Fostering Creative and Critical Literacy Skills in Children's Multimodal Literacy Practices

Çocukların Çok yönlü Okuma-Yazma Uygulamalarında Yaratıcı ve Eleştirel Okuryazarlık Yetilerini Geliştirme

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Abstract

It is a widely known fact that children today are extensively exposed to digital and multimodal literacies. Such exposure to digital and multimodal literacies requires child learners' adaptation to semiotic resources, especially in formal settings such as classrooms. By linking the importance of children's adaptation to semiotic resources to the development of critical thinking or literacy skills, this review paper highlights the crucial role of achieving critical literacy skills or developing critical thinking skills, and suggests ways of improving pre-school curricula by drawing on the related literature. The paper also focuses on the idea of creativity, as well as notions of 'little c creativity' and 'possibility thinking', and makes suggestions on how these skills can be fostered and nurtured in pre-school contexts. Moreover, the paper explores how critical literacy skills can be enhanced through multimodal literacy practices and suggests possible classroom practices and tasks.

Keywords: Creativity, multimodal literacy, possibility thinking, critical literacy, early years, pre-school.

Öz

Günümüzde çocukların yoğun bir şekilde dijital ve çok yönlü yazın yeteneğinin olduğu ortamlara maruz kaldıkları herkesçe bilinen bir gerçektir. Bu durum çocukların kendilerini, özellikle sınıf gibi resmi ortamlardaki göstergesel kaynaklara adapte etmelerini gerektirmektedir. Bu çalışma, çocukların göstergesel kaynaklara kendilerini adapte edebilmelerinin önemi ile eleştirel düşünme ve okuma-yazma yetilerinin geliştirilmesi ile ilişki kurarak, eleştirel düşünme yetisinin hayati önemini vurgulamayı ve okul öncesi müfredatının geliştirilmesi için ilgili alanyazından da yararlanarak önerilerde bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Ayrıca, bu çalışma yaratıcılık, 'küçük y ile yaratıcılık', 'olasılıklı düşünme' gibi kavramlar üzerinde durarak bu becerilerin okul öncesi eğitimde nasıl geliştirileceğine dair bazı hususların altı çizilmiştir. Bunun dışında, çalışmada, eleştirel okuma-yazma yetilerinin çok yönlü okuma-yazma uygulamaları ile nasıl geliştirileceğine dair sınıf-içi aktivitelere dair önerilere de dikkat çekilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yaratıcılık, çok yönlü okuryazarlık, olasılıklı düşünme, eleştirel okuryazarlık, ilk yıllar, okul öncesi.

1. Introduction

This paper discusses the ongoing importance of fostering possibility thinking as an aspect of creativity (Burnard, Craft, Cremin, Duffy, Hanson, Keene, Haynes, & Burns, 2006) and critical literacy skills in an era surrounded by multiple and multimodal literacy landscapes. In today's world, various types of multimedia such as computer, laptop, iPad, television, and text messaging have a pervasive presence in children's lives. In today's world, students do not only require print literacy practices but also need to be provided with a range of digital literacy practices so that they can learn how to use semiotic resources and communicate in digital environments (Craft & Chappell, 2014; Saccardi, 2014; Schmier, 2014). For instance, in order to survive and thrive in this innovative, digital, and technological world

surrounded by a variety of semiotic resources, it is of utmost importance that these practical skills should be nurtured and fostered effectively within curriculum. To this end, the aim of this paper is to draw upon the literature to define multi-literacies and multimodal literacies and why it is important to use them as literacy practices in today's classrooms.

First the paper focuses on exploring some scholar's conceptualization of literacy. As many state (e.g. Arrow & Finch, 2013; Craft & Chappell, 2014; Johnson & Vasudevan, 2012), literacies in literacy education are multiple, and also vary in their modes. Rowsell & Walsh (2011) state that:

> modes are regularized sets of resources for making meaning. A visual, a sound, a word, a movement, animation, spatial dimensions are resources brought together or in isolation to achieve an effect in texts. Such effects are read and composed in different ways compared with linguistic text features (p. 55).

