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## **The Significance of Critical Thinking in Text Comprehension**

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## **The Significance of Critical Thinking in Text Comprehension**

### **ABSTRACT**

What is critical thinking? It is rather difficult to give an exact definition of this interesting phenomenon as the opinions of scholars vary. The majority of linguists consider that critical thinking is a complex process using inquiry strategies, forming questions, and seeking answers to these questions. It implies not only fixing facts but also clearing up their reasons and results. The essence of critical thinking can be defined as taking care of one's own thinking. Critical thinking starts as soon as the information reaches our mind and ends when we already have our own standpoint regarding this information. The aim of this paper is to study the importance of critical thinking in text understanding. Critical reading strategies, in their way, develop critical thinking skills that are essential for a deeper and successful perception of a text. It supports and encourages pupils and students to be more aware of reading comprehension skills, to explore how to read between lines and behind the words. Critical thinking is independent thinking. When teaching is built on the principle of critical thinking, each pupil or student is able to formulate his/her own ideas, estimations, and convictions independently. Consequently, thinking is critical only when it carries individual character. A pupil or a student should have enough freedom in order to think and solve different problems independently. It is true that people who are able to think critically, always ask a set of questions formulated in a proper way, try to pick up information from different people and make proper conclusions about this or that person, thing, or phenomenon. Critical thinking is not a child's innate quality. Some individuals can develop it as a result of training. In order a person to think critically, an individual has to have a rich imagination, be rather creative, and have background knowledge. All these three qualities are absolutely necessary for a good critical thinker. Critical thinking is an attempt to see through things. It is challenging the existence and making counter-arguments. The main function of critical thinking is to enable a thinker to see the effectiveness of an argument by exploring the reasons, assumptions, and warrants behind a particular stand. One of the most significant peculiarities of critical thinking is that it enables a person to make a claim with a perspective to appreciate the strength of others' arguments and helps recognize how one has reached a particular point while developing arguments. It is worth mentioning that the basic components of critical thinking are properly formulated why and how questions to make pupils/students think profoundly and penetrate into the essence of any kind of text, which leads to its full comprehension.

**Keywords:** *Critical thinking, text comprehension, background knowledge, effectiveness.*

What is critical thinking? It is rather difficult to give an exact definition of this interesting phenomenon as the opinions of scholars vary. The majority of linguists consider that critical thinking is a complex process using inquiry strategies, forming questions, and seeking answers to these questions. It implies not only fixing facts but also clearing up their reasons and results. The essence of critical thinking can be defined as taking care of one's own thinking.

Though most teachers/lecturers strive to make critical thinking an essential thing in the process of text comprehension, many may not know that in order to develop as thinkers, pupils/students must go through critical thinking development phases. That is, most teachers/lecturers are uninformed of the stages of intellectual growth that people go through as their thinking skills increase. We believe that major improvements in the intellectual quality of student work will not be accomplished until teachers/lecturers grasp that competent critical thinking develops only when it is appropriately cultivated and only through predictable phases.

We assume the following: (1) every individual who develops as a critical thinker goes through predictable phases; (2) moving from one phase to the next requires a certain level of commitment on the part of an individual to develop as a critical thinker, is not automatic, and is unlikely to occur subconsciously; (3) instructional effectiveness is inextricably linked to the intellectual content of student learning.

We consider that the critical thinking goals are broad statements that focus on intentional critical thinking development. They are intended to apply critical thinking, starting by focusing first on the received information, then on developing the intellectual standards for the topics under discussion, and finally, they also include feedback. Critical thinking aims at developing in pupils/students the skills of analysis, those of independent judgment as well as reasoning skills.

Critical thinking strategies and activities should be properly formulated to establish a clear and logical relationship between them and achieve critical thinking goals. Critical reading strategies, in their way, develop critical thinking skills that are essential for a deeper and successful perception of a text. It supports and encourages pupils and students to be more aware of reading comprehension skills, to explore how to read between lines and behind the words.

