An Investigation of Critical Reading in Reading Textbooks:
A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract

As a technique for discovering and evaluating information within texts, critical reading might be a panacea for those learners whose voices and choices are muted and ignored. A crucial question is thus to ask whether and to what extent popular reading textbooks meet the criteria for the development of critical reading. To this end, the present article seeks to identify and investigate the presence of those items within reading textbooks which help promote critical reading. Based on the literature on critical thinking, the cornerstone of critical reading, a checklist is provided whose items are indicator of whether a particular text promotes critical reading or not. Moreover, it is recognized that autonomy and engagement are prerequisites for enhancement of critical reading and that they can be achieved through strategy instruction and task-based instruction, respectively. Three reading textbooks (Select Readings: Upper-intermediate, Active Skills for Reading: Book 4, and Mosaic Reading 2) are leveled against three criteria: Critical thinking items, the use of appropriate tasks, and strategic instruction. The results indicate that these textbooks meet the first criterion to some extent, but seriously lack the last two ones.

1. Introduction

John Dewey's (1916) and Paulo Freire's (1970) democracy-seeking views on education have inspired many scholars, researchers, and teachers who were fascinated with helping learners have their voices heard. The 'banking' approach to education hinders learners from thinking critically by imposing on them a passive stance which makes them adaptive to the status-quo.

Critical pedagogy rejects the 'banking' concept of education and aims at liberating students from the confines of those classrooms in which the teacher is traditionally expected to transfer knowledge to students, while students receive and accept the information, right or wrong, without deserving the right to question the authenticity of the knowledge being transferred.

Critical reading is an area which has been the center of attention of critical pedagogues for many years. Several scholars and researchers have made attempts to incorporate, or encourage the inclusion of, critical reading indicators in reading programs (e.g., Freire, 1983; Patching, Kameenui, Carnine, Gersten, & Colvin 1983; Peavey, 1954; Walz 2001; Wolf, King, & Huck, 1968), yet the degree to which these attempts have been successful is an uncertain issue upon which we may cast doubt. For this purpose, the present study sought to qualitatively examine whether or not reading textbooks encompass critical reading items.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 The Nature of Reading

Brown (2001) lists seven characteristics of written language (vis-à-vis spoken language): Written language is permanent giving readers the chance to go back to previous parts and read at their own rate. It is distant as the author

is not accessible. Because of its ambiguity, it needs a lot of inference-making, interpretation and reading between the lines. Written language has more complex structures with longer clauses; it also enjoys a variety of lexical items and a higher degree of formality.

A text does not carry meaning by itself; the reader brings information, knowledge, emotions and experiences to the printed word (Brown, 2001). There are two categories of schemata: content schemata and formal schemata. The former refers to our knowledge of people, the world, culture and the universe, whereas the latter refers to our knowledge of the structure of texts (Brown, 2001).

Alderson and Bachman (2000) make a distinction between the process of reading and the result of that process, the product. The process refers to the interaction of the reader and the text, and what the reader can get as the meaning of a text. They further suggest that the process of reading is not a static process; rather it is a dynamic one. Similarly, Nuttall (1996) maintains that reading, like conversation, is interactive; that is, readers and writers depend on one another. Interactive reading in another sense refers to a continual shift from one focus to another, now adopting a top-down approach to predict the probable meaning, then moving to the bottom-up approach for checking that meaning. Some authors (Alderson & Bachman, 2000; Brown, 2001), therefore, suggest that both top-down and bottom-up processes are important, and a combination of these two processes, i.e., interactive reading, is necessary for reading successfully.

Depending on the level of students, reading can be defined differently: for beginners it mainly concerns decoding and deciphering individual words or is an activity to learn aspects of pronunciation and speaking; but in most cases, one reads a text as to get the message/meaning that the author has intended (Brown, 2001). In the past, reading was viewed as a decoding activity in which the reader's job was to decode the message that the writer had encoded, but the fact is that the reader is not always able to get the writer's encoded message or he/she may even get a different meaning from the text as the reader and writer may not have a common assumption of a subject.

"The process of reading is different for different readers on different texts at different times and with different purposes (Alderson & Bachman, 2000, p. 3)." The reason for such variation is that readers differ with regard to their schema and that the writer may presuppose many points of which the readers are not aware (Nuttall, 1996). In a conversation, one can ask the other interlocutor if he or she does not understand something, but in reading no one [author] is available, so good readers have to get involved in "active interrogation of a text" (Nuttall, 1996, p. 10).

