th grade Language Arts and was in her second year in second grade in 2007 when she first participated in this program. Jan had earned a master's degree with a state reading endorsement. As Grant School Language Arts Coordinator, she attended district meetings bringing back information to the staff and lead school professional development (PD) sessions.

We wondered throughout our interactions with Jan and the other teachers, how critical literacy (CL) would be incorporated into their practice since most of their school day contained what we saw as diametrically different practices including school-based Direct Instruction and district-wide use of Accelerated Reader, a computer-based independent reading program requiring students to take objective tests on texts they read.

We chose to examine Jan's journey because we hoped to understand how small scale and carefully planned PD, considering the specific context of the school, might influence practices of a veteran teacher. We wanted to find out what a veteran teacher would incorporate to support primary grade students to critically examine concepts of environmental sustainability and social justice. We also wanted to see how she juxtaposed teaching the concepts of critical literacy with school and district initiatives having different theoretical frames.

Critical Literacy (CL)

To us, CL is not synonymous with character education or something teachers do during part of the school day, say in the literacy block or a science experiment. CL is a perspective toward literacy that is anchored in particular lines of thinking of what it means to be literate in our relationship with the earth and other human beings. CL strives to unpack power relations in text as they relate to the natural world and all people. CL is about developing practices that help readers not just to unlock and make meaning from text, but also to understand what the texts are doing to the reader and what the author of the text wants the reader to believe about the world, including the natural world and humans' interactions with the natural world as well as social justice. Authors are powerful people who have the capacity to perpetuate or challenge particular perspectives concerning how the world is. CL supports children during this process.

In practice, teachers and young people can take critical stance toward any text—from fairy tales to family stories and everything in between. For example, one could read Cinderella, take a critical stance, and ask who had power over Cinderella's life in the beginning of story. Why allow the stepmother and her daughters to order Cinderella around and make her into a servant rather than a respected member of the household as her two stepsisters were? Drawing from their lives, young

people would talk about experiences in their own "blended families" to understand the plight of Cinderella and the family dynamics in the beginning of the story.

However, unlike the Cinderella story, certain children's literature foregrounds social and environmental issues. For example, we observed a primary grade special education teacher in the PD program lead a CL dialogue. She used the children's book *Common Ground* by Molly Bang (1997) that has the theme of limits on natural resources. During the first lesson the students had a difficult time understanding the concept of common ground or the importance of preserving their environment. They knew what pollution was but not how it could have a personal impact on their lives. The second day's lesson began with discussing resources in their homes, their classroom, their school, and their neighborhoods. The teacher emphasized the concepts of sharing and supporting resources for the *common ground.* The children could readily understand the need for a shared, common supply of pencils available in the classroom when a child needed one. The children came up with other examples of sharing toys and books in the classroom as well as the sidewalks and streets outside. For the third day's lesson the teacher read aloud *Common Ground: The Water, Earth, and Air We Share.* The class talked about the importance of taking care of their shared or common environment, and the implications of pollution in their homes, classrooms and school. A lively discussion took place and children came up with ideas like putting up a "No littering" sign to preserve their local environment for the *common good.*

Our Inquiry

The main question guiding our inquiry was the following: *In what ways, if any, does a TRT approach to PD impact a veteran teacher's understandings of literacy and literacy practices?* Our sub-questions were: *How did the literacy leader's reflections about the personalized PD evolve throughout the life of the project? How did the CL impact her instructional process? How CL was juxtaposed by the literacy leader with regard to school and district literacy initiatives that evolved from a different philosophical stance?*

Theoretical Framing of Professional Development

Paulo Freire's (1970) work founded Critical Literacy, as he believed that literacy instruction must help people of poverty understand power relationships. Critically reading texts could aid children as they develop reading and writing skills by helping them recognize that literacy provides an avenue by which one can make changes in their lives and in the power structures in which they live. Today all citizens, no matter their socio-economic status, need to pursue a deeper understanding of powerful structures that manipulate information presented to the public. Because fossil fuels represent large investments and are also the prime source of energy to fuel our civilization, powerful conglomerations present information in favor of their own interests, which often leads to the detriment of the natural resource base that supports life on earth.

