

Terrance McDonald

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Dr. Brace

Abstract:

“What Is It Good For:

Literacy and the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test”

Despite literacy's known importance in our society, there is limited understanding of different types of literacy and a lack of means to effectively judge literacy in individuals. The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test creates a self-fulfilling definition of literacy, which functions much like Paulo Freire's concept of banking education. This essay addresses three important issues that literacy and literacy tests encounter: the relationship between literacy and politics; literacy's complex structure; and the opportunity literacy gives. Through the educational theories of Freire and Ivan Illich, as well as the ideological frameworks of Louis Althusser and Slavoj Žižek, I argue that literacy should be seen as more than simply a political or economic end because literacy is a means to obtain individual empowerment and critical consciousness. Moving forward, Ontario Educators may have to accept political and economic demands—like the OSSLT—but they must ensure that these demands do not consume the structure of education and bankrupt our students' futures.