Gray (1960) distinguishes between reading the lines, reading between the lines, and reading beyond the lines; "the first refers to the literal meaning of text, the second to inferred meanings, and the third to readers' critical evaluation of text" (as cited in Alderson & Bachman, 2000, pp. 7-8). Alderson and Bachman (2000) contend that society values a critical understanding of texts above the other two modes of understanding, i.e., literal and inferred meanings.

Paulston and Bruder (1976) look at the distinction between intensive and extensive reading as crucial to teaching reading. Intensive reading refers to reading through focusing on the linguistic features necessary to decode the message. Nuttall (1996) also defines intensive reading as "approaching the text under the guidance of a teacher or a task which forces the student to focus on the text" (p. 38). Extensive reading, on the other hand, is an approach to reading which resembles that of native speakers reading in their mother tongue; the student reads, at his own level and pace, directly for meaning. It is reading large quantities of materials and longer texts consistently over a long period of time to get a general meaning and it can happen during class time or at home (Hedge, 2000).

A combination of intensive and extensive reading throughout a reading program is emphasized by many authors (e.g., Brown, 2001; Nation, 2009). Brown (2001) also highlights the role of affective factors in motivating learners to read: "The love of reading has propelled many a learner to successful acquisition of reading skills" (p. 300). However, making the right choice of the material has a great role in producing this love, materials which, in Nuttall's (1996) words, have the suitability of content, exploitability and readability. Inspired by Vygotsky, especially his notion of ZPD, Wilhelm (2001) argues that text difficulty should be within students' zone of proximal development; that is, they can read the text with assistance. But if the texts are within students' zone of actual development or beyond their ZPD, readers may not read efficiently and critically since the former belongs to an independent reading level that is not challenging and thought provoking for readers and the latter is at students' frustrational reading level.

2.2 Creative Thinking

A creative idea or product is usually defined as original and appropriate scientific findings and theories; even imaginative conversations are deemed as creative products. On the other hand, reproduced and stereotyped products are not considered creative, no matter how fine and elegant they might be (Fisher, 2005).

Jean Piaget (As cited in Arcaro, 1995) defines creative thinking as "the principle goal of education is to create men who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what other generations have done _ men who are creative, inventive and discoverers. The second goal of education is to form minds which can be critical, can verify, and not accept everything they are offered" (p. 51). Stories, designing, brainstorming, drawing, games, wordplay, and puzzles are among the most popular stimuli for creativity (Fisher, 2005).

All children are capable of creative thinking irrespective of their IQ provided that their parents provide the appropriate climate so that children's creativity can flourish (Fisher, 2005). According to Carl Rogers, human beings need two conditions to be creative: psychological safety and psychological freedom (as cited in Fisher, 2005, p. 28).

2.3 Critical Thinking

It is a misconception to consider creative thinking unrelated to critical thinking. The former implies adding some elements, re-combining them or looking at a problem from a new perspective, while the latter refers to analyzing the elements of a problem in a logical and critical fashion. So if creativity is finding new solutions to a problem, it necessitates critical judgment; and any system which focuses on one of them at the expense of the other is losing (Fisher, 2005).

Critical thinking means good thinking which is against irrational thinking. The following skills are regarded as important factors in developing critical thinking: interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation (Facione, 2006). Fisher (2003) suggests seven types of questions that can stimulate critical thinking: context, temporal order, particular events, intentions, choices, meaning (meta-discourse message), and telling (as cited in Jarvis, 2005). Debate, for example, is an essential activity which presupposes freedom of speech as one of the preconditions for investigation of and judgment about contemporary problems.

Instruction in critical thinking aims at achieving the ability to explore, criticize, or advocate different ideas, to reason inductively and deductively, and to infer sound conclusions from ambiguous statements (Freeley & Steinberg, 2000). However, Gatto (2001) contends that school does not let our children to take an active role in community life: "School, as it was built, is an essential support system for a model of social engineering that condemns most people to be subordinate stones in a pyramid that narrows as it ascends to a terminal of control" (p. 13).

2.4 Critical Reading

Reading a paragraph involves finding the main idea of the paragraph and how it is related to other paragraphs. Structural reading can be used to locate the main paragraphs in a text. Having understood the main ideas in a paragraph, good readers are able to connect them meaningfully to their own situations and experiences (Elder & Paul, 2004).