Shannon (1990) defined *critical literacy* as a tool with which [students] learned about themselves, their lives, history, culture, and contradictions; [students] made connections between and among their lives and those of others within a social structure; and [students] acted upon this new knowledge in order to bring about social justice and equality. It provided a questioning attitude and recognition that social relations do not have to take their current form and that collective action can change them. (p. 149)

CL Theory in Practice

As educators, we perceive an essential need to strengthen our critical perspective when thinking about inseparable environmental and social justice issues. We discern a need to move past the surface and dig deeply into what matters, what will sustain a viable future for all living things, not for just the human race but for every being on our planet. That is what this project was about: how teachers can guide children into dialogue about environmental and social justice issues in ways that are encompassing and empowering.

We defined CL in this project as an approach that addresses how to teach a critical perspective concerning humanity's impact on the environment and multiculturalism using picture books whose themes relate to the environment and diversity and how teachers can use them to spark critical dialogues. Through this work children explore their ideas and voice concerning important issues. In this project students benefited from a *critical literacy approach* to texts as opposed to *traditional text comprehension.* In traditional text comprehension, the teacher asks students to summarize the content of a text, to remember what the author wrote. In this project, teachers examine with students questions such as, What is the author's purpose? Can students make connections between the story and their own life and support their responses? Do you agree with the ideas the author presents? Both teachers and students ask these Big Idea questions. Teachers select books that foreground environmental and social themes, that are relevant to and of interest to the students, and lend to environmental and social critique.

As children respond to ideas they generate, they learn to use their voices. The teacher encourages students to bring their own experiences and points of view to the discussion of books. The teacher acknowledges that learning about and connecting to the world, particularly concerning power relationships increases ability to read words. The teacher selects texts that generate themes often looking into myths such as a "Certain racial or cultural group is superior to another" or "Natural resources as limitless." The teacher ensures that discussion of human impact on the environment and social issues occurs within an open and non-authoritarian stance encouraging student input. The teacher acts to empower students through dialogue on how environmental and social conditions can be improved and through action projects, such as play-acting points of view, interviewing those with differing perspectives, and writing letters to corporate polluters and politicians.

To facilitate critical conversation, multiple texts are needed. In addition, some texts are more profound or provocative than others. Teaching with a critical stance includes using texts whose themes reveal important issues. Teachers with a critical perspective often support children to examine different voices and points of view. This examination is less likely to occur by reading only one text. The investigation of the possibility of transformation toward a more sustainable, just, equitable, and tolerant society can empower and motivate children to acquire and utilize reading and writing skills.

More specifically, to move the teachers into CL the core concepts of this program encouraged teachers to 1) select texts that foreground environmental and/or social justice themes, 2) use open-ended, thought provoking questions posed to and by students, 3) practice an open and encouraging stance toward student input and dialogue, and 4) acknowledge that learning about the world, especially power relationships enhances learning to read. We see another important part of CL is to work with strategies which support children in perceiving differing points of view surrounding the generative themes focused on. Because of the timing of the program and the fact that the teachers' way of teaching differed greatly from CL, we decided not to encompass this facet of CL.

The books in this project focused on concepts for classroom conversations that arose from reading stories or allegories aloud. Books included *The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson, *Grandfather's Journey* by Allen Say, and *The Color of Home* by Mary Hoffman. These were springboards for discussion of racial and multicultural themes.

Fiction, nonfiction, and hybrid picture books are well suited for critical literacy. Some books focus on how humans work with nature, such as the delightfully illustrated book, *How the Ladies Stopped the Wind* by Bruce McMillan (2007). The storyline describes ladies who live in an Icelandic village and plant trees to decrease the wind, which have been blowing them over. McMillan's story engages young people in discussing their own experiences of helping plants grow by keeping such wildlife as deer from eating newly formed leaves. Notice that this example illustrates a story, *not science content books* such as Anne Rockwell's (2006) *Why Are the Icecaps Melting?* that introduces young readers to climate change.

A nonfiction chapter book for children suitable for CL is Kathleen V. Kudlinski's biography of *Rachel Carson: Pioneer of Ecology* (1989). Lynne Cherry's *The Sea, the Storm, and the Mangrove Tangle* (2004) is a hybrid with information on ecology within a fictional story. What classifies these books for use with CL is that both emphasize threats posed to nature by human activity: in Kudlinski, the threat of chemicals to birdlife; and in Cherry, the impact of pollution and development on mangrove ecology. Kudlinski also mentions how chemical companies, to protect their interests, tried to discredit Carson and her pioneering book, *Silent Spring* (1962). An extensive and continually updated list of annotated books that foreground environmental themes to children can be found at greenliteracy.org.

