

TEACHING CRITICAL READING:
A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

by 1264

ELEANOR BRENT

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Approved by:

Richard M. Haun
Major Professor

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPROVING CRITICAL READING INSTRUCTION	1
The Need for Critical Reading Instruction	1
Existing Reading Programs	3
Organization of the Remainder of the Report	5
II. DEFINITION OF CRITICAL READING	6
III. ESSENTIALS OF CRITICAL READING	10
IV. FACTORS AFFECTING CRITICAL READING	15
V. OBSTACLES TO CRITICAL READING	28
VI. IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR EDUCATORS	33
VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY	43

CHAPTER I

THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPROVING CRITICAL READING INSTRUCTION

I. THE NEED FOR CRITICAL READING INSTRUCTION

The need for critical reading instruction in our changing society is becoming more and more apparent. As Robert Emans notes: "The need for reading intelligently, thoughtfully, and critically is a need of our times." Because so much of our information comes to us secondhand through radio, film, print, and television, most of what we know has been "sifted through someone else's eyes and mind, with someone else's beliefs and biases."¹ Nila Banton Smith agrees with Emans when she maintains that critical reading "is of tremendous importance at the present time" because so many people are trying to influence our thinking. Much of the influencing is done through mass communications, and Smith maintains that "the most imminent danger of mass communication lies in its potency as a mold of public opinion."² David H. Russell stresses the need for critical reading instruction to

¹Robert Emans, "Meeting Current Reading Needs in Grades Four Through Eight," Recent Developments in Reading, ed. H. Alan Robinson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 13.

²Nila Banton Smith, Reading Instruction for Today's Children, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 18.

combat the conforming influence of mass communications. He notes that the dangers of conformity "are particularly great, and insidious, in relation to the impressionable minds of children."³ John Dewey emphasized this same danger when he stated: "He who has learned as we call it to read without having learned to judge, discriminate, and choose has given hostages of dependence to powers beyond his control."⁴ Strang, McCullough, and Traxler assert this same idea when they state that "in an environment permeated with propaganda, one must use critical reading as a tool to maintain one's integrity -- to avoid being used as a means to other people's ends."⁵ and Russell G. Stauffer states that "the pupil who does not learn to deal with reading as a thinking process undergoes an intellectual servitude that deceives and deludes and sets at naught that which reading for meaning aims to accomplish."⁶ According to William Eller, American citizens must constantly evaluate their sources of information. He says that because of the "monopolistic trend in newspaper ownership, the

³David H. Russell, "The Prerequisite: Knowing How to Read Critically," Elementary English, XXXX (October, 1963), pp. 579-582.

⁴John Dewey, Construction and Criticism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930), p. 17.

⁵Ruth Strang, Constance McCullough, and Arthur E. Traxler, The Improvement of Reading (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1961), p. 11.

⁶Russell G. Stauffer, "A Directed Reading-Thinking Plan," Education, Vol. 79 (May, 1959), pp. 527-32.

superficial coverage of events by the wire services, and the inclinations of so many publications to sacrifice factual accuracy in order to tell a good story, it is downright difficult for the reader to 'get the facts' at times."⁷

The importance of critical reading instruction simply cannot be minimized, for as Robinson states: "Critical reading is basic to the appreciation of literature, to arriving at sound conclusions about personal and social problems, to scientific investigations and ultimately to education in its broadest sense."⁸ It appears that if our democratic way of life is to survive, the populace must be taught to read and think critically. George H. Hiram maintains that the answers to problems in a democratic society must be discovered by the people themselves since the ultimate directive force in such a society is the will of the people. Therefore, it follows that "the people in such a society must be trained to think accurately."⁹

II. EXISTING READING PROGRAMS

When one examines the previous statements and then the

⁷William Eller, "Fundamentals of Critical Reading," The Reading Teacher's Reader, ed. Oscar S. Causey (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1958), pp. 30-34.

⁸Helen M. Robinson, "Developing Critical Readers," Proceedings of the Annual Educational Reading Conference, ed. Russell G. Stauffer, 1964, pp. 1-12.

