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CRITICAL READING AND WRITING FOR CRITICAL THINKING

Summary. *Practical guide for improving the critical thinking of the students.*

Key words: *critical thinking, teaching students.*

The goal of teachers of English is to teach pupils to write, read and speak English. Clearly and effectively to acquire knowledge, convey and discuss ideas, evaluate information and think critically.

What is meant by critical thinking? The latest research supports the idea that critical thinking is the habit of mind a “personal disposition to open-mindedness, inquisitiveness, and willingness to reconsider in light of new information”.

Thus, critical thinking is not only a skill but also a personal attribute. It is quite clear a teacher should facilitate and encourage all the activities which develop such pupils skills, attributes and abilities. At the operational level, a teacher has to highlight the main identified components of critical thinking skills: interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation.

What to teach? The core of critical thinking is defining concepts and debating. When your pupils can investigate and completely define a phenomenon as the word that names it, then they have acquired a substantial bit of knowledge. When your pupils can also consider the association between two or more concepts and figure out how different conditions might be a result of that association, then they have developed an argument, a position, evaluating information, and choosing what is probably true to believe is essential to critical thinking. This already involves the use of logic and inference.

There are three sets of data that we, teachers, can use to determine the level of critical thinking of pupils.

1. The most superficial level of “figuring things out” occurs at the verbal level that is when students are speaking as it’s easy to say something. A teacher must listen to how pupils talk about their lessons, tasks.

2. The second level implies reading and understanding how others ‘figure things out’. A teacher should pay attention to how pupils have interpreted what they have read.

3. Finally, the highest and the most difficult way to “figure things out” is to write what you think about something and present your thesis as a speech. A teacher should look very carefully at the structure and substance of what pupils write and present orally regarding their lessons [1].

Thus, speaking, reading and writing are not only the goals but, at the same time, the tools utilizing which we can develop our student’s critical thinking skills. These three activities are important because they provide information about pupils ability to think critically and are evidence necessary for their curriculum evaluation.

When and Where to Teach? It is generally believed that acquiring critical thinking habits and skills takes a long period. It logically follows that critical thinking needs to be taught throughout the school curriculum or any educational programme.

How to Teach? Pupils show that people retain 10 per cent of what they see, 20 per cent of what they hear and 80 per cent of what they see, hear and do. Our pupils will need to be and will expect to be ‘doers’. So, the slogan could be “Learn to think by thinking” or ‘Learn to read by reading”, which explains that thinking and reading could be goals and tools of learning a language.

The educational shift from leaning to thinking is in theories of how to teach. The dominant theory of knowledge, learning and literary is to teach pupils what to think so that they learn what the teachers know. In contrast, the emerging critical theory is to teach pupil show to think so that they can find their way through the problems and concerns they meet in life. The pupils are to become individual centres for

storing strategies and approaches to gather, evaluate, and use information. This requires a new perspective of the role of a teacher, that is to change the role of the teacher as a purveyor of knowledge and trainer of skills to guide and companion in the knowledge search. Teachers should facilitate and encourage their pupils to find out for themselves and to work cooperatively with other pupils in applying what they have discovered, which is no longer a pedagogical option, but a necessity in the educational environment of the new millennium.

There are different ways to design the curriculum, courses, and teaching strategies. The numerous ideas about how to teach critical thinking. Wink suggests using questioning. Brown and Sorell suggest using journals. Bell uses debating. Kyzer provides some excellent example of lack of critical thinking which could be used as the basis of a class discussion. Chubinski has developed teaching strategies based on Richard Paul's theory of critical thinking. For each of the skills identified in the theory, Chubinski has developed a strategy for teaching that skill. The skills include identifying, the problems, deciphering the purpose, uncovering the assumptions, recognizing and using different paradigms, demonstrating different methods of reasoning, examining data, creating alternative solutions, and evaluating one's thinking to improve it.

How to Evaluate?

There is the definition by Delphi, which briefly is as follows: "Critical thinking is the process of purposeful, self-regulatory judgment. This process gives reasoned consideration to evidence, contexts, conceptualizations, methods, and criteria". This definition identifies two major areas of critical thinking. One is personal dispositions: truth-seeking, open-mindedness, analyticity, systematicity, self-confidence and maturity. The second is that of skills: analysis, evaluation, inference, deductive, and inductive reasoning. There is a set of criteria for self or other evaluation of critical thinking: precision, specificity, accuracy, relevance, depth, breadth, and logic.