The Professional Development

The PD effort led and supported urban teachers to explore using picture books, authentic environmental and multicultural literature. After a series of focused group sessions, working in teams, teachers experimented using this literature in their classrooms through mini action research the authors termed Teach Reflect Teach (TRT). Participating teachers incorporated into their practice picture books that foregrounded environmental and multicultural themes. The process aimed to bring about student-teacher discussions concerning the environment and diversity, using picture books as springboards. We call this PD *personalized* for three reasons: 1) A small number of grades 1-3 teachers from one school were involved in PD, 2) during PD sessions facilitators provided information of CL to participants but also participants explained to facilitators how they taught language arts and their beliefs about it, and 3) the use of the Teach Reflect Teach Process (TRT).

This 2½ year project involved intensive monthly on-site PD opportunities with two or three facilitators working with eight to ten teachers attending these sessions. Facilitators modeled Read Aloud's and encouraged discussions and follow-up with writing and drawing activities. See Table 1 for a list of the children's literature used during these sessions. The Grant teachers were extremely appreciative that during each session they received a children's literature selection related to the discussion, allowing them to easily use a book in Read Aloud's with their children soon after the PD session. Selected books were used with strategies such as Directed Reading Listening Activity, Free Response, and Making Self to Text Connections. Teachers read and discussed two books on CL: Mary Cowhey's *Black Ants and Buddhists* and VivianVasquez's *Getting Beyond "I Like the Book."* In the last semester of the project, the teachers read Ellin Keene's *To Understand: New Horizon's in Reading*

Comprehension emphasizing comprehension strategies that included making connections and student generated questions. Since the children attending Grant School come from all over the world, children shared similarities with Cowhey's classroom as well as classrooms portrayed in Vasquez's and Keene's books.

Teacher Sharing of Practices and Belief

As we dialogued with teachers we uncovered they were concerned about when they could fit the ideas we were presenting into their school day that consisted of much "teaching to the test", focusing on content standards to prepare for state achievement tests. We listened to their concerns and offered ways they could embed content standards within their CL teaching episodes. In the frameworks of their TRT projects they included social studies and writing standards.

Author 1 and Author 2 discussed with each other the differences between the two approaches, DI and CL. The texts used in DI were created around the phonics that had been taught in the program and thus tended not to be natural language and the teaching is scripted. The CL approach we brought to the Grant teachers emphasizes teacher decision-making, the texts used are real literature, and considers a person to be literate when they critiqued what authors wrote. These two ways of teaching reading are philosophically divergent and are quite different in practice as DI is based on behavioral assumptions and CL is socio- constructive philosophically.

In using the CL approach, teachers and their children needed to learn ways to interact that added to their teaching repertoire from a simple "question/ answer/ teacher judge answer as right or wrong" format to a

Table 1.
Children's Literature Featured in Professional Development Sessions

Common Ground by Molly Bang 1997	A book about the water, earth, and air we share.
Flower Garden by Eve Bunting 2000	Go on a botanical journey as a girl and her father create a garden surprise.
The Great Kapok Tree by Lynn Cherry 1990	A lumber jack falls asleep in an Amazon forest and dreams its inhabitants talk to him.
Hey Little Ant by Phillip and Hannah Hoose 1998	A boy plans to squish an ant with his foot and the ant talks back!
Wump World by Bill Peet 1970	Peaceful Wumps are invaded by ecologically-challenged Pollutians.
Grandfather's Journey by Allen Say 2008	A story about a boy's grandfather longing to be in two places at once.
The Other Side by Jacqueline Woodson 2001	Two girls, one white and one black, begin a friendship, despite coming from two different sides of a fence. Both parents warn them not to engage in friendship.

more complex interaction pattern involving thoughtful dialogue, children listening and responding to each other, not just the teacher.

Frequently in the focus group sessions the Grant teachers talked about their use of DI and how they believed this process taught their children to read. On one occasion the teachers compared and contrasted DI to Critical Literacy (CL). Figure 1 shows how Jan and her colleague compared DI and CL. At the conclusion of this PD discussion, one teacher said the only way they were alike was that "they both were in English!"

We noticed that one of the differences Jan and her colleagues emphasized concerned *teaching practice,* such as how DI provides "no discussion opportunities" and CL advocates discussion strategies such as Turn and Talk giving each child an opportunity to engage in exploring their ideas by sharing. We noted that Jan and her colleagues portrayed DI as "how to teach" and CI "how to think."

