



## CHAPTER FIVE

# Critical literacy instruction and the tension of assessment: How do I know what they have learned?

### Introduction

**W**hat images does the term *assessment* conjure up in your mind? A register filled with dots, slashes and crosses? (Hill, 2000). Or maybe rows of children silently filling in the correct answer to a commercially prepared exam? Or perhaps the teacher and students considering a marking rubric that is projected on a screen, making changes to it as they debate each aspect? Or do you think of the teacher sitting alongside a student, listening and taking notes?

The term *assessment* has its roots in the Latin *assidere*, which means “to sit beside or with” (Wiggins, 1993, cited in Earl, 2003, p. 21). This definition creates an image of the teacher sitting alongside the student to develop a portrait of what the student is able to do, which in turn informs future teaching and learning. This image is in keeping with views of assessment that proclaim, “assessment should be used predominately to foster improvement in students’ learning” (Hill, 2001, pp. 178–179).

I think we can safely say that most educators view assessment as an essential piece of the teaching–learning equation (Absolum, Flockton, Hattie, Hipkins, & Reid, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2010). We have to develop a picture of what students are learning in order to determine where to go next or how to revise our pedagogy. However, delving into the assessment literature we are met with a barrage of terms and concepts: formative/summative, high stakes, criterion-based, performance-based, assessment of/for/as learning, authentic assessment, and so on (Butler & McMunn, 2006). In addition, teachers have to navigate what is often a minefield of policy imperatives (e.g. O'Neill & Scrivens, 2005).

If we view our assessment practices with a critical literacy lens, it follows that our choices on how and what we assess send strong messages about what we value in education (Stiggins, 1991). The CLRT found in the New Zealand context that there are currently no standardised<sup>29</sup> forms of assessment that would support teachers incorporating critical literacy in their programmes. This will probably come as no surprise. The act of assessment, by its very nature, is a political act (Burke & Hammett, 2009b). Someone determines which aspects of the curriculum are important enough to assess, and currently critical literacy is not an explicit aspect of any policy statements (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2003, 2006).

So, how do you know what they have learned? In this chapter we will examine an area of critical literacy pedagogy that has received very little attention in the literature: assessment (Morgan & Wyatt-Smith, 2000). First, we will explore tensions between our understanding of critical literacy and theories and principles of assessment. We will then traverse the research literature to consider key concepts and principles of assessment. The chapter will conclude by considering some possible tools that teachers can use to inform critical literacy instruction, including “roaming around the known” (Clay, 1979), interviews, rubrics, journals, learning stories (Carr, 2001) and (e-)portfolios.

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<sup>29</sup> Not to mention the fact that given the fluid nature of our definition of critical literacy it is not desirable to have standardised assessment of critical literacy.

**REFLECTIVE INTERLUDE**

- What images does the term *assessment* bring to mind?
- What forms of assessment do you currently use in your literacy programme?

**Critical literacy assessment: Theory and practice**

I have argued throughout *Planting Seeds* that theory and practice are tightly linked. Teaching and assessment are no different. We can view assessment activities as “instantiations of theory in practice” (Wyatt-Smith & Murphy, 2001, p. 22). In the introductory chapter we located critical literacy within a multiliteracies framework (Anstey & Bull, 2006; Bull & Anstey, 2010) using the Four Resources model (Luke & Freebody, 1999). The difficulty for teachers in working with a broader conceptualisation of literacy that includes critical literacy is that they can no longer rely on traditional tools of assessment:

the broad knowledgeability, flexibility, problem-solving ability, and open sensibility required by successful learners today simply cannot be measured by assessment techniques which focus overly on standardization, universality and regularity. (Kalantzis, Cope, & Harvery, 2003, p. 25)

For example, in terms of multimodal texts, it has been claimed that

templates, rubrics and provincial examinations do not offer us the flexibility we need to explore new ways of thinking, composing and critiquing; we must find a way of assessing work that is innovative and responsive to the opportunities offered in new literary environments. (McClay & Mackey, 2009, p. 115)

Thus, literacy assessment from a multiliteracies perspective presents a number of challenges for educators (Burke & Hammett, 2009a; Kalantzis, et al., 2003), not the least of which is how we assess students’ ability to critically analyse a variety of texts for a variety of purposes when there is no single correct answer. In this section we will explore different conceptions of assessment alongside the theoretical underpinnings of critical literacy, and consider how we might work within what might be referred to as the Bermuda Triangle

of assessment practices in critical literacy pedagogy. Like the Bermuda Triangle,<sup>30</sup> many refer to its existence but few report from inside its borders.

In Chapter Two we discussed how the version of critical literacy in *Planting Seeds* is included by critical social and postmodern theories. Enacting assessment practices that are in keeping with the theoretical underpinnings of our version of critical literacy is challenging. In fact, it seems that enacting *any* assessment practices within critical literacy pedagogy is a challenge, if the lack of discussion of assessment in the literature is anything to go by (Morgan & Wyatt-Smith, 2000). This “most surprising silence” (p. 124) signalled by Morgan and Wyatt-Smith indicates that any complex discussions of the synergies of critical literacy pedagogy and assessment have been filed in the too-hard basket. The CLRT identified assessment as a key issue in need of attention: How can teachers support students to critically analyse texts if they are unable to chart their learning in meaningful ways?

Differing conceptions of assessment are related to differing conceptions of teaching, learning and, more generally, education (Brown, 2008; Drummond, 2008). In other words, assessment is about “deciding what to give value to” (Rinaldi, 2006, cited in Drummond, 2008, p. 16). As we did in Chapter Two with different conceptions of critical literacy, we can trace different conceptions of assessment to their philosophical underpinnings (James, 2008; James et al., 2006). Literature in the area of assessment refers to three generations of assessment practices, each sustained by a different theoretical heritage.

According to Mary James (2008), first-generation assessment practices, or “assessing what is taught” (James, 2008, p. 21), are underpinned by behaviourist conceptions of learning. In this view, children’s minds are like empty vessels for teachers to fill with important facts. Learning takes place like it did for Pavlov’s dogs,

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30 This metaphor is purposely modelled after Black and Wiliam’s (1998b) “black box”, whereby what goes on in classrooms has frequently been ignored by education policies that aim to raise student achievement. Morgan and Wyatt-Smith (2000) draw our attention to the ways in which critical literacy assessment has been ignored in the literature.

through conditioning a preferred response to particular stimuli. In the case of teaching, this often takes the form of rote learning exercises, an emphasis on the need to know basic facts before moving on to more complex learning, and breaking down complex skills into bite-sized pieces.

In contrast, constructivist theories inform second-generation assessment practices, or “assessing learning as individual sense-making” (James, 2008, p. 25). Constructivists argue that behaviourism ignores the role of the student in constructing understanding or making meaning. For constructivists, learning takes place as students build mental models, which are then used to make sense of new experiences and information. Constructivist teaching focuses on supporting novices, or students, to acquire the problem-solving abilities and understanding of experts.

Third-generation assessment practices, or “assessing learning as building knowledge as part of doing things with others” (James, 2008, p. 29), are based on sociocultural theories of learning. Briefly, sociocultural theories view learners as active members of a community and learning as taking place when “people participate in the sociocultural activities of their community, transforming understanding, roles, and responsibilities as they participate” (Rogoff, Matusov, & White, 1996, p. 390). Teaching underpinned by sociocultural theories seeks to create authentic assignments that novices (students) can complete with the assistance of more expert others (teachers or other students). In the sociocultural classroom we would find teachers and students communicating with each other as they work in a community to solve problems (Wenger, 1998).

James (2008) asserts that it is not just about applying third generation assessment practices across all learning areas. Instead, it is about “fitness for purpose” (James, 2008, p. 34). Some assessment purposes may call for different approaches to assessment, or different generations of assessment. You may be thinking that third generation assessment tools are probably most in keeping with the sorts of tools that might support student learning in critical literacy. I would agree. The idea of students and teachers working alongside each other fits

nically with our previous discussions on dialogue and power sharing. The third generation of assessment practices has the potential to create a space where in any given moment the teacher or the other students have the expertise needed to support other students as they strengthen their skills of text analysis.

So how might we move forward? In keeping with our theoretical influences, we should take a critical literacy lens to any assessment tool we develop to support critical literacy learning. We can ask any of the following questions (Box 1), keeping in mind that we will not necessarily ask all of the questions of any one given tool.

**BOX 1: QUESTIONS TO ASK OF ANY CRITICAL LITERACY ASSESSMENT TOOL**

1. Does this tool encourage students to consider issues of inclusion, exclusion and/or representation?
2. Does this tool encourage students to draw on their knowledge and experiences, or “funds of knowledge”?
3. Does this tool support students to construct multiple meanings of the text?
4. Does this tool encourage students to consider how their analysis of the text has affected their thoughts and/or actions?
5. How does this tool position students and the teacher (expert, novice, deficit, etc.)?

