

Critical Literacy

Helping Students Get Beyond the Sift-and-Surf Mode to Deep Synthesis of Texts

1. What examples have you experienced with students who have a naïve belief about the veracity of information found on the Internet? How have you helped them when this has occurred?
2. In this chapter, we said, “As teachers of adolescents and citizens of the world, we are concerned that the emphasis on declarative knowledge (facts) has pushed conditional knowledge (knowing when and why to apply information) to the side.” Please react to this statement. Do you agree or disagree?
3. The Tasmania (New Zealand) Department of Education (2006) uses a simple but powerful framework for provoking a critical literacy stance: *In whose interest? For what purpose? Who benefits?* How might you apply one or more of these ideas in your content area?
4. What experiences or readings have you used to disrupt the commonplace in your content area? What were the reactions of students? Families?
5. Respected history educator Sam Wineburg calls the traditional history curriculum the “one damned thing after another approach” (2002). What gets lost when students view history as an unending list of facts to memorize? How can this put them in peril?
6. What are the challenges and cautions in utilizing a critical literacy approach in your classroom? How is this balanced against community expectations and state standards?
7. Taking a critical literacy approach in the absence of background knowledge is foolhardy. How can a lack of background knowledge hurt a student?