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CPL Podcast: Critical Literacy

Host: Kate Ambrose

With: Kathy Rushton and Joanne Rossbridge

INTRODUCTION:

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Kate Ambrose:

Welcome to the Centre for Professional Learning Podcast for the New South Wales Teachers Federation, I'm Kate Ambrose and I'm the Director of the CPL.

Today I'm talking with Kathy Rushton and Joanne Rossbridge about Critical Literacy in the classroom, Kathy and Joanne welcome.

Kathy Rushton and Joanne Rossbridge:

Hi, thank you.

Kate Ambrose:

Can you start by telling us today, what is Critical Literacy and what are its goals and main ideas?

Joanne Rossbridge:

Critical Literacy is obviously an aspect of literacy but it's looking deeper into text and also outside of text to look at different perspectives, points of view, considering the text in context, so we know who wrote them or drew them or painted them and when they did it and considering beyond that even, what were the values and beliefs and ideologies of the time and how they might bump up against those in 2020 or beyond and so on, and being able to think about perspectives but also our own beliefs and so on and how they work with those communicated in text.

Kathy Rushton:

And I think when you're talking about the main ideas and goals, why Jo and I are particularly interested in talking about this right now, right here, right now. It's the context we're all experiencing across the world and I don't mean the pandemic. I mean what's revealed about the social issues that we're experiencing? It's this sort of thing; how does education and what we're talking about in schools fit



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with the reality of our students' lives? So we are all following curriculum documents and syllabus documents that are similar across Australia and of course we are mandated as teachers to do that but how can we help our students see what they need to learn in terms of their own world experience? So that's what we think Critical Literacy is all about, supporting students in the context in which we find ourselves, wherever that may be.

Joanne Rossbridge:

Being able to operate across context isn't it, their own context, the context in the past, in the future and having that broader view of the world which makes for more inclusive, I guess communities, school, society and so on to, accepting others values and being able to step back and think about them in a critical way.

Kathy Rushton:

I think this is really connected within engagement in learning as well because our experience as EAL/D teachers and our experiences especially in secondary schools and upper primary, students become disengaged with learning when they can't see themselves in the curriculum and that's really important, that idea of who we are, when we talk about 'we' and that's really important in History and English because a lot of people say that, for instance, an old one, not "*Looky, Looky here comes Cooky*" as Steven Oliver said because his people said, look he's coming, it's more like oh, Cook discovered Australia, that's a perspective, given straight away there and we see that in poetry and literature and in primary sources, this is what Jo and I think is really important, our teachers are extremely well trained and they are worth their weight in gold, working really hard but we think there is room to manoeuvre to look at the text we're asked to use with students and bring a critical perspective to them.

Joanne Rossbridge:

Absolutely, and that's the key, the text that we use with students and as teachers being able to find, select, curate text that represents multiple voices, multiple views of the world and particular we can see this happen in English and History is a really nice avenue to think about this.

Kate Ambrose:

Can you expand a little bit on in what way our students may feel excluded from the texts that are chosen in the classroom?

Kathy Rushton:

Do you know what, it's not actually the text that's the problem, it's the perspective you bring to the text and digging through that? So, let's start off with no text is neutral, not the one here today, Jo and I have got an agenda, we've got a theoretical perspective that we bring to our teaching and that we're bringing right here, right now. I think a really good example of this, I love this is Bruce Pascoe "*Dark Emu*", everyone's heard of that and Bruce Pascoe is an Aboriginal man, he brings his perspective as an



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author to Dark Emu, but what were the primary sources he used, colonial perspective and primary sources and they have been with us since the invasion and they were accurate accounts of what those explorers saw and he's used them to say, our history has been taught incorrectly, this is how it should be seen. Now that's very interesting, it's not that we didn't have the text, we've always had them, it's looking at them and seeing what they mean. Critical Literacy is not going out and getting a new book to use or choosing something different, it's having a look at what you've got and discussing it with the students, Jo used that word, you can see that you pressed my button Jo, curate, that's what it's all about and our teachers are more than able to do this but I think in the high stakes testing regime we've got now, where a lot of students are disadvantaged and they're disadvantaged by the testing as well, made to feel like school is not for them or they can't achieve, the teachers themselves get trapped by this and are reticent to discuss text in this wild way, this walk on the wild side actually having a really good look at them and I think that's what we need to do, you don't spend any money, you just have to do what you can already do, get the stuff you've got and have a good old read and then a good ole yarn about it with your kids. What do you reckon about it, Jo?