What skills should we develop?

To teach pupils to speak and write clearly and effectively a teacher needs to teach them to understand what they read and interact with the text making necessary connections thus developing their critical reading skills.

This includes the ability of pupils:

- to explain the most important notions and give definitions of the words;
- to examine and interpret the text;
- to analyst what they have read and to compare the author's experience with their personal experience;
- to find out the main ideas and supporting details;
- to choose facts and opinions
- to see how events keep the story go

It is essential to teach pupils to understand the structure of the contents no matter what type of literary worry we have.

What do we pay attention to?

1. Details — find and remember the important details.
2. The main idea — put the details together and find the main idea.
3. Sequence — underline and remember the order in which things happen.
4. Context — use the words and sentences nearby to find out the meaning of the words.
5. Inference — find the meaning and ideas that are not stated, and conclude.
6. Cause and effect — understand what makes things happen and why.
7. Predicting outcomes — based on what you have read and your personal experience, tell what will happen next.
8. Understanding Character — find out about people through their words and actions.

I propose you some exercises to develop your critical thinking.

Task 1. The steam builder

Boats used to need the wind, the tide, or people rowing to be to move. Robert Fulton, the US engineer and inventor, changed that. Fulton designed and build the first successful steam board that worked. His board moved on steam power. He called his steam board the Clermont. Other people did not believe that steam could make a boat go. They laughed at Fulton. But Fulton had the last laugh. The Clermont made a trip from New York City up the Hudson River. The Clermont travelled more than a hundred miles (161 kilometres) using steam power. Just a few years later, many steam boards were sailing rivers, crossing oceans. The first warship was the Fulton, build in 1814–1815 [1].

1. Who is the main character? What are the facts about him?
2. If you were asked to give a summary of the events in the life of the famous inventor, what would be their time order?
 - A. The Clermont made a trip along the Hudson River.
 - B. Many steamboats were used to cross the ocean.
 - C. The first warship that used steam power was called after its inventor.
 - D. People used wind and, or they rowed, to move boats.
 - E. Robert Fulton called his first steamboat the Clermont.
 - F. Robert Fulton designed and build the first successful steam boards.

Task 2. Great hunter

More than one hundred years ago, there was a famous hunter named William Cody. Cody lived when the first railroads were being built in the west. Hundred of railroads workers needed food, but the West had no stores or supermarkets. There were no farms in the West in

those days, either. There was, however, plenty of meat that could be used to feed the workers. The meat comes from buffaloes. The buffaloes were found in great herds in the West, but somebody had to shoot them for meat. One expert shooter that the railroad found was William Cody. He had learned to shoot when he had been a soldier. Now he became a buffalo hunter. Cody was so expert that he shot more than four thousand buffaloes in one year and a half. That was a lot of meat for the railroad workers. William Cody became known as Buffalo Bill. He was also known as the owner of a Wild West Show. From 1883 he toured the USA and Europe with his show [2].

1. Who is the main character?
2. In what sequences do the facts from William Cody's life come?
 - a) William Cody become known as Buffalo Bill.
 - b) Cody toured the USA and Europe.
 - c) William became an expert to shoot buffaloes.
 - d) New roads were being built in the West.
 - e) William become the owner of a Wild West Show.
 - f) Workers who build the roads needed food.
 - g) One year William shot more than four thousand buffaloes.

Task 3. Sometimes the main idea of a paragraph is not clearly stated in a single sentence. It must be discovered by reading the whole paragraph.

In the night sky, a great square of stars marks the constellation named Pegasus. On autumn nights it is visible in the Northern Hemisphere. In a Greek myth, Pegasus was a winged horse that was born from the blood of a slain monster. A young man named Bellerophon caught and tamed Pegasus. Together they won many battles. After a while, however, Bellerophon became filled with pride over his success. Pegasus threw off his proud rider and flew away into the sky to become a new constellation [1].

- 1) The word a "visible" here means:
 - A. obvious
 - B. clean
 - C. could be seen
 - D. bright
- 2) The word a "tamed" here means:
 - A. domesticated
 - B. trained
 - C. mastered
 - D. cultivated
- 3) Finding the main idea. The main idea of the paragraph?
 - A. A great square of stars marks the constellation Pegasus.
 - B. The constellation Pegasus was named a mythical winged horse.
 - C. Many Greek legends are based on astronomy.