Nation (2009) provides a list of principles for the teaching of effective reading. In his view, a reading program should be designed and practiced for a range of reading purposes, from reading to search for information to reading to critique texts. He maintains that effective reading involves training learners to acquire and integrate a range of reading strategies such as: "previewing, setting a purpose, predicting, posing questions, connecting to background knowledge, paying attention to text structure, guessing words from context, critiquing, and reflecting on the text" (p. 7). Furthermore, it is suggested that learners master different text structures including those typically found in newspapers, stories, reports, and so on.

According to McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004), a book may deceive readers at the same time that it can enlighten readers and expand their knowledge (as cited in Molden, 2007). It is because readers sometimes leave texts unquestioned (Molden, 2007). So whether readers are deceived or enlightened depends on how they approach the task of reading: They are deceived if they read the books without questioning them, but if they question the author's perspective and their own, they are more likely to be enlightened. Molden (2007) further suggests that in order to keep the balance between writing in which writers typically write critically with a clear purpose in mind, and reading we need to "read against the grain" (p. 51); we need to maintain the equal status of reader-author relationship. Thus, comprehension may not only be a final goal, but it can also be a point at which readers begin their critical discussions. All the texts that we use for teaching have got ideologies behind them, the ideologies that were dominant in the day of their publication (Wallace, 2003). So how discourse is shaped by prior discourse and how discourse shapes the possibilities for future discourse are also important points to ponder (Johnstone, 2008).

Several authors and researchers have emphasized the importance of assigning critical reading tasks and activities to students of different ages (e.g., Alderson & Bachman, 2000; Jewett, 2007; Kay, 1946; Kottmeyer, 1944; Patching, Kameenui, Carnine, Gersten, & Colvin 1983; Peavey, 1954; Walz 2001; Wolf, King, & Huck, 1968; Zigo & Moore, 2004).

To help students read critically, Jewett (2007) made use of some strategies such as 'whose voice' and 'conversations with characters'. In the former, students were asked to question whose voices were heard in the stories (and whose voices were not), and what those voices might have said. In the latter, some students take on the roles of the characters in the stories, while other students ask questions from these fictitious characters. Walz (2001) investigated the role of developing critical reading skills in learners with respect to a new context, the Internet. According to Walz, internet is a proper place to practice critical reading skills because "internet is available to all, is attractive enough to encourage frequent visits, yet has absolutely no accountability, since anyone can publish any information, right or wrong, on any topic, and not have to defend it" (pp. 1193-1194). He focused on three aspects of critical reading pertaining to the internet: context, vocabulary, and content. Context provides basic background information; vocabulary will provide additional information that is essential to critical reading; and finally the reader must delve into content in order to find the flaws in logic commonly found on the web, i.e. manipulation, unsupported arguments, and bias. In another study conducted by Kay (1946), students were given different excerpts to discern what the main ideas of the excerpts were and then they were asked to decide whether the author's conclusions were the same as theirs. Three types of activities were used by Kottemeyer (1944), analysis of propaganda, reading editorials, and interpretation of cartoons. Throughout the first activity, students became familiar with seven types of propaganda, namely, bad names, glad names, transfer, the testimonial, plain folk, stacking the cards, and the bandwagon; then they were given workbooks comprising large numbered envelopes. In these envelopes, there were several samples of propaganda used in advertising. The students were supposed to write the names of advertisements, and after each one, they were asked to write the kind of propaganda they thought it was. For the second activity, the teacher scanned the pages for editorials dealing with subjects that showed promise of at least several weeks of interest. Another activity was the interpretation of cartoons in newspapers. However, not every kind of cartoon had the capacity to be read critically. The selected cartoons were required to have some social and political potential for evoking logical reasoning and analysis. In their attempts to examine the role of direct instruction of critical reading in learners' performance, Patching, Kameenui, Carnine, Gersten, and Colvin (1983) compared a control group with no intervention and two experimental groups: one receiving direct instruction (systematic instruction), and the other working on workbook with corrective feedback approach. Students' ability to detect instances of faulty generalizations, false causality, and invalid testimonial was dealt with. The results showed that students from systematic instruction group performed at a higher level than those in the workbook group. Brian (2007) investigated the essential features of a reading assignment designed to develop critical thinking skills. Students were asked to read a text and identify the major thesis and key causal relationships. The students were invited to engage in counterfactual reasoning by speculating about the likely implications of a hypothetical "what if?". It was found that incentives for critical reading can be created by providing a list of thought-provoking study questions and assigning student journals. In a similar vein, Gelman (2007) also shows the necessity of moving toward critical reading in statistics teaching. In most surveys, we give our participants limited alternatives from which to choose; for instance, the question 'Do you attend church?' with the choices 'Yes/No'. The writer reasonably declares the possibility of the extension of a question presenting only two choices to a similar question asking for more exact and refined answers such as: 'How often do you attend religious services, not counting weddings or funerals?' One important feature of "The Survey of English Masters" is its policy of open-book examinations that pose critical questions to students. LeFevre (1955) found that the students' knowledge that they may have unrestricted access to their books and notes during the examinations encourages them to read as deeply and imaginatively as possible, and frees them from the pressure of rote memorization of factual information. It also makes students read and think actively and do some first-hand experiencing of literature; moreover, it prevents students from parroting teacher's comments. This type of question enables the teacher to give considerable credit to students who answer mistakenly, but with wit, ingenuity, and rational evidence in support of their position.

