

Critical Thinking: Theory and Practice

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CRITICAL THINKING: THEORY AND PRACTICE

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FOREWORD

Reading is considered as an active, fluent process which involves the reader and the text to make sense of the textual meaning. However, with the advancement of the technology and ever increasing knowledge, readers are induced into the situations where they have to catch on with changing concepts and scopes of literacy. Hence, individuals of the 21st century need to develop their critical literacies since they are always in search for comprehending, analyzing, questioning and judging the world round them. In this active learning context, reading stands out as a core skill in education in that it has long-lasting effects on learners' academic literacy and success. It is a core skill in education since "literacy in academic settings exist within the context of massive amount of print information" (Grabe, 1991:389). With the new curriculum designed by YOK and implemented in all the faculties of education, there emerged a new course for the teacher trainees to follow: Critical Reading. To help them read successfully in the mother tongue and target language and lead them to utilize and teach in their classes, this book came into fruition thanks to the hardworking colleagues. The main chapters revolve around the basic literacy techniques that are popular around the world such as what is critical literacy, the main critical strategies, digital literacy, critical reading through metaphors, critical Reading through New Criticism, critical reading through reader-response, critical reading through deconstruction, critical reading through psychoanalysis and intertextuality. Each chapter starts with a solid theoretical framework and then implements a model reading with examples and ends with the discussion question.

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CHAPTER 1

CRITICAL READING

*Havva KURT TAŞPINAR**

Preliminary questions

1. What is critical literacy?
2. What is critical reading?
3. How are critical reading and critical thinking related?
4. How do critical readers read?
5. Why is critical reading critical in English Language Teaching?



Figure 1. Critical reading (<http://thepenngazette.com/critical-reading/>)

Introduction

This chapter will shed light on critical reading, which is of great importance in (English as a Foreign Language) reading and reading instruction. First, critical

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literacy will be explained. Next, definitions of critical reading and critical thinking provided by various scholars will be analyzed, and it will be explored from a critical discourse analysis perspective. The chapter will also elaborate on critical readers and how they read. In the application section, *A Momentous Arrest* by M. Jr. Luther King will be analyzed.

Critical literacy

Critical literacy (CL) has long been on the agenda of scholars conducting research on education. To be able to learn and resist the reading positions that have been imposed, readers should question “why the text is the way it is, how could it have been otherwise, and whose interests or purposes it serves” rather than solely accepting the text as it is given and seeking answers for factual comprehension questions (Goatly, 2000: 155). Some scholars assert that CL has its roots in critical discourse analysis, which emphasizes that language use is not neutral. For some, it derives from genre theory and systemic functional linguistics. That is, the choices writers make regarding language and text reflect the social purposes they are aiming to achieve; hence, readers should possess a critical language awareness. For other scholars, critical pedagogy and the Freirean notion of empowerment has the greatest impact on the emergence and development of CL (Brown, 1999). In this sense, it is a means to closely examine the interaction of language and power relationships (Duzer, Florez, & Cunningham, 1999). Regardless of the philosophy it derives from, CL requires the reader to gain and practice the skills to identify and work with this non-neutral facet of language (Hull, 2000). In the broadest sense, the term refers to efforts to grasp the deep meaning of a text by going beyond the surface meaning and questioning the who, what, why, and how of its creation and eventual interpretation (Lohrey, 1998).

Having emerged as a relatively recent notion in English language teaching, critical literacy contrasts with functional literacy. Traditional literacy refers to the linguistic and functional ability to read and write. Whereas, critical literacy enables the reader to explore beyond this basic understanding (Coffey, 2015). In today’s world, individuals need not only to be literate functionally but also to be critical since CL is a vital skill (Brown, 1999). Through CL, individuals are able to be equipped with the skills that are necessary “to examine the source of a text along with biases and purposes; question the veracity and applicability of the information provided in the text; assess the broader societal messages regarding values, attitudes, and power relationships, and consider their own biases, reactions, and realities” (Duzer, Florez, & Cunningham, 1999: 3). Plus, they can become more aware of their own views and how their views influence their interpretations

of texts and interactions with other individuals (Hall, & Piazza, 2008). Therefore, the pedagogical approaches and the language curriculum should be built upon the critical approaches focusing on critical practice, critical thinking, critical language awareness, and critical reading so that readers can attain a critical literacy stance while reading.

