# Deconstructing and Reconstructing Cinderella: Theoretical Defense of Critical Literacy for Young Children

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Introduction: Critical Literacy and Young Children

Once upon a time there was a pretty young girl named Cinderella. Cinderella was loved by everyone because she was good and sweet and kind (Disney, 1998, p. 47).

Princess Smartypants did not want to get married. She enjoyed being a Ms. (Cole, 1996).

...There was Prince Ronald. He looked at her and said "Elizabeth, you are a mess!...Come back when you are dressed like a princess." "Ronald," said Elizabeth, "your clothes are really pretty and your hair is very neat. You look like a real prince, but you are a bum." They didn't get married after all (Munsch, 1980).

Cinderella's a girl in a book. But she's on shoes too!-Isabelle (pseudonym), 4 years old

Early childhood education pedagogy needs to consider the potential role of critical literacy in preparing children to meet the ever changing and unprecedented pace of change in the literate world. The 'New Times,' a term used by several language arts scholars (Hagood, 2000), are increasingly exposing young children to a growing multitude of media and technological interactive texts. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, corporate America has also increased its presence as a pedagogical site in the "corporate construction of childhood" (Cannella & Kincheloe, 2002; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997). Media, technological, interactive, and corporate-constructed texts are fast becoming part of children's everyday experience within industrialized nations. Like many other classic literary fictional characters (e.g., Pippi Longstocking, Paddington Bear, Winnie the Pooh, and Babar), Cinderella is no longer confined to the pages of a book. Cinderella's image and persona appear in a multitude of texts, including, video, posters, clothing, toys, websites, and assorted paraphernalia, that children are repeatedly exposed to. Corporateconstructed texts include curriculum packages sponsored by corporations such as *Project* Learning Tree, sponsored by the Manitoba Forestry Association (2008) and Decision Earth, sponsored by Proctor and Gamble, (Clouder, 2002), as well as corporate messages, slogans, and brands that appear within the classroom environment, such as Campbell's Labels for Education<sup>TM</sup>. Corporate-constructed texts are criticized as biased and self-serving. Children may not be able to unearth the 'manipulated messages' within such texts (Beder; 1997; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997).

Critical literacy can provide new and varied 'lenses' to understand experiences, explore multiple viewpoints, and uncover the influence of socio-political and power relationships in shaping

perceptions and actions (Bainbridge, Malicky, & Payne, 2004). Young children are capable of challenging the everyday representations of "culture, knowledge, and power" that exist within texts, while also advocating for social change and action (Giroux, Lankshear, McLaren, & Peters, 1996).

Early childhood educators have a long-standing tradition of providing multiple and diverse opportunities for children to learn and develop 'early literacy skills' (Spodek & Saracho, 1993). However, in the several sources I consulted in writing this article (e.g., Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Bainbridge et al., 2004; Glasgow, 1994; Roskos & Neuman, 1998; Seefelt, 1999; Spodek & Saracho, 1993), the subject of critical literacy within early childhood pedagogy was noticeably absent. Although some early childhood educators (e.g., Paley, 1992; Vasquez, 2004) have embraced critical literacy within an early childhood curriculum, this appears to be an exception to the norm.

I propose that the addition of critical literacy within an early childhood program is theoretically defensible and pedagogically necessary to prepare young children for the ever-changing literate world. This article presents a discussion of the continuum of literacy ideologies that have shaped current literacy practice within early childhood education and school curriculum. Additionally, I discuss critical literacy as a means of challenging conventional notions of learning to read and write and present some examples of how early childhood education pedagogy can bridge critical literacy theory and practice.

## Continuum of Literacy Ideologies

What does it mean to be literate in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? What practices, knowledge, and dispositions should literacy pedagogy foster in young children? Cadiero-Kaplan (2002) described a continuum of literacy ideologies that have attempted to answer these questions and have shaped literacy curriculum and teaching: a functional approach, a cultural approach, and progressive ideologies.

A functional approach to literacy learning involves the teaching of basic skills necessary to recognize and decode words. Children also analyze texts such as *Cinderella* at a basic level by answering questions such as: Who is the author? Who is the protagonist? What happened in the beginning, middle, and end of the story? This approach to literacy does little to encourage children to challenge the status quo and transform their environments. A functional ideology compartmentalizes literacy components and emphasizes "learning to read" and not "reading to learn" (Cadiero-Kaplan, p. 374). Teachers who take up a functional approach may use commercial programs, such as *Scholastic Reading Counts* (2008), that group children according to their language proficiency or reading level in order to deliver the "appropriate curriculum." When using the functional approach, teachers expect children to follow a predetermined path of checkpoints toward a determined goal. Children tend to be compartmentalized into various groups of ability and a form of social control emerges. Furthermore, children are not encouraged to explore concepts of self and others or other social-political issues.

