

October 2018

## Critical Literacy: Across the K-6 Curriculum

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### Recommended Citation

Christ, Tanya (2018) "Critical Literacy: Across the K-6 Curriculum," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 51: Iss. 1, Article 11.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol51/iss1/11>

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# Critical Literacy: Across the K-6 Curriculum

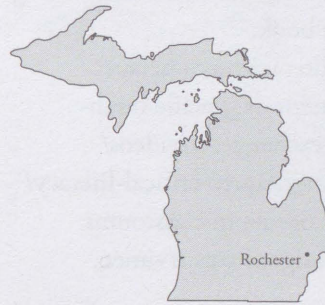
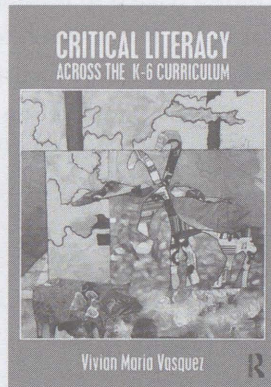
by Tanya Christ, Ph.D.

Vasquez, V. (2017). *Critical literacy: Across the k-6 curriculum*. New York, NY: Routledge.  
ISBN 978-1138188495

Vivian Vasquez's (2017) new book, *Critical Literacy: Across the K-6 Curriculum*, builds on her own and others' work on developing and implementing critical literacies as a teaching stance, rather than as content. She describes the purpose of critical literacies as "creating spaces" for students "to participate in the world differently" (p. 2). If you are wondering what this kind of practice might look like, the book provides 11 chapters with narratives and vignettes that describe such practices across content areas, and figures that demonstrate connections between theories and these practices. Vasquez suggests that this approach to teaching can be used to "build curriculum from their [students'] interests" so the work has "importance to their lives" (p. 2), and the examples in each chapter illuminate how this occurs in real classroom practices.

The key tenets of a critical literacies perspective that Vasquez presents include that "the world is seen as a socially constructed text that can be read...texts work to position readers in certain ways...[and] the ways we read texts are also never neutral" (p. 3). Thus, to support readers in understanding and addressing these realities of text and reading, Vasquez suggests that teachers should help students (and themselves) "unpack the positions from which we engage in reading," address issues of social justice, and ultimately use this to incite action to address "inequitable ways of being, problematic social practices, and places and spaces in which we live our lives" (p. 4).

Across the book, Vasquez shows how different kinds of texts are used to do this unpacking, including picture



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books, advertisements, holiday celebrations, music, and blogs. She also offers discussion questions to guide the unpacking:

- "What are the words and images attempting to do to me as a consumer" [or reader, student, voter, etc.]? (p. 10)
- "Whose voice is heard?" (p. 12)
- "Whose voice is silenced?" (p. 12)
- "Whose reality is presented?" (p. 12)
- "Whose reality is ignored?" (p. 12)
- "Who is advantaged?" (p. 12)
- "Who is disadvantaged?" (p. 12)

Further, she suggests several ways to support deep exploration of complex issues, such as engaging in process drama (chapter 7), re/creating music lyrics (chapter 8), and developing podcasts as a way to construct and voice what is learned (chapter 11).

Personally, I found the reflection questions at the end of each chapter really helpful to guide my thinking about the chapter content. These would be great to guide a learning community or book discussion group, or to use in teacher education courses. One set of questions that Vasquez posed, which I felt was crucial for us all to consider as literacy educators, was as follows:

- "What literacies are privileged in [our] classrooms?"
- "What literacies are ignored?"
- "How might we change what literacies are privileged?" (p. 122)

Vasquez's book also provides a support guide for kindergarten through college level teachers who want to adopt a more critical stance in their literacy teaching. Additional resources to get you started include the following videos of Vasquez and Jerome Harste discussing concepts that align with the book:

- Understanding critical literacies as a perspective versus teaching content or specific methods: <https://thelearningexchange.ca/videos/jerome-harste-and-vivian-vasquez-critical-literacy/>
- Taking ideas from what occurs in classrooms to inform curriculum design: <https://vimeo.com/104032292>
- Developing inquiry questions with young children: <https://thelearningexchange.ca/videos/jerome-harste-and-vivian-vasquez-student-inquiry/>

I hope this text and the videos re/ignite your passion for improving your critical stance in the classroom as much as they did for me.

## Author Biography

**Dr. Tanya Christ** is an Associate Professor of Reading and Language Arts at Oakland University. She teaches courses related to reading assessment and instruction for K-12. Her research focuses on early childhood vocabulary, comprehension, and digital literacies learning and instruction; culture, access, and equity in literacy education; and literacy teacher education. She has taught both inclusion and general education in Title 1 classrooms in Brooklyn, NY. Her work appears in journals such as *Journal of Literacy Research*, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *The Reading Teacher*, and *Young Children*. She can be reached at [christ@oakland.edu](mailto:christ@oakland.edu).