Teach Reflect Teach

Teach Reflect Teach (TRT) process (Author 1, 1992) was used to follow up whole group PD sessions. This led teachers through team-based mini action research studies, involving their students. The teachers worked in instructional teams of two working in one classroom. Instructional team configurations included two classroom teachers, a teacher and a literacy coach, or a teacher and a university professor. Through TRT, teachers worked together to teach lessons using Read Aloud's, questioning strategies and writing or drawing response activities. The pairs chose Read Aloud books promoting environmental and/or diversity themes from the University-based literacy project's classroom collections and planned lessons together. All teams were asked in their TRT project to answer the following question:

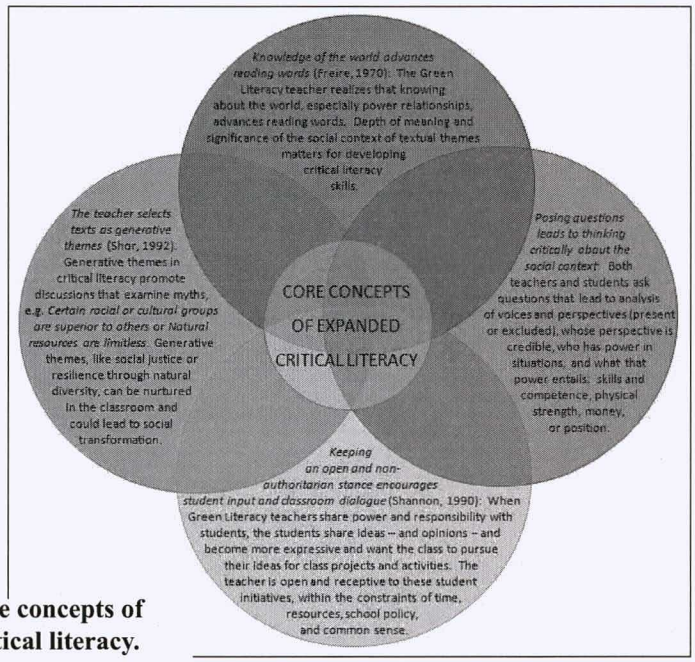


Figure 1. Core concepts of expanded critical literacy.

When using critical literacy for a series of lessons, what teacher activities and child engagements seem to support students the most in meeting the content objectives?

Participating teachers found time in their school day to work with another teacher in one of their classrooms so that one teacher could take notes on the other's teaching in order to use these data to reflect on the impact of their teaching with the children. TRT contains four steps. First, a pair of teachers works together in the same classroom. The teachers plan together, and then one teaches the lesson while the other takes notes on how students are responding. During the lesson, one teacher reads a picture book aloud to the class and leads discussions during and after the Read Aloud, asking the young people to respond by drawing and writing. These lessons tended to span 30 to 40 minutes for two or three days. In the second step of TRT, the pair of teachers meets to reflect on how to engage their students more fully in a similar lesson. In the third step, teachers teach a similar series of lessons incorporating insights they gained in the reflection step of the process. The fourth and final step of the process involved teachers making a tri-fold poster of their project and sharing it with colleagues at school.

Methods

This project was grounded in the concept of teacher as researcher and critical reflector (Craig, 2009; Milner, 2007). Qualitative means were used to analyze data collected in the form of recordings of teacher interviews, written reflections by teachers, and teacher artifacts such as lesson plans and action research projects. Project analyses used multilayered pattern analysis (Gregory & Williams, 2000) and constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998) to identify patterns and themes within data. To report Jan's story we analyzed both her responses to three different interviews and two TRT projects in which she participated. The interview protocols were developed to determine the extent to which participants "bought into" CL with environmental and social justice themes and the extent to which these ideas became incorporated into their teaching repertoire.

Jan's Evolving Reflections

Jan participated in the TRT process twice during the program, each time with a different partner. She was enthusiastic about the teaming aspect of the TRT process throughout the program. After her first experience she stated, "It's nice to be able to discuss it (TRT paired teaching) afterwards, what really happened. I think teaming is wonderful."

After her second experience, she clearly explained what we saw as the purpose of the TRT, which is to think about what worked well and what could be done more effectively:

> I think it's helpful. It's two sets of eyes. It helps you. Once you read something, you can say, "What did you think? Do you think they got this? What could we have done differently? What can we do the same?" That was helpful, feeling like you're not quite alone. The input was good.

