

# An Interdependent Literacy Model to Assist with Critical Reading Comprehension in the English First Additional Language Classroom

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## Abstract

Various attempts have been made to assist the multitude of South African learners who experience literacy challenges, particularly critical reading challenges, in the classroom. Although a number of critical literacy models that focus on reading literacy have been developed to alleviate the reading comprehension crisis in South Africa, poor reading comprehension continues to prevail among South African learners, as shown in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study reports. This article argues for a focus on critical reading comprehension in the classroom. Based on a review of the Four Resources Model of Critical Literacy and the Interdependent Model of Critical Literacy, the researchers propose a new model to the literacy debate, the Critical Reading Interdependent Literacy Model (CRILM), which is designed to be used at school level and is suitable to be used from Grade 4 and beyond. CRILM is based on an instruction and learning framework that promotes a participatory-interactive-interdependent relationship between educators, learners, the text, and the author. Through the text and author, learners will be able to initiate critical insight and societal knowledge development from within the English First Additional Language classroom. Centred on the educator, the learners, the text, and the author, as well as their relation to reality, this proposed new model hypothesises the interaction and interdependence of all the participants during the reading process for the successful development of classroom critical reading comprehension.

**Keywords:** critical reading comprehension; critical literacy; reading instruction; English First Additional Language (English FAL); CRILM

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## Introduction

Literacy involves daily engagement with text. For example, the National Institute for Literacy (2009) connects “literacy” with daily routines such as the ability to think, speak, listen, solve problems, make predictions, make inferences, and interact with other people. All these routines are needed to function effectively as an individual in a social environment such as school, at home and in the family and within the larger society. This statement gives the impression that educators, classmates, colleagues, family members, or other citizens and societal factors could influence literacy practices and their development.

The understanding of the concept of “literacy” has transformed as politics, cultures, economies, and societies have changed over time (Programme for International Student Assessment 2003). For example, the ways in which people practise literacy are no longer confined to reading and writing (UNESCO 2014); over time the concept has developed to include the use of language within sociocultural contexts, and it is through these perspectives and influences that we attach meaning to a text, whether inside or outside school. Street (in Purcell-Gates 2007, 3) argues that literacy forms part of the everyday activities of human society and is practised by social and cultural groups. Concurring, Pretorius and Ribbens (2005) explain that although literacy generally refers to the ability to read and write the written word, it is, for the greater part, dependent on the sociocultural context in which it occurs. In other words, literacy is a socially constructed form of human behaviour. It is for this reason that Harste (2014, 1) advises that literacy should not be viewed as a commodity (something you either have or do not have). Instead, it should be regarded as a social practice, valued and practised by a group of people.

In the context of this study, literacy is seen as abstract knowledge, combined with textual knowledge, gained inside and outside school. This notion is supported by research conducted by Hull and Schultz (2001), who suggest that literacy practices are indicative of the various ways in which learning, teaching, communication, interaction, and negotiation occur, both inside and outside the school environment. This view of literacy proposed by Hull and Schultz (2001) aligns with the literacy explanation provided by the National Institute of Literacy (2009), which states that literacy enables one to read and write within a specific social community, as well as to participate within the community.

Arguably, “illiteracy”, or the inability to read and write, prevents effective participation in literacy practices in a group or community (UNESCO 2014). A Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) report (Mullis et al. 2006) reveals that approximately 861 million people (that is, approximately 20% of adults in the world) are illiterate, meaning that they are unable to read or write. In other words, 20% of adults in the world are unable to function optimally or contribute to the economic growth of society. Consequently, illiteracy may result in non-participation in social, economic or cultural liberation. Accordingly, Pretorius and Ribbens (2005) argue that literacy is a

sociocultural human behaviour, which is affected by the context in which it occurs, the function it performs within that context and the effect and value it has within a community. We can infer that the sociocultural context in which people operate determines and subsequently influences their literacy practices.

In an educational context, reading forms an essential part of a learner's literacy journey. In fact, reading can be perceived as one of the most empowering literacy skills that learners need to advance academically in a sociocultural learning context. However, the PIRLS reports (Mullis et al. 2006; Mullis et al. 2009; Mullis and Martin 2015) and Pretorius and Machet (2004, 47) indicate that South African learners struggle to read. In addition, Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016) argue that teachers are not immersed in rich reading practices and they lack a clear understanding of reading concepts, reading development and reading methodology.

Considering that reading is a real concern in South Africa and failure to practise critical reading literacy effectively can hamper the progress of learners, not only academically but also socioculturally, this article argues for the introduction of a new model, the Critical Reading Interdependent Literacy Model (CRILM), to develop critical reading comprehension instruction and learning in the sociocultural context of the English First Additional Language (FAL) classroom. CRILM is centred on the educator, the learners, the text, and the author, as well as how they relate to reality. The model harnesses the interaction and interdependence of all the participants during the reading process for the development of classroom critical reading comprehension.

To explore how South African learners' critical reading comprehension ability in the classroom can be improved, this article is structured as follows: First, it reflects on literacy practices in the classroom context. This is followed by a discussion of critical literacy as a necessity for critical reading comprehension, as well as the relationship between critical reading literacy and critical reading comprehension. Thereafter, an overview of the two main critical reading models, the Four Resources Model of Critical Literacy (Freebody and Luke 2003; McNulty 2013, 19) and the Independent Model of Critical Literacy (Janks 2013, 227) is presented and discussed within a critical reading context. In conclusion, an argument is made for the CRILM, which acknowledges that the educator, the learners, the text, and the author, as well as their interpretation of the world concerning reality, all contribute to the effective development of critical reading instruction and learning in the English FAL classroom.