3. Methodology

Based on the criteria for determining whether a text or reading material helps develop critical reading in students, the researcher has tried to investigate the effectiveness of different excerpts from three well-known textbooks designed for developing the reading skill. The investigation was focused on the extent to which different topics, different exercises that come before and after the text, and the texts themselves, promote critical reading.

Since in developing countries, even in high schools and colleges, the lack of skills in critical reading is quite tangible, and very few, if any, courses in universities are aimed at developing critical awareness of readers, the researcher chose to investigate three reading textbooks designed for upper-intermediate and advanced English learners: Mosaic Reading (Wegmann, & Knezevic, 2002), Active Skills for Reading: Book 4 (Anderson, 2008), and Select Readings: Upper-intermediate (Bernard & Lee, 2004). These textbooks were selected because they were among the most creditable reading textbooks worldwide.

For this purpose, the chapters of these three textbooks were juxtaposed with the items in the previously designed checklist and with different reading tasks to see whether they are suitable for promoting critical reading or not. Furthermore, the researcher commented on the usefulness of these tasks for developing critical reading and, when necessary, some suggestions were given for increasing their effectiveness.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Select Readings: Upper-intermediate

The opening page to each chapter of *Select Readings* (Bernard & Lee, 2004) presents the title of reading passage and the following text's content; moreover, we are presented with a quote related to the theme of that reading passage. This goes quite in line with our claim that any text must activate readers' background knowledge beforehand. As an example, let's take the opening page to chapter 2 into account, and we see that a combination of the previously mentioned parts and a picture's subscript reveals to us that the boy about whom the passage has been written is a courageous and intrepid man though he may be suffering from a dangerous physical handicap.

The next section of each chapter comprises some questions under the rubric 'Before You Read'. These questions are supposed to make readers reflect on their prior knowledge of the topic, or to ask them to practice their pre-reading skills like skimming and scanning. Furthermore, there is usually a picture about which a question is asked. Not to mention the effectiveness of reflecting on prior knowledge and skimming or scanning, there is a need to cast doubt on the effectiveness of the last question being asked about a particular picture. While some questions like those asked on page 49 "What do you think is going on in this cartoon?" and "What do you think may have led to this situation?" might somewhat challenge readers, other questions such as those asked on page 37 about the picture of a famous soccer player "Who are the most celebrated athletes in your country?" or "How much do they get paid?" are not even close to be considered challenging questions, let alone being capable of raising readers' critical awareness.

In the 'Before You Read' section, some useful questions are raised that ask readers to read the title or the first paragraph of the passage and expect them to predict what the whole text will be about. As a result, readers are able to gauge the accuracy of their guesses after they finish reading the text.

The next section is the reading passage itself. We already know that a good reading book must include texts from a rich variety of genres; the text sources should be authoritative and valid; and the texts must be appropriate for raising critical discussion. The reading passages in 'Select Readings', as the authors claim, truly become increasingly longer and more complex as the chapters progress. But the important point here is whether the topics and the issues chosen for the chapters of the book are suitable enough to pave the way for developing readers' critical awareness or not. Are the themes such as 'suggestions for learning to think creatively' or 'suggestions for becoming a skillful reader' (chapters 1 & 11, respectively) hot issues for discussion? With regard to the former, it is not clear whether all or even most of the readers know what 'creative thinking' is and/or are interested in it, let alone expecting them to be able to hold a discussion about it or look at it from different perspectives. And when talking about the latter, we should probably expect a wave of disinterestedness on the part of readers. Because it is the act of reading itself which is interesting for readers, not talking *about* the ways through which they can improve their reading skills. On the other hand, topics which revolve around interesting issues like World Cup Soccer, Internet, and Electronic Games, respectively related to chapters 4, 7, and 9, seem to be more appropriate. However, it is recommended that reading books contain passages with burning social and political issues like drugs/addiction, delinquency, election fraud, religion, so that readers have an opportunity to freely discuss them in classroom and let other students hear their voices and viewpoints. It is important to remember that the topics should not be culture-specific, but should be those of which everybody has a clear understanding; for example, while almost every student knows what 'religion' is, 'Holocaust' is something which not every student knows much about.