Semiotic resources, on the other hand, are said to be the activities or tasks that enhance our meaning-making. Such meaning-making is often conceptualized in the field of multimodality, which deals with how people understand modes and multiliteracies, and is often viewed as a kind of pedagogy (Arrow & Finch, 2013). There is a claim by those scholars working in the field of multiliteracies that "the screen governs our understanding of the world, and curricula need to reflect this dramatic shift in our ideological and interpretative frame" (Rowsell & Walsh, 2011, p. 55). Hence, many argue that teaching should be based on what students are already familiar with, or along with the skills they have already acquired or know; in other words, what they have already been exposed to (e.g., screen). In this way, it is believed that their learning can be critically framed allowing them to think in relation to "multiple modes, issues of power, ruling passions, communities of practices, home and community literacy, the role of their race, culture, religion, and social class in their literacy learning" (Rowsell & Walsh, 2011, p. 56). In the light of these arguments, we would contend that in order to cope with the changing social and semiotic landscape, students should be provided with multimodal literacy practices in which they can make meanings with different kinds of mode. Therefore, being literate in the contemporary world requires being creative and critical thinkers who can successfully adapt their gained literacy skills into their lives and contribute to social actions. Thus, in addition to developing literacy skills, educators should also provide students with practices through which they can develop their critical and creative thinking skills so that they can "critically enquire into the historical, cultural and social nature of particular systems and practices in order to transform knowledge for their own purposes" (Schmier, 2014, p. 40).

Accordingly, rather than focusing on traditional literacy, it can be argued that schools should provide students with multiple literacy curricula in which learners' cognitive thinking skills (creative and critical) can be nurtured and developed so that they are able to transfer and apply their learning to the rapidly changing world (Silvers et al., 2010). One way of doing this could be the inclusion of critical pedagogy into literacy. Our continuously changing world requires active, reflective individuals who are equipped with analytical skills and who can contribute to welfare in social, economic, industrial and cultural fields. Giroux's (2010, p. 717) definition of critical pedagogy is clear, in the sense that it may shed light on how critical pedagogy can become a power and how, they can contribute to all sorts of social actions and social changes:

> Critical pedagogy attempts to understand how power works through the production, distribution, and consumption of knowledge within particular institutional contexts and seeks to constitute students as informed subjects and social agents (p. 717).

Within this scope, it would not be wrong to say that educators should find ways in which they can foster and nurture students' critical and creative thinking skills and widen their perspectives. Therefore, we would argue that if students' common interests are valued and included in literacy practices, they could have competence in critical and creative thinking skills. In this context, we can propose that educators should give an ear to students' out-of-school interests and experiences and incorporate them into their learning experiences because as Schmier (2014) notes that bringing students' popular cultural artefacts and practices into the classroom can enhance their academic literacy skills. There is also no doubt that being able to use these skills effectively enables students to use and apply their own language in a unique way and become reflective learners (Norris et al., 2012). Moreover, gaining these cognitive skills may help them become confident and independent individuals who can later intrepidly and successfully transfer and apply their knowledge to the real world and contribute to economical, industrial, social and cultural welfare and change (Saccardi, 2014).

In this paper, we aim to shed a light on the development of critical and creative thinking abilities in the current world which involves different semiotic resources. In the first section, we elaborate on the concepts of creativity and critical literacy and show how and where they intersect. In the second and final sections, we touch upon multiliteracies and multimodalities in literacy practices and argue that since the children are surrounded by a variety of multiple and multimodal literacy practices in their digital worlds, educators should value students' out-of-school experiences and bring them into the classroom to enact with their creative and critical thinking skills.

2. Unpacking Creativity and Critical Literacy

2.1. Little c creativity

Creativity can be explained in numerous ways and in varying disciplines. Howard Gardner (1997), for example, defines creativity as "the ability to solve problems and fashion products and to raise new questions" (p. 27). Lucas (2001) contends that "it is a state of mind in which all our intelligences are working together" (p. 121) whereas Robinson (2001) states that it is an "imaginative process with outcomes that are original and of value" (p. 26). However, in this paper, we unlock creativity by drawing upon literature on Craft's notion of 'little c creativity' and 'possibility thinking' since today's people are required to use their creative thinking skills effectively in order to survive and thrive in a rapidly changing world. Therefore, rather than focusing on "high creativity, which can only be manifested by the talented" (Craft, 2002, p. 56), our focus is on a sort of ordinary creativity that everyone is capable of learning and using. It is a life-wide fundamental attribute that empowers people to adapt and respond to the fast-changing world (Craft, 2003, p. 122). To begin with, we provide some definitions in an attempt to define what little c creativity is:

> …little c creativity … focuses on the resourcefulness and agency of ordinary people. A 'democratic' notion, in that I propose it can be manifested by anyone (and not just the few), it refers to an ability to route find, successfully charting new courses through everyday challenges. It is the sort of creativity, or 'agency', which guides route finding and choices in everyday life. It involves being imaginative, being original/innovative, stepping at times outside of convention, going beyond the obvious being self-aware of all of this in taking active, conscious, and intentional action in the world (Craft, 2002, p. 56).

Looking at the above definition, it is clear that little c creativity is not an innate, extraordinary ability but a kind of ability that everyone can learn and develop. There is no doubt that today's world is a technological and digital place, and this technological and digital environment makes up a large part of our everyday lives. In other words, the digital environment that we are living in has become our everyday life. Therefore, as quoted above, in order "to cope with these everyday challenges" (Craft, 2002, p. 56), education policies should turn their attention from extraordinary creativity to ordinary, practical creativity. In addition to this, today's educators need to perceive students' creativity as a "fundamental attribute" (Craft, 2003, p.122) and should develop and foster it in order to enable them to survive and thrive in this digital world. Moreover, when this fundamental skill is nurtured, students can become individuals who "have trust, freedom of action, variations in context, the right balance between skills and challenges and interactive exchange of knowledge and ideas, as well as real world outcomes to reinforce change" (Banaji et al., 2010, p. 42) and, with this gained skill, they can easily keep up with the rapid changes in economies, societies, digital environments, and technology (Craft, 2013; 2014). Accordingly, educating individuals to become innovative, imaginative and problem solving thinkers should start in the early years. They should gain the capability of using their creative thinking skills when they are young and use these skills effectively for imagining possible consequences (Craft, 2014). For this very reason, creativity in early years and primary education has gained critical importance internationally. At this point, we want to steer the discussion to possibility thinking.

2.2. Possibility thinking

The notion of possibility thinking was coined by Craft (2002) when she argued that it is "at the core of creative learning" (p. 109), as creative thinking requires thinking of possibilities through questioning, self-expression and imagining. Craft's (2002) definition of possibility thinking is as follows:

> Possibility thinking encompasses an attitude which refuses to be stumped by circumstances, but uses imagination, with the intention to find a way around a problem. It involves the posing of questions, whether or not these are actually conscious, formulated or voices. The posing of questions may range from wondering about the world which surrounds us, which may lead to both finding and solving problems; and from formulated questions at one end of the spectrum, through to nagging puzzles, to a general sensitivity at the other. Possibility thinking also involves problem finding. Being able to identify a question, a topic for investigation, a puzzle to explore, a possible new option, all involve "finding" or "identifying" a problem (p. 111–2).

Within the scope of this definition, we would argue that today's technological, innovative and digital world requires smart individuals who can efficiently use their imagination to think of possibilities for finding solutions and generating new ideas. Therefore, possibility thinking should be qualified as a twenty-first century capability (Craft, 2014) and take place in the early year's curriculum. This was also highlighted in an earlier study by Burnard et al. (2006), which

is similar to Craft's conceptualization of possibility thinking, and generated a framework to emphasize the importance of possibility thinking in the early years. Their reconceptualised possibility thinking involves:

- Posing questions
- Play
- Immersion
- Innovation
- Risk-taking
- Being imaginative
- Self-determination (Burnard et al., 2006, p. 29).

In their paper, Cremin et al. (2006) also argued that when these core areas of possibility thinking are integrated into creative teaching and learning in the early years, children's critical aspect of creativity is fostered and developed:

> Possibility thinking is implicit in learners' engagement with problems, suggesting that it is exemplified through the posing, in multiple ways, of the question 'what if?' and that it involves the shift from 'what is this and what does it do?' to 'what can I do with this? (Cremin et al., 2006, p. 109).