We will return to these questions. Next we consider some of the key concepts from the assessment research literature and how they are relevant to critical literacy assessment.

**REFLECTIVE INTERLUDE**

- Which generations of assessment practices do you currently use? In which areas? Why?
- What questions remain about the theory of critical literacy assessment?

## Navigating the assessment research literature

In this section we will traverse some of the key concepts in the assessment research literature, including formative and summative assessment and the importance of feedback and feed forward. This will be followed by a discussion of self-assessment and peer assessment.

### Formative, summative or assessment as learning: What's in a name?

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, there is a wealth of vocabulary associated with assessment. The terms *assessment for summative purposes* and *assessment for formative purposes* have been truncated over time to *summative assessment* and *formative assessment* (Taras, 2005; Ussher & Earl, 2010). In one of the most frequently cited articles on the subject, Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam (1998a) describe *formative assessment* as “encompassing all those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged” (pp. 7–8). The term *summative assessment* describes an activity that takes place at the end of a unit or year level to gain information on the skills, knowledge or content that students have gained (Butler & McMunn, 2006). Summative assessments are frequently recorded in teachers’ grade books and used to report on the students’ level of achievement or progress to audiences such as parents/guardians and boards of trustees (Hill, 2001). The distinction between formative and summative assessment has been compared to cooking: “When the cook tastes the soup, that’s formative; when the guests taste the soup, that’s summative” (Stake, 1991, cited in Earl, 2003, p. 23).

Bill Ussher and Kerry Earl (2010) argue that this shorthand form of the terms has created a great deal of confusion. To further add to the confusion, assessment data from any given assessment tool can be used *both* to inform future teaching and learning (formative) and as a judgement on what students have learned thus far (summative) (Absolum, et al., 2009). New Zealand teachers are not alone in their confusion (see Taras, 2008). Maddalena Taras (2008) suggests that some of the confusion may arise from the fact that most teachers

realise that assessment data can be used for both summative and formative purposes, and in fact many refuse to separate formative from summative assessment (see also Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, 2003).

As a way out of this confusion, teachers are encouraged to focus on the *use* of the information gathered, rather than viewing the assessment task itself as formative or summative. This focus on the purpose of assessment has led Lorna Earl (2003) to adopt different names for these approaches: *assessment of learning*, instead of *summative*; and *assessment for learning*, instead of *formative*. The key assessor in each of these cases is the teacher. In New Zealand, teachers are being encouraged to adopt an assessment for learning stance (Ministry of Education, 2010). The current position in New Zealand is that students and their learning should be located at the centre of any assessment practice. In this view, “assessment not used formatively at some level of the system is not worth doing” (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 20).

In keeping with the idea of student learning as being at the heart of assessment practices, Earl (2003) describes *assessment as learning*, where the key assessor is the student. In assessment as learning, the student is directly involved in self-assessment practices to enhance his/her own learning. The concept of assessment as learning provides a framework for thinking about the recommendation given in the *Directions for Assessment in New Zealand* (DANZ) (Absolum, et al., 2009) paper:

That the success of any national assessment strategy be judged by whether all students are developing the capability and motivation to assess, interpret, and use information from quality assessments in ways that affirm or further their own learning. (p. 2)

The emphasis on the role of the student in assessment practices represents a subtle, but important, shift in the role of the teacher and supports many of the suggestions in this chapter.

### **Feed up, feedback and feed forward**

It is clear in the research literature on assessment that feedback is an integral element in assessment for learning, or formative assessment



practices (Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Swaffield, 2008). Feedback is such a key component of useful formative assessment that John Hattie and Helen Timperley (2007) claim that “Feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement” (p. 81). While most teachers will be familiar with the concept of feedback, they may not have heard of feed up and feed forward (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). In this section we will briefly explore key aspects of feedback, as well as feed up and feed forward, and consider how these might apply to the assessment of critical literacy.

Hattie and Timperley (2007) suggest that there are three main questions addressed by useful feedback: “Where am I going?; How am I going?; and, Where to next?” (p. 87). The first question, “Where am I going?”, relates to goal setting, or feed up. Students need explicit criteria, sometimes referred to as success criteria (Clarke, 2005), so that they have a clear sense of what they are expected to learn. As we discussed in Chapter Four, there is a need for explicit teaching in critical literacy pedagogy. This explicit teaching includes the direct instruction of metalanguage, as well as unpacking the key aspects of our understanding of critical literacy with students. By identifying key aspects such as inclusion or representation as the goal for a particular session, and giving students explicit criteria for the ways in which they might meet that goal, students have the opportunity to practise that aspect. With more practice and quality feedback, students have increased opportunities to develop the skills of a text analyst, with the ultimate goal being independent text analysts who have the skills and confidence to question any text.

The second question, “How am I going?”, relates to the actual feedback the student receives in relation to the success criteria, or the goal that has been set (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). This is one aspect of assessment that is particularly sticky for critical literacy, as discussed in the previous section. Unlike other curriculum areas that may have one correct answer, critical literacy, as understood here, seeks to encourage multiple readings of texts. Teachers must therefore be cautious about giving feedback to students that might suggest there is only one “answer” or response.

The *form* of the feedback can be written or verbal (Swaffield, 2008). Some studies suggest that if you want to give written feedback, you are better off giving comments alone without a mark or grade (not that we would encourage you to give grades for critical analysis!) (Black, et al., 2003; James, et al., 2006). The kinds of comments most likely to support future student learning are those that “identify what has been done well and what still needs improvement, and give guidance on how to make that improvement” (Black, et al., 2003, p. 49). Feedback that consists mainly of praise, such as “great work” or “well done”, has been found to be less useful in promoting further learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Shute, 2008).

The *timing* of feedback is important to consider. Feedback given within a short time frame can have an immediate impact on learning, but feedback that is delayed can still affect the transfer of learning (Shute, 2008). Valerie Shute (2008) explains that the timing of feedback should be linked to the particular objective. In addition, Shute’s review of the literature suggests that students who need more support should receive more immediate feedback.

It is also important to consider how students might read or make sense of feedback. Research shows mixed results in terms of how students *receive* feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Depending on the level of students’ confidence and self-efficacy, they may not interpret feedback in the ways the teacher intends. Hattie and Timperley propose that “teachers need to view feedback from the perspective of the individuals engaged in the learning” (2007, p. 101). As a way to support students to make sense of feedback, Richard Stiggins (1991) suggests that students need help decoding and making sense of the feedback they receive through direct instruction. He asks, “Who trains students to be critical consumers of the feedback provided by their teachers?” (p. 535). Because critical literacy may be new to many students, it is important to demystify the feedback they receive to support further learning. Teachers may also wish to take a critical literacy lens to the feedback they provide students as a way to consider how the feedback they give may position students as deficient or as expert, and so on.

The third question, “Where to next?”, encourages teachers and students to set goals yet again, also known as feed forward (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). This time they are setting goals as a result of considering “How am I going?”. Thus the three questions provide the basis for a continuous feedback loop of goal setting, consideration of student learning, and more goal setting. Hattie and Timperley conclude that “to be effective, feedback needs to be clear, purposeful, meaningful, and compatible with students’ prior knowledge and to provide logical connections” (p. 104).

Of course feedback is not effective if the teacher doesn’t adjust his or her teaching (Alton-Lee, 2003). So the question “Where to next?” is a question for *both* the teacher and the student. If the student is having difficulty identifying multiple readings, for example, then the teacher will need to provide additional opportunities for the student to practise this skill.

How might this play out in practice? In terms of critical literacy pedagogy we can align the feedback loop we have discussed here with the critical literacy lesson plan template from Chapter Four. In Figure 17 we can see that the rationale for the section of the text and the link to the critical literacy poster or definition are spaces where the teacher can make explicit the focus or goals of that lesson. These goals form the “Where am I going?” of the lesson for the students and the teacher. The template reminds teachers of the need to explicitly plan for feedback for each lesson. Will you give feedback to the entire class or individually? Will you give written feedback or verbal? Of course these decisions on feedback are related to the goals of the lesson and the particular task the students are completing. It is important to note that the lesson plan template is a framework to get you started; by all means do not follow it in lock-step fashion. Frequently during the analysis of a text with your students you will shift the focus as you open up the different readings. This will in turn result in different feedback and feed forward from what you might have anticipated.

	Title and level of text:
Where am I going? (feed up)	Rationale for selection of text:
	Link to CL poster/definition:
	Questions to elicit student discussion:
	Metalanguage:
	Discussion skills:
How am I going? (feedback)	Feedback (to individual students or the whole class, verbal or written):
Where to next? (feed forward)	Reflections on the lesson:

FIGURE 17: FEEDBACK/LESSON PLAN TEMPLATE

Let's look at a concrete example. Imagine a project in which students are asked to produce multiple readings after watching an episode of Jamie Oliver's *Food Revolution* (<http://www.jamieoliver.com/tv/jamie-s-food-revolution>). Students are asked to complete the following (see Example 1).