## Literacy in the Classroom Context

This article focuses on the critical reading comprehension practices of educators and learners within the sociocultural environment of the English FAL classroom. This stance was motivated by the knowledge that every school classroom is a sociocultural space for the promotion of literacy development. Children go to school to learn to read and write. Pretorius and Machet (2004, 129) argue that literacy forms the backbone of scholastic success at all school levels, but it is not limited to the school context. In fact,

every school classroom is a sociocultural environment where most learners acquire literacy skills. Blikstad-Balas (2013, 1) asserts that schools are literacy power institutions, yet they only offer literacy skills such as the reading and writing of texts, which are prescribed by the curriculum. Barton (2007, 176) asserts that schools are powerful, knowledge-generating sociocultural institutions for many aspects of life, especially in the field of literacy education.

In disagreement with the aforementioned, Säljö (2010) points out that, in the school context, literacy, which includes reading comprehension, is restricted to the memorising and reproducing of text. Arguably, as times are changing, school-based notions of literacy should expand. This is so that learners' literacy abilities can improve, which will enable them to understand the world from the word and, thereby, give meaning to unfamiliar texts. In fact, McKenna (2012, 17) draws on the work of Drucker (1996), who explains that knowledge acquired through school (which should include critical literacy practices) is the new "knowledge economy". In other words, knowledge, which is a constituent of critical reading literacy, has become a "currency",<sup>1</sup> instead of just a theory and practice. Critical reading comprehension is the "currency of knowledge" used to obtain knowledge of the world, society, and power. More importantly, it appears to the researchers that present-day critical reading comprehension researchers should be cognisant of the fact that, as times have changed, educational research has advanced, and so too should the trajectory of the human understanding of literacy.

Based on the above discussion, literacy seems to be a continuous process of active learning. For this reason, it appears to the researchers that, as learners mature, they grow in knowledge, not only in words, but also in world knowledge. Every time learners interact with a text, their personal experience, past and present knowledge (that is, their osmotic knowledge),<sup>2</sup> as well as their discourse competence,<sup>3</sup> come into effect. Regardless of the availability of books or print materials in the environment, learners need interaction with literacy users (Salinger 1996) to develop their literacy proficiency effectively. Literacy users are people who use language to communicate. Learners "use" literacy with other people, and this assists them to construct an understanding of how to read the word and, consequently, how to read the world. Indeed, for learners to function effectively in a competitive global environment, they will need to become socially interactive readers, not only of the word in print but also of the world around them. It is essential that educators guide learners on how to comprehend both the word they read

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<sup>1</sup> Something that is used or accepted by many people "for trading purposes" (*Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* 2010, 359).

<sup>2</sup> "Osmosis", derived from the Greek word *osmos*, refers to the process by means of which people or ideas influence one another (*Collins English Dictionary and Thesaurus* 2011, 728). In the context of this study, osmotic knowledge means knowledge acquired through interaction with other people and/or influenced by ideas, perceptions or concepts from the environment.

<sup>3</sup> Discourse competence relates to the ability to produce oral or written text to communicate meaning and to listen to an oral text or read a written text in such a way as to extract meaning from it. It focuses on the ability to analyse and synthesise language functions above sentence level, corresponding with the characteristics of critical literacy (Van der Walt, Evans, and Kilfoil 2009, 43).

and the life they live. This means that literacy entails the social act of attaining and replicating knowledge, which involves reading and learning about and from life.

### Critical Literacy as a Necessity for Critical Reading Comprehension

Critical literacy as a pedagogy,<sup>4</sup> as argued by Gee (1996), is rooted in the sociocultural approach to literacy. According to Janks (2010), critical language awareness relates to aspects such as reading comprehension, which needs to be practised in both English First Language and English FAL classrooms (Wallace 1995). Moreover, critical literacy, as argued by Janks (2013), is about supporting and enabling learners not only to read the written word but also the world, based on power relations,<sup>5</sup> differences, identities, resources, skills, tools, and access to knowledge. Giroux (1989, 33–34), on the other hand, explains that critical literacy provides learners with the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills, which will assist them with understanding and analysing their own experiences as part of a self and social empowerment project. Although many variations of critical literacy exist, they all stem from and collaborate with Freire’s pedagogy (Freire and Macedo in Felderman 2010, 20), which prepares learners to “read the word and the world” and offers a critical reading comprehension lens on societal concepts, as well as challenging the dominant perceptions instituted by society. For this reason, it appears that, compared to formal instructive conduct, critical literacy is a socially constructed concept that is better taught as an interactive social practice (Boakye, Olifant, and Cekiso 2021).

Parallel to critical literacy, the concept of “critical reading comprehension” refers to the process of understanding print material and attaching meaning to it (Pretorius and Ribbens 2005). Vaseghi, Gholami, and Barjesteh (2012, 406) propose that critical reading literacy is about thinking, that is, cogitating, or rather comprehending while reading. Similarly, Bobkina and Stefanova (2016, 681) postulate that critical reading comprehension refers to the ability to interpret a text and make various inferences with regard to it in a manner that can deliver different conclusions. Critical reading comprehension involves engaging in the act of reading with a questioning mind, which will result in the comprehension, evaluation, and decision to accept or reject what was read.

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<sup>4</sup> Pedagogy, originating from a Greek expression that relates specifically to the education of children and young people, refers to the practical application of teaching and curriculum content as well as theory relating to how and why learning occurs.