⁹George H. Hiram, "An Experiment in Developing Critical Thinking in Children," Journal of Experimental Education, Vol. 26 (December, 1957), pp. 125-132.

reading programs in most schools in our country, it would appear that most reading programs are not dealing adequately with critical reading instruction. Stauffer substantiates this when he states the following:

In many ways, classroom practices used to direct a reading activity have saddled the learner with . . . a corrupting procedure -- the practice of 'round-the-robin comprehension.' This is the procedure whereby the teacher asks almost all the questions and the pupils play back answers from a text usually verbatim. There is no examining of clues available and declaring of purposes in terms of a pupil's or a group's background of experience, intellect, language facility, interests, and needs. There is no adjusting of rate to purposes and materials; no weighing of facts and inferences; no reading and rereading to make judgments; and no generalization. This is the procedure whereby the teacher tries to anticipate all word recognition needs in advance of the reading so that the mechanics of reading can be accomplished without any word mishaps These are the procedures that have dropped the verbatism curtain in education, thus dooming the would-be learner to new modes of intellectual servitude.¹⁰

Emmett A. Betts agrees, stating: "There is . . . evidence that our pupils need help on how to think in reading situations . . . Too often parents believe their children can read when they are merely pronouncing words."¹¹

That we must view reading as more than a skill is pertinently stated by Ruth Strickland.

Reading is not just a skill but rather a resource for fuller living. That concept changes the emphasis in the teaching of reading from mechanics to meaning, from the acquisition of mechanical skill to the development of ability to

¹⁰Stauffer, op. cit., p. 528.

¹¹Emmett A. Betts, "Reading Is Thinking," The Reading Teacher, Vol. 12 (February, 1959), pp. 146-51.

gain meaning from symbols and to think with it, interpret it, and use it for personal and social ends. The quality of an individual's reading is not determined by the degree of mechanical skill he has attained but by the quality of personal satisfaction and enrichment that he finds in the experience of reading.¹²

III. ORGANIZATION OF REMAINDER OF THE REPORT

It is the intent of this author to examine the definitions of, essentials of, affective factors of, and obstacles to critical reading. With this background the author will discuss the resulting implications for educators with some general suggestions they might use in the teaching of critical reading.

¹²Ruth G. Strickland, The Language Arts in the Elementary School, (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1951), p. 312.

CHAPTER II

DEFINITION OF CRITICAL READING

Before one can discuss critical reading instruction, he must develop a definition of the term critical reading. Such a task is not easy and when one examines the literature in this area, he soon realizes the truth of Marksheffel's statement: "At this time, there is some uncertainty and lack of agreement among authorities about a definition of 'critical reading.'"¹³ However, the teacher of critical reading should understand some of the most commonly accepted concepts included in many of the definitions of the term.

Comprehension is involved, but most authors maintain that critical reading goes beyond literal comprehension and interpretation. Nila Banton Smith asserts that it goes beyond either of these "in that the reader evaluates, that is, passes personal judgment on the quality, the value, the accuracy, and the truthfulness of what is read."¹⁴ Bond and Wagner say that critical reading is a "type of comprehension in which the reader appraises the worthwhileness, the relevancy, or the accuracy of one or more passages."¹⁵ George Spache agrees with both sources

¹³ Ned D. Marksheffel, Better Reading in the Secondary Schools (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1966), p. 250.

¹⁴ Smith, op. cit., pp. 263-64.

¹⁵ Guy L. Bond and Eva Bond Wagner, Teaching the Child to Read (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), p. 214.

when he states: "Understanding the facts is obviously basic to critical reading and an integral part of it. But critical reading is much more than literal reading or a simple ascertaining of facts." Furthermore, he notes that "critical reading involves an active integration of the author's facts and the reader's insights into a new understanding and interpretation of the material."¹⁶ Frances Triggs' definition agrees with that of Spache when he states that critical reading "involves the use of all of the reading skills the reader has, but it includes more; to read critically one must read beyond the material presented by the author and involve one's own experiences and previous learning." He further notes that he feels critical reading "requires a contribution by both the author and the reader," and that the interplay between the two contributions should result in new understanding -- "something more than or different from the original contributions."¹⁷ Because of his views which are similar to those stated by Triggs, David Russell feels that critical reading is one kind of creative reading, a term used by several authors to denote what others call critical reading. Russell maintains that critical reading is actually one facet of creative reading "because criticism may be a creative act.

¹⁶ George Spache, Toward Better Reading (Champaign, Illinois: Garrard Publishing Company, 1963), p. 83.

¹⁷ Frances Triggs, "Promoting Growth in Critical Reading," The Reading Teacher, Vol. 12 (February, 1959), pp. 158-64.

