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We Suggest

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WE SUGGEST

Eleanor Buelke

Stauffer, Russell G., Editor

Dimensions of Critical Reading

Newark, Delaware: The Reading-Study Center, University of Delaware, 1965, Pp. v-169.

In our democratic culture, we cannot afford for one moment to become careless about critical reading and reflective thinking. Pupils free to think and evaluate are also responsible for proof and sound decisions.¹

“Critical reading” is a pedagogical term that has been used by teachers and reading experts for a long time. Many have agreed that it is a basic consideration in reading instruction. Similar agreement has been found among teachers in some of the content fields as well. However, as more has been discovered about how cognition occurs in learners, recent emphases concerning critical reading have differed.

Thinking, writing, and research about the nature of creativity, the heuristic method of learning, the theoretical construct of self, patterns of teacher-pupil interaction, and the hypothesis that reading instruction is fundamentally instruction in concept development have extended the more familiar dimensions of critical reading and added some new, related entities. In turn, these have given rise to more, related thinking, writing, and research. *Dimensions of Critical Reading*, a collection of scholarly articles by those who know and practice expertise in the area concerned, suggests and reports valuable reflection and research in this field.

Set forth in this volume are some of the factors which may modify, affect, or limit the levels of readers' critical thinking and their maturity of choice. Also included are suggested teacher behaviors which might evoke spontaneity of thinking and maximum use of children's intellectual powers.

One of these factors affecting reader performance or achievement is curiosity. Several writers in this book have written concerning the place of curiosity in critical reading and thinking, how it is related to cognitive processes, and how it may be fostered and tested. A second factor is that of variations in attitudes. These include the reader's attitudes toward content of reading material and toward his own

1. Russell G. Stauffer, “Critical Reading At Upper Levels,” (a mimeographed paper), p. 10. Newark, Delaware: The Reading-Study Center, University of Delaware.

reading performance. A third factor is the focus, or range, of interests of the reader. A fourth factor, motives, is one about which comparatively little is known, or understood. Consequently, the relationships of motives to reading appear to be complex, subtle, and speculative, at best. More investigation is needed in this area. A fifth factor, creativity, has received much attention by investigators and writers in recent years. In this book identification is made of some of the ingredients common to both creative reading and critical reading.

Another facet of the book which has real significance for the classroom teacher is the delineation of types of teacher behavior which will help to develop and to direct the kind of critical reading that will transfer from the classroom into life outside the school. These behaviors include the persistent, consistent (1) use of varied, appropriate materials for reading; (2) organization of materials so that students need to make decisions as to their acceptance, or courses of action to pursue; (3) fostering of discussions which reflect differing views; (4) questioning, calling for critical evaluation; (5) requiring pupils to produce evidence for decisions or solutions; (6) willingness to allow time to develop evaluating criteria to weigh the evidence; (7) determination of cause-and-effect relationships, through formulation of a null hypothesis and suspension of judgment until sufficient data warrant a conclusion; (8) planning for interaction of pupils, flexibly relating ideas and assumptions to each other; (9) acceptance of the child's right to freedom and spontaneity of thinking and expression; (10) sensitivity to suitable group experiences; and (11) creative experimentation with methods and techniques, such as pupil-planning, group-structuring, and original production of instructional materials.

Reading and study of this publication should prove timely, challenging, and illuminating for those who wish to view critical reading in its proper, possible, dimensional proportions, clearly, and with responsibility.

Under proper teacher guidance pupils will learn to have the strength of their convictions and the courage to deal with ideas. They will not be fearful, but courageous; not blind, but discerning; not hasty, but deliberate; not deceitful, but honest; not muddled, but articulate; not acquiescent, but militant; not conceited, but modest; not imitative, but original.²

2. *Op. cit.*, p. 10.