<sup>5</sup> “[P]ower and knowledge directly imply one another; [which means] that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (Foucault 1977, 27). Foucault claims that power is everywhere, diffused and incorporated in discourse and knowledge. “Power”, in the context of this study, refers to (a) the power for change that you feel you have in the classroom, school, and/or community and (b) the power you have in terms of your knowledge (that is, referral resources) and personal capacity (that is, confidence and commitment) to make changes.

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)<sup>6</sup> findings of 2006, 2011, and 2016 indicate that South African learners continue to demonstrate a lack of literacy, specifically falling short in thinking and reasoning abilities for critical reading comprehension (Mullis et al. 2006; Mullis et al. 2009; Mullis and Martin 2015). Considering the PIRLS findings, the question should be asked: How can South African learners' reading comprehension ability in the classroom be improved?

Grabe (2009, 21) is of the view that critical reading entails "higher-level processing", which is a critical thinking process that establishes what the text is about and underlies decisions on how to interpret the text, make inferences, and accept or reject the text, among others. Pretorius (2002, 170–71) believes the act of reading, which is a key element in critical reading comprehension, forms part of human behaviour that occurs in a sociocultural context and thus contributes to the meaning of the text and the reading practices within a community. The learner's knowledge and background, as well as personal and social experiences, create a relationship between the reader and the text and subsequently lead to a reflection and, in some instances, reformulation of the written word. Thus, it appears as if critical reading comprehension is an activity of learning about the world from the word.

To illustrate learners' critical reading comprehension skills, Zin, Wong, and Rafik-Galea (2014, 45–52) conducted research on 295 first- and second-year English FAL learners from various fields of study in a Malaysian university. Through the formulation of critical reading questions, their study explored learners' analytical ability by identifying the author's purpose and the main idea in the text. The study found that 66% of the participating learners failed to identify the author's intention with the text. Only 34% of the learners could identify the main idea correctly in the text. The learners' inability to determine the author's purpose with the text accurately, according to Zin, Wong, and Rafik-Galea (2014, 49), indicated that they are unable to detect an underlying intention or message, which is a basic comprehension ability. Generating the main idea, as stated by Wang (2009), requires higher-level inference skills. Therefore, these results indicate that many of the participating learners lacked analytical and inference skills. Overall, the learners demonstrated an inability with regard to critical reading comprehension, displaying an inability to make informed decisions following critical textual dialogue.

In summary, researchers such as McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004a, 2004b), Molden (2007), and Boakye, Olifant and Cekiso (2021) assert that critical reading comprehension, a constituent of critical literacy, involves asking questions to analyse the terminology, concepts, and purpose of the text, identifying the elements of the argument introduced by the author, evaluating the evidence and credibility of the

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<sup>6</sup> PIRLS is an international assessment study of reading literacy that focuses on processes of comprehension, reading purposes and reading habits of Grade 4 and 5 learners. The study is conducted on a five-year cycle under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) (Mullis et al. 2006).

content of the text, and positioning the reader in relation to the text. Ultimately, critical reading comprehension is an act that can help to empower learners to distinguish among the various relationships, discriminations, inequalities, and injustices in a text and to transfer that knowledge to their daily lives.

In our study, critical reading comprehension is explored as a practice that delves into a text to recognise and understand the deeper, abstract strata that exist within a piece of writing. Konza (2010, 6) confirms this explanation, asserting that the culminating goal of critical reading literacy is to “read between the lines”. Hence, the process of critical reading comprehension requires the reader to notice what is written, how it is written, why it is written, and the author’s direction and purpose with the writing. Furthermore, the reader needs to “critique” the author by asking crucial questions that will illuminate the author’s point of view, as well as the conditions and atmosphere surrounding the writing of the text.

### Critical Reading Literacy and Critical Reading Comprehension

Critical reading literacy and reading comprehension are interrelated. If a reader (or a learner, in the context of this study) can understand and envision the outcome of a text effectively, the ability to apply critical reading comprehension is inevitable. Dreyer and Nel (2003, 350) are of the view that reading comprehension is the “essence of reading”, that it is not only crucial for academic progress but also for professional success and a journey of lifelong learning. Smith (2015, 2) avers that “critical literacy is a form of comprehension that goes beyond the literal reading” of the word. In other words, critical reading comprehension means applying experiential insight while reading. Bharuthram (2012, 1) is of the view that comprehension scaffolds the ability to analyse, evaluate, and critique a text. Additionally, Mullis et al. (2009) point out that during the comprehension process, the person who reads employs a repertoire of experience, background knowledge, linguistic and cognitive skills, and metacognitive capabilities to attach meaning to the text.

We are of the view that when a reader can read with understanding, they can comprehend a text or utilise higher-order thinking skills to gain deeper insight into the text effectively. This will lead to critical reading comprehension outcomes such as generating questions while reading, activating prior knowledge, making inferences, predicting outcomes, recreating and retelling the story, visualising the text, evaluating and making decisions based on the text, and recognising embedded hegemonies and individual ideologies in the text. Pretorius and Ribbens (2005, 139) add that the comprehension of a text also involves the reader’s ability to see the author’s intention. In other words, the reader should be able to see where the composer of the text is leading them by means of lexical units, as well as the written and unwritten contextual clues implanted in the text, and should thus be able to attach meaning to the text in its entirety.

Based on the information above, there seems to be an analogous relationship between critical literacy and reading comprehension, since the ability to interpret texts enables,

supports, and enhances the potential of the reader to critique texts. In a classroom, learners have divergent perceptions about life and, accordingly, their approaches, behaviour, and practices in life differ. Furthermore, the global collage of cultures, communities, religions, levels of education, politics, finances, genders, sexual orientations, and cognitive and metacognitive abilities all contribute to the learners' acts of engagement, namely, what they read and how they read. How learners comprehend texts and engage in critical reading comprehension practices will be affected by their living conditions and environments. Accordingly, we can construe that the critical reading comprehension practices of learners and educators are impacted by the sociocultural settings and engagement in school classrooms. English FAL reading comprehension research consistently indicates that learners and educators need to make a continuous effort to engage comprehensively and critically with texts. In brief, due to the significance of reading comprehension, as emphasised by the PIRLS studies, there is a consistent call for further research into the sociocultural phenomenon of critical reading comprehension.