In reacting to a paragraph, the critical reader may achieve a fresh insight, a unique synthesis, which makes his reading creative."¹⁸

Most authors reviewed for this paper agreed that critical reading involves complex thinking to a certain degree. Gertrude Williams says that critical reading is intelligent, purposeful reading which involves more complex thinking than does simple recall.¹⁹ Judging the author's statements enters to some extent into most definitions of critical reading. A. S. Artley considers it mandatory in the critical reading process for a reader to severely judge a writer's ideas.²⁰ Since one must possess criteria on which to base judgments, many authors would expand Artley's definition and agree with William Gray who defines critical reading as ". . . the evaluation of what is read in the light of sound criteria."²¹

A reader's purpose plays an important role in some authors' definitions of critical reading. Because of this role, Sochor states that literal and critical reading cannot be

¹⁸David H. Russell, Children Learn to Read (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1961), p. 472.

¹⁹Gertrude Williams, "Provisions for Critical Reading in Basic Readers," Elementary English, Vol. 36 (May, 1959), pp. 323-31.

²⁰A. S. Artley, "Teaching Word Meaning Through Context," Elementary English Review, Vol. 20 (February, 1943), pp. 68-74.

²¹William S. Gray, "The Major Aspects of Reading," Sequential Development of Reading Abilities, ed. Helen M. Robinson ("Supplementary Educational Monographs," No. 90 [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960]), p. 17.

differentiated. She asserts that depending upon the purpose of the reader, what may be literal for one reader, may be critical reading for another.²² Ruth Strang also stresses the point that a reader's purpose determines the kind of reading required.²³

Marksheffel incorporates ideas from several definitions when he describes critical reading as "purposeful reading in which higher-level thinking processes are used in making sound judgments on the basis of all available evidence."²⁴

One clarification is necessary since many writers use the terms critical thinking and critical reading synonymously. Marksheffel maintains that although the two processes are almost identical, "critical reading and critical thinking are not synonymous terms." The difference between the two processes is that "critical thinking becomes critical reading when it is applied to written symbols."²⁵

²² Emma Elona Sochor, "The Nature of Critical Reading," Elementary English, Vol. 31 (January, 1969), pp. 47-58.

²³ Ruth Strang, "Secondary School Reading Is Thinking," The Reading Teacher, Vol. 13 (February, 1960), pp. 194-200.

²⁴ Marksheffel, op. cit., p. 250.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 251.

CHAPTER III

ESSENTIALS OF CRITICAL READING

Closely related to and perhaps indivisible from the discussion of a definition of critical reading is the discussion of skills involved in or the essentials of critical reading.

Naturally, in order to read critically one must be able to understand the words used by the author. As Triggs notes, this understanding may be gained from actual experience or from vicarious experiences which may come from reading.²⁶ Many authors agree that because a type of judging is involved in critical reading, a sufficient background must be one of the essentials. DeBoer feels that above all else critical reading "involves a sufficient background of knowledge to provide a sound basis for judgment."²⁷

Edgar Dale feels an important ingredient of critical reading must be the willingness of the critical reader to modify previous beliefs, to be flexible to change. Involved in this, Dale maintains, is the reader's awareness of the barriers to truth which may be in his own mind.²⁸ Eller agrees when he

²⁶Triggs, loc. cit.

²⁷John DeBoer, "Teaching Critical Reading," Elementary English, Vol. 23 (October, 1946), pp. 251-54.

²⁸Edgar Dale, "The Critical Reader," The Newsletter, Vol. 30, No. 4, (January, 1965), pp. 1-4.

includes "personal adjustment which will permit objective consideration" in his list of essentials of critical reading.²⁹ Bond and Wagner feel that this is accomplished if one has a broad and rich background. They feel that the teacher of critical reading helps to eliminate prejudices when he is concerned with building backgrounds.³⁰

DeBoer notes that "critical reading implies the existence of appropriate criteria in the mind of the reader," and that in order to arrive at a sound judgment about the reading the critical reader must be able to evaluate data, identify and compare sources, and synthesize the findings.³¹ Triggs notes several of these same skills when he states that the critical reader needs the following: "ability to read for main ideas and details and to distinguish between the two, ability to recognize inferences and conclusions, and ability to adapt the rate at which materials are read to the situation met."³² Edgar Dale mentions several of these same skills and further