The planned activities should be clear and succinct in order for students to be able to evaluate things and show reasons for supporting their ideas with certain facts. Consequently, they will become skilled at independent judgment and develop cognitive skills. Critical thinking is independent thinking. When teaching is built on the principle of critical thinking, each pupil or student is able to formulate his/her own ideas, estimations, and convictions independently. Consequently, thinking is critical only when it carries individual character. A pupil or a student should have enough freedom in order to think and solve different problems independently. It is true that people who are able to think critically, always ask a set of questions formulated in a proper way, try to pick up information from different people and make proper conclusions about this or that person, thing, or phenomenon.

According to Linda Elder and Richard Paul, there are six types of thinkers: "The unreflective thinker, the challenged thinker, the beginning thinker, the practicing thinker, the advanced thinker, the accomplished thinker" (Elder & Paul, 1996).

**Unreflective thinkers** are unable to objectively realize their thinking and improve it. When thinkers become aware of the significant role of thinking, they become "**challenged**" **thinkers**. Those who develop into **beginning thinkers** are actively pursuing the goal of gaining explicit control over their thinking in various areas of their lives. Such thinkers acknowledge that their thinking has fundamental flaws and make first efforts to better grasp how they may take control of and change it for better. **Practicing thinkers** are aware of the habits they must cultivate in order to gain control over their thoughts. They not only understand that there are flaws in their thinking, but they also see the necessity to address these flaws in a systematic and global manner. They are actively examining their thinking in a variety of fields, based on their awareness of the need to practice constantly. However, as practicing thinkers are just beginning to address thinking development in a systematic fashion, they have limited insight into deeper levels of thought, and hence deeper levels of the issues that are buried in thinking. **Advanced thinkers** develop solid thinking habits. They not only actively evaluate their thinking in all important sectors of their life, but they also have significant insight into problems at deeper levels of thought. While advanced thinkers are capable of thinking well across the main aspects of their life, they are not yet capable of consistently thinking at a high level across all of them. **Accomplished thinkers** have not only methodically taken control of their thinking, but they are also constantly monitoring, updating, and rethinking ways to enhance their thinking. They have fully absorbed fundamental thinking abilities, making critical thinking both conscious and natural for them. Accomplished thinkers use their considerable experience and expertise in self-assessment to not only actively analyze their thinking in all major aspects of their life, but also to generate fresh insights into issues at a deeper level.

The goal of each teacher/lecturer should be to turn pupils/students from unreflective thinkers to accomplished ones, passing through all stages of development.

M.J. Bezanilla, D.F. Nogueira, M. Poblete, and H.G. Dominguez consider that the most common techniques used by teachers/lecturers to foster critical thinking may be divided into three groups: "Firstly, the methodologies that are most commonly used to develop critical thinking are related to oral and written communication as well as to reading and text analysis, that is, oral and written reflection and argumentation, and reading, analysis and synthesis of

resources; secondly, methodologies which are considered active methodologies, as for example, case studies, collaborative and cooperative learning, connection with the real world, and problem and project based learning are used; and thirdly, other methodologies which are used to a lesser extent are: assessment, follow-up, and feedback, questioning, evaluation, interpretation, and justification, research, other methodologies (flipped classroom, role playing, and so on), and lectures” (Bezanilla, Nogueira, Poblete & Dominguez, 2019).

As the aim of the presented paper is to study the importance of critical thinking in text understanding, we would like to go through the stages of text cognition according to the text structure. The organization of information inside a written text is referred to as a text structure. This method teaches pupils/students that any text might provide a core concept and details, a cause and subsequently its effects, and multiple perspectives on a main topic. Being aware of recognizing a text structure, pupils/students will be able to check their comprehension. As R. P. Pirozzi states “students’ critical thinking, critical reading, and reading comprehension were significantly correlated. In conclusion, students’ success in reading comprehension was significantly affected by their critical thinking and critical reading” (Pirozzi, 2003).