In her third interview, she emphasized the value of collaboration:

> I think it was helpful just because two heads are better than one. You can learn from each other. When Katy read, I learned from her and the kinds of questions she asked, and I'm sure vice versa. You get different takes on ways to expand as a team.

Jan's ideas concerning *when* in the school day she could include Read Aloud's with CL discussions changed throughout the program. During her first experience with TRT, she and her partner used the process emphasized in the PD sessions in writing and she also mentioned this in the interview. She talked about

how she wanted to Read Aloud books and encouraged discussions first thing in the school day before the DI period started. In the other interviews she participated in, she mentioned using Social Studies objectives and Language Arts objectives. She reminded us that DI is scripted so she used the CL strategies at other times during the day.

Impact of CL on Jan's Instruction

CL discussions *did* become a part of Jan's teaching repertoire. In the first interview her concerns were with the teaching strategies we modeled, she commented, "Give students a sense of ownership. A lot of times we can put our spin on them and not pull out their thoughts and feelings. I think it is a good thing!" Further she said, "Instead of reading the story with no talking, you ask *them* questions. . . . I did learn that . . ." and "Have the students write responses of what *they* are thinking at the time."

In the second interview after her second TRT experience, she had moved beyond the idea of what teaching strategies to use to "how I can make my students to be more socially aware." She stated,

> It (CL) causes me to think about (teaching) differently and use books differently. . . . As opposed to just comprehension questions or what's important but getting them to think a little deeper about certain issues rather than not necessarily just the science questions, but how can I tie into social thinking and the environment. . . . I look at it more critically. Using reading strategies to try to think about literature which leads them to discussion in the classroom and questioning. Sometimes I like to use a series of texts (with similar themes). . . . It makes more sense to do that.

In the last interview Jan continued in a similar vein, adding how she wants to continue to incorporate CL into her teaching:

> I really think it's made me aware more than anything else that literature can be used to teach deeper concepts, even to younger children. Concepts or responsibility to the environment and social responsibility. . . I think it made me more aware of how I teach and what I am looking for. What kinds of questions can I ask? In that way, it's made a big difference. There are certain books I would like to do more of, but I want to do the sticky notes in all the books that I use, so I try to do a few more every year so I've got an arsenal of books that I know I want to teach because of the value. . . . I have to study the book and make sure it's what I'm going to use.

When asked how CL had impacted her students, she gave the following animated response: "They'll grow up and be adults wanting to take care of our environment, wanting to be a key player in society." In her first TRT, one of the books used was *Wump World.* She said,

> We went on a field trip. They saw water pouring out of a factory. They immediately saw more polluting so they were able to make those connections. . . . I see them doing that. It makes things more relevant. . . . You go through pollution (had read and discussed *Wump World*) and what it is, but when they see it in the world, they're able to connect it. It allows them to connect in a way that they otherwise wouldn't do.

In her second TRT, one of the books read was *The Color of Home.* After reading this book, the second graders developed interview questions and interviewed Grant school third graders from war torn Somalia. Here is what Jan had to say about how this teaching impacted her class:

> This year when we read *Color of Home*—it somehow humanized them. They realized that the children from

> Africa may smell and eat differently, but they are actually like me. The interviewing of the African students was a real eye opener for the children to see what the immigrant children actually face. A lot of times those books are real springboards. Bringing critical literacy into (the curriculum) turns out to be a real good springboard for so many moral concepts that you're trying to get across. . . . That is probably the best part.

Jan's TRT and Core Concepts of the PD

In short, the Core Concepts of the PD were 1) select texts that foreground environmental and/or social justice themes, 2) use open-ended, thought provoking questions posed to and by students, 3) practice an open and encouraging stance toward student input and dialogue, and 4) acknowledge that learning about the world, especially power relationships enhances learning to read.

1 - Select Texts for Themes They Generate

In analyzing the TRT teaching episodes Jan and her partners developed, we note that she embraced the idea of selecting picture books that she thought were provocative and of value to promote critical dialogue about humanity's impact on the environment and valuing human diversity. In her first TRT she chose the books, *Wump World,* which brings up the issue of pollution, and *The Giving Tree*, which brings up the theme of how humans use nature for their own advantage with little regard for it (see Figure 2). In her interview she emphasized one of the aspects of CL she valued was choosing texts to Read Aloud with themes of environmental sustainability and social justice.