As the 'back to basics' movement and factory model of education gains momentum in many industrialized nations (Allen, 1997; Apple, 1988; Comber & Nichols, 2004), I have observed that

many young children are again being exposed to the "replication and repetition" approach to early literacy (Leland, Harste, & Huber, 2005, p. 259) that involves the use of *drill and skill* worksheets in the early childhood literacy curriculum. A literacy approach based solely on functional ideology fails to engage children with texts. Children also require critical lenses to question and challenge texts and discover the multiple meanings expressed within those texts (Kohl, 1995). They need to critically analyze the historical, cultural, and a political context represented both within texts and within their own lives.

The second literacy ideology, a cultural perspective of literacy learning, emphasizes the teaching of morals and values of the dominant culture (Hirsch, 1988). These common core values, morals, and culture are taught to children in a gradient fashion where the teacher acts as the cultural authority (Cadiero-Kaplan, 2002). Criticism of the cultural literacy approach centers on the issue of *cultural universals* where the "curriculum reflects an ideology based in Western traditions, an ideology that not only attempts to control the spaces where knowledge is produced but to legitimate certain core knowledge" (Caidero-Kaplan, p. 376). As Giroux (1983) contends, reading in Western traditions "is a process of learning that reduces classroom content to that deemed appropriate to the well-educated citizen" (p. 212). The cultural literacy approach appears to dismiss the rich cultural diversity of young children's lives.

The third schooled ideology, progressive literacy, emerged with socio-cultural theory (Cadiero-Kaplan, 2002). During the 1990's, literacy learning was reconceptualized to align more closely with a perception of the nature of knowledge as being embedded within social and cultural experiences (Barratt-Pugh, 2000). The New London Group (1996), for example, argued that the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of the world, as well as children's increasing exposure to multimedia technologies, required a view of literacy pedagogy that was broader than traditional language-based approaches. This perspective provides a framework for conceiving literacy as a form of 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1977), where young children are positioned in different ways to learn to read and write with particular kinds of culturally specific texts (O'Brien & Comber, 2000).

This perspective values the knowledge the child possesses and creates spaces for the construction of new meanings and understandings. The use of writers' workshops and the whole language approach are examples of progressive ideologies, where greater emphasis is placed on the children's interests and self-discovery. Because literary activities are viewed as social constructions and culturally defined, the goal of literacy curricula becomes the fostering of children's competence as *literary users* and analyzers of a multitude of literacy texts (Luke & Freebody, 1999).

Critical literacy, the perspective I advocate in this paper, is the fourth ideology. It expands on the notions of progressive ideology to include the essential elements of "critique, dialogue, and reflection" (Cadiero-Kaplan, 2002, p. 377) whereby children learn to *read the world and the word* (a concept introduced by Freire, 1970/2000). Critical literacy is philosophically rooted in Freire's concept of a "liberating education" as a means to address what he termed the "pedagogy of the oppressed." For Freire, capitalistic societies are based on oppression and within education certain dominant ideas and cultural values are privileged while others are marginalized. Freire contended that traditional education is always political. He proposed a system of emancipatory

education, where knowledge is constructed as the child is both a subject and actor within the world, capable of 'reading' and radically rewriting that world. In terms of literacy education, a critical approach encourages children to think critically, question texts and transform themselves or the world around them (Kohl, 1995). Critical literacy thus becomes a "literacy of social transformation in which the ideological foundations of knowledge, culture, schooling, and identity-making are recognized as unavoidably political, marked by vested interests and hidden agendas" (Kelly, 1997, p. 10). Without a critical lens some critical theorists fear young children are inculcated into the dominant ideology of texts (McDaniel, 2004). Critical literacy creates opportunities for children to enter into a dialogue with texts such as *Cinderella*, and examine issues of power, gender, social class, religion, culture, and race, relating the text to their own world. The possibilities of deconstructing (and reconstructing) *Cinderella* within a critical framework are addressed in the next section.