Critical thinking starts as soon as the information reaches our mind and ends when we already have our own standpoint regarding this information. Consequently, pupils/students start thinking immediately as they read the title of a text. After giving correctly formulated *why* and *how* questions, a teacher/lecturer asks pupils/students to brainstorm their ideas around the title. They focus on thinking independently and clarify and analyze the essence of the title the way they perceive it.

The next step is text reading. It is worth mentioning that the structure of any text (be it a short story, a novel, a fable, a poem) should be divided into four components: exposition (the situation at the outset of the story before the action begins), story (the succession of tensions and events in the story that leads to the climax), climax (the turning point, the most intense, thrilling, or crucial aspect of the text), denouement (the end of a story in which the plot's intricacies are revealed and the conflict is ultimately resolved).

The process of the text discussion and its critical analysis involves the chronological order of the text’s constituent components. We consider that before expressing their overall impressions about the text and analyzing it critically, pupils/students should scrutinize each of the aforementioned components separately. The teacher/lecturer should pose a set of questions for the pupils/students to think about the text critically, comprehend it and get ready for the further discussion. The process of text analysis should necessarily be interactive.

Pupils/students listen to each other in a critical way and also make plausible inferences and predictions or interpretations.

Through discussions, pupils/students increase the depth of their understanding, broaden their background knowledge, and develop critical thinking skills. On the other hand, discussions help the teacher/lecturer to find out how pupils/students learn and understand the basic idea of the text. The teacher/lecturer can initiate the discussion by presenting pupils/students with open-ended questions. Good questions, on the one hand, give them an opportunity to think profoundly, and on the other hand, give the teacher/lecturer the full picture of the degree and depth of student understanding. Such questions engage pupils/students in debates that expands their thinking horizon. Finally, as a follow-up activity, it would be recommended that pupils/students write an essay on the analysis of the given text showing their critical thinking skills. The teacher/lecturer has to monitor the process to avoid any kind of cheating and observe pupils/students to follow the intellectual standards, such as: accuracy, precision, depth, breadth and fairness.

Thus, developing critical thinking takes a lot of practice.

## **Conclusion**

It is a well-known fact that critical thinking is not a child's innate quality. It can be developed as a result of training. In order a person to think critically, they have to have a rich imagination, be rather creative, and have background knowledge. All these three qualities are absolutely necessary for a good critical thinker. Critical thinking is an attempt to see through things. Unlike other things, thinking is not visible. But everything is possible. It can happen that even thinking can be made visible by using the language of thinking, by surfacing a great number of opportunities for thinking during subject matter learning, by asking appropriate questions, such as "What do you see that makes you say so?" It is easier to study anything when one visually sees it. Such an approach should be applied from the very first day the teacher/lecturer enters the class.

Furthermore, the idea of questioning is the most effective method of teaching in order to develop critical thinking skills. Questioning is the most effective method of teaching critical thinking. Teachers/lecturers should have the skills of asking questions, but these questions should certainly be appropriate to the topic. It can probably be called the "art" of asking good questions. Appropriately set questions definitely make pupils/students think critically.

Otherwise saying, this is the most effective method for developing the skills of critical thinking in pupils/students. In the process of questioning-answering, teachers'/lecturers' and pupils'/students' roles should correctly be distributed.

Conducting the teaching process actively and pupils'/students' participation in the process is utmost crucial. Involving pupils/students in debates is a very effective method of active learning, which, consequently, leads to the development of critical thinking skills in pupils/students through text comprehension.

Thus, the main function of critical thinking is to make a thinker able to see the effectiveness of an argument by exploring the reasons, assumptions, and warrants behind a particular stand. One of the most significant peculiarities of critical thinking is that it enables a person to make a claim with a perspective to appreciate the strength of others' arguments and helps recognize how one has reached a particular point while developing arguments. It is worth mentioning that the basic components of critical thinking are properly formulated *why* and *how* questions to make pupils/students think profoundly and penetrate into the essence of any kind of text, which leads to its full comprehension.

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