In Jan's second TRT she and her partner chose the books *The Color of Home*, a sensitively told story of a Muslim boy and his family who leave a war torn country to find a new home, and *Angel Child, Dragon Child*, a story of a Vietnamese girl who struggles as she gets used to her new home school and country in the U.S. These books engaged the class in discussions about displacement of people because of war, refugees, acceptance, and appreciating diversity (See Figure 3).

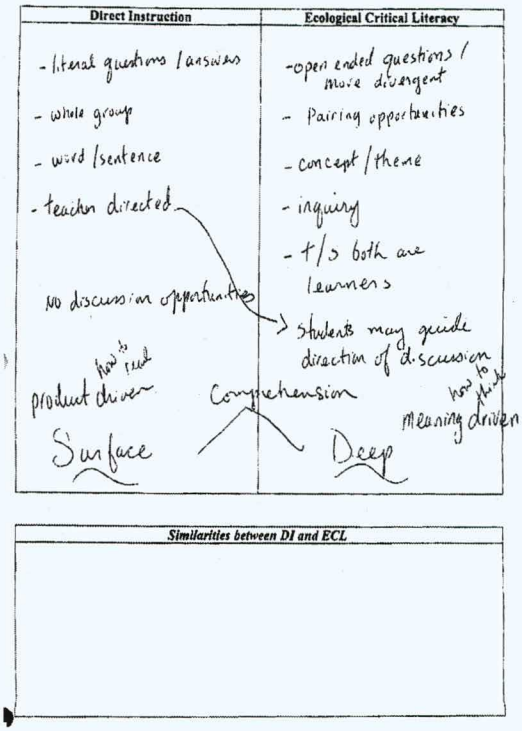


Figure 2. T-Chart comparing Direct Instruction and Ecological Critical Literacy.

Jan mentioned in her third interview that she realized the importance of using more than one book with related themes. She understood that this was a way to increase connections to texts and encourage depth of thought for children.

2 - Use Open-ended, Thought Provoking Questions Posed to and by Students

In the first TRT using the *Wump World* and *The Giving Tree*, Jan and her partner engaged the children in writing what they

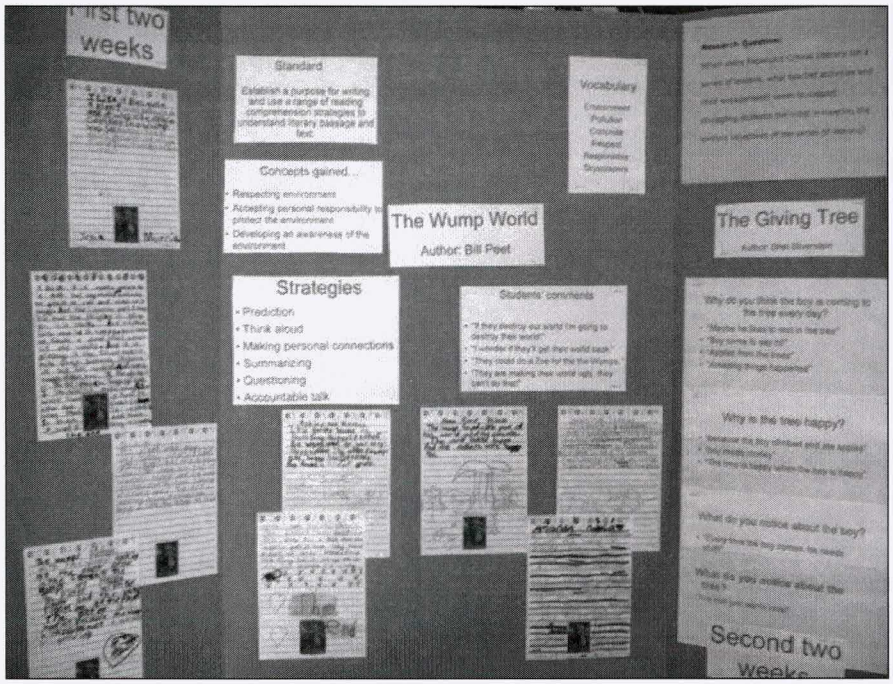


Figure 3. Jan's Environmental Critical Literacy TRT Project: *The Wump World* **and** *The Giving Tree.*

