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The concept of 'passing' as a critical entryway and threshold concept into decolonising the South African FET English Literature Curriculum

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Abstract

This thesis proposes using the concept of passing as a critical intervention into the FET English literature curriculum in South African schools. It argues that passing is an ideal threshold concept for learners because of its relevancy to the South African context and how it illustrates the mutability of human identity. This work adopts a broader definition of passing to also include forms of identity dissociation; in particular, it argues that the concept of passing can illuminate the fluidity of identity, where identities that were once seen as fixed (for example, racial, gender or religious identities) are now able to be consciously altered by individuals. The concept of passing, here, is a powerful tool that allows learners to critically reflect on their own identities, and could offer them entryways into texts that might have seemed unrelatable to their lives or contexts.

In this study, a critical literacy approach to teaching literature in South African English classrooms will be explored through the use of critical literacy theory, culturally relevant pedagogy, a pedagogy of discomfort and decolonial theory. These four theories will be used to analyse F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* to build a more socially conscious framework for teaching literature in FET classrooms. The proposed framework can be used to develop learners' critical engagement with texts and can culturally interpellate black, working-class South African learners who feel that they cannot relate to English set-works.