



education review // reseñas educativas

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a multi-lingual journal of book reviews

October 9, 2010

ISSN 1094-5296

Janks, Hilary. (2010). *Literacy and Power*. New York: Routledge.

Pp. 245 ISBN 978-0-415-99963-2

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Hilary Janks, author of *Literacy and Power*, began her transformative career in the field of education in the 1970s as a high-school English teacher. Unsatisfied with simply teaching the classics, she focused on helping her students to develop a love of reading. Janks is currently a professor of Applied English Language Studies at the University of the Witwatersand in Johannesburg, South Africa.

The thesis in Janks's work is that literacy and power are closely related and as such it is important to deconstruct and reconstruct textual meanings and analyze both the influence that texts have on society as well as the societal interests at work. She explores the "access paradox" that teachers of English face. Teachers can provide education in English in which case the dominance of the colonial language is maintained, this is access without a theory of

Citation: Yearta, Lindsay Sheronick. (2010 October 9) Review of *Literacy and Power* by Hilary Janks. *Education Review*, 13. Retrieved [Date] from <http://www.edrev.info/reviews/rev983.pdf>

domination. Alternatively, teachers can decide to not provide education in Standard American English, using students' home language instead, and marginalization is perpetuated as students are unable to compete in society, this is dominance without access. In an answer to the access paradox, Janks references the work of James Paul Gee: without acquiring any secondary discourses, we remain locked into our own local communities. Therefore, Janks advocates an English education which incorporates the home languages of the students and critically analyzes the effect of colonialism on languages and power.

In the first portion of the book, Janks explores the dominant definition of literacy as the social practice of being able to read and write. However, she also maintains that literacy is difficult to define. In fact, many languages lack a word for literacy. *Literacy and Power* explores how literacy can be expressed and experienced in varied ways. Janks builds her body of work upon the well known theories of Marx, Foucault, and Bourdieu. Janks' interdependent model of critical literacy education, which includes the key aspects of dominance/power, access, diversity, and design, is presented as well. Texts should be read critically and Janks provides her readers with sample texts and evaluative tools which remind readers to consider an author's lexical, grammatical, and sequential choices and how language constructs reality.

The second portion of the book expands the discussion of each of the terms in the critical literacy education model, dominance/power, access, diversity, and design and examines the terms singly and in relation to other terms. Janks also explores the consequences of disregarding dominance/power, access, diversity, or design. In reading texts critically, the reader must learn to read with and against the text while considering whose interests are served. The task of reading against texts is made easier when the texts offend us or are outside of our present discourse. Students must have access to dominant texts as well as diverse texts; they must analyze the design of the text while determining whose interests are being served.

In the last chapter of the book, Janks argues that even if we lived in a peaceful world, without the threat of global warming or world wars, there would still be a need for critical literacy. In fact, there will always be a need for critical literacy as long as there are differences among people, and as such it must be able to adapt to changing needs. This chapter is Janks's vision for the future. She advocates that critical literacy should and is able to address both global and local issues which make critical literacy accessible and relevant for any student. Critical literacy helps us to understand the effects of power as well as the ultimate need for redress.

The strengths of *Literacy and Power* are numerous. Janks includes pictorial examples which illustrate her more abstract concepts and allow the reader to connect and understand even if the reader has little background in the area. There are activities to try and questions to work through which aid the reader in monitoring comprehension. Janks provides numerous examples of unconventional representations of literacy.

Limitations in this book are slight. The body of work that Janks has assembled needs to grow. There are implications for future research. Janks's interdependent model of critical literacy should be implemented in classrooms beginning in primary school all the way through institutions of higher education. Practical implications abound here.

In comparison with *The Dreamkeepers* by Gloria Ladson-Billings which takes a more practical approach, *Literacy and Power* draws on social theories and discourse analysis, utilizing the work of Marx, Foucault, Bourdieu, Gee, Fairclough, and Luke. Both authors, Janks and Ladson-Billings, serve the reader with a similar message that students deserve to feel valued in the classroom. There are ways to teach the dominant discourse while also teaching and learning about the various cultural funds of knowledge that students bring with them into the classroom. Ladson-Billings details the classroom experiences of eight teachers of African American

students; Janks draws upon her own classroom experiences as well as the experiences of a few close colleagues. Janks does include multinational examples such as the one from South Africa in which teachers worked with students from a remote South African village in order to create multimodal texts that they then shared with Australian students. The South African students videotaped, drew, and wrote details in English on how to play a game. They were learning to communicate through a dominant discourse while using knowledge that the students deemed valuable, cultural knowledge that the students brought to school with them.

Throughout our lives we will compose and be exposed to a multitude of texts in a range of formats. Possessing and enabling our students to possess the skills of analyzing a text for the core message is beneficial in numerous ways. Images and texts, used together or separately, have the power to perpetuate the dominant way of thinking. Looking beyond the surface, analyzing the purpose of the message, gives incredible power. As a teacher of critical literacy, Janks has created a work that would be beneficial to classroom teachers, administrators, teacher educators, and mature students: each would profit from exposure to Janks's work. The book focuses on a critical stance to curricular content, not simply a specific curriculum and as such is useful to a myriad of readers.

Reference

Ladson-Billings, Gloria. (1994). *The Dreamkeepers*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

About the Reviewer

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