Task 4. Can you recall the fact in the article you have read? Read the article below remembering the most important fact.

Have you ever seen someone with a lot of freckles? Freckles are small dark spots on the skin. Sometimes people get freckles when they spend some outdoors in direct sunlight.

Strangely enough, the sun has 'freckles' too. These dark places on the sun's surface are called sunspots. You should not try to see these spots because your eyes can be damaged by looking directly at the sun. But astronomers can safely observe sunspots by looking through their telescopes.

Sunspots usually last a day or two. It is not a 'spot' at all but a hole. The surface of the sun is made of very hot gases. In some places, the gases whirl around and get cooler. These cooler whirlpools are darker than the rest of the surface and look like spots.

Scientists have learnt that sunspots usually occur in eleven-year-old cycles. At the beginning and of each cycle there are very few sunspots. But in the middle years of a cycle, there may be hundreds of sunspots.

There may be a link between sunspots and life on the earth. For instance, trees seem to grow faster during the years when there are more sunspots. About three hundred years ago sunspots practically disappeared for seventy years. No one knows why. During those same years, something changed the normal growth of trees. Scientists can see the pattern of a tree's growth by examining the annual rings in the wood when the tree is cut down. The rings of very old trees show very little growth between 1645 and 1715 the years the sunspots disappeared [2].

Which statements match the facts from the article? Try to do exercises without rereading the text.

- 1) People may get freckles from being in direct sunlight.
- 2) Eyes could be hurt if you look straight at the sun.
- 3) Sunspots are spots.
- 4) It is not safe to use a telescope without special glasses.
- 5) A sunspot lasts two or more days.
- 6) The place with a sunspot on the sun is cooler than the rest of the star.
- 7) A sunspot cycle lasts for seventy years.
- 8) There are usually more sunspots at the beginning and the end of the cycle.
- 9) The number of sunspots can reach hundreds.
- 10) Scientists think that somehow life on the earth is connected with sunspots.
- 11) It is clear for the scientists why there were few sunspots between 1645–1715.
- 12) Trees seem to grow faster when there are more sunspots.
- 13) The pattern of a tree can be seen on the cut part of the tree.
- 14) Trees grew very rapidly from 1645 to 1715.

Task 5. Read the story once and try to remember as many details as possible

The sound of shattering glass broke the stillness of the night. At the same time, an alarm went off the

jewellery store. Two masked robbers reached through the broken window. Then, hearing the sounds of police sirens, the robbers dashed across the street and disappeared into the alley.

The sirens grew louder. A police car raced down the street and screeched to a stop. Two police officers jumped out, guns in hand. A man drove up in his car. He was the owner of the jewellery store.

After looking over the damage, the owner laughed. “Well”, he said. “Those robbers may think they have a trayful of diamonds, but all they have are a few dollars worth fake jewels. I have the real diamonds locked up in my safe” [3].

Without rereading the story, tell which statements are true according to the story.

1. There were three robbers.
 2. The robbers wore masks.
 3. The police office had guns.
 4. The real diamonds were hidden.
 5. The robbery happened early in the store.
 6. There was an alarm system inside the store.
 7. The police officers caught the robbers.
 8. The owner of the store was shocked and beside himself sorrow.
 9. The fake jewels were taken by two robbers.
 10. The real diamonds were stolen.
 11. The robbers disappeared into the back yard.
- The police officers laughed at the owner of the store.
12. The owner of the store came into a police car.
 13. The robbers ran when they heard the police siren.

14. The robbers ran when they heard the police siren.

Task 6. A detail is a small bit of information. You can have a more complete mental picture of something by knowing details about it.

There was something very mysterious about the old brown house. Some people believed it was haunted. The was a narrow, three-story building. It had a steep, gabled roof. Five wooden steps led up to a front porch. A heavy cobweb draped itself over the front doorway like a lace curtain. The hinges of the door were old and rusty. They squeaked mournfully as a gentle blew against the door [1].

Exercise 1. Filling the blanks to complete the statements below. The details in the paragraph will give you the answers.

1. The colour of the old house was ...
2. People thought the house was ...
3. There were ... stories in the house.
4. There were ... wooden steps leading up to the front porch.
5. A cobweb reminded a lace ...
6. The hinges of the door were ...

Exercise 2. Write as many words connected with the house (its parts as you can remember without rereading the text.

Exercise 3. Write as many adjectives (describing the house) as you remember.

References

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