The above quotation can be interpreted in the sense that if, for example, young children are provided with opportunities to pose questions, imagine alternatives and generate new ideas, they can learn how to think creatively and critically. Moreover, they can learn how to use these fundamental thinking skills in this innovative, digital world. There is no doubt that in order to keep up with the technological and digital changes, citizens of our world need to be imaginative and develop the critical aspect of their creativity to pose questions such as "what if?" and "what can I do with this?" This is well explained by Craft (2014) as:

> In a world characterised by radical change and continuous, often unexpected, decision-making and the balancing of dilemmas, undertaken both individually and collaboratively, it could be argued that PT is a core capability of responsible and imaginative citizens and so a core element of what educators need to offer all students (p. 4–5).

All the information provided above is subject to the need for creative and critical thinkers in the contemporary world. Therefore, we would argue that when an individual is able to use his/her imagination effectively and pose the right questions at the right time to find solutions for certain problems, they can become the creative and critical thinkers. In other words, as Fisher and Williams (2004) put forth:

> We need both critical and creative thinking, both analysis and synthesis, both the parts and the whole to be effective in our thinking. We need both reason and intuition, order and adventure in our thinking. We need creative thinking to generate the new, but critical thinking to make judgements about it" (p. 114).

The implication here is that PT is like "engine of creativity" (Chappell et al., 2008, p. 9) and this "engine" is what intersects creativity and critical thinking. It helps to generate the new and at the same time makes judgements through posing questions. Therefore, we would contend that developing and fostering these skills would give individuals the power of self-expression to question and the power of self-confidence to challenge other values, attitudes, and beliefs in their social practices. As it is known, social practices require language to share knowledge and convey messages.

In today's world, we do not have only print literacy. Literacy is everywhere. It exists in pictures, photos, billboards, images and symbols, and in digital settings. In other words, it has become multimodal and most social practices and interactions occur in these multimodal and digital literacy settings in a contemporary society. Accordingly, there is a need for a skill or skills that will enable us to comprehend and convey the messages in these social practices.

Each picture, each video, each poem or even Facebook or Twitter post speaks to us in a different way. They embody social, personal, or cultural messages that are embedded in each context waiting to be revealed. In order to discover the hidden message in each multimodal setting, we need to gain certain thinking abilities (possibility thinking and critical thinking) that would enable us to construct meaning and make inferences from the given picture, text, video, and message. Consequently, these skills should be rooted in the early years and curricula should provide children with those activities that would develop and foster these skills. Otherwise, as Larson (2006) notes, students will be subject to being illiterate in this world surrounded by multimodal and digital literacies. From now on, we want to change our focus on critical literacy and draw upon literature to shed some light on the vital importance of becoming critically literate in relation to today's world.

2.3. Critical literacy

Technological and digital changes have had a big impact on the literacy practices, and today the educators are trying to reshape traditional literacy practices in a way that can answer the demands of the rapidly changing world. This is clearly put forth by Carroll (2011) as:

New technologies are transforming current literacy practices and challenging what it means to be literate. Literacy instruction is being both intentionally and unintentionally adjusted to take advantage of the opportunities presented through mediums such as search engines. The new literacies will build upon the solid foundational skills of comprehension, writing, spelling, vocabulary development, phonemic awareness and phonics in order to prepare our students for the unimagined literacies of the future. Our goal remains that students need to be equipped to become critical thinkers, problem solvers, innovators, effective communicators and collaborators, and self-directed learners (p. 28).

The statement above can be viewed as evidence that being literate takes on a completely different meaning under the current circumstances when our lives are not immune for the impact of technology and digital media. New literacy requires wise, humanizing creativity that generates innovative, creative, and critical thinkers, who can communicate effectively in collaboration and then, can contribute to social change (Craft & Chappell, 2014). In other words, social changes and developments in nations happen when the people begin "thinking outside the box" (Notar & Padgett, 2010: 45) through questioning the values, attitudes and beliefs of the multimodal literacies around them. Therefore, literacy practices should provide students with opportunities to learn more than reading and writing only, but to become critically literate so that they can contribute to social change. With this in mind, we will draw upon some literature to shed light on critical literacy as a required ability to survive and thrive in the twenty-first century.

First of all, we want to draw on Giroux's paper (2011) to highlight how the notion of critical literacy was developed. Giroux's paper (2011) discusses the crucial role of Paulo Freire in the development of 'critical pedagogy'. Giroux notes that:

Paulo Freire occupies a hallowed position among the founders of 'critical pedagogy', the educational movement guided by both passion and principle to help students develop a consciousness of freedom to recognize authoritarian tendencies, empower the imagination, connect knowledge and truth to power, and learn to read both the word and the world as part of a broader struggle for agency, justice, and democracy (p. 153).