### **Example 1: Jamie Oliver's *Food Revolution***

Watch the first episode from the first season. Consider the different knowledge and experiences that different readers bring to the text and the different readings they might produce. Then complete the following.

Provide as many readings from different perspectives as you can. The names of two readers have been provided to get you started.

Reader <sup>31</sup>	Knowledge and experience that reader brings to the text	How might that reader make sense of this episode?
Me		
Jamie Oliver		

Now imagine one student has completed the following (Example 2).

**Example 2: Jamie Oliver’s *Food Revolution*: student response**

Reader	Knowledge and experience that reader brings to the text	How might that reader make sense of this episode?
Me	I know what kind of food I like and it isn’t salad.	Didn’t like it.
Jamie Oliver	He is an expert chef.	Loved it.

What feedback might you give? Consider the feedback I have given below. Does it meet Black and Wiliam’s (1998b) recommendation that “feedback to any pupil should be about the particular qualities of his or her work, with advice on what he or she can do to improve, and should avoid comparisons with other pupils” (p. 143). Why or why not?

<sup>31</sup> Remember that here we are using the term “reader” to mean anyone who engages with the text through reading, watching and so on.

**Example 3: Student feedback**

[Student name],

You were able to describe some of the knowledge and experiences that two different readers (you and Jamie Oliver) bring to the text. You were then able to consider how you both make sense of the first episode of *Food Revolution*. Can you elaborate *why* they may have read it that way? What other readings are possible from you and Jamie? What other readers could you list? Do you think there are only two possible viewpoints (like it/don't like it). Why or why not?

This feedback would be even more powerful if it could be discussed in conferences between the student and the teacher, giving the student opportunities to engage with the feedback and respond to the questions.

As we noted in Chapter Three, once the dialogue begins about a text it can be compared to “opening up Pandora’s box” (RTWD, 5/8/05, p. 19). This is both the promise and the challenge of any given critical literacy lesson. Using Hattie and Timperley’s (2007) questions of “Where am I going?; How am I going?; and, Where to next?” (p. 87) is a promising framework that appears to be flexible enough to be applied to critical literacy instruction. However, by keeping in mind the points we are discussing here, you can negotiate these issues in the heat of the pedagogical moment.

**Self- and peer assessment**

In their review of the literature, Black and Wiliam (1998a) found that few teachers included self-assessment in their assessment programmes. Self-assessment describes the process whereby students are able to give themselves feedback on the gap between their current achievement and a desired goal, whereas peer assessment describes the process whereby a student is able to give feedback to other students on the gap between their current achievement and a desired goal (Black, et al., 2003). Self- and peer assessment involve many of the same processes. Both practices are in keeping with postmodern theories that place emphasis on the individual (Harrison, 2004). Colin Harrison (2004) argues that in postmodernism there is a repositioning of the role of the reader “as an active and purposeful

user of texts and creator of meaning” (p. 168). This acknowledgement includes the understanding that there is no one correct or uniform reading that students will produce.

We can position self- and peer assessment as *assessment as learning* (Earl, 2003), where the assessment practice feeds directly into student learning because students are learning as they conduct the practice. There appears to be general agreement in the assessment literature that self- and peer assessments should form part of a repertoire of assessment tools (Black, et al., 2003; Clarke, 2005; Earl & Katz, 2008). In the New Zealand context there is an increased emphasis on the role of the student in assessment (Williams, 2010). Indeed, the DANZ paper (Absolum, et al., 2009) recommends:

- that all our young people be educated in ways that develop their capacity to assess their own learning; and
- that the success of any national assessment strategy be judged by whether all students are developing the capability and motivation to assess, interpret, and use information from quality assessments in ways that affirm or further their own learning. (p. 23)

This view of the role of the student in assessment practices locates students in a more powerful position than other views of assessment where the main assessor is the teacher (Earl, 2003).

Black and Wiliam (1998b) argue that “self-assessment by pupils ... is in fact *an essential component of formative assessment*” (p. 143, original emphasis). When you think about it, this should not come as a surprise. It will be difficult for students to achieve a particular learning goal if they don’t know what the goal is, where they are currently and what they might do in order to achieve it (Black, et al., 2003). If you are directly involved in the assessment process, through giving feedback to yourself or others, you are much more likely to have a grasp of where you need to go next.

There are several advantages to having students peer assess each other (Black, et al., 2003). Firstly, peer assessment has been found to enhance student motivation to complete work with greater care. There is also some evidence in the assessment literature that peer

assessment can lead to gains in learning and achievement (Black & Wiliam, 1998a). Another advantage is that students may use language with each other that is more easily understood than the language of the teacher. Finally, peer assessment frees the teacher up to work individually with more students, who in turn are better informed about the sort of assistance they need from the teacher as a result of the self or peer feedback they have received.

For students to be able to self- or peer assess, they need to have a clear understanding of the agreed standards they will assess against. Some might view this as a limitation, because classroom time will need to be allocated to the direct teaching and/or negotiation of the criteria or goals (Clarke, 2005). However, negotiating the criteria or goals is a valuable way to include students (Williams, 2010) as well as providing additional learning opportunities. As students discuss and debate the criteria that will be used in the assessment, they have multiple opportunities to consider these criteria and become more familiar with them.

There are some cautions to keep in mind when setting out to implement self- and/or peer assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998a). For a start, some students may adhere to misunderstandings and be unwilling to change their thinking or practice. Dialogue will need to take place to shift student beliefs. Following on from the point above about the need for students to understand the assessment criteria, students will not be able to make use of formative feedback and feed forward if they are unable to formulate a plan for where to go next. Again, the “Where to next?” will need to be developed in consultation with the teacher.

Where do you go from here? It has been suggested that you should begin with peer assessment because it can support students to become confident in the practice of self-assessment (James, et al., 2006). You may wish to trial either the rubric tool or the interview tool to facilitate peer assessment. (See Example 4 for an adaptation of the rubric tool for use for peer assessment. See Example 5 for a self-assessment tool developed by the CLRT.) This would involve explicit teaching of how to use the tools, perhaps through modelling an example of work and



group marking it. Group moderation of the results will be essential so that students have multiple opportunities to discuss how they assessed a particular piece of work, what feedback they gave and why they gave that feedback. Remember that students will also need support in making sense of the feedback so that it is formative rather than emotive. This will most likely be a long-term goal and will need school-wide support over a long period of time.

### Summary

In this section we looked at the areas of formative and summative assessment—feed up, feedback and feed forward—and self- and peer assessment. As we begin to look at some assessment tools we should keep the following in mind.

- In order to enhance the critical analytical skills of our students we will want to provide them with explicit teaching of the goals of critical literacy (feed up), as well as feedback and feed forward so that they can continue to develop the practices of a text analyst.
- The majority of the assessment practices that will be used in critical literacy pedagogy will involve assessment for learning and assessment as learning (Earl, 2003). These practices allow us to focus on the teaching–learning cycle as we seek ways to enhance students’ ability to critically analyse texts.
- Rather than capturing “snapshots of learning” (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 104), a rich repertoire of assessment tools should be used that can provide information that informs future teaching and learning. This repertoire should include peer and self-assessment practices.

I am aware that some of these suggestions seem to contradict the postmodern theoretical underpinnings of critical literacy. For example, specific feedback and feed forward on critical literacy may seem to close down rather than open up different interpretations of texts. As suggested earlier, the best way forward is through frequent reflection on the tools that you choose to implement and the consequences of those tools.

### REFLECTIVE INTERLUDE

- Name some of the tools you currently use that could be positioned as assessment for learning and assessment as learning.
- Do you currently make use of peer and self-assessment practices? Why or why not?
- What types of feedback do you give most frequently? In what ways would you like to change your feed up/feedback/feed forward practices (if any)? Why?
- Which area do you want to know more about?
- Try using the rubric (Example 4) with the Jamie Oliver example (Example 1).
- Where would you locate the student example on the rubric? What feedback and feed forward would you give? Why? Moderate your rubric response with a colleague and discuss.