Joanne Rossbridge:

Could I also say in addition to that have a good old chat to your Teacher Librarian too?

Kathy Rushton:

Yeah, we love them.

Joanne Rossbridge:

Because they're critical in schools.

Kathy Rushton:

Round of applause for Teacher Librarians.

Joanne Rossbridge:

A great source of you know, resources and you know, maybe giving you some opportunities to look at things that maybe you are not aware of at this point in time too, so that's really important as well.

Kate Ambrose:

How do we help besides using the teacher-librarian, how do we help teachers, help students to interrogate text or how can teachers help students to interrogate text?

Kathy Rushton:

Well, I've got to say something that will make her laugh for sure, and maybe you too. Read the book, ok, read the stuff you are supposed to be sharing with your kids.



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Now I'm a teacher, I've taught in primary and secondary school and I'm guilty, we all are, you skip over stuff because you're busy or whatever, read it and now if you've got internet access it's really quite easy to find out who the author is and find out some information and Jo and I put in our article that we wrote, some guiding questions about what you'd ask a text and one of them is, what perspective is assumed by the author and is the text authoritative or does it explore the subject and allow you to think critically about it and the big question, whose voices are silent or whose interests are absent.

Kate Ambrose:

And I guess depending on the age of the students and the ability of the students about where you start with that, with them. Do you start with those big questions or do you break it down with them?

Kathy Rushton:

You start in Kinder, Kate. You start in Kinder and it's very easy, little girls can see that in some text all the action are not them, not little girls, that's not hard to see, or all the boys can see that all the beautiful things perhaps are not for them, they're given different roles, this is not rocket science, it's easy and especially now we've got the resources, we've got the technology to explore this. I mean, do you know Carole Wilkinson, that's a really good example don't you think Jo?

Joanne Rossbridge:

Yes, just thinking about, I don't know if people know Carole Wilkinson as an author but writing about dragons and ancient China and so on and looking at again different perspectives there, I guess, that's more of a novel, so probably something more in the middle years, but again thinking about what view of the world, what's going on historically, culturally and actually even politically, some of her Dragon Keeper text is really interesting when you sort of think in that way, it's not just, 'oh we're reading a novel, and we're going to comprehend it'.

Kathy Rushton:

Or we're meant to be talking about an Asian perspective so we'll read a book about dragons, you know so there's, I'm going to say it 'Field-Tenor-Mode', don't you reckon, we're not just looking at the subject matter, we're looking at what our intended audience was and how they're relating to that audience, that's what it's really about and I think there is another perspective we want to drag in and it's quite contentious but here we go; Rebecca Lynn has written about dragons, how is that different from Carole Wilkinson, I love both of their books, I use both of them at school but Rebecca Lynn is an outspoken, Australian of Chinese descent, I believe Chinese descent, now I think it's important too, to make sure that all our authors are not old white women and men, we need to make sure we've got actual diverse voices in terms of the songs that are written and sung, the words that are spoken and the perspectives and that's not to say that we're not empathetic. I'm an old white woman but it needs to be



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really taken very good care of by teachers who were the guardians to make sure that the books and the poetry are the primary sources, that we use in our classrooms, that we know who wrote them, and when because that makes a difference, doesn't it.

Kate Ambrose:

Absolutely, and having a wide range of text to show a variety of perspectives, I guess is important in any classroom, in any school across the whole country and not only because each of those classrooms has a variety of perspectives and a variety of experiences but it's also about and I'm picking up on your word empathy there Kathy, those students' whole world has a variety of perspective and experiences.

Joanne Rossbridge:

Which sounds like you're talking about the History syllabus actually when we think about concepts and so on in history and empathetic understanding looking at different perspectives, contestability, it's all there and it's what we're required to teach and if you look across the stages you'll see how that develops over time, starting with what the syllabus says, bumping history and English together particularly with that link around perspectives is a really good way, just even to sit down and think about what teaching different subject areas might potentially look like because it's not teaching them from a Critical Literacy perspective, it's Critical Literacy in there, it's very clear when you go looking, so we actually need to do so.

