

Hammond, J., & Macken-Horarik, M. (1999). Critical literacy: Challenges and questions for ESL classrooms. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33, 528-544.

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Summary: Analyzing critical literacy in an Australian context, researchers suggest that engaging with scientific texts requires a great deal of time and effort from both teacher and students. The data presented from a case-study involving a 10-week unit in a science and literacy program suggest that “students will be able to undertake effective analysis and critique of any text only when they are able to engage with the text” (p. 531).

Case Study: During a Year 10 biology program in a secondary school in Australia, human sexual reproduction was explored through a 10-week unit. As a part of the unit, students were expected to explain various reproductive technologies and their social and moral implications through classroom discussions, small group activities, and independent writing tasks.

Findings:

- Without prior awareness of technical and scientific knowledge and the epistemological and cultural wherewithal, students may not be able to engage critically with the social and moral implications of reproductive technologies. Additionally, researchers concluded that without continuous systematic instruction in developing mainstream literacy, critical approaches are difficult.
- Learning to talk, read, and write critically takes a lot of time. The teaching of critical literacy is not an “extra,” and researchers suggested that critical approaches should be integrated throughout a comprehensive program of study.

Suggestions for Teachers:

- Identify the areas of your curriculum that may require critical literacy.
- When teaching these areas, find ways for students to learn how to critically evaluate what they learn.

Suggestions for Literacy Leaders:

- Help teachers see the role that critical literacy may play in their instruction.
- Help teachers learn ways to promote critical literacy among students.