### Deconstructing and Reconstructing Cinderella with a Critical Lens

Critical literacy curriculum "focuses on building students' awareness of how systems of meaning and power affect people and the lives they lead" (Leland, Harste, Ociepka, Lewison, Vasquez, 1999, p. 70). It provides a means for learning to *read between the lines* and form alternative explanations. Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2005) synthesized various definitions, coming up with the following four dimensions: (1) disruption of the commonplace; (2) interrogation of multiple viewpoints; (3) a focus on socio-political issues, and (4) the taking of action and promotion of social justice (p. 382). These dimensions create a framework for children to address social, political, and cultural equity issues inherent within texts such as *Cinderella*.

Paul (1998) explains that "fairy tales are cultural barometers" (p. 23), requiring multiple and varied *ways of reading* (e.g. reading from different theoretical perspectives to reveal multiple meanings within texts). In the classic version of Cinderella, the *heroine's* value is measured in terms of her servitude, kindness, genteelness, and beauty. Ultimately these traits are rewarded with Cinderella's submission into a "valuable marriage" to that of a *charming* prince, whose worth is measured by his royal Eurocentric male status. Are young children's understandings influenced by these narrowly defined gender roles simply by reading a story such as *Cinderella*? As McDaniel (2004) states (in her reference to the fairytale *Beauty and the Beast*), it is the "continual exposure to such texts without the benefit of critical questioning and discussion [that] could indoctrinate readers into the ideology of the story" (p. 477).

Critical literacy empowers children to see both the enjoyment within texts as well as the social construction of those texts. Thus, children are encouraged to examine and question their own beliefs and values, as well as those that are represented in texts. By asking questions such as "Who does this story benefit?" or "Whose voice dominates and whose voice is silenced?" children are encouraged to question and critique their own assumptions as well as those within texts. Children can also gain an understanding of how certain knowledge or understanding of a particular group is valued within texts (e.g., the wealthy class of the Cinderella story) while other groups, such as the working class, are marginalized (Simpson, 1996). A critically literate child moves beyond the text to social action, whereby "stories that disrupt what is seen as normal are important" (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2005, p. 266). Traditional fairytales such as *Cinderella* can 'invite conversations' with young children about gender roles for example, about how males

and females are positioned within texts. By pairing the traditional fairytale with alternate versions of the story or by exploring how girls and boys are positioned within advertisements (or other texts such as books, websites, greeting cards, television advertisements), classroom discussions can be generated about how children's gender roles are constructed within the dominant culture.

Given that children are inducted into culturally specific versions of folktales such as *Cinderella* at a very young age, critical literacies can promote explorations of "alternative ways of structuring practices around texts to address new cultural and economic contexts" (Luke & Freebody, 1999, p. 6). For example, providing young children with different versions of *Cinderella* to deconstruct the "concealed ideology" is an effective way of fostering critical thinking (Green & Cochrane, 2003; Stephens, Watson, & Parker, 2003). The French story by Charles Perrault that many Canadian children know, or the Disney version may be juxtaposed with Babette Cole's parodies, *Prince Cinders* (1996) or *Princess Smartypants* (1997), to uncover the nuances and subtle cultural messages within texts. Children are encouraged to explore and question the multiple meanings that arise from the differing versions of the *Cinderella* story. Young children could also be encouraged to recreate (pictorially or orally) the story of *Cinderella* from a different character's perspective, or create a parody of the classic Disney version. They might cast Cinderella as a boy, as a girl from a different culture.

From these conversations and text analysis, social transformation is possible as a group of children can be encouraged to re-examine issues related to gender groupings, language, power, and privilege within the classroom. Children are then positioned to take transformative action and make changes in their own environments through activities such as letter writing to advertisers or authors, establishing new and more equitable classroom rules, incorporating inclusive texts within the classrooms, or creating welcoming play spaces where all children's diverse cultures are reflected.

Critical literacy enables children to become *literacy users*, as they gain the ability to "question and challenge the way things are in texts and in everyday life" (O'Brien & Comber, 2000, p. 153). Critical literacy encourages children to both deconstruct and reconstruct texts by asking: *What role do I play in aiding or opposing the status quo?* and *What role can I play to improve things?* In the next section, I elaborate on additional ways in which educators might successfully incorporate a critical literacy ideology within an early childhood classroom.

### Beyond Cinderella: Bridging Critical Literacy with Classroom Practice

In general, early childhood educators can foster critical literacy development by providing opportunities for children to explore the relationships between language practices, power relations and identities within a multitude of texts (O'Brien & Comber, 2000). Critical literacy practices provide a vehicle for educators to challenge children's thinking, question the authority of texts, explore various viewpoints, and delve into social and political issues that are often thought of as off-limits or beyond young children's capabilities. Although some attention has been directed to incorporating a critical examination of media texts and materials within specific curriculum (e.g., Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006), often educators lack the training and experience necessary to fully exploit and realize the benefits of a critical approach within their

classrooms. Additionally, administrators may not have carried out a critical analysis of the ideological position underlying critical literacy. The implementation of critical literacy requires a *praxis* of critical reflection and action that permeates all levels of education.