On pages 150-168, readers can find explanations for cultural references that appear in each chapter. These cultural points which are in blue type in the reading passages may be culture-specific and all readers may not be familiar with them, hence the usefulness of these explanations for comprehending the texts.

The next section of each chapter is allocated to a part under the rubric 'After You Read: Understanding the Text'. Readers are usually asked two types of questions: firstly, their understanding of the text is gauged, and secondly, their ability to discuss the issues raised in the reading is tested. The former is evaluated through different kinds of exercises such as 'True/False', 'Multiple-choice Questions', 'Order the Events in the Story', 'Choosing the Best Summary', and 'Check Supporting Ideas'. Among these, the first two are traditional mechanistic exercises, while the others are newer and more challenging methods of checking readers' comprehension of a text: by unscrambling the sentences in the reading passage, readers analyze author's choices of language; by choosing the best summary, they practice looking for the main purpose of the text and the most important information present in the text; and

finally, by checking supporting ideas, they are evaluated with regard to their ability to detect the relevant details and examples included in the text.

Although these exercises are necessary for a general understanding of the text, they are not enough for making readers have a critical understanding of the text. For this purpose, another section is added to the end of each chapter: 'Discussion and Writing'. Here, students are sometimes asked to put themselves in similar conditions as what actually happened in the passage; other times they are supposed to refer to their own experiences for answering or discussing those questions. On page 60, for instance, students are asked to imagine they are attending a seminar to help employees and supervisors improve their listening skills. They should decide who will be the supervisor and who will be the employee. This is done in order to grant power to students. After they finish the role-play, they write one or two paragraphs on what they have learned. And finally, they relate the events to their own experiences: "Think of a time when you had a problem and you tried unsuccessfully to explain it to someone." Another example on page 123 clearly grants readers the necessary power to imagine themselves to be in charge of a restaurant, a classroom, a train or bus, a library, a department store, and a church or temple, and asks them to decide in which of these places people cannot use their cell phones. Students should also design an announcement or sign to remind people of what they cannot do. However, although conducting a survey on some people and asking the respondents to identify nationalities from pictures is an interesting job, it does not seem a suitable task to be included in the discussion section on page 72, since not only it does not raise the necessary amount of discussion among readers, but also it is too time-consuming within the limits of a reading session.

4.2 Active Skills for Reading: Book 4

The passage in the first chapter of *Active Skills for Reading* (Anderson, 2008) consists of biographies of two successful figures, namely Michael Dell and Anita Roddick, together with a short interview with each of them. The reading skill which is claimed to be developed is scanning; so it is not supposed to develop critical awareness to a great extent. Rather, by presenting such questions like 'look at the photos on the next two pages. Can you name these two entrepreneurs? Can you name any other famous entrepreneurs? Where are they from', and also by expecting learners to answer True-False questions even before they read any part of the passage, the author further evades being considered a critical writer. The only seemingly positive point about the reading is a section allotted to 'Critical Thinking' putting forward some discussion questions expecting readers to put themselves in the protagonist's shoes and see the world from his/her eyes, and also asking them to express their feelings about the characters in the passage.

Units 1 (chapter 2), 7 (chapter 1), 8 (chapter 2), 10 (chapter 1) and 11 (chapter 1) are taken from different web pages. As we saw in the introduction part, Walz (2001) had referred to the unreliability of the texts which are authorless and are brought to the web pages without being critically assessed with regard to their authenticity. So it is recommended that some items be allotted to questioning the authenticity and validity of written texts; however, as we go through these chapters, we do not face any such type of questions.

Another point worthy of being investigated is the appropriateness of the topics. While a topic like 'hacking' (unit2, chapter1) is so familiar to and experienced by almost all readers, other topics such as 'emotional intelligence' (unit6, chapter1) and 'genetically modified food' (unit7, chapter1) are not appropriate ones for raising critical discussion, since these issues are those whose understanding need a considerable degree of expertise and the common reader is not able to maneuver over it and criticize its implications and specialist concepts. For example, a common reader who is not familiar with the experimental sciences will probably have problems reading a passage full of such specialist terms as DNA, chromosomes, allergens, pests, and herbicides. For this reason, it is recommended that texts written for ESP learners not be used for critical reading programs.

