

Micro-Paper 58: *Critical Digital Literacies*



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Defining the Term

Critical Digital Literacies (CDL) combines several perspectives on what it means to be literate, what it means to be critical, and what it means to live and learn in a digital age.

While the definition of *literacy* continues to evolve over time, we use it to refer to the reading and writing of texts in a broad sense - we consider a wide variety of media "texts" that can be read and written. We pluralize the term to *literacies* to reflect the [many different ways](#) that people can develop in and express being literate. When we talk about *critical literacies*, we mean the use of print and other media to analyze, critique, and transform the social norms, rule systems, and practices of everyday life. Finally, when we talk about critical literacies in a *digital age*, we recognize that for many people around the world, our literate lives and [identities](#) are necessarily "hybrid" - existing both in the physical world of bodies and books, as well as the virtual worlds of digital and social media.

CDL is a way to recognize how reading and writing are related to the historical, political, economic, and cultural circumstances of which we are a part of. Further, CDL positions all humans as readers and writers of the virtual and physical worlds we inhabit, with the potential to transform our societies through the ways that we engage with literacies.

Connecting it to LSLP

Our perspective on CDL aligns with LSLP's view of literacies as a range of [social practices](#), rather than a discrete set of skills that live only in our brains and our books. We trace the roots of CDL along similar lines as those of [other contributors](#) to the LSLP,

drawing on foundational work of Paulo Freire, Allan Luke, and others. Finally, CDL builds on LSLP's perspectives on [critical media literacy](#) by extending literacies to include engagements with the underlying rules, algorithms, and lines of programming code that give rise to the digital media and virtual worlds that we experience.

Expanding Second Language Research

Considering the importance of [content](#) and [context](#) in second-language (L2) research, CDL asks us to additionally consider L2 acquisition learning (and teaching) as it occurs across virtual and physical spaces, including interactions with the procedural dimensions (rules, algorithms, code, etc.) of digital texts. In this sense, CDL acts as an umbrella concept uniting emerging areas of research such as [gaming literacies](#) with more established perspectives on reading and writing. Meanwhile, the emphasis on the critical of CDL reminds us that digital literacies are a way to understand and transform the social worlds we all inhabit and invites L2 researchers in CDL to explore this area as well.

References

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