## Models of Critical Literacy

Critical literacy is a crucial element in how we perceive the world around us and can empower us to become valuable contributors to and participators in our environments. It is imperative that learners be equipped with the ability to practise critical literacy so that they can meet the demands of this globalised era effectively (Rambe 2017, 73).

Goodman (2003) asserts that critical literacy proficiency enables learners to evaluate information (critically) and to make informed decisions. As a result, critical literacy can capacitate learners to contribute and participate in the transformation of their social environment. Furthermore, critical literacy (with a specific focus on critical reading comprehension) can inform learners, as readers of texts and citizens of the world, that all forms of discourse (including printed text) are never value-free, but are embedded within social, political, cultural, and/or economic entities (McInulty 2013, 18).

Promoting classroom critical literacy practices demands of scholars of literacy that they continue the search for literacy instruction and learning models and approaches that can assist with equipping learners to practise critical reading effectively in the classroom. The instruction and learning of critical literacy through the lens of critical reading comprehension is the focus of this article. To assist us in addressing the research question presented in this article, Luke and Freebody's Four Resources Model of Critical Literacy and Janks's Interdependent Model of Critical Literacy are presented and discussed.

### **The Four Resources Model of Critical Literacy**

The Four Resources Model of Critical Literacy presents "critical literacy" as a four-component concept that promotes critical literacy practices at various levels (McInulty 2013, 18). This is specifically important for children. As hypothesised by Sigelman and

Rider (2006, 45), children are beings that learn about the world around them through social interaction. As such, it is important to introduce learners to the practice of critical literacy at the primary education level. Freebody and Luke (2003) are prominent advocates of critical literacy practices in the classroom. These researchers state that presenting learners with the opportunity to engage in textual analysis in the classroom can assist them to become more informed readers of both the word and the world. In other words, the learner can engage in the practice of critical literacy in the classroom by learning how to read the world in the text.

By conceptualising literacy as a social practice (Luke and Freebody 1999), these scholars of literacy suggest that it is shaped, reshaped, and promoted by social institutions such as schools. From the foundation phase level, educators should stimulate critical reading comprehension practices through critical instruction approaches and strategies that enable the learners not only to critique and challenge printed text but also to engage in critical discussions with the educator and one another. Accordingly, the Four Resources Model of Critical Literacy serves as a relevant pedagogical reference to explore the critical reading comprehension practices in education.

The four components of the model needed for the critical understanding of various forms of texts are: the code-breaking ability (phonics, vocabulary), the meaning-making ability (reading comprehension), the text-using ability (sociocultural interaction with meaning created by texts), and the critical-analysis-of-text ability (critical text analysis resulting in transformation).

**Table 1:** Four Resources Model of Critical Literacy

<b>Critical literacy components</b>	<b>Application of critical literacy component</b>
Code-breaking ability	The code-breaking ability refers to phonological and syntactical awareness, which involves the understanding and interplay of sentence structure, parts of speech, and textual information that enable the learner to use prior knowledge and make sense of text through accurate word usage and concise sentence constructions to break the code of language. Code-breaking also includes understanding discourses based on the sociocultural practices of communities, institutions or social groups.
Meaning-making ability	The meaning-making ability refers to semantic awareness and the attachment of meaning to a text, that is, understanding print and verbal discourse with the objective of comprehension. The available knowledge and experience schemata in a reader and/or listener are evoked and effectively employed to attach meaning to discourse. Inferring meaning thus entails more than what the sum of words represents in discourse. The process of reading comprehension converts the role of the reader from a passive contributor to texts (just to read and understand) to an active participant in texts, that is, to take meaning from and give meaning to texts, along with the ability to redesign texts with the purpose of initiating positive actions and reactions, not only at a personal level but within the greater community. In other words, it is the process of converting reading comprehension into critical reading comprehension.
Text-using ability	The text-using ability refers to pragmatics, that is, the function of words in text, since critical literacy involves not only recognising words and their meaning (code-breaking and meaning-making capabilities) but also recognising the way in which language forms and content are altered to match cultural and social norms required by differing social contexts. The text-using ability refers to the learner's ability to recognise different text forms and to be aware of how and why the author chose to employ these various uses of text.
Critical-analysis-of-text ability	The critical analysis of text refers to the ability to recognise that every text is embedded with sociocultural determinants and ideologies, which represent the bias applied by the author with the intent to guide and persuade the reader to his/her point of view. In other words, the text composer will silence some perspectives while making others audible, and only those who can apply critical reading comprehension are capable text critics, able to analyse and challenge authorial intentions. More importantly, through critical reading comprehension, learners become aware that textual characters and groups of situations can be altered to include or increase missing or non-dominant voices, as well as alternative perspectives.

Adapted from Freebody and Luke (2003, 58) and McNulty (2013, 19)

One of the reasons why the Four Resources Model of Critical Literacy is pertinent within the framework of this study is that it considers the literacy needs of learners, their linguistic and sociocultural practices, the literacy challenges of the time (such as South African learners' reading comprehension challenges outlined in the PIRLS reports), and future literacy pathways (Freebody and Luke 2003, 58). Moreover, McNulty (2013, 19) explains that this model facilitates an approach to critical literacy practices that draws on socioculturally inclusive, collaborative, and adaptable pedagogies.