Critical reading

Despite being referred to as one of the core skills in the 21st century, critical reading has been prominent in educational research and language teaching pedagogies for a long time. To illustrate, De Boer (1946) proposed the following definition of critical reading (CR):

Critical reading involves the search for relevant materials, the evaluation of the data, the identification and comparison of sources, and the synthesis of findings. It involves the capacity of suspended judgement and the interpretation of the writer's motives. But chiefly it involves a sufficient background of knowledge to provide a sound basis for judgement. Critical reading implies the existence of appropriate criteria in the mind of the reader (as cited in Robinson, 1966: 250).

QDe Boer implies the importance of readers' background experience and knowledge to be able to construct criteria in order to judge the value of the reading material identifying the relevant material. A relatively more recent definition by Robinson defines CR as

the judgement of the veracity, validity, or worth of the ideas read, based on sound criteria or standards developed through previous experience. *Veracity* might apply to a political statement in the newspaper, validity to the description of a scientific experiment, and worth to a value-judgement of the literary quality of a poem, short story or book (1966: 250).

Both scholars emphasize that CR requires the reader to possess relevant previous experience and background knowledge so as to develop criteria and make judgements and evaluations regarding veracity, validity, and worth of ideas presented in reading materials and texts. That is to say, CR has its roots in the spirit of critique that is required to understand texts (Freire, & Macedo, 1987).

Critical reading requires the reader to go beyond the literal and achieve an interpretative comprehension of the target text or reading material (Par, 2018). By raising their critical awareness of the writers' conscious or unconscious language choices in composing and revising texts, readers are able to move away from a

naïve position and become more critical readers (Goatly, 2000). In this sense, critical reading can enhance readers' critical language awareness (Wallace, 1998). The critical issue regarding these language choices is how they structure readers' thought processes and affect their social and environmental behavior. Huijie (2010: 42-43) proposes a comprehensive and chronological summary of definitions of CR in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of definitions of critical reading

Author(s)	Main points of the definition	Year
Poulson & Wallace	It asks for keeping an open mind, retaining a conditional willingness to be convinced, etc.	2004
Schwegler	CR is active reading. It involves some activity on the reader's part.	2004
Pirozzi	It is high-level comprehension of written material requiring interpretation and evaluation skills.	2003
Bean et al.	CR, like writing, is an active process of composing	2002
Garrigus	It requires to explain figurative language and to identify basic logical fallacies and emotional appeals.	2002
Milan	It requires to maintain objectivity and not to allow expectations, biases, or personal prejudices to interfere with understanding.	1995
Phillips & Sotiriou	It is more than the ability to understand the explicit meaning of the passage. It involves application, analysis, evaluation and imagination.	1992
Adams	It refers to distinguishing fact from opinion, recognizing intent, attitude, and tone; recognizing inferences and drawing conclusions.	1989
Clegg	It distinguishes between truth and distortion, information and propaganda, public policy and personal prejudice.	1988
Hancock	It requires to question, compare, and evaluate, to detect faulty logic and information... and then to determine to accept or reject the information.	1987
Maker & Lenier	CR enables to size up the author's arguments and to evaluate how well he supports them. A reader must think beyond what is stated and decide what the author is trying to imply.	1986
Wassman & Paye	Critical readers evaluate the writer's information and draw conclusions of their own.	1985
Raygor & Raygor	It requires to distinguishes among humor, satire, sarcasm, irony, and straightforward writing; to recognize implicit assumptions or inferences the author is making, etc.	1985
Spache & Berg	It is the ability to read with analysis and judgment.	1984
Hafner	It is a thinking process that is improved by way of using language more constructively and clarifying concepts through discussion and questioning	1974

(Huijie, 2010: 42-43)