Considering the above quotation, it can be said that critical pedagogy gives students freedom to reflect their own voice through the use of their imagination and construction of knowledge. Therefore, we can contend that critical pedagogy empowers the learners to "speak back" (Park, 2012, p. 24). Nowadays, learners come across multiple literary settings and being critically literate enables them to interpret or speak back to each value, concept or attitude that is conveyed in different literary settings. Thereby, through self-reflection, students learn to look at the world from a different perspective, as is needed for a social change. As Giroux (2011) suggests, learners need to be critical literates in order to understand the social messages conveyed in multimodal literacies. Thus, becoming a critical literate does not only mean being capable of going beyond the printed text, but also being able to go beyond the visual imagery such as posters, advertisements, cartoon and magazine layouts and to be able to read the hidden messages (Bazalgette & Buckingham, 2013). Therefore, as Giroux (2011) notes, critical pedagogy provides students with "the opportunity to read, write, and learn from a position of agency to engage in a culture of questioning" (p.154). When going beyond the printed texts and visual imageries and revealing the embedded meanings and messages, students question and challenge the existing, given knowledge. This challenge is a very valuable personal experience, since it provides students with opportunities "to relate their own narratives, social relations, and histories to what was being taught" (Giroux, 2011: 155), therefore, we would argue that critical pedagogy gives students the freedom to think beyond "the seeming naturalness or inevitability of the current state of things" (ibid.) and challenge assumptions through reflecting their own voice.

It would also be said that Freire played a significant role in the development of critical pedagogy and his arguments are at the core of critical literacy in the current educational system. Now we want to draw on literature to consider how different scholars often view critical literacy:

Critical literacy involves the analysis and critique of the social structures that create inequality and the texts that embed these unequal relations, as well as the active engagement in the reconstruction of these social structures and their corresponding textual representations (Johnson and Rosario-Ramos, 2012, p. 50).

Critical literacy can refer to the capacity to 'speak back' to written texts, considering questions such as who wrote the text, for whom, and in what context; whose interests might the text serve; and whose experiences, meanings, and perspectives are privileged. It can also mean the capacity to 'read the world' and question the basic assumptions of society (Park, 2012, p. 629).

The literature we draw on above intersects at the point that critical literacy is primarily a social practice, and it gives students the power to challenge, critique, analyse and question the messages within any kind of text (printed, visual or digital). That being said, if we are to talk about critical literacy as a social practice, we need to engage students in a sort of critical literacy practice that involves thought-provoking printed, visual and digital texts. In other words, multimodal and multiple literacy texts should feature in school curricula to enable students to go beyond the text, to

critique, interpret and then shape and construct the hidden meaning. In her paper, Larson (2006) argues the importance of multiple literacy texts in critical literacy practice. She notes that "critical literacy serves as a useful framework for conceiving and implementing a multiple literacies curriculum that has an explicit goal of social justice and equitable participation in democratic societies" (p. 322). Therefore, we would argue that using multiple and multimodal literacies and engaging them in critical literacy practices enables students to use the power of their voice and "speak back to the texts" (Larson, 2006, 322). In addition to Larson (2006), Comber's (2003) suggestions highlighting some key principles and repertoires involved in the practice of critical literacy are also of crucial importance:

- Engaging with local realities
- Researching and analysing language-power relationships, practices and effects
- Mobilizing students' knowledge and practices
- (Re)designing texts with political and social intent and real-world use
- Subverting taken-for-granted school texts
- Focusing on students' use of local cultural texts
- Examining how power is exercised and by whom (p. 89)

These key principles can shed light on the importance of incorporating multimodal literacies that students come across in their everyday lives in critical literacy practices. In the same way, Janks (2012) emphasizes the importance of mobilizing students' critical literacy practices through engaging them in multimodal literacies that they face in their digital world. She notes that:

> In an age where the production of meaning is being democratized by Web 2, social networking sites and portable connectivity, powerful discourses continue to speak to us and to speak through us. We often become unconscious agents of their distribution. At the same time, these new media have been used for disseminating counter discourses, for mobilizing opposition for questioning and destabilizing power. This is the context within which we need to consider the role of critical literacy in education (p. 150).