According to Bloom's taxonomy, the best questions are 'evaluation questions', those which ask readers to determine the value of something, and to evaluate the authors' use of language according to the purpose they had in mind (their beliefs and values). However, as we go through the chapters of this book, we can see very few examples of such questions: On page 152, for example, the writer is asking readers whether they think the ideas for producing alternative, renewable energy in the reading passage are realistic or idealistic. On the other hand, we frequently see 'application questions' asking readers to use familiar situations and experiences. For example, on page 184, the writer is asking readers what ideas about progress are common in the society 'they' live in; likewise, on page 76, readers are expected to decide whether the type of story they are presented is found in all cultures of the world or only in some particular ones.

4.3 Mosaic Reading 2 (Fourth edition)

'Before-reading' activities in *Mosaic Reading* (Wegmann, & Knezevic, 2002) are mainly concerned with decoding words and sentences. For instance, there is a recurring activity in most chapters asking readers to guess the meaning

of unknown words from context. Optimal use of such activities seems to be a 'must', but overreliance on such decoding activities can lead readers, as Wilhelm (2001, p. 94) contends, to "get mired at the local level of comprehension."

Another point concerning the 'Before-reading' section of Mosaic Reading is that almost half of the chapters of the book lack any sort of prediction or discussion activity to activate readers' schematic knowledge before reading. From chapter 7 onwards, there is a prediction activity in which students are simply asked to look at the title or illustration and predict the content of the article. It seems that simply asking students to predict from the title is not enough for activating background knowledge and for enhancing readers' engagement and interest. Instead, the author could provide readers with a discussion task based on an opinion survey or a questionnaire to involve learners, to engage their interest, and to provide a reason for reading.

The 'After-reading' exercises can be classified under two main headings: One kind of these exercises ask for factual information present within the text like 'recalling information'. For answering this kind of exercise, the reader simply needs to refer to the text itself; readers are not required to see texts as parts of larger conversation called 'grand conversation' (Wilhelm, 2001). The other kind of exercise asks students to analyze the logic of the text and reasoning of the author. These after-reading exercises require students to make use of a wide variety of strategies that promote critical reading. The following strategies, matching those items in our checklist, were found throughout the book and, depending on the content, the topic, and organizational structure of the text the author has chosen some of them for different chapters. These strategies include finding support for or against a hypothesis, talking it over, summarizing different points of view, finding basis for inferences, applying inferences to a specific situation, refuting false arguments, identifying a bias, separating facts from opinion, paraphrasing the theme or main idea, paraphrasing key ideas, inferring attitude, finding support for main ideas, summarizing an article, formulating an argument, identifying causes, writing an ending, and arranging events in a sequence. As a case in point, while in chapter 3 the writer uses 'arranging events in a sequence' and 'identifying causes' as strategies for developing critical awareness of readers, in chapter 2 'making inferences' is the main strategy that is stressed.

5. Conclusion

Having analyzed these three reading textbooks, the researcher suggests that whether a particular book promotes critical thinking, and consequently critical reading, depends less on the kinds of materials, tasks and exercises than on the way the instructor handles the classroom, presents different tasks and instructs different strategies by taking into account learners' agency. That is, even in the case of using tasks as a way to make readers engaged, care should be taken to consider these tasks as "uniquely situated, emergent interactions based on participants' goals and not merely task objectives and invariant task procedures" (Lantolf, 2000, p. 44).

Several scholars (e.g., Jewett, 2007; Kottmeyer, 1944; Patching, Kameenui, Carnine, Gersten, & Colvin 1983; Peavey, 1954; Walz 2001; Wolf, King, & Huck, 1968; Zigo & Moore, 2004) believe that instructing children how to think and read critically is an important aspect of all reading programs. Therefore, not paying enough attention to critical thinking in reading, in turn, may lead to children's inability of obtaining excellence in academic achievement. Other researchers are thus recommended to examine the appropriateness of other reading textbooks within different contexts. The present study contributed to fill this gap by examining three reading textbooks which are most commonly used in Iranian universities for an undergraduate course; yet other researchers are encouraged to investigate other reading textbooks in order to come up with a clear understanding of the possible inherent drawbacks.

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