Kathy Rushton:

So we're actually talking about using the syllabus to do this but because of what's been normal in classrooms maybe not enough of this has gone on and teachers feel under the pump about things like the standardised testing but they don't do as much of this as they'd like to. I think teachers would like to do this and you know, in English, we're asked to get students to express themselves in their understandings about the world, what's that if it's not history. Jo and I were just talking about these two poems I've been using for years because I love them together, is Dorothea Mackellar's *"My Country"*. Now Ali Cobby Eckermann's answer to that is *"Nah it's my Country – OK?"*, but when Dorothea wrote it if you contextualise it in the time, she was saying I'm not British, I'm Australian, I love this place, that's a lovely thing, even though now some of the words in her poem are not what we like to express at this moment about owning the land and what the land can give her, you know that is why Ali Cobby Eckermann as an Aboriginal woman didn't like that but if you teach that to students, that poem, *"My Country"*, it's got some beautiful words in it and it's a beautiful poem, I think, alongside Lionel Fogarty, *"Cook didn't find us. We saw them first"*. You've got the history of Australia in two poems.

Joanne Rossbridge:

And just as a result of that I think pedagogy in classrooms starts looking and sounding different, you know maybe I'm being a bit cheeky, so instead of colouring in a bubble to answer a question, we're actually



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having, you know, extended in-depth responses with a variety of perspectives points of view just by opening up the conversation to our students. There's no worksheet for this, this is about how we actually talk, engage, talk around text, use text and so on and that's got to come from us as teachers and how we talk, I was going to say to students, I should say how we talk with students.

Kathy Rushton:

And it's interesting because you said 'we' then and we all knew who you meant, you meant us teachers and really that's where this lies, Critical Literacy is not developed by going outside of your school and asking what books can I buy for Critical Literacy, where is the worksheet for Critical Literacy? No, we think what it is, is you have a very good look at what you're doing, what texts you're using and you see what is missing, that question what voices are silent or absent.

Kate Ambrose:

There are very explicit links to Critical Literacy in the English and History syllabus's but I would say that Critical Literacy is important in every subject which may not be your subject Kathy and Jo, but can you talk a little bit about that and I think you've answered it, Jo, in terms of it's about a conversation, it's about a discussion with students in class and there's a place for it in every subject

Joanne Rossbridge:

Absolutely, yeah there's language, there's text, take science, for instance, there's a whole range of different perspectives and thinking has changed and I suspect will change overtime, so if we're not approaching a subject area like science for instance from a Critical Literacy perspective then again we're doing a bit of a disservice to the students certainly but also to the discipline or the subject area I would think too because I think science is a good example in that way, nothing is set in concrete forever.

Kathy Rushton:

But some things are and that is what amuses me. Dark matter, I know that's the things between the stars, oh you mean like Aboriginal people have always been looking at. They recognise that science explains the natural world but if for over 60,000 years you've been having a very close look at it, maybe you've got something to share, and I think this perspective in science means not saying, this is the modern Western world has developed science, no it didn't and just knowing a little bit about history, European history would make you realise where the ideas came from and how they went around the world and it's not Europe that developed the ideas that scientists have built on, in the recent times it might be but historically no it wasn't so, Critical Literacy yes, it belongs everywhere.

Joanne Rossbridge:

Creative Arts is another good example actually too, particularly with the link to history, you know, what paintings are that you're looking at, not looking at, when were they painted, who did them, you know? Again, very interesting, what version of the world do I keep presenting to my students.



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Kate Ambrose:

What blurb is written about that painting in the gallery, in the art gallery?

Joanne Rossbridge:

Yeah, why is this one so you know, famous, you know, it's existed for a couple of hundred years but then there are these other ones that have existed for tens of thousands of years.

Kathy Rushton:

And how many women painted them under men's names? Like all the novels that were written by George Sand and George Eliot etc., you know, I wonder how much of that happened. So Critical Literacy is not about getting something new or even doing something new, it actually involves one of the well understood reader roles. So we're teaching reading when we're developing Critical Literacy, it's the text analysis roles that requires you to move outside the text and examine where it came from. The situation and the context in which it was developed, the intended audience and then what it actually says and then making another relationship to now. I would push this a little bit further by saying, and I love Brewarrina, it's got the fish traps, been there, love the place, if you were there and that's a strong Aboriginal community, talking about any of the issues that we're talking about in stage three and four syllabus, you want to make the connection to those kids lives in that context, so they could bring what they've got to the text, if you're in Bankstown and a lot of the kids are first or second generation from hundreds of countries, speaking hundreds of languages, you want to make connections with their lives. Now the teachers are really good at doing that, all the quality teaching research that went on showed that teachers are very good at supporting their students emotionally and I think that's true but we can support them academically by helping them see how these texts they are asked to learn from and about at school have been developed and what it means to them in their contemporary lives. I think that means engagement with learning.