*Example 4: Peer assessment rubric*

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Above expectations</b>	<b>At expectations</b>	<b>Below expectations</b>
<b>Personal experience/knowledge</b>	Clear and relevant evidence of links between text and personal experience/knowledge with appropriate explanation/justification.	Some relevant evidence of links between text and personal experience/knowledge with appropriate explanation/justification.	Little or no relevant evidence of links between text and personal experience/knowledge with appropriate explanation/justification.
<b>Viewpoints</b>	Clear and relevant evidence of multiple viewpoints with appropriate explanation/justification.	Some relevant evidence of multiple viewpoints with appropriate explanation/justification.	Little or no relevant evidence of multiple viewpoints with appropriate explanation/justification.
<b>In-/exclusion</b>	Clear and relevant evidence of in-/exclusion with appropriate explanation/justification.	Some relevant evidence of in-/exclusion with appropriate explanation/justification.	Little or no relevant evidence of in-/exclusion with appropriate explanation/justification.
<b>Representation</b>	Clear and relevant evidence of representation with appropriate explanation/justification.	Some relevant evidence of representation with appropriate explanation/justification.	Little or no relevant evidence of representation with appropriate explanation/justification.
<b>Influence on his/her thinking</b>	Clear and relevant evidence of influence on the student's thinking with appropriate explanation/justification.	Some relevant evidence of influence on the student's thinking with appropriate explanation/justification.	Little or no relevant evidence of influence on the student's thinking with appropriate explanation/justification.
<b>Feedback &amp; feed forward</b>			
<b>Student reflection</b>	Successes & challenges:		

Source: Adapted from (Sandretto & Ledington, 2010)

**Example 5: Self-assessment tool**

	Scale:	1	2	3	4	5	
	Not so much						Very much so
<i>For each statement, rate yourself and provide an example from the text you just read to support your rating.</i>							
1.	I am able to make links between the text and my personal experiences.						.....
	Give an example:						
2.	I am able to identify multiple viewpoints.						.....
	Give an example:						
3.	I am able to identify incidences of inclusion (or exclusion).						.....
	Give an example:						
4.	I am able to discuss how people/animals/topics are represented in the text.						.....
	Give an example:						
5.	I am able to discuss the influence the text has had on my thinking.						.....
	Give an example:						

## Critical literacy assessment tools

In this section we will consider a variety of assessment tools that you may wish to trial in your critical literacy programme. Keep in mind the questions listed earlier (Box 1 is repeated below) and use these to reflect on the tool and the effects of the tool.

### BOX 1: QUESTIONS TO ASK OF ANY CRITICAL LITERACY ASSESSMENT TOOL

1. Does this tool encourage students to consider issues of inclusion, exclusion and/or representation?
2. Does this tool encourage students to draw on their knowledge and experiences or “funds of knowledge”?
3. Does this tool support students to construct multiple meanings of the text?
4. Does this tool encourage students to consider how their analysis of the text has affected their thoughts and/or actions?
5. How does this tool position students and the teacher (expert, novice, deficit, etc.)?

First we consider “roaming around the known” (Clay, 1979, p. 55) as a means to collect information on the initial state of students’ text analysis skills. We will then look at an interview tool and a rubric tool developed in the research project. After that we will look at journals, (e)-portfolios and learning stories as complementary tools that can be added to a critical literacy assessment repertoire.

### Where to start: “Roaming around the known” (Clay, 1979, p. 55)

The basic premise of Marie Clay’s (1979) initial assessment procedure, which she named “roaming around the known” (p. 55), is for teachers to leave their preconceptions about the (dis)abilities of a student aside as a way to get to know each student and his/her capabilities, strategies and strengths. In the case of Clay’s work, “roaming around the known” takes place during the first 2 weeks of the reading recovery programme for a student. The teacher selects texts the student will be able to read with approximately 90 percent accuracy

(Clay, 1979). In Clay's model, this is a period for assessing how well the student is able to break the code and make meaning from texts (Luke & Freebody, 1999). Clay encourages teachers to note the strategies the student uses, the features of print the student is able to recognise, and so on as she/he engages with the text.

Cheryl Dozier, Peter Johnston and Rebecca Rogers (2006) have extended Clay's notion of "roaming around the known"<sup>32</sup> in their work with pre-service teachers to include "roaming the values, experiences, strategies, and proficiencies the children bring from their homes and communities" (p. 63). These are the "funds of knowledge," or the "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 133) that are developed in the social spaces of home, peer groups, communities and popular culture (Moje et al., 2004). As noted in Chapter Two, making use of student experiences and knowledge is an important aspect of critical literacy.

In applying "roaming around the known" to critical literacy pedagogy and assessment, you may wish to give students multiple opportunities to critically analyse a variety of texts as you get to know your students, their capabilities and their funds of knowledge. Don't view these early sessions as teachable moments, but rather gather information on the:

- critical literacy vocabulary your students already have in their repertoire, such as *representation*, *stereotype* and *bias*
- critical literacy strategies your students can deploy, such as analysing for inclusion and exclusion
- funds of knowledge your students draw on
- kinds of texts your students are able to critically analyse, such as digital, written, live, moving and visual
- dialogue skills your students are already able to use, such as up-takes or add-ons.

Also, give your students opportunities to respond both orally and in writing.

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32 They term it "roaming in the known" (Dozier, et al., 2006, p. 61).

These “roaming around the known” critical literacy sessions may resemble critical literacy lessons you will develop later on (see Chapter Four). The difference is that you do not do any direct instruction of metalanguage or dialogue skills, but rather use these first sessions to find out how your students go about the practices of a text analyst. You can then use this information to direct future teaching and learning. And of course this information informs what will be a growing portrait of the ways in which your students are becoming critically literate.

### Interview tool

During the research project we discovered that one of the data sources showed promise as an assessment tool (see Appendix C). As mentioned briefly in Chapter Three, stimulated recall interviews (SRIs) (Calderhead, 1981) are focus group interviews that take place directly after a lesson. The stimulated recall method has its origin in studies by Benjamin Bloom<sup>33</sup> (1953) of students’ thought processes during a range of instructional modes; in particular, lecturing and group discussion. Bloom made audio recordings of class sessions that were played back to the students, who were required to recall what thoughts they had experienced at significant points of the class. In the Critical Literacy Research Project we used SRIs with students to gain insight into their understanding of critical literacy pedagogy.

In conducting the SRIs after each lesson we realised that the SRIs were a very useful way to chart student understanding of critical literacy because they gave a great amount of in-depth data that teachers could use as either assessment of or assessment for learning (Earl, 2003). Teachers could use the SRI schedule developed during the project as a means to gather data at various points during the year on student understanding of critical literacy that could inform their teaching. Questions such as “What does critical literacy mean to you?” and “If you were the teacher, what would you do to help students learn about critical literacy?” provide valuable insights into students’ understanding, particularly when combined with other tools. Although the SRIs were not originally

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33 You may be familiar with his work through *Bloom’s Taxonomy* (Bloom, 1984).

formulated as an assessment tool, we came to see their promise as one tool in a growing repertoire of literacy assessment tools.

Let's take a look at some of the information we gathered. In one set of SRI transcripts we can see the shifts for a group of Year 12 students. In their first SRI we encounter:

Researcher: What do you think were the key points in today's lesson?

Student 2: Racism.

Student 5: Effects of racism.

(SRI, Year 12, 3/4/07, p. 1)

Here the students are focused on what they viewed as the content of the lesson: racism and Jim Crow laws in the South at the time that *To Kill a Mockingbird* was written. They were unable to articulate any responses to what they thought critical literacy involved.

In the next SRI, we find:

Researcher: The first thing we want to know is what you think were the key points in the lesson today.

Student 1: Different perspectives.

Student 2: Yeah, different perspectives, or how the author ... wrote, so that different people had different views in the story.

Researcher: What does critical literacy mean to you?

Student 1: I don't know.

Student 2: Lots of talking.

Student 4: Discussions.

Student 3: Critically analysing a character or passage from a book.

Student 5: A lot of stuff that may not make much sense to why we're doing it, but it actually helps us understand the story better.

Researcher: If someone came in and you had to describe what critical literacy was to them, a new student for example?

Student 2: Discussions.

Student 3: Bringing across lots of perspectives of different people.

(SRI, Year 12, 22/5/07, pp. 1-2)



In this excerpt we begin to see a shift from a focus on the content of the lesson to the skills that are also being taught. The students begin to see the discussion involved in the critical literacy lesson as an integral component of critical literacy. They also see *critical* as involving critical analysis to support them to better understand the story. Finally, they now view critical literacy as a means to consider different perspectives and the ways in which the author has constructed the story to include or exclude different perspectives.

In the third SRI for this group we see:

Researcher: What do you think were the key points in the lesson today?

Student 2: Perspective of the community of mathematics around John Nash [in the movie *A Beautiful Mind*].

Student 3: The changes in the perspective ... of how Nash was seeing ...

Researcher: What does critical literacy mean to you?

Student 4: Is it what different people think of different text?

Student 3: Or what an author or director tries to make the reader think by doing certain things in the text?

Student 2: A discussion.

(SRI, Year 12, 24/7/07, pp. 1–2)

This excerpt is very similar to the one above. The students view critical literacy as a means to consider the different perspectives in a text. In addition, critical literacy lessons involve discussion. One thing that is different between the two excerpts is that the lessons used different texts. For the May excerpt, the students considered the historical context of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In the July excerpt, the students considered the movie *A Beautiful Mind*. These two excerpts demonstrate the students' ability to view critical literacy as a skill that can be applied across multiple text types.

In the final interview for this group we find:

Researcher: Do you think there are certain issues that critical literacy lessons help you explore?