Educators such as Vasquez (2004) and Paley (1997) provide a window into their own early childhood classrooms, showing how they negotiated a critical literacy ideology within those contexts. Moreover, several scholars highlight various strategies that one can incorporate into a critical literacy program for young children, including using critical questions, critical reading, comparing different vantages, creating alternative endings, use of contrast and comparison of various texts of the same event, rewriting part of the text, role play, role reversals, and parody (Apol, 1998; Bainbridge, Malicky, & Payne, 2004; Kohl, 1995; Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002; Paul, 1998). Children can be encouraged to think critically and answer critical questions of various texts. Critical questions enable children to examine their own insights as well as those presented in texts. Educators need to encourage children to challenge the status quo of what is represented within texts, asking questions such as:

- 1. Whose voice is heard and whose voice is left out?"
- 2. Who is the intended reader? (For example asking, is the text intended for specific groups of people and if so how is that group portrayed?)
- 3. What was the world like when the text was created?
- 4. What does the author want you to feel or think?
- 5. What does the author expect you to know or value?
- 6. What does the text say about boys (about girls)?
- 7. Is it important that the main character is beautiful (powerful/wealthy)?

This list is not exhaustive, and the critical questions that arise will often depend on the children and the issue involved (see Apol, 1998; McDaniel, 2004; Paul, 1998; Simpson, 1996, for more examples of critical questions). Children's interests and questions should also be incorporated into the literacy curriculum and form an important addition to the critical questions that arise. By honouring children's own natural curiosity and using their inquisitiveness as a starting point, greater depth and engagement with texts is possible.

Young children may be predisposed to a critical approach to literacy learning, as they are well versed in the practice of multiple role play, drama, perspective taking, negotiating, multiple meaning making, and construction and reconstruction opportunities that are afforded through naturally occurring play episodes (Saracho & Spodek, 1998). Drawing on the notion of literacy as a social-cultural phenomenon, we can perceive young children's pretend play as being very story-like in its structure with specific texts, characters, a plot, a setting. Children's play is often focused on an issue of interest to the children (e.g., putting the babies to bed) (Roskos & Neuman, 1998). Moreover, roles and perspectives are interchanged in play among peers, as young children often visit and revisit aspects of their own lives. The narratives that evolve from children's imaginative play may provide interesting social dilemmas for educators and groups of children to deconstruct and analyze using questions such as, "Why do only girls play in the doll corner?" or "What makes an action-hero a hero?" Educators need to be attentive to the dialogue that arises from the children's own interests and be open to the possibilities of how these conversations could shape the curriculum. Educators can channel children's own interests in

critical ways as well as offer an array of literacy activities that challenge children's abilities to "perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves" (Freire, 2000, p. 83).

I would caution all educators to resist the "commodification" (Luke & Freebody, 1999, p. 6) of critical literacy, as they recognize the important benefits of fostering young children's critical viewing of texts. There is no single 'recipe' of how to incorporate critical literacy within an early childhood curriculum. Furthermore, critical literacies for children should not be considered "political correctness training for young junkies of popular culture" (O'Brien & Comber, 2000, p. 171). Rather, spaces for critical literacy need to be created within the curriculum, so that the children themselves can influence the social-political issues that are raised. Recently, I overheard an eight year old complaining bitterly of the inequities she felt existed on the playground during school recess. The issue involved a school administration ban on girls' performing handstands for safety reasons, while permitting boys' rugby games to continue. The issue could have been analyzed and gender role expectations, power within the school culture, marginalization, and social activism could have been discussed and deconstructed. Books such as Click, Clack, Moo! Cows that Type (Cronin, 2000) or White Socks Only (Coleman, 1996) could have been utilized within this classroom to illuminate and draw parallels between the playground issue and greater societal issues concerning marginalization and social transformation. Despite the lack of attention the playground issue received in the various classrooms, this fourth-grader self-initiated a petition and was soon joined by not only her classmates but also the pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and grade one classes. This example highlights the importance of including socialpolitical issues of interest to children and the need to recognize the capabilities of very young children to engage in social transformative action.