Although the Four Resources Model provides insight into critical reading instruction, the model has a few drawbacks. One is that it only focuses on situating the learner within the reading context. For example, first, the learner needs to practise decoding, which focuses on emphasising sounds, vocabulary, and grammar. Second, the practice of meaning-making places the emphasis on cohesion, genre and register. Third, the practice of action places the emphasis on communicative purpose and genre. Finally, the practice of analysis is where the learner may develop an understanding of the application of the text and the relationship of the text to other texts, as well as developing skills to evaluate the effectiveness of the text. The Four Resources Model does not explicitly focus on the role of the educator in this context; nor does it consider the critical literacy process of learners' knowledge obtained through reading the text and relating it to reality. This omission in the Four Resources Model is flagged by Luke (2000), who points out that the model does not propose a developmental hierarchy whereby one moves from coding practices to analytical practices.

### **The Interdependent Model of Critical Literacy**

Janks (2002, 2010, 2013) is one of the primary researchers of critical literacy practices among young people in South Africa. Gregory and Cahill (2009) describe schools as learning institutions that have the potential to guide learners (who constitute the population of young people) to understand the relationship between knowledge and power. For this reason, Janks (2002, 2010, 2013) advocates the need for critical literacy among young people. These researchers posit that critical literacy instruction provided by the educator empowers learners to gain insight into the reason for, as well as how to interpret, power structures, not only in the written word but also in the world they live.

McInulty (2013, 17) asserts that in today's fast-paced, digital world, learners are continuously bombarded with various forms of text and printed images, such as advertisements, tweets, social media, consumer information and others. Hence, literacy is viewed as socially constructed and situated practices within our discourse environments, which are influenced by knowledge, culture, values, social class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, economics, and politics. For this reason, as Shannon (1995) points out, critical literacy, which is achieved through critical reading comprehension, provides the learner the space to explore, act on, and even react to the present, the past, and the future.

Related to the above, in Janks's (2004) hypothesis, critical literacy is based on a sociocultural theory of language and pedagogies that interrogate the relationship between language, literacy, and power. Echoing Janks, Gregory and Cahill (2009) summarise the four constituents of critical literacy pedagogies as follows: pedagogies based on the constituent of power, also referred to as the constituent of domination, enable learners and educators to explore the impact of language policies, language structure, language usage, and the effect of signs in human relations in a societal context portrayed in texts and in life. To promote the constituent of access, critical reading comprehension can allow non-dominant role players access to the knowledge, language, and power relations of dominant individuals, groups, stakeholders, or situations in both the word and the world. The constituent of diversity refers to classroom pedagogies that explore the practices of language usage to create, affect, and legitimate diverse social identities illustrated by words as well as reality. The design/redesign aspect examines "language" as a social concept that affects human relationships that present/represent individual, communal, and social identities and realities, along with the context of "social relations and interactions" (Gregory and Cahill 2009, 9). Janks (2010, 2013) illustrates the four constituents of critical literacy, which is achieved through critical reading comprehension, as follows:

**Table 2:** The Interdependent Model of Critical Literacy

<b>Constituents and relations in critical literacy education</b>	<b>Relation description</b>
Power and access	The relation of power is the dominant constituent of whom we are, what we say, and what we do in our daily lives, and these humanistic practices are sometimes reflected in texts by means of powerful language usage or print representation.
Power and diversity	Power without diversity lacks the need for transformation, whereas power coupled with diversity facilitates change, which can occur because of critical reading comprehension.
Power and design/redesign	The design constituent refers to human creativity to deconstruct, with the purpose of redesigning (reconstructing) powerful texts and practices by means of language, which can include critical reading comprehension.
Access and power	The constituents of access and power refer to the recognition of how embedded power relations enhance text comprehension, based on history, identity or resources, which can be analysed through critical reading comprehension. Poor critical reading comprehension, or a lack of critical reading comprehension, can result in the incomprehension of social ills and marginalisation.
Access and diversity	The access/diversity relation refers to the subtle difference(s) imbued in a text and provides knowledge of what and who benefit from access based on history, identity or resources, which can be identified through critical reading comprehension.
Access and design/redesign	The alignment between access and design/redesign refers to forms of domination that can be used to initialise transformation and provide access based on history, identity and resources.
Diversity and power	Diversity and power refer to the latent difference(s) that occur(s) because of relations of dominion, considering that not all languages, literacies, discourses, or genres are equally powerful, and these power disparities can be signalled through critical reading comprehension.
Diversity and access	Diversity with access enables powerful language usage and informed discourse, but diversity without access to structured language usage “ghettoises” the learners. In contrast, critical reading ability can enhance language proficiency and vocabulary.

Diversity and design/redesign	Diversity with design/redesign allows for different ideas, creativity, and alternative viewpoints pertaining to the discourse, which can initiate change individually and in a sociocultural context. A lack of diversity and design/redesign leads to knowledge stagnation, whereas critical reading comprehension can assist to identify where transformation is needed to initialise redesign.
Design/redesign and power	The absence of power relations in designs/redesigns produces static relations that are unable to initiate change.
Design/redesign and access	The relationship between design and access can involve inaction. The design/redesign theme persists when inaccessibility is present based on history, identity and resources. However, access to social power enables the reader to design/redesign.
Design/redesign and diversity	This relationship refers to the benefits afforded to dominant forms and structures portrayed in discourse, illustrating the inequality that can be caused by a lack of design/redesign with diversity.