Student 1: It helps to see different views of the same thing. Like different people see one thing in a different light.

- Student 2: You have the discussion area ... you know the other ways that the other people see it, so you understand the other ways of seeing something.
- Researcher: What sort of topics, themes or issues do you think critical literacy might be useful to explore?
- Student 3: Issues.
- Researcher: What do you mean by issues?
- Student 3: How you get like more than one person's point of view. You don't just get your own point of view, you get everyone's.
- Student 4: Debate.
- Researcher: Stuff that's open to discussion would you say?
- Student 4: Yeah.
- Student 1: Like anything that has two sides to it.
- Researcher: Is it just two sides?
- Student 2: No, multiple sides, anything which can have different takes and different ways of looking at it. Debates.

(SRI, Year 12, 11/9/07, p. 2)

In this excerpt the students view critical literacy as a useful tool for exploring multiple viewpoints on different issues. It is also useful to inform debates. Thus, over the course of the year the students have shifted from being unable to articulate any understanding of critical literacy to describing critical literacy as being about considering multiple perspectives on texts.

These statements from students gained during the SRIs convinced the CLRT of its promise as an assessment tool. There is surprisingly little discussion of interviews for critical literacy assessment in the literature. This is surprising primarily because the use of either individual or focus group interviews is in keeping with our discussion of the use of dialogic instruction for critical literacy pedagogy (see Chapter Three). Thus the use of an interview assessment tool represents a form of authentic assessment in that it is “an assessment requiring students to use the same competencies, or combinations of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, that they need to apply in the criterion situation in professional life” (Gulikers, Bastiaens, & Kirschner, 2004, p. 69).

Lisa Patel Stevens and Thomas Bean (2007) briefly describe the case of one teacher who used individual interviews with each student as a means to find out “about her transformed understandings” (p. 91). Interviews can be conducted individually or with small groups, or teachers may wish to pilot interviews where students interview each other to generate greater student ownership of critical literacy skills (as well as supporting students to develop the research skill of interviewing). Students interviewing other students is in keeping with the principles of assessment as learning (Earl, 2003).

As with any assessment tool, there are some limitations to interviews. One limitation is that individual interviews with students are a time-consuming process. One way to mitigate this limitation would be to have students interview other students. The responses would be written or audiotaped for later evaluation.

Another limitation involves the issue of trying to access tacit thinking. Many New Zealand teachers will be familiar with the diagnostic interview used in the Numeracy Project (Ministry of Education, 2007a). Used in this context, the diagnostic interview is a means to examine the mental strategies the students use to solve problems. However, Gavin Brown, Earl Irving and Peter Keegan (2008) caution that it is difficult to assess student responses about their thinking processes. Students may not be able to express their thinking in words, or they may try to please the teacher and tell him/her what they think their teacher wants to hear. These cautions also apply to the interview used to examine a student’s thinking about critical literacy. Nonetheless, interviews, used in conjunction with some of the other tools in this chapter, have the potential to provide teachers with a glimpse of the ways in which their students are developing the skills and strategies of a text analyst.

### **Rubric tool**

Rubrics are largely concerned with performance assessment (García & Pearson, 1994) and can be constructed to reflect the complexity of any given task. Heather Fehring (2005) claims that in our current context of traditional standardised assessment tools, combined

with the need to engage students with multiliteracies, “personalized literacy assessment matrices and rubrics still bridge the gap between the old and new literacy assessment practices” (p. 101). In the light of Fehring’s argument, the CLRT chose to explore the promise of a rubric (see below).

### *Critical literacy rubric cover sheet*

#### Underpinning principles (philosophy)

- All texts are social constructions. (Thus this point on the poster is not directly assessed.)
- Critical literacy is a cumulative set of critical thinking strategies/skills that will be developed and enhanced over a number of years and practised over a lifetime.
- Critical literacy is about supporting students to become aware of multiple interpretations.

#### Assessment design

- Pre/post-test design.
- “Snapshot” of students’ critical thinking.
- Supplements running record and/or STAR data.
- To be used with small groups in a guided reading lesson.
- In some circumstances the teacher may elect to conduct an individual assessment.
- Teacher may elect to use as a self- or peer assessment tool.

#### Purpose

- Pre-test is to inform teaching and learning.
- Post-test is to gauge progress and next-step learning.

Task development (responsibility of teacher)

1. Lessons using the rubric have been developed for the purpose of critical literacy assessment.
2. Provide as many opportunities as possible for students to articulate their thinking and achieve each aspect of critical literacy.
3. Allow for wait time during questioning and use neutral responses to student answers.
4. Use follow-up questions such as, “Why do you think that?” or “Can you explain further?” or “What makes you think that?” or “Explain your thinking” to provide an opportunity for students to justify their responses.
5. In order to assess all five areas, multiple lessons will be necessary. (In an ideal world assessment would be completed within a fortnight.)
6. Attach a copy of the CL lesson plan templates.

Level of performance

With support

- Student is able to demonstrate aspect of critical literacy with teacher prompting and/or scaffolding.

Identifies

- Student is able to state, list or record with regard to critical literacy aspect, but does not provide justification even when prompted.

Justifies

- Student is able to rationalise, explain, or debate with regard to critical literacy aspect with or without prompting.

Expectations

Age of the student and exposure to critical literacy will be among the many factors determining the level of performance. We caution teachers to avoid viewing the assessment rubric as the sole indicator of the student’s overall achievement and growth in critical literacy. It is intended to be part of a larger programme of formative and summative assessment.

## CRITICAL LITERACY RUBRIC

<b>Link to poster</b>	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>With support</b>	<b>Identifies:</b> list, state, record	<b>Justifies:</b> explain, debate, “because...”	<b>Independent</b> able to discuss multiple texts without prompting
All readers have different knowledge and experiences they bring to texts	The student is able to recognise: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• links between text and personal experience/ knowledge</li> </ul>				
Readers will make sense of texts differently	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• multiple viewpoints</li> </ul>				
People make choices about who and/or what is included so some things and/or people may be excluded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• occurrences of in/exclusion in the text</li> </ul>				
Choices are made about how things and/ or people are represented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how people/ animals/topics are represented in the text</li> </ul>				
We can develop an awareness of how texts influence our thoughts and actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• influence of text on his/her thinking</li> </ul>				

The CLRT developed the rubric in a workshop following the rubric development guidelines outlined in Jon Mueller's (2008) online resource. Colleagues working in the area of educational assessment then evaluated the draft rubric before implementation began. The rubric follows the key concepts captured in the critical literacy poster. By starting with the poster, we argue that the curricular validity (Lissitz & Samuelsen, 2007; Mills, 2008) of the rubric has been enhanced. In other words, we believe that the rubric reflects the curriculum the students received and thus represents a form of authentic assessment (Newmann & Archbald, 1992). I am using the term *authentic assessment* here to mean "an assessment requiring students to use the same competencies, or combinations of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, that they need to apply in the criterion situation in professional life" (Gulikers, et al., 2004, p. 69). In this case, we are using the rubric to comment on the critical literacy skills that we expect students to apply to any given text.

The rubric development included the co-construction of a cover sheet that outlined the underpinning philosophy of the rubric: assessment design, purpose, task development, level of performance and expectations (see above). This was developed as a way to make explicit the thinking that underpinned the development and expectations for the use of the rubric. We hope that the cover sheet will support others to trial the rubric in their contexts.

We used a pre- and post-test design to evaluate the usefulness of the rubric (see Sandretto, 2009). The participating primary and secondary teachers piloted the rubric with a focus group of students using the same sorts of lessons the students were receiving in class. The researchers used the rubric with primary students who were at the same level and attended the same school as the students in the project, but who were in different classes and thus not receiving instruction in critical literacy from participating teachers. We were able to collect a complete data set (pre- and post-test results) on 31 students involved in the project and nine who were not involved. The rubric was completed as the teacher, or researcher, categorised students during the discussion over the course of a lesson. Data

analysis for evaluating the rubric consisted of frequency counts of the categorised rubrics and then comparing the results for students involved and not involved in the project.

We found the rubric to be a flexible tool to chart student understanding of critical literacy when used to assess student responses during discussion. For example (Table 4), we found in a Year 2/3 class that was not involved in the project that at the beginning of the year, over two guided reading lessons, all the students in the focus group were located in the “identifies” and “justifies” categories. At the end of the year this focus group was still located in these same categories, with two students needing support on one aspect (“how people/animals/topics are represented in the text”). This represented little or no growth in critical literacy skills.

In a Year 5/6 classroom that was involved in the project (Table 5), the teacher found that at the beginning of the year the students were very mixed, with results falling in each category. Four students were able to independently make links between the text and their own experiences/knowledge. At the end of the year the focus group had made gains in most areas, with most students in the “justifies” category. There was an exception of one student, who made no progress in the “links between text and personal experience/knowledge”. However, the students who at the beginning of the year could independently make links between the text and their own experiences/knowledge had shifted to “justifies”. This finding warrants further exploration because it could be attributed to a number of reasons, including a lack of focused instruction in that area or differently categorised rubric results.