Based on Chambers' (1996) notion of the "protection of the right to know," children need to be perceived of as competent and deserving of literacy experiences that reflect the harsh realities of their own lives and the communities around them. Often early childhood educators aim to protect children and adults mistakenly 'dumb down' literacy experiences by presenting children with texts that are not objectionable and are "universally acceptable" (Paul, 2000, p. 338). As Paul points out, texts are "rendered meaningless if they are emptied of all specific social, cultural, and historical content" (p. 341). Texts, even *radical or objectionable* ones, can be used as prompts to help children realize the underlying ideologies of both the texts and the context of their own lives (McDaniel, 2004). I define *radical or objectionable* texts by borrowing from Leland, Harste, Ociepka, Lewison, and Vasquez's (1999) suggestions for choosing critical texts. Radical texts chosen for young children should meet the following criteria:

- Texts don't make difference invisible, but rather explore what differences make a difference;
- Texts enrich children's understanding of history and life by giving voice to those who have been traditionally silenced or marginalized;
- Texts show how people can begin to take action on important social issues;
- Texts should explore dominant systems of meaning that operate in our society to position people and groups of people;
- Texts should not provide "happily ever after" endings for complex social problems. (p. 70)

I am not suggesting that *every* text need be radical or objectionable, but that teachers should not be afraid to use them. Young children are competent analyzers and naturally question almost everything in their everyday lives. As Chambers (1996) emphasized, young children appear to be natural born critics when provided opportunities to express ideas and opinions on subjects of *deep interest* to them. Thus, children deserve a "curriculum that deliberately 'makes significant' diverse children's cultural and social questions about everyday life" (Vasquez, 2004, p. xv). Early childhood programs that incorporate a critical literacy ideology will enable young children to examine various perspectives and issues, as well as foster their abilities to make competent decisions on how to behave differently and effect change. As Paul (2000) highlighted, "it is important to learn to recognize the vulnerability of our own cultural assumptions and learn to challenge them" (p. 340). The 'happily ever after' ending of *Cinderella* provides children little insight into the complex social problems of their daily lives such as class distinctions, gender issues, discrimination, or marginalization.

Canada is a multicultural society and this diversity is reflected in many early childhood classrooms. However, critical literacy is equally important in monocultural settings where acquainting and exposing children within these settings to issues of diversity, oppression, and social justice that are not always present within their own contexts becomes a valuable learning experience (Lelande, Harste, & Huber, 2005). Educators need to challenge children and provide balanced literacy opportunities that value the social-cultural construction of knowledge while reflecting the diversity of children's lives. Opportunities to collaborate, discuss, critique, deconstruct, and reconstruct a multitude of meaningful and radical texts (Kohl, 1995) are equally important in literacy development as learning to identify phonemes of sound. Critical texts, such as those in Appendix A, are too often overlooked within early childhood classrooms. Texts for young children need to include depictions of characters engaged in critically reading the world, questioning the explicit and implicit social-political-cultural assumptions, and transforming the world (McDaniel, 2004). These texts encourage discussions and conversations about social, political, or cultural inequities that young children are often involved in and affected by in their own lives (Leland, Harste, Ociepka, Lewison, & Vasquez, 1999). Children can be encouraged to construct new and varied meanings of texts through this sense making process inherent within a critical literacy approach.

Preparing young children to be literate in their fast-paced technological and multiple text world requires educators to reflect upon and challenge their own beliefs of literacy. The learning of functional literacy skills is important but it cannot overshadow the opportunities presented from incorporating critical literacy pedagogy. Through critical literacy the contexts of children's lives are valued, analyzed, critiqued, and reconstructed through social action. Young children then become critical appraisers of the many texts they are exposed to and learning is generative and sustained.