Joanne Rossbridge:

And just to make a connection back to that to the English syllabus, in particular, objective D and E. Objective D, so this is primary and secondary, is about thinking imaginatively, creatively, interpretively and in Stage 3 we get the word critically. It's in the big heading for that outcome, it's important, from Stage 3 to 4 that thinking critically is quite salient and you know we have to do it, and when you look at objective D which is about expressing themselves, it's what Kathy was just talking about there, so we're looking at students identity and their place in the world, themselves as individuals, social, cultural aspects as well and you'll actually see those terms in the content. I think we're pretty comfy with the skills and knowledge and understanding around English which is objectives A and B, while objective C and D is really where this happens as well, okay as an aspect of reading but it's very clear that in 2012 and when New South Wales changed their English syllabus that this is something that really matters.

Kathy Rushton:



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But you know what, you're getting too heavy for me. The real issue about Critical Literacy is it's more fun, isn't it, yeah, it's more fun, it's not boring, for the kids or the teachers and you can use and should use drama in the classroom, how would you develop an empathetic understanding, stand on the cliff and watch those big white birds come up the harbour. What do you make of that? You run back to the cave and say, get the spears out boys, we don't want them here. There are ways of acting this out so you can have a feeling of what it felt like to be maybe one of those wives that are out on the goldfields with no water, no support, little children running around and living in a tent. Act it out, drama is really good in history and in English for making people understand what the past was like and how we got to where we are now. There's plenty of things we can do in the classroom like that, that develop literacy in context in the subject area and helps kids engage, like we strongly believe this, you want to be good at secondary school and upper primary, you've got to read and want to read from when you're very young, so that means, primary school teachers especially have to get their students engaged with learning and we think Critical Literacy is one of those ways because again a reading role, text participant, you bring to the text your world, we don't shut your world out of the classroom and when we say '*we*' we don't mean you, when we say '*we*' we mean all of us.

Kate Ambrose:

You've touched on a number of things there and I love the, it needs to be fun because it really does, and we've got links to mandatory syllabuses. I'm thinking about standard one and the Australian Professional Standards, teachers know your students and how they learn. We're talking about inclusive pedagogy which I'd like to come back to in a moment and we're talking about having fun, having fun in the classroom with your students and enjoying the learning.

Kathy Rushton:

And I'd go further. I wouldn't say it's a link to the syllabus, I would say, it is the mandated stuff you have to teach but I think that '*we*' teachers have been pushed away from that and into this skills thing, you know, can you colour in that bubble and get that noun right. That is not what we're supposed to be doing, and a lot of teachers feel like that because there is not enough support for them and not enough support to do this but I think it's all there in the syllabus document in actually saying this is what we should do.

Joanne Rossbridge:

We should be the starting point, there is a whole lot of other stuff that's on offer to support teachers but I think that the syllabus is the commonality, it's what you're mandated to teach so if we look there I think it tells us where to go, what to do, rather than maybe having other versions of what say reading is



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or narrow versions of reading, this is an aspect and it's really, really important that we give students the opportunity to be critical thinkers.

Kathy Rushton:

And that's the big issue, is this thing, you see it all the time, oh we have a reading hour, we have a literacy hour, so literacy in math and literacy in history and literacy in English, it's different, they're different genres, you need to use grammatical features differently, there are different audiences, different purposes, so we need to be teaching literacy as part of everything we do at school, whether it's primary or secondary, it doesn't matter, everything, it's part of it and what do you do there, it means the teacher has to be really okay with the texts that you're reading and writing so that you teach reading and writing while you're having fun.

Kate Ambrose:

Putting all those things aside in terms of it being fun, syllabus requirements, meeting the standards as a teacher, why is it essential then to develop inclusive pedagogy within our classrooms?