**TABLE 4: RUBRIC RESULTS, YEAR 2/3 CLASS NOT IN PROJECT**

Criteria	With support		Identifies list, state, record		Justifies explain, debate, “because...”		Independent able to apply to multiple texts without prompting	
	Term 1	Term 4	Term 1	Term 4	Term 1	Term 4	Term 1	Term 4
Links between text and personal experience/knowledge			M* A Z S R	M A Z S R				
Multiple viewpoints				Z A	M A Z S R	M S R		
Occurrences of in-/exclusion in the text			M A Z S R	R Z M S		A		
How people/animals/topic are represented in the text	Z R		M A Z S R			M A S		
Influence of text on his/her thinking				Z	M A Z S R	M A S R		

\* Note: Letters represent individual students.

**TABLE 5: RUBRIC RESULTS, YEAR 5/6 CLASS IN PROJECT**

Criteria	With support		Identifies list, state, record		Justifies explain, debate, “because...”		Independent able to apply to multiple texts without prompting	
	Term 1	Term 4	Term 1	Term 4	Term 1	Term 4	Term 1	Term 4
Links between text and personal experience/ knowledge	C	C				D M H A	A D H M	
Multiple viewpoints	C		A D H M			C H M A D		
Occurrences of in-/exclusion in the text	C D		H		A M	C A D M H		
How people/ animals/ topics are represented in the text			C M A D		H	A M D C H		
Influence of text on his/her thinking	C		H D		M	A H M D C	A	

Although not statistically significant, we can see the promise in the rubric tool by comparing the two groups of students' aggregated pre- and post-test scores across the performance levels (Figures 18 and 19). For the students involved in the project (Figure 18), there are more pre-test responses in the lower performance levels and more post-test responses in the higher performance levels. When comparing this to the students not involved in the project (Figure 19), there is clearly less movement for the students: most students were located in the "identifies" and "justifies" categories for both the pre- and post-tests.

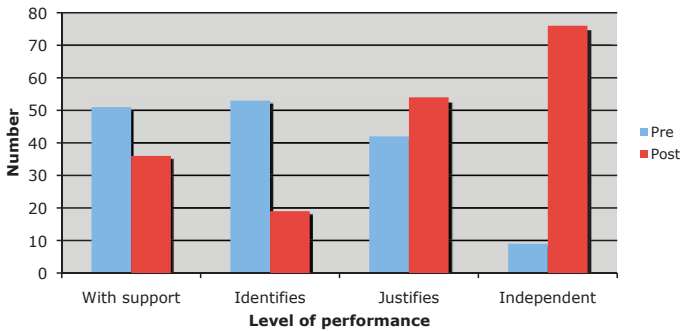


FIGURE 18: PRE- AND POST-TEST RESULTS FOR STUDENTS INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT

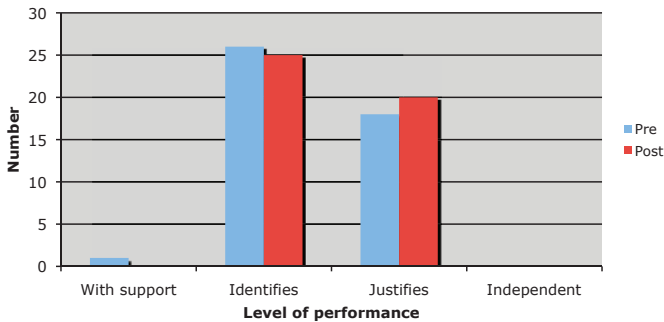


FIGURE 19: PRE- AND POST-TEST RESULTS FOR STUDENTS NOT INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT

These findings gave the CLRT some assurance that the rubric was measuring what we sought to measure. We also found that the rubric could be used to measure how students applied critical literacy strategies to a particular text, or to measure their understanding of critical literacy terms and concepts more generally. We believe that the rubric is a flexible tool that accommodates a range of text types. The secondary teachers also suggested that the rubric could be used as a self-assessment tool, a practice supported by Fehring (2005).

There are, however, some limitations to the rubric we developed. The participating teachers commented that it was difficult to categorise groups of students “on the fly” during a lesson. Teachers may wish to audiotape student responses to rubric assessment to avoid having to make decisions on the fly. It was also difficult for teachers new to critical literacy to use the rubric as a pre-test. The CLRT suggested that teachers new to critical literacy who wish to use the rubric in a pre-/post-test design may wish to have a more experienced colleague administer the pre-test. Having a colleague administer the rubric may also address the concern that some teachers may not be reliable in their interpretations and may be more (or less) generous in their recording of results, also known as inter-rater reliability (e.g. Andrade, 2005; Moskal & Leydens, 2000).

There is limited discussion on the use of rubrics for assessment in the critical literacy literature. Roberta Hammett (2007), for example, reflects on the ways in which currently existing literacy assessment in the Canadian context fails to attend to “more complex aspects of critical literacy” (p. 348) and suggests that teachers and students might co-construct rubrics that more closely resemble and reinforce the critical literacy skills we are seeking to develop. Fehring (2005) agrees: “The most effective rubrics have been developed in a collaborative partnership between teachers and their students” (p. 107). Yvonne Reed (2008) reminds us to be cautious in trying to capture “the magic” of the complexity inherent in the critical analysis of a text (see also Newfield, Andrew, Stein, & Maungedzo, 2003). Reed, like Fehring (2005) and Hammett (2007), advocates the co-construction of assessment criteria.

## Journals

Journals are used to support and assess learning across a number of different subjects and with different kinds of learners (Butler & McMunn, 2006). Reflective journals are commonly used to support teachers to critically reflect on their teaching practice (Roe & Stallman, 1994; Sandretto, Kane, & Heath, 2002; Spalding & Wilson, 2002). Journals have been used with university students to promote reflection in online classes (Andrusyszyn & Davie, 1997), with secondary students to support mathematical learning and instruction (Borasi & Rose, 1989), and with primary students to support the development of their information literacy skills (Harada, 2006), to name but a few examples. In the case of critical literacy pedagogy, journals could be used to capture changes in student understanding of critical literacy over time. As a rich source of information for formative assessment they can be used as a self-assessment tool or a peer-assessment tool (Earl & Katz, 2008).

One common use of journals is the dialogue journal (Ghahremani-Ghajar & Mirhosseini, 2005; Peyton & Seyoum, 1989; Roe & Stallman, 1994). Dialogue journals capture the written dialogue between a student and a teacher (Peyton, 2000) on a topic of the student's choice (Gambrell, 1985). In dialogue journals, teachers typically focus on communicating with the student by prompting the student and responding to questions rather than making corrections to surface features such as spelling or grammar (Peyton, 2000). The most powerful feature of the dialogue journal is the timely teacher response (Gambrell, 1985). Many teachers have found that dialogue journals enable them to strengthen their relationships with students as they get to know them better (Gambrell, 1985). Sue-san Ghahremani-Ghajar and Seyyed Mirhosseini (2005) used dialogue journals to support *both* the English-language development *and* the critical literacy of their high school students. They found that with the support of dialogue with the teacher, the students' critical entries increased over the course of the year.

Along similar lines to dialogue journals, Mary Nicolini (2008) used letter writing as a means to encourage the development of critical

literacy. Her high school students used anonymous letter writing to participate in “dialogue at a distance” (Moffett, 1992 cited in Gambrell, 1985, p. 77). She found that the letter writing supported the development of critical literacy in students who did not speak during class discussions, and encouraged students to support and defend a position on a particular topic (the death penalty) and to consider other viewpoints.

Online journals, weblogs (or blogs, as they are commonly referred to), provide an electronic forum for journal writing (Huffaker, 2005; Wilber, 2007). Blogs represent just one of the many tools available through Web 2.0 (Beach, Clemens, & Jamsen, 2009). Students’ use of Web 2.0 digital communication tools allows them to be involved “in social interaction as both readers and writers of digital texts through not only sharing information but also persuading others to adopt a certain position on a topic or issue” (Beach, et al., 2009, p. 157). Young people are taking up blogging through sites such as LiveJournal (<http://www.livejournal.com>) or Blogger ([www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com)) at a rapid rate (Huffaker, 2005). Blogs work on the same basic premise as a personal journal, with a very important distinction: blogs blur the lines between the private and the public (Davies & Merchant, 2007).