Based on the above statement, it could be argued that students become more active and responsive in their critical performances when the institutions value their popular culture. In other words, students are more enthusiastic and willing to reflect on the texts that are drawn from their popular culture. Therefore, we believe that incorporating students' out-of-school, everyday literacy practices into school settings can enact responsive and critical curricula and, on top of this, encourage active and fruitful participation in which students analyse, interpret, critique, and construct unique meanings and later in their lives contribute to social change. When students' everyday texts and popular culture are valued and have a place in the critical literacy curriculum, educators can easily be aware of students' potential for thinking possibilities and constructing and reshaping their unique, personal meanings, which will then enable them to contribute to social change in the future.

As a first step, in this section we have attempted to shed light on little c creativity as everyday, life-wide creativity and then examined possibility thinking to show where creativity and critical thinking intersect. As indicated earlier, we need both creative and critical thinking skills to thrive in this digital and technological era and to contribute to the required social changes. For this reason, critical literacy, which embodies possibility thinking, as it involves questioning, imagination and engagement with problems (Craft, 2013) will be the focus of the final part of this paper enumerating the ways in which children's creative and critical literacy abilities can be fostered and developed.

3. Developing and Fostering Children's Possibility Thinking Skills and Critical Literacy Abilities in Multimodal Literacy Practices

We cannot deny the huge impact of technology on children's lives. Television, computers, digital games and social media have an important place in their out-of-school lives. This has caused educators and policy makers to turn their lenses on new literacy practices. This is also raised by Marsh (2011) as:

> The work of Lankshear and Knobel (2006) has extended the initial framework of the new literacy studies school to embody new literacy practices, which include practices that are mediated by new technologies. These activities and texts have been described variously as new literacies or digital literacy, and work in this area has acknowledged the multimodal, multimedia nature of communicative practices in contemporary societies (p. 101).

It seems that it is of vital importance to value children's multi-literacy and multimodal literacy practices in their everyday lives and to use them to develop and foster children's possibility thinking skills and critical literacy abilities. Most children generate their conversations, communication, and interaction with one another within the bounds of play and their popular culture. Marsh (2005) defines popular culture as "those cultural texts, artefacts, and practices which are attractive to large numbers of children and which are often mass produced on a global scale" (Marsh, 2005, p. 2). Therefore, play (digital), artefacts and cultural texts provide children with multimodal literacy practices in which communication involves "a diversity of modes—visual, written, auditory, musical, gestural and so on" (Bazalgette &

Buckingham, 2013, p. 97). While children are communicating and interacting in their real or virtual (digital) worlds, they are very enthusiastic and willing to question, rationalize, criticize and construct different meanings. In other words, they have the freedom and power to show their critical voice (Janks, 2010) and make different meanings in their own unique narratives and storytelling. Thus, this literacy that is found within children's everyday storytelling is invaluable and should be harnessed to support their literacy development (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011), as it allows educators to understand how children interpret, analyse and make meanings in their own narratives and storytelling. Herein, we suggest that schools should value children's out-of-school, multimodal literacy practices within the bounds of their popular culture and provide opportunities to nurture and develop their critical-analytic thinking abilities. We also argue that educating active, questioning, problem solving, critical and creative students requires inclusive classes in which children are given opportunities to talk about their shared, common world (popular culture and digital environment) and engage in extended and decontextualized conversations that nurture and develop their critical, creative thinking skills (Murphy et al., 2014). In other words, children's mutual understandings of these shared worlds (popular culture and play) provide them with opportunities to use their funds of knowledge and challenge, discuss, analyse and critique different perspectives. Therefore, this inclusive space in the classroom generates communicative practices and can later sustain change (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011, p. 131). At this point, we draw upon literature to exemplify how children's experiences with popular culture and digital environments engage them in multimodal literacy practices in which they are provided with opportunities to imagine possibilities, generate new ideas, critique, seek solutions and engage in critical social action.