Adapted from Janks (2013, 227)

The Interdependent Model of Critical Literacy, as proposed by Janks (2010, 2013), was regarded as applicable for this study in the search for a critical reading comprehension model that educators can use in school classrooms to scaffold learners towards critical literacy. In addition, the English FAL classroom as a sociocultural environment was proposed to illustrate the necessity, as implied by the PIRLS reports, of implementing critical reading comprehension as a tool of learning and instruction in a linguistically, culturally, and socially diverse, yet democratic society.

Critical literacy, particularly critical reading comprehension, as mentioned by Coffey (2008, 1) and Janks (2002, 6), empowers the reader to interact reflectively with the text, to acquire an insight into the imbalances generated through the misuse of power, such as inequality, discrimination, and injustice in human relationships. Consequently, Janks (2002, 6; 2004, 1) reasons that all the constituents of literacy education, that is, power, access, diversity, and design/redesign, are equally important and function interdependently to promote critical literacy as a practice by teaching learners to understand and manage the relationship between language (which is the cornerstone of literacy) and power.

Luke and Freebody's Four Resources Model of Critical Literacy and Janks's Interdependent Model of Critical Literacy both attempt to promulgate a sociocultural interpretation of literacy by encouraging learners to read, interact, analyse, critique, compare, concur, disagree, accept or reject, as well as design or redesign print material and the meaning attached to it, with the purpose of effecting individual and social transformation. A review of these models serves as a point of reference for existing critical literacy pedagogies that address critical reading comprehension, through which learners are encouraged and taught through scaffolding to analyse, challenge, accept,

reject, or differ from information according to the word or the world. Ultimately, both models provide an effective framework as a prelude to the newly proposed critical reading comprehension model, CRILM.

This article positions critical literacy, which includes critical reading comprehension, as an essential classroom practice and enables the researchers to propose the CRILM, a critical reading comprehension model that can be used by both educators and learners in the English FAL classroom against a sociocultural backdrop.

## The Proposed Critical Reading Interdependent Literacy Model

Based on the review of the two critical reading models, the researchers developed the Critical Reading Interdependent Literacy Model based on the three building blocks of (1) participation in the reading process, (2) interaction with the text and other participants within the reading process, and (3) the interdependence of the various components within the reading process. The model is designed to be used at school level and is suitable from Grade 4 and beyond.

## The Origin of the Proposed Model

A model of instruction and learning describes the learning environment and the behaviour of the participants within the environment where the model is used (Joyce, Weil, and Calhoun 2014). Thus, a model can be understood to be an instructional learning pedagogy that directs the educator's instruction approaches and supports effective learning processes. In the classroom environment, educators endeavour to promote appropriate learner participation and interaction with instructional learning materials to facilitate optimal and life-long learning.

Considering the consistently low performance of South African learners, as shown in the PIRLS reports (Mullis et al. 2006; Mullis et al. 2009; Mullis and Martin 2015), it is evident that teachers do not effectively promote critical reading comprehension instruction and learning practices in the classroom. The researchers, influenced by the Four Resources Model of Critical Literacy (adapted from Freebody and Luke [2003, 58] and McNulty [2013, 19]) and the Interdependent Model of Critical Literacy (adapted from Janks [2013, 227]), propose a critical reading comprehension instruction and learning model, that is, the CRILM, which is suitable from Grade 4 and beyond.

The Four Resources Model of Critical Literacy refers to four components involved in the critical understanding of various forms of text, which are the code-breaking ability (phonics, vocabulary), the meaning-making ability (reading comprehension), the text-using ability (sociocultural interaction with meaning created by texts), and the critical-analysis-of-text ability (critical text analysis resulting in transformation). To give greater effect to the existing Four Resources Model of Critical Literacy and enhance its relevance with regard to having an impact on the present-day instruction-learning process and contemporary sociocultural environments, the researchers blended it with

the Interdependent Model of Critical Literacy. Wade and Moje (2000, 67) point out that critical literacy practices are “intertextual” because they require extraction from as well as the integration of literacy skills, daily literacy activities, past literacy experiences, as well as social, cultural, and environmental involvement if readers are to fully comprehend a text, form their own interpretations of the text, make sense of the environment around them, and contribute to transformation in their sociocultural environments. For this reason, the researchers concluded that critical literacy, particularly critical reading comprehension, refers to the art of reading, questioning, interpreting, and critiquing societally constructed concepts, such as the impression of power within human relationships in a sociocultural environment.

In response to the above, the researchers conclude that certain elements, namely (a) participation, (b) interaction, and (c) interdependency, are pivotal in the critical reading comprehension instruction-learning process, with the classroom serving as the sociocultural environment.

**Participation:** Nel, Nel, and Hugo (2016, 13) explain that every learner should be presented with an opportunity to participate in all classroom activities to ensure shared learning experiences. In effect, participation requires a participatory environment in which the learners have a sense of inclusion, empowerment, and self-determination (Soresi, Nota, and Wehmeyer 2011). But more pertinent to this study is the elucidation by the *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health* (World Health Organization [WHO] 2001) that describes participation as working and supporting people to choose and achieve shared goals in reciprocal recognition, acknowledging the rights and high expectations of every individual, and the use of power to advance and not disadvantage the person receiving support (Soresi, Nota, and Wehmeyer 2011).