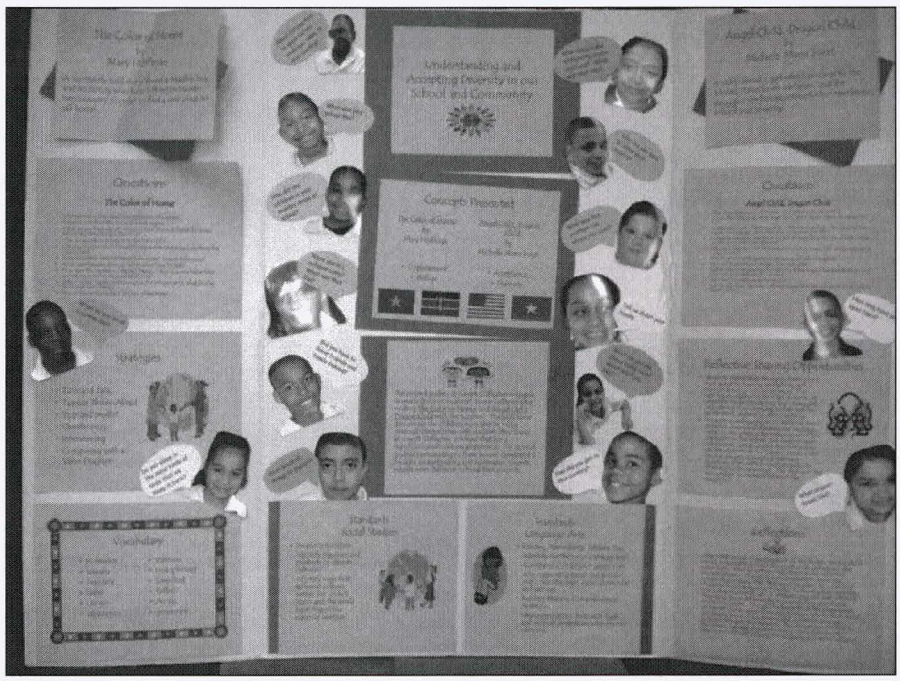


Figure 4. Jan's Citizenship Critical Literacy TRT Project: *The Color of Home* **and** *Angel Child, Dragon Child.*

thought would happen to the Wumps after the Pollutians left at the end of the story. They included in their poster comments made by children as they read two stories in a free response fashion. Jan and her partner *did not* ask Big Idea questions of her children in this TRT.

In comparison, her second TRT increased in asking the children Big Idea questions. Jan and her partner capably encompassed into her teaching this core principle in her second TRT. In the second TRT she and her partner developed many insightful open-ended, Big Idea questions they asked children throughout the Read Aloud. In her second TRT Jan and her partner read the books, *The Color of Home* and *Angel Child, Dragon Child.* The questions they asked included the following:

- When Hassan and his mother were at the refugee camp, how did do you think they felt?
- How is Hassan's home different from yours? How is it the same?

These questions are open-ended and designed to help children understand the characters in the story and for the children listening and responding to make connections and have empathy toward immigrant children.

Not only did she ask open-ended, Big Idea questions, Jan and her partner in her second TRT created an authentic occasion where her second graders posed questions and were attentive to the other schoolmates who responded to their questions. In this second TRT as a result of the dialogue surrounding the books, *A Color of Home* and *Angel Child, Dragon Child,* the second graders posed questions to children in Grant School from Kenya and Somalia, similar to Hassan in *Color of Home*. The teaching team wrote on their poster,

> Following the interviews it was clear that both sets of students realized that although they came from different backgrounds, they shared many similarities. Overall, the honesty of the interviewers and interviewees opened barriers between the students and a new found sense of acceptance and understanding was fostered between the students. The discussion sparked by the books read were definitely a catalyst for positive change in attitude among the students at Grant.

We see this dialogue with the Kenyan and Somalian schoolmates as significant. It involved increasing opportunities for the children from new comer groups so they could participate in school to a greater degree.

The questions posed in Jan's two TRTs never moved into inquiring into different perspectives on the issues involved. This is not surprising, because even though this is important in CL, we did not have time to model and engage the teachers in the teaching strategies that involve differing perspectives in the focused sessions.

3 - Practice an Open and Encouraging Stance Toward Student Input and Dialogue

Jan and her partners incorporated this core principle into both TRT teaching episodes.

In Jan's first TRT she and her partner used teaching strategies encouraging student input—making predictions and making personal comments.

In Jan and her partner's second TRT, they used Turn and Talk, a strategy in which children are asked open-ended questions and asked to turn to a child next to her and share responses. Then pairs can share their responses with the whole group. Jan's second graders developed questions so that they could interview schoolmates, greatly encouraging meaningful dialogue.