Joanne Rossbridge:

It's easy to make assumptions about people, I think we all do it often and unless we invite everyone to the table to talk about everyone's background, I think we'll keep making assumptions.

Kate Ambrose:

And so, our role as teachers is to develop our students to be able to create a better world as well for all of us.

Kathy Rushton:

It's Australian, we're lucky, this is a beautiful country, the Aboriginal people haven't tried to chuck us out of, I think that's pretty good, and we've come from everywhere. I'm a first generation Australian, there's many people like me. Our parents came from somewhere else and we've had all the advantages of living in this beautiful country, we should be caring about each other and I think Australian's want to alright. We don't think teachers aren't doing the right thing, we think that they're worth their weight in gold, and doing more than they're paid for, but we just think that we'd like to give you permission to have more fun, just to get the stuff that you've got and have a really good look at it. If you do this you can have something happening in your classroom, for instance, our colleague, Dr Jacqui Deward, has got this lovely language mapping strategy that we've used, where you ask the kids to draw a map of how and where and when they use language. If you just did that at the beginning of the term, got kids to talk about who they speak to and what language they use or what kind of language they use, gosh Australian Professionals Standards, know your students, yes, tick the box and in terms of developing Critical Literacy, you just threw out the drawbridge to the community and said, 'hey walk across it to me, your



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teacher, I might not understand everything you're telling me or the language that you speak but gee I'd really like to know, so *we* can talk about things together.'

Joanne Rossbridge:

I've actually done that with teachers in a couple of schools and they've been astounded just in a class, there might be half a dozen kids they've suddenly found out who actually speak three, four different languages, and going back to assumptions, they were assuming they either spoke English only or English and one other language, so just getting that information from doing something like language maps is quite an eye-opener and then look at all the things you can talk about there, look at all the different aspects of the curriculum from that as well.

Kathy Rushton:

And what do you need to do a language map, absolutely nothing, a pen, and some coloured pencils and maybe a bit of paper, but that's Critical Literacy is not about spending it's about reading and asking questions and listening to answers.

Kate Ambrose:

But do you have any specific advice for remote and rural teachers in general and maybe other sets of teachers such as early career teachers and different groups of teachers that have different experiences depending on the context of their classroom, at the moment?

Kathy Rushton:

The research I've done with my colleague Dr Jeanette Dunton we encourage teachers to do that language mapping and to share stories in the classroom, to develop this Critical Literacy, and the teachers use their own language background experiences, it just so happened, we didn't say are you all bilingual but a whole lot of them happened to be, so when they brought their language into the classroom, hey guess what the kids all shared theirs, they were all different, but it didn't matter and I think that was a really rich experience that you shouldn't diss down what you know as a teacher, so if you went into teaching, you did it because you really want to work with kids, or the subject, if you're a secondary teacher you might just love history or English or primary you might love all of it and love young, very young learning, count on that, whatever you've got that's your strength, you develop it and I think sharing it with colleagues through professional associations and the Federation that's a really good place to start because other people there are willing to chat with you and if you've got access to the internet, that makes life a lot easier but otherwise there are publications that you can purchase or share again back to the teacher librarian but I think your own experiences, don't be frightened to bring them into the classroom and be vulnerable to the kids and encourage them to share.



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Joanne Rossbridge:

I think as part of your own experiences, that's your own reading as well, so collecting texts over time, even if it's something you find in a newspaper and you think, oh that might be good one day, having that collection of things, I was looking at working with a group of teachers the other day and they were looking at a connection to place and I found in one of my own books and I've actually never noticed it before, a poem that was really useful but what was particularly useful was the image that went with it, in that it only had, it was a map of Australia but only had the western part of Australia drawn, so when you put that image with the poem, it was a particular version of what Australia was like to one group of people at one point in time, while there was a whole different version of what Australia was like from another group of people, so the Aboriginal people at the time, which they saw Australia as a far more extensive place, even things like that I've actually taken a photo of it, copied it, popped it somewhere I hope I find it again, that's a big part of it, organising all this but I'm thinking, oh I can use that in several different places so the collection of resources when you come across them, then you can go, oh I remember I've got that one, it might not be what you want to use tomorrow but when you think, oh there's something about this that I can bump it up against some other things, I think that's a practical way of starting to curate.