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Appendix A

Some Suggested Critical Texts for Young Children

Title and Year of Publication	Author	Subject Material
Lady in the Box (1997)	Ann McGovern	Homelessness
Fly Away Home (1993)	Eve Bunting	Homelessness
Freedom Summer (2005)	Deborah Wiles	Differences (race)
Other Side (2002)	Jacqueline Woodson	Differences (race)
Feathers and Fools (2000)	Mem Fox	Differences
Voices in the Park (1998)	Anthony Browne	Different Vantages
One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dads, Blue Dads (2004)	Johnny Vanentine	Tolerance
Belinda's Bouquet (1989)	Leslea Newman	Differences/Tolerance
Asha's Moms (2000)	Rosamund Elwin & Michele Paulse	Same-gender parents
White Socks Only (1996)	Evelyn Coleman	Differences (race)
A Day's Work (1997)	Eve Bunting	Poverty (unemployment)
Frederick (1967)	Leo Lionni	Race/Gender/Identity
Tusk, Tusk (2006)	David McKee	Differences/Tolerance
What's the Most Beautiful Thing You Know about Horses (2003)	Richard Van Camp	Stereotypes/Animal Rights
Quiet as a Cricket (1997)	Eric Carle	Environmental issues
Something from Nothing (1992)	Phoebe Gilman	Gender/Perspectives
7 Blind Mice (1992)	Ed Young	Multiple Perspectives
The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs (1989)	Jan Seieszka	Perspective
Click, Clack, Moo! Cows that Type (2000)	Doreen Cronin	Animal Rights/Activism/Perspective
Sitti's Secrets (1994)	Naomi Nye	Diversity/Activism
A Chair for My Mother (1984); Something Special for Me (1986); Music, Music for Everyone (1988)	Vera Williams	Collectivism within working-class community

## **Author Biography**

Debbie Harwood has a PhD from the University of Victoria in the department of Education, Curriculum and Instruction. She has been an Early Childhood Educator for approximately 15 years and has worked in various capacities as a Special Needs Educator and Program Director. Currently, she is a substitute teacher working in the elementary section of an international school in Europe.

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#### **Abstract**

How do we prepare young children for the literate world? What does it mean to be literate in the rapidly changing technological society of today? Young children are increasingly exposed to a growing multitude of media and interactive digital texts, often with underlying corporate media messages. Young children need to be prepared to be *critical appraisers* of the multiple texts that surround them each day. Children must be afforded literary activities that provide new and varied 'lenses' to understand their experiences, explore multiple viewpoints, and uncover the varied influences of socio-political and power relationships that shape perceptions and actions.

As an early childhood educator working with children aged 0 to 6 years in an urban inner city early childhood education centre, I have often relied on 'happy ending' type of literacy experiences. My choices of books, media, art and visual materials, and literacy activities have dealt with themes of friendship, happiness, and goodness. However, I champion encouraging and teaching young children to challenge, question, and contest the ways meanings are represented within texts.

The use of critical literacy within an early childhood program is theoretically defensible and grounded in Freire's (1970/2000) concept of a "liberating education". In this article I outline the theoretical framework for the inclusion of critical literacy within early childhood curricula, using the example of the fairy-tale, *Cinderella*, to anchor the discussion to the everyday practice of

educators. I believe that understanding the epistemology of critical literacy is the first step toward bridging theory and practice.

### Résumé

Comment prépare-t-on les jeunes enfants aux littératies du monde? Que signifie être un individu 'alphabète' dans la société d'aujourd'hui alors que les changements technologiques surviennent à si grande vitesse? Les jeunes enfants sont de plus en plus exposés à une multitude de textes numériques interactifs, souvent teintés de messages médiatiques corporatifs. Les jeunes enfants ont besoin d'être préparés à évaluer de manière critique les multiples formes de textes auxquels ils sont exposés dans la vie de tous les jours. Il est important qu'on offre aux enfants la chance de vivre des expériences de littératies diverses à travers lesquelles il leur est possible de jeter de nouveaux et différents regards qui les aideront à comprendre ces expériences, leur donneront la possibilité d'explorer différentes perspectives et leur permettront de découvrir les diverses influences sociopolitiques et les relations de pouvoir qui définissent les perceptions et les actions. Travaillant auprès d'enfants de 0 à 6 ans dans un centre préscolaire en milieu urbain (centreville) à titre d'éducatrice, je favorise souvent des types d'activités de littératie à 'fin heureuse'. Mes choix de livres, de produits médiatiques, d'objets d'art, de matériel visuel et d'activités de littératie touchent aux thèmes d'amitié, de bonheur et de bonnes actions. Toutefois, j'encourage les enfants et leur enseigne à remettre en question, discuter et contester les interprétations qu'ils retrouvent dans les différentes formes de textes qu'ils rencontrent. L'idée d'intégrer le concept de littératie critique dans un programme d'éducation au préscolaire est fondée sur la notion 'd'éducation libératrice' de Freire (1970/2000). Dans le présent article, je décris brièvement le cadre théorique qui appuie l'intégration d'une littératie critique à l'intérieur d'un programme éducatif au préscolaire. Afin d'ancrer cette discussion à la pratique journalière des éducateurs, j'utilise comme exemple, le conte de fées Cendrillon. Comprendre l'épistémologie de la littératie critique est selon moi le premier pas en direction d'une pratique inspirée de la théorie.