Many readers will be familiar with the movie *Julie & Julia* (Ephron, 2009), about a young woman who sets out to cook all of the recipes in Julia Child’s *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* (Beck, Bertholle, & Child, 1961) and captures her efforts in a blog (Powell, 2002). This is the first film based on a blog. Blogging has shifted from early incarnations that were focused on more diary-like entries, to current versions that are more focused on social networking (Davies & Merchant, 2007). Online blogging allows bloggers to connect with each other and publish their journal entries instantly, as well as archive past entries. Blogs can be open to the public or set to allow only authorised users. Teachers who wish to use a blog as a critical literacy assessment tool will need to make decisions about the privacy settings: Is the student’s blog only open to the student author and the teacher, to the class, to the school, to parents? It will be important to consider the “fitness for purpose” (James, 2008, p. 34)

rule of thumb when using blogs—or any of the assessment tools discussed in this chapter for that matter. Decisions made about the purpose of the assessment tool, blogs in this instance, will shape the decisions teachers make about how to best structure those tools.

As with any tool, there are some limitations to using journals for critical literacy assessment. Susan Butler and Nancy McMunn (2006) detail some ways that journals have been used in different subject areas. They note that journals can provide a space where students disclose personal information, which can raise sticky ethical issues for teachers. They suggest that teachers who use journals make it clear to students that they have an ethical obligation to report some kinds of information, such as disclosure of abuse, to the authorities if it is shared with them. Notwithstanding this potential limitation, journals can be a useful means to connect to students' prior knowledge, or to check to see how the key points from a lesson have (or have not) been taken up by students.

In addition to any ethical issues that may arise, teachers will find that to benefit from the use of journals requires an investment of time. Linda Gambrell (1985) suggests that teachers may wish to rotate through small groups of students rather than work with the whole class as one way to mitigate this limitation. Teachers find that with practice they become more efficient and focused at responding to the journals. After working with small groups, teachers may wish to work with the whole class.

An advantage of using journals, as noted earlier, is their potential to strengthen relationships. Stephanie Jones (2006) used a home-school weekly journal as a means to communicate with the families of her students. These journals did not have a set format but provided an open channel of communication with the family. Each week the teacher wrote a short note to the family in the journal. The family could respond in any way they wanted: ask questions, share concerns, write shared stories, disclose information they thought was important for the teacher to know, and so on. These journal entries provided the teacher with a way to get to know each student and family a bit better, and thus make better use of the student's knowledge and experiences

in critical literacy lessons. Not only do these home–school journals have the potential to enrich critical literacy pedagogy, but there is also a great deal of value in having strong relationships between families and the school (Comber & Kamler, 2004).

There are a number of different ways that the use of a journal to capture learning in critical literacy could be structured. Using some of the questions from the interview, students could be asked to reflect on a particular critical literacy lesson, as follows:

- What do you think were the key points in today’s lesson?
- What did you learn about critical literacy today?
- What did the teacher do today to help you learn about critical literacy?
- Why do you think we’re doing critical literacy?
- How confident are you to express your own point of view when it is different to that of the teacher (or the majority of the class)? Why?
- If you were the teacher, what would you do to help students learn about critical literacy?
- Which critical literacy question would you ask of (a particular text)? Why?

If the teacher wants a less structured journal format, she/he can follow the dialogue journal idea, encouraging students to write on any topic of their choice. Teachers can then respond to student writing through carefully structured comments and questions designed to further develop students’ critical analysis.

### **(E)-portfolios**

Many teachers will be familiar with the use of portfolios as tools to inform the assessment of learning and assessment for learning (Butler & McMunn, 2006; James, et al., 2006; Valencia & Calfee, 1991). Butler and McMunn (2006) define a portfolio as “a *purposeful*, integrated collection of student work showing effort, progress or a degree of proficiency” (p. 66, original emphasis). They go on to describe five types of portfolios that are useful for assessment: best



work, memorabilia, growth, skills and proficiency, and promotion. These five types are by and large self-explanatory. A best work portfolio is a collection of the student's exemplary work, often in art or writing. A memorabilia portfolio is less common: much like a scrapbook, memorabilia portfolios are a collection of artifacts that can provide information about student interests and attitudes. A growth portfolio is used to demonstrate changes in student skills or abilities. This is probably the most common type of portfolio found in classrooms. The skills portfolio demonstrates proficiency in particular areas. Finally, the proficiency or promotion portfolio contains evidence that the student has met particular standards.

Electronic portfolios, or e-portfolios, take advantage of the affordances available through Web 2.0 communication tools (Beach, et al., 2009). For example, students in the English Department at the University of Minnesota can:

Upload a draft of one of the required documents, annotate the draft with questions and comments; write a reflection about an aspect of the document such as writing issues, audience, purpose, or questions; and then share the document electronically with one or several peers, instructors, and/or advisors, requesting feedback. (Beach, et al., 2009, p. 172)

One of the strengths of electronic portfolios is the flexibility available for teachers and students. At the same time, the full potential of the e-portfolio will not be realised if it is just treated as "an electronic filing cabinet" (Beach, et al., 2009, p. 174).

There are commercially available e-portfolio tools (Beach, et al., 2009), but they have been criticised for being expensive and inflexible (Beach, Campano, Edminston, & Borgmann, 2010). However, schools and teachers don't have to invest in these tools. It is possible to use blogs or wikis as an e-portfolio (Beach, et al., 2010). The difference between an "ordinary" blog or wiki and a blog or wiki converted into an e-portfolio is the level of self-reflection a student engages in about his or her work.

Whether you choose a paper portfolio or an e-portfolio, a crucial element of portfolio assessment is reflection (Kimball, 2005). Miles Kimball (2005) discusses portfolio pedagogy and explains that

Reflection undergirds the entire pedagogy of portfolios. It is the reason we collect—so we can reflect on what we have done. It is the rationale by which we select—the basis upon which we build the criteria for mature discretion. Without reflection, portfolio-making is lowered to the status of record-keeping. (p. 451)

In other words, if we don't support students to reflect on their work, we will lose the learning potential of the portfolio (Beach, et al., 2010). When reflection is a key component of portfolio pedagogy, portfolios can provide rich evidence to prompt student self-assessment, or assessment as learning (James, et al., 2006).

Harrison (2004) suggests that the use of portfolio assessment is in keeping with postmodern principles of assessment. He argues that portfolio assessment

is directly valuable to both teacher and student, it emphasises the individual, it makes use of a variety of evidence sources, it provides a site for authentic reading tasks, it gives the reader a sense of ownership and finally permits the reader to be an advocate for their own performance; taking a stronger authority position as a maker of meaning. (pp. 168-169)

Thus, when combined with other assessment tools, portfolios have the potential to provide a practice that is in keeping with our theories of critical literacy.

One of the limitations of using portfolios as an assessment tool is that it is difficult to manage validity and reliability across student portfolios (Valencia & Calfee, 1991). This means that it is difficult to judge how accurate the evaluations of the portfolio are across groups of students. If teachers and students use portfolios together to inform future teaching and learning, however, the validity and reliability issues of assessment of learning (or summative assessment) fade. Another limitation of using portfolio assessment is time. Like most of the tools discussed in this chapter, in order to realise the potential of a portfolio assessment tool, teachers and students need to invest sufficient time (Valencia & Calfee, 1991).

How might portfolios or e-portfolios be used to support critical literacy pedagogy? There are a number of potential formats. Students could be asked to provide evidence for and reflect on:

- connections between the text and personal experience
- multiple viewpoints
- inclusion and exclusion
- representation
- the effects of texts on thinking and actions.

The construction and reflection of the portfolio could be supported by using the self-assessment tool. Students could also work in groups using the peer-assessment rubric or conference with the teacher (Beach, et al., 2010).

### Learning stories

In the New Zealand early childhood context, the concept of using stories to document learning in all of its complexity was developed as a means to implement assessment practices that mirrored the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), the early childhood curriculum (Carr, 2001; Carr et al., 2002). Learning stories begin with observation of the child in a classroom setting and have four aspects: describing, discussing, documenting, and deciding (Carr, 2001).

Stories are attractive to us as teachers. We tell them all the time. We use them to make sense of our students and our teaching (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Stories are increasingly used in educational research as a way “of capturing the complexity, specificity, and interconnectedness of the phenomenon with which we deal” (Carter, 1993, p. 6). The first step in constructing a learning story is to *describe* a learning event. In the case of early childhood education, this would be a learning event that captured one, or more, of the five strands of *Te Whāriki* (Carr, et al., 2002). If we are applying learning stories to critical literacy, the first step would be to describe a learning episode that portrays one or more of the key aspects of our understanding of critical literacy (e.g., inclusion, exclusion, all readers have different knowledge and experiences that they bring to texts, and so on). The step of describing is about emphasising what students are able to do (Carr, 2001), rather than taking a deficit approach that focuses on what students are not able to do (Bishop, 2005).

The next step is to *discuss* the learning episode with colleagues, students and families (Carr, 2001). These discussions serve a number of purposes and can position learning stories as assessment for learning or assessment as learning. In the case of critical literacy, discussing the event with students provides them, and the teacher, with another opportunity to revisit key aspects of critical literacy. This discussion is an opportunity for the teacher to feed back to the student, which lies at the heart of formative assessment, or assessment for learning (Swaffield, 2008; Taras, 2005). The discussion also provides an opportunity to celebrate what the student is able to do.