Kathy Rushton:

You know what though, those guiding questions that we put into our journal article, that's all you need, because it's not about books as such, that's reading, it's about viewing and listening as well, so we were just talking about Steven Oliver's "*Looky, Looky here comes Cooky*", you know that's something great to show in a classroom and all the beautiful songs and singers that have got diverse voices, Australian voices, you know, you listen to music don't you, get one of them down, that's poetry with a musical backing, I think all of these things we should be braver about what we bring into the classroom and the curate word exists because this is secondary school I'm speaking to now, oh but we've got two million three thousand four hundred and fifty copies of, I don't know, some book that was written in 1954 and we have to use it, well OK I can't do anything about that, what can I collect around that to make this sing to the kids, you know, what can I do that is going to make this work, that's the way we have to think.

Kate Ambrose:

You're both EAL/D teachers, very experienced teachers in the classroom with EAL/D students, they're often bringing a huge variety of perspectives, and sometimes through your role as the EAL/D teacher is about coming from the basics in terms of language but that doesn't take away Critical Literacy.

Kathy Rushton:

Of course not, because many of those children have much more than basics in their own language and if you think about it, have you ever tried to learn a language, nearly every kid that comes to schools got



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one, and they've done that before they were five and a lot of them, in those remote areas have done it with three different languages and a couple of dialects, I think we want to go back to what Jo said, no assumptions, how can you fix that, we just gave you that example of language mapping and the book that we wrote with Jacquie Deward and Janette Dunton "*Tell Me Your Stories?*" has got a heap of things that you can do in the classroom and examples of what kids did in the classroom when you do that.

Joanne Rossbridge:

And just going back to assumptions, I think we need to be careful; we don't make assumptions that just because they don't come with English there's not a whole wealth of languages and experiences that we can draw upon.

Kathy Rushton:

You said it, Jo, reading with, taking the teachers role, not as the font of all knowledge, it's I have to say that again, that banking concept, where the teachers got everything and they tell you what you need to know, no, let's go, well I've been to Uni, I want to be a teacher, I love this subject, now I'm going to try and help you enjoy it as much as I have, you know, that's what we want, somebody who shares their love and knowledge they've got and lets kids bring what they've got, that's the best way.

Kate Ambrose:

You've written a fantastic article for the *Journal of Professional Learning* and called "*Critical Literacy in English and History Stages Three and Four*", why did you, for that article, choose that transition stage from Stage Three to Stage Four?

Kathy Rushton:

Because of all the things we've said today, and this is what the problem is, especially when we're thinking, well I was, I think Jo was too, about kids who aren't doing the best at school, you know, in terms of you know, top of the class, as soon as they hit high school, the support drops and this is when the door opens for, "I'm not going to be interested any longer", I think it's really an opportunity in Stage 3 teachers to understand what they can do to get kids geared up for secondary school and for secondary teachers to understand what is happening in primary school to let them look at that transition more carefully because teachers aren't supported to do it, all the attempts that have been made to do this has not worked because of the structure of our schooling system, it doesn't work. Some central schools, I would think they've got an easier time but even then, I've seen they're often on different campuses and the teachers don't speak to each other and there's no pathway for teachers in terms of their employment through the middle school, it's like Stage Three boom and here's a brand new world where everything is different, quite often in secondary school things are repeated and no one realises, we thought this was an opportunity teachers rarely get to talk to each other and learn from each other and Jo and I would bring up some of these ideas and then the secondary teachers and



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primary teachers not from the same area maybe yes, maybe no, but just to have a conversation about texts.

Joanne Rossbridge:

And just, I've already said this but it's very apparent in Stage three and four that we have a Critical Literacy approach in History and English, we can tell you the page numbers, it's the logical place to kind of look at it.

Kate Ambrose:

It is a very risky time isn't it, that transition and I have very strong memories of and I'm thinking about it now, I have strong memories of in year 7 and I guess what I was doing was doing exactly what you've explained when the students would come in finding out what they had already done in primary...what do you know about this subject area already, why do you think that, have you learnt that in school, what's your perspective on this, so if we're doing what is History as we used to do, then what do you know about this, what does it mean because they're bringing a huge variety of perspectives also from their different primary education contexts.