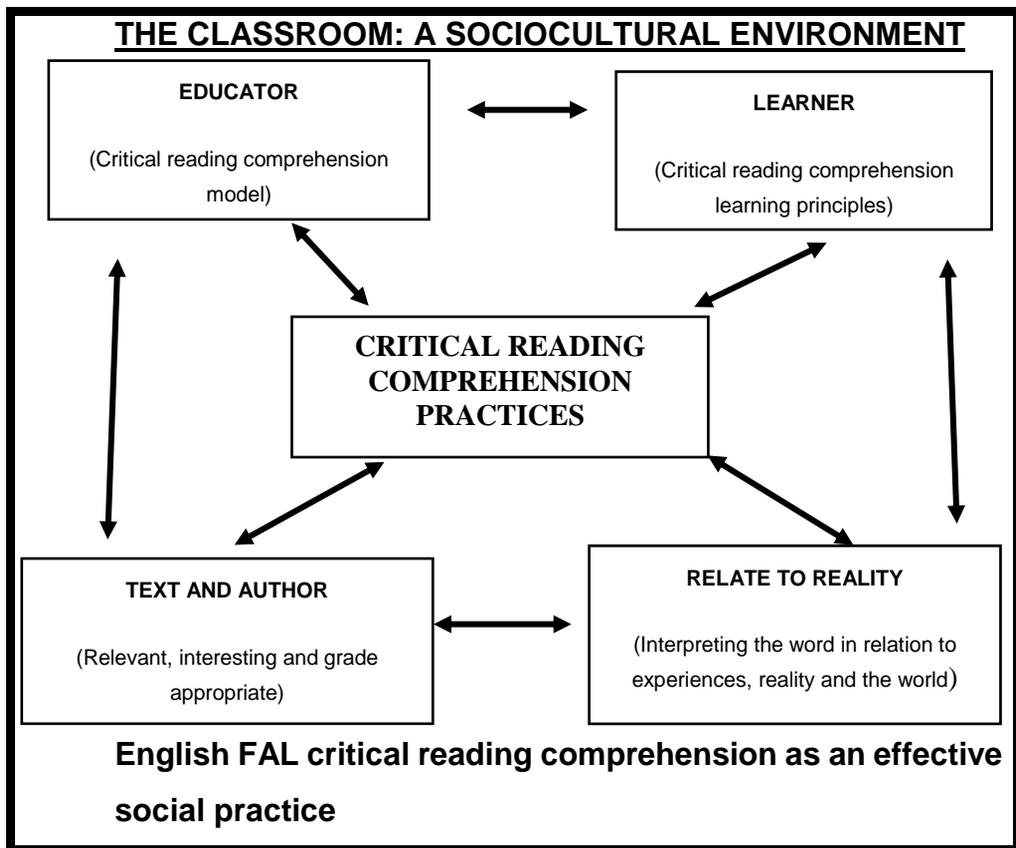
**Interaction:** When learners are active participants in the classroom, it generates a sense of acceptance that can encourage free interaction (Donald, Lazarus, and Lolwana 2014, 155). Apart from participation, Donald, Lazarus, and Lolwana (2014) assert that meaningful interaction is also required to construct as well as reconstruct learners’ knowledge in a social classroom context. Engelbrecht and Swanepoel (2013, 9) point out that the facilitation of interaction requires the relinquishing of power differences between the educator and the learners to ensure “equal membership in the classroom”, with the purpose of promoting critical literacy practices such as constructive social dialogue within the classroom.

**Interdependence:** Donald, Lazarus, and Lolwana (2014, 410) posit that interdependence manifests through a change in one component in a process affecting or influencing the other components, which ultimately influences the result. In other words, no component within the process or system can operate successfully on an individual level. There is an equally balanced relationship between all the components in the process or system. Thus, these researchers explain, what happens to one component also happens to the other component. Holistically, these components are

interdependent in their interactions with one another (Donald, Lazarus, and Lolwana 2014, 41). In other words, the educator, the learners, the text, the author, and their life experiences all depend on one another for interpretation, association, constructive discourse, and making sense of the word and relating it to occurrences in the world.

Everyone and everything within the sociocultural classroom environment that enter the critical reading comprehension situation becomes a participator and interacts with the other participants. They become dependent on the participation and interaction of the other participants in order to establish classroom critical literacy practices. Based on this preamble, the researchers designed and developed the CRILM.

The Critical Reading Interdependent Literacy Model of instruction and learning is proposed because it is viewed as a set of social and cultural interactive processes, which require the participation of both the educator and the learners, and this process is demonstrated by the following diagrammatic model:



**Figure 1:** The Critical Reading Interdependent Literacy Model (CRILM)

## Principles of the Proposed Critical Reading Interdependent Literacy Model of Instruction and Learning of Critical Reading Comprehension

The CRILM is based on the reviewed models, (a) the Four Resources Model of Critical Literacy and (b) the Interdependent Model of Critical Literacy. The CRILM principles demonstrate that all the components within the critical reading comprehension process are interactive with regard to each other and dependent on each other for the effective interpretation of the word and the world.

The principles proposed by the CRILM are as follows:

The educator should adhere to the following critical reading comprehension principles:

- Act as a model of critical reading comprehension awareness by identifying, introducing and promoting relevant reading materials and topics based on the learners' interests in the classroom.
- Align the purposes of the various types of textual material with the objectives of critical reading literacy as outlined by National Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements.
- Use the CRILM to ensure that all learners have access to and participate in the critical reading comprehension curriculum according to their individual academic level.
- Use the CRILM to accommodate all learners in the critical reading process and dialogue about the topic of the comprehension text, since it allows all learners to participate in the critical reading comprehension process at their own unique level of interpretation.
- Use the CRILM to scaffold the learners to construct their own learning experiences based on prior knowledge, interaction, and real-world occurrences and relationships.