4 - Acknowledge That Learning About the World, Especially Power Relationships Enhances Learning to Read

We see Jan's adopting this principle as problematic. First, this way of thinking comes from Freire. The way we addressed this in the focused PD sessions was through the teachers reading and discussion of Cowhey's book as Cowhey discusses Freire and her teaching embodies Freire's ideas.

We wonder whether Jan acknowledged that learning about the world of power relationships would enhance children learning to read. She did emphasize the importance of children making connections as they did on a field trip when they saw pollution coming out of a factory and the children began talking about it.

From Jan's quotes she believed that the DI "taught the children to read." So did she acknowledge that learning about the world and power relationships would enhance children learning to read, or was CL more like icing on the cake of learning to read that DI provided? Perhaps she does understand this but our interview questions did not elicit this knowledge. In a recent phone conversation, she said, "The program made a big difference in her teaching," that she would continue to Read Aloud books with environmental and social justice themes that sparked conversations.

How Jan Juxtaposed CL With Other School-Based Literacy Initiatives

Jan's response during the session when we asked teachers to compare these two approaches indicated she sees the two as quite different in practice. Jan remained a supporter of DI, even as she became enthusiastic about CL. She explained, "They need to read on their own and DI helps them with this. After they know how to read, and even now as they are learning how to read, they can . . . develop the higher order competency in critical literacy. I think both pieces are necessary."

During the last semester of the PD and our involvement in Grant School, the district had an initiative for all classrooms to use Accelerated Reader (AR). As with DI, Jan articulated the difference between the practices of AR and CL and energetically used *both* approaches. She said,

> The children read the books independently more so than my reading them. They're not writing deep answers to them. They just do the quizzes which is basic comprehension. They, I think, make the connections themselves. Sometimes they mention something they read in a book. They pull it out. . . . I encourage them to read a lot. AR has encouraged them to do that.

What Jan is saying is that AR gets children to read independently and children make connections on their own, perhaps because of exposure to CL. In her mind there is room for CL with school and district mandated programs which we think are philosophically opposed. Jan sees CL, DI, and AR as all necessary pieces! She did not express that she sees tension between them.

In the last interview, Jan and the interviewer conversed about how the state assessments were "mainstream" and the Jan's students were not. She said, "It (the state assessment system) is kind of a way to keep the poor poor.... The underlying motivation doesn't come out... There is more to it than meets the eye, I think, unfortunately....I don't know if they want urban children to succeed in other words." In this case, Jan *was* looking at power and was socially critiquing the intentions behind the state assessment system, though she never in our conversations considered the power issues or the definitions of what it means to be literate implied in the instructional systems, DI and AR and how they differ from the assumptions backing up CL.

What Have We Learned?

The main advice we would give to others planning a similar program is that there are "no quick fixes" in teacher PD, especially in resource challenged urban schools like Grant Elementary. Face-to-face meetings need to be scheduled where project leaders learn from school participants and share theory and "how to's" for encouraging CL. Project leaders need to provide time for such programs to evolve. We were trying to impact the culture of the school so that in addition to teaching children to give "one right answer", teachers would ask children to make connections from literature to their lives, dialogue with each other, state opinions on critical issues, and support their opinions. We modeled this technique and in our case the teachers positively responded. This process cannot be short circuited.

We were grateful that our project participants involved school leaders including the Language Arts coordinator, Social Studies coordinator, and Literacy Coach. We felt having these participants helped support the positive influence our project had within the building culture.

As we reflect on this line of inquiry, we would like to offer additional questions for future study such as, What can PD leaders do to facilitate teachers within schools to become leaders in CL? Can the Teach /Reflect/ Teach process be used to impact teachers in other PD efforts? Would CL be interpreted differently in different socio-cultural communities? The teachers in this program viewed critical literacy as a way to meet social studies, science and writing standards and not reading. Is this unique to these teachers or would other teachers come to similar views if involved with a personalized PD on CL?

We chose Grant School because of its urban and caring nature. Yes, teachers there are immersed in behavioral approaches emphasizing phonics and teaching low level comprehension; however, they were also amazingly open and receptive to more constructivist approaches such as CL that foregrounded environmental and social issues.

In closing, we agree with Jan's comments:

> If you read aloud, you want it to be the most effective. You can get across comprehension, but you can also get across something else to cause them to think more deeply about life around them or the environment . . . and social issues, things like that.

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