In her paper, Craft (2014) notes that the twenty-first century requires a different form of creativity in which there is a collaborative and communal engagement. She also refers to this as 'humanizing creativity'. As explained in an earlier paper, Chappell & Craft (2011), as:

> Humanizing creativity emphasizes that creativity happens individually, collaboratively and communally. Communal creativity is particularly important to the humanizing process and encourages a strong focus on empathy, shared ownership and group identity……. As valuable new ideas emerge from joint embodied thinking and shared struggles, humanizing is the process of becoming more humane, an active process of change for the creative group (p. 365).

In today's world, most social activities are generated within digital environments. Therefore, these environments have become places for the youth and children of today to develop shared, collaborative and communal engagement and activities (Craft, 2013). Through social networking (e.g. Facebook and Twitter), digital games, and other digital communication networks, children engage with communities and cultures that have different beliefs, values and perspectives and develop a sense of communal and collaborative activity. Craft (2014) states that these communal and collaborative activities in digital environments foster children's humanizing creativity and possibility thinking. As Craft (2013) puts forth, the communicative affordances of technology in digital environments provide children with opportunities to experience different literacy practices (multimodal and multiliteracies). Today's digital world does not merely consist of printed texts. As Pahl & Rowsell (2011, p. 117) note, literacy practice has become more "materially situated". Children's world is full of images, pictures, sounds, artefacts and messages in which hidden meanings and messages are embedded and waiting to be revealed. Herein, educators should provide children with critical literacy practices so that they can draw on their funds of knowledge and contribute to fruitful meaning-making. These practices require the inclusion of children's out-of-school and popular culture in the school setting. Children love talking about what they value. This is why, in their out-of-school lives, they are very active and responsive. Thus, if the policies take note of children's interests and include their popular culture, such as social networking, artefacts, digital games, songs and films in the curriculum, they become more enthusiastic and responsive to contribute to discussions and meaning-making. As Pahl & Rowsell (2011) state, "Artefacts give power to meaning makers. They can lever power for learners, particularly learners who feel at the margins of formal schooling." (p. 134)

When out-of-school experiences are valued and take place within the curriculum, students are provided with opportunities to practise multimodal and multifaceted new literacies (Rowsell & Walsh, 2011). Therefore, the inclusion of children's popular culture in the curriculum not only generates enthusiastic and responsive students, but also fosters their cognitive thinking abilities and empowers to question, critique, interpret and make fruitful meanings. Moreover, most of the students share the same out-of-school experiences. Consequently, when their popular culture (digital games, social network, artefacts, etc.) is brought into the class, these common interests provide a kind of collaborative classroom atmosphere. In other words, common interests enable students to "share and receive feedback both within and beyond the classroom" (Schmier, 2014, p. 39) and to exchange ideas, critique, make decisions, solve problems and draw on their funds of knowledge collaboratively.

Accordingly, there are many benefits to drawing on children's out-of-school experiences in classes and these benefits would later enable them to contribute to social actions and social changes as they become competent at using their cognitive skills efficiently.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, we have attempted to highlight the fundamental importance of developing and fostering students' creative and critical thinking skills in the current, innovative and digital world. Every nation is looking for individuals who are smart enough to contribute to the social, economic and industrial welfare of their countries. This contribution requires some fundamental skills, such as creative and critical thinking skills. Therefore it should be one of the foremost considerations of education policies to find ways to develop and foster these skills in schools. As we have noted, if those in charge of the school curricula turn their lenses on the learners' values and bring them into the classrooms, educators can discover ways to nurture their critical and creative thinking skills. What children do, what they wear, what they play and what they listen to are the clues to understanding their values. Therefore, if educators provide students with new literacy practices in which they encounter their popular cultural artefacts and activities, they can enthusiastically and efficiently draw on their current funds of knowledge and contribute to fruitful meaning-making and social actions. Accordingly, shifting the focus of the curriculum from traditional ways of teaching and learning literacy to the integration of popular culture, multiple and multimodal literacies can develop and foster students' critical and creative skills and enable them to have the courage to reveal their suppressed thoughts so that they can critique, judge, find solutions and contribute to social actions and change. As a final argument, we would assert that if there is a need for social action and social change in societies, educational policies should not merely focus on what students do in the classroom. They should also be aware of who their students really are and what they really do outside the school. In other words, change can only happen if we can learn to value what the students' value, and change the autonomous, traditional way of teaching and learning into authentic spaces where students have the freedom to voice their embedded feelings and thoughts.

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