The learner should adhere to the following critical reading comprehension principles:

- Apply various critical reading comprehension strategies to a text to have a holistic impression of and insight into the comprehension text and engage in dialogue about the topic of the text with the educator and peers.
- Apply the meaning-making ability (reading comprehension), the text-using ability (sociocultural interaction with meaning created by texts) and the critical-analysis-of-text ability (critical text analysis resulting in sociocultural insight) during critical reading comprehension.
- Apply a critical analysis of the text by identifying textual characters, as well as groups of situations that can be altered to include or increase missing or non-dominant voices, as well as alternative perspectives.
- Identify (a) the constituent of access, which refers to classroom literacy practices allowing access to knowledge, (b) the constituent of power, which refers to the language that shows the power relations of the dominant individual, group,

stakeholders, or situation, (c) the constituent of diversity, which refers to classroom pedagogies that explore the practices of language usage to create, affect, and legitimate diverse social identities illustrated by words, as well as reality, and (d) the design/redesign constituent, which examines “language” as a social concept that affects the human relationships, social identities, and realities portrayed by the comprehension text, along with the context of social relations and interactions.

The text and the author should adhere to the following critical reading comprehension principles:

- The text should be based on a topic with which the learners can identify and that triggers their interest, which will promote interactive learning between the learners, the educator, and the text.
- The text should be grade-specific, relevant to the sociocultural environment of the learners, and reflective of relevant occurrences and real-life relationships.
- The role of the author needs to be clarified, and the involvement of various characters and components should be highlighted and described so that the learners are aware of the ambiguity of issues, for example, culture, gender, and ethnicity, within the comprehension text.
- The context of the author’s voice needs to be explained to the learners to show that every text expresses the voice of the author(s), which may be influenced by ambiguity, the use of rhetoric, gender, and social or cultural conventions, among other factors.
- The learners should be guided to question and discuss the narrative and grammatical constructions in the comprehension text, as well as to identify the worldview and/or reality depicted by the text, since all texts relate to and uphold a worldview.

The reality relationship should adhere to the following critical reading literacy principles:

- Interpretation and critical awareness: The learners should reflect on their own experiences to identify the difference and/or similarities between the occurrences in the text juxtaposed with real-life occurrences and relationships.
- Decision-making and thoughtful problem solving: The learners need to consider their position in relation to the text and/or reality, which will assist them to solve problems identified in the text and/or guide them as to how to solve problems in their own lives.
- Relationships: The learners need to identify and discuss the various relationships illustrated by the text and refer to and compare their own relationships with people and institutions in their lives.
- The learners should identify, explain, and elaborate on power relationships, the potential for change with regard to diversity, equal access to opportunities, and the deconstruction and reconstruction portrayed by comprehension texts by relating

their own experiences, emotions, and beliefs about these factors in their lives, as well as discussing how these factors affect them.

The CRILM instruction and learning framework proposes a participatory-interactive-interdependent relationship that will present the educators, the learners, the text, and the author with a platform to initiate critical insight and societal knowledge development through the text and the author from within the classroom.

## The Significance of the New Proposed Critical Reading Interdependent Literacy Model (CRILM)

As learners begin their formal schooling instruction, they do not only develop their reading literacy skills, but also the ability to critically comprehend text. CRILM was designed to help address the poor reading comprehension ability of learners and promote effective critical reading comprehension instruction and learning within English FAL classrooms. In other words, this new model would help direct and support educators regarding how to use a critical reading approach to support critical reading comprehension in the classroom. In addition, the new model will provide scaffolding to learners on how to apply critical reading literacy strategies to text, which will enhance their critical reading comprehension ability and promote classroom critical reading literacy.

Literacy is a practice of interaction that occurs within a person and among people, groups, and communities in different social settings (Street 2001, 430). To put it differently, the gap in the classroom reading literacy field that the researchers sought to address with this study, specifically referring to critical reading comprehension, is that:

- Literacy is a practice of interaction that exists between: (a) the educator, (b) the learner, (c) the text and its author and (d) how the learner relates to all these components within (e) a sociocultural environment, such as the English FAL classroom.
- Literacy inter-occurs between people, groups, and communities such as: (a) the educator and the learner, (b) the educator and the text, (c) the educator and reality, (d) the learner and the educator, (e) between the learners, (f) the learner and the text, (g) the learner and reality, and (h) the text and reality.

In other words, all the participants involved in the critical reading comprehension situation participate in the literacy instruction-learning process. Moreover, the interdependent and interactive literacy interactions occur through the participation of all the participants in the classroom, which serves as a sociocultural setting. The participatory approach to instruction involves the participation of educators and the learners in an ongoing interactive analysis of text with the intention of attaining “personal reading goals, problem-solving strategies for making sense of texts and the resources available for building knowledge beyond the text” (Alvermann 2002, 202).

## Conclusion

This article addressed the question “How can South African learners’ reading comprehension ability in the classroom be improved?” and offered a possible solution in the proposed new Critical Reading Interdependent Literacy Model (CRILM).

Within the sociocultural classroom context, the CRILM could possibly assist educators in providing better support to learners in the critical reading instruction process. Furthermore, the CRILM could also guide educators in assisting learners with how to engage critically with a text and its author in a manner that promotes insight not only into what they read but also their lived realities.

Through a review of (a) the Four Resources Model of Critical Literacy and (b) the Interdependent Model of Critical Literacy, combined with their experiential knowledge as educators, the researchers designed and proposed the new Critical Reading Interdependent Literacy Model. The CRILM may assist to enhance educators’ approaches to critical reading comprehension instruction by embedding critical literacy in their practices. Furthermore, the CRILM may initiate or enhance learners’ awareness that any text is embedded with sociocultural elements and guide them regarding how to recognise these elements in a text through the lens of critical reading comprehension.

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