A further powerful aspect of this second step is the opportunity for students to provide input into the learning story through the discussion between the teacher and the student. Discussion can also take place between the teacher and the student's parents/caregivers. This discussion provides an opportunity to communicate key aspects of critical literacy to the family in a format they may find accessible: a story. Finally, when discussing the learning story with colleagues, teachers are provided with professional development opportunities to reflect on their critical literacy understanding and pedagogy.

The third step is to *document* the learning event (Carr, 2001). This can be accomplished in a number of different ways, including using Figure 20, as well as photos, scans of student work or even videotapes. Student and parent/caregiver learning stories can also be incorporated using Figure 21. Student and/or parent/caregiver stories add to the growing portrait of the student's development as a text analyst.

5: CRITICAL LITERACY INSTRUCTION AND THE TENSION OF ASSESSMENT

Name:

Date:

Link to poster	Focus	√	Learning story
All readers have different knowledge and experiences that they bring to texts.	Student recognises links between the text(s) and personal knowledge/ experience.		
Readers will make sense of texts differently.	Student recognises multiple viewpoints		
People make choices about who and/or what is included so some things and/or people may be excluded.	Student recognises occurrences of in-/ exclusion in the text(s)		
Choices are made about how things and/or people are represented.	Student recognises how people/animals/topics are represented in the text(s).		
We can develop an awareness of how texts influence our thoughts and actions.	Student recognises the influence of the text(s) on his/her thinking.		

Discussion (What learning is happening here?)	Deciding (Where to next?)

FIGURE 20: CRITICAL LITERACY LEARNING STORY

Source: modelled after (Carr, 2001, p. 146)

**Student and/or parent comments****Student name:****Date:****Story teller** (student/parent/caregiver):

<b>Link to poster</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>√</b>	<b>Learning story</b>
All readers have different knowledge and experiences that they bring to texts.	Student recognises links between the text(s) and personal knowledge/ experience.		
Readers will make sense of texts differently.	Student recognises multiple viewpoints		
People make choices about who and/or what is included so some things and/or people may be excluded.	Student recognises occurrences of in-/exclusion in the text(s)		
Choices are made about how things and/or people are represented.	Student recognises how people/animals/topics are represented in the text(s).		
We can develop an awareness of how texts influence our thoughts and actions.	Student recognises the influence of the text(s) on his/her thinking.		

**FIGURE 21: CRITICAL LITERACY LEARNING STORY: STUDENT AND/OR PARENT COMMENTS**

Source: modelled after (Carr, 2001, p. 146).

The fourth and final step is *deciding* where to go next (Carr, 2001). Like discussing, this step also links to the formative assessment aspect of learning stories (Earl, 2003). That is, learning stories can be viewed as formative assessment if the comparison between what the student is able to do and what is possible “yields information which is then used to alter the gap” (Black & Wiliam, 1998a, p. 53).

## Summary

In this section we have discussed a number of tools that teachers may wish to trial in their critical literacy programme. “Roaming around the known” (Clay, 1979), has been suggested as a tool that can support teachers to understand where students are starting from. Other tools that teachers may be familiar with include interviews, rubrics, journals, (e)-portfolios and learning stories. Each of these tools can be adapted for use with critical literacy pedagogy. It is important to keep in mind that no one tool alone will suffice to capture student learning of critical literacy. Finally, it is important to remember that regular reflection, on the part of teachers and students, will be necessary to continually revise the tools. The questions listed in the reflective interlude below are intended to support reflection on and revision of the tools.

### REFLECTIVE INTERLUDE

- Which assessment tools will you use? Why?
- What are the potential strengths and limitations of your selected tools?
- Do these tools encourage students to consider issues of inclusion, exclusion and/or representation?
- Do these tools encourage students to draw on their knowledge and experiences, or “funds of knowledge”?
- Do these tools support students to construct multiple meanings of the text?
- Do these tools encourage students to consider how their analysis of the text has affected their thoughts and/or actions?
- How do these tools position students and the teacher (expert, novice, deficit, etc.)?

## Conclusion

We began this chapter by considering the theories and practices of assessment. I suggested that we need to be cautious and continually reflect on the assessment tools we select to support critical literacy pedagogy to ensure they are in keeping with the theories of critical literacy that we espouse. As noted by one of the students in the project, “Critical literacy gets your brain thinking” (SRI, Year 5/6, 3/4/07, p. 4). Yet critical literacy is difficult to assess using the sorts of standardised tools that are currently available to teachers (Fehring, 2005; Mills, 2008). In this chapter we have discussed six promising tools that teachers can adapt to suit their contexts. The chapter provides just one example of how “assessment practices ... [could be] productive” (Morgan & Wyatt-Smith, 2000, p. 130) in terms of helping students and teachers to produce more diverse literacy practices.

I believe that the assessment tools discussed here show a great deal of promise when used as part of a larger repertoire of assessment strategies. Kalantzis, Cope and Harvey (2003), for example, advocate for project, performance, group and portfolio assessment as flexible forms of assessment that are “grounded in processes that reflect current understandings of learning, literacy and society” (Johnston & Costello, 2005, p. 265). I believe that the promise of these tools can be enhanced by working alongside students to develop and refine them (see also Fehring, 2005). This co-construction of the aims and forms of assessment may help us to avoid *camouflage* (Cumming & Maxwell, 1999), whereby a traditional form of assessment is “dressed up to appear authentic” (p. 188).

As noted in the introduction, current initiatives in assessment in New Zealand promote a more active role for students in assessment practices (Absolum, et al., 2009). A very promising and powerful way forward for critical literacy assessment is to work *with* students to revise any of the assessment tools described in this chapter and develop new assessment tools (Fehring, 2005). In the project described in this book, we found students to be very generous in offering critique and suggestions on how to improve our practices. For example, when asked, “If you were the teacher what would you do



to help students learn about critical literacy?”, one student replied, “Well maybe ... instead of the teacher always asking the questions, maybe the students could ask some of the questions” (SRI, Year 5/6, 24/8/06, p. 6). Suggestions from students like these warrant further investigation as a means to augment our critical literacy pedagogies.

Finally, I am well aware of the tension between the theories and goals of critical literacy and those of assessment (Morgan & Wyatt-Smith, 2000). Yet at the same time I firmly believe that assessment and teaching go hand in hand (Bouffler, 1992); that is, like theory and practice they need one another. Thus, while proclaiming that we must be cautious about standardising the tools we have discussed here, I also wish the tools to be of use to other teachers and researchers interested in critical literacy. What I want to emphasise here is that I believe the greatest promise lies in the ways in which the tools of assessment discussed in this chapter arose directly from the ways in which the CLRT theorised and enacted critical literacy. In other words, this *localised process* may hold the greatest promise for the future of critical literacy theory and practice that supports students to engage with texts in meaningful ways. For example:

- Researcher: What does critical literacy mean to you?  
 Student 3: How people represent their thoughts through texts.  
 Student 4: How we interpret texts and we get different meanings out of the text.  
 Student 1: Um, how different people write texts differently and like the bits that they don't put in it.

(SRI, Year 7/8, 21/6/07, p. 2)

## Suggested further reading

### *Assessment for learning*

- Black, P., Harrison, C., Lee, C., Marshall, B., & Wiliam, D. (2003). *Assessment for learning: Putting it into practice*. Maidenhead, Berkshire, UK: Open University Press.
- Earl, L. (2003). *Assessment as learning: Using classroom assessment to maximize student learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Swaffield, S. (Ed.). (2008). *Unlocking assessment: Understanding for reflection and application*. London, UK: Routledge.

### **Feedback**

- Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(1), 81–112.
- Swaffield, S. (2008). Feedback: The central process in assessment for learning. In S. Swaffield (Ed.), *Unlocking assessment: Understanding for reflection and application* (pp. 57–72). London, UK: Routledge.

### **Self-assessment and peer assessment**

- Clarke, S. (2005). *Formative assessment in the secondary classroom*. London, UK: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Earl, L., & Katz, S. (2008). Getting to the core of learning: Using assessment for self-monitoring and self-regulation. In S. Swaffield (Ed.), *Unlocking assessment: Understanding for reflection and application* (pp. 90–104). London, UK: Routledge.

### **Assessment tools**

- Carr, M. (2001). *Assessment in early childhood settings: Learning stories*. London, UK: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Clay, M. M. (1979). *The early detection of reading difficulties*. Auckland: Heinemann.
- Gambrell, L. B. (1985). Dialogue journals: Reading-writing interaction. *The Reading Teacher*, 38(6), 512–515.
- Hammett, R. F. (2007). Assessment and new literacies. *E-Learning*, 4(3), 343–354.
- Valencia, S. W., & Calfee, R. (1991). The development and use of literacy portfolios for students, classes and teachers. *Applied Measurement in Education*, 4(4), 333–345.