Joanne Rossbridge:

And they often think it's the subject, like the field, so history is about, you know, if you take Stage 4, the ancient world, etc., often students aren't going to say, well history is about critical thinking, they'll say it's about the topic, wouldn't it be nice if they actually, you know, day one Year 7 when the teacher says, what do you do in history, critical thinking, that's my goal for the world.

Kathy Rushton:

But it is back to field tenor and mode, we all shortcut to field subject matter and that is not what it's about, we're educating young minds, it's about critical thinking, obviously, you know that democracy, you need to understand how we got here and why it's important, you know, just something as simple in Australia as the mandated voting, what's that all about, why do we have it and does anybody even know that it's different in another country, you know these sorts of things we need to talk about and Jo is absolutely right and English and History are just too beautiful, sit side by side you know, so if you use novel's and poetry written at different times, you get different messages, if you dig into Shakespeare, boy was that interesting what he was writing in, that time in history, so interesting, if you do this curation all the time, it's very, very interesting, I think a lot more students would be able to connect if they knew about the author and who they were and what time they were writing, if there was more development in Critical Literacy and ideas, do you know what though, it takes more time, it's slow cooking.



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CPL Podcast: Critical Literacy

Kate Ambrose:

In your article that you wrote for the Journal of Professional Learning you've talked about different teachers' strategies around Critical Literacy and you've mentioned a couple like verbal ping pong and conscious alley can you expand on that a little for us?

Joanne Rossbridge:

I think if you take something like conscious alley you have students if you can visualise, two rows, face to face and you have somebody walking down the middle, who might have, let's say there's some dilemma that's come out of a text.

Kathy Rushton:

She said, "I have to go home by midnight, or my dress would turn back to rags".

Joanne Rossbridge:

Yes, and one side, one row whispers if you like because they're playing the conscious.

Kathy Rushton:

Rock on sister! You'll never get another chance.

Joanne Rossbridge:

Ok and the other side.

Kathy Rushton:

Says go home, she told you, you get one magic wish and that's the end of it.

We use that one example from the conscious alley, that from drama, there's so many of them and the verbal ping pong, I just love all the debating games and that's just one of them, it works the same way, where kids are calling out answers for and against something, once you've drawn it up on the board as they call out the answers and then it's like a debate, you've got two sides of the argument, to include people, it's to give people the right to discuss it, and not to leave other voices out. Isn't that the point, to say it wasn't a one-way ship it was two ways, so if we take universal suffrage, was that given to people or fought for by people, was it given to women or fought for by women? I'd say a bit of both, wouldn't you, you know, if you use one word there you can come away with the impression that it was fought for or it was given, if you have a discussion you can see who was doing the given and who was doing the fighting and you can have a better-rounded picture of it, that's what we want to achieve with Critical Literacy, it's not telling somebody this is the way it was, it's letting somebody look at it, discover it and see for themselves and I think that's a really necessary skill for adults.



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CPL Podcast: Critical Literacy

Kate Ambrose:

Jo and Kathy, it's been delightful to have you in here today, thank you so much for your time and for sharing your wisdom and knowledge, and expertise with us, we hope that you come back.

You've been listening to the Centre for Professional Learning podcast for the New South Wales Teachers Federation, today I've been talking with Kathy Rushton and Joanne Rossbridge about Critical Literacy in the classroom.

For more information, for the courses, conferences, Journal of Professional Learning, and podcasts produced by the CPL, please visit the CPL website at www.cpl.asn.au

CONCLUSION:

The CPL podcast is produced by the Centre for Professional Learning and the New South Wales Teachers Federation. All opinions expressed in this podcast are those of the individual speakers only and do not necessarily represent the views of their employer or associated organisations. The host was Kate Ambrose. Technical direction by Jason Nicholas.

Kathy Rushton has worked as a literacy consultant, ESL and classroom teacher with the DoE (NSW), and in a range of other educational institutions. She is interested in the development of literacy, especially in socio-economically disadvantaged communities with students learning English as an additional language or dialect. Kathy is currently a lecturer in the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Sydney.

Joanne Rossbridge is an independent literacy consultant working in both primary and secondary schools and with teachers across Sydney. She has worked as a classroom and ESL teacher and literacy consultant with the DoE (NSW). Much of her experience has involved working with students from non-English speaking backgrounds. Joanne is particularly interested in student and teacher talk and how talk about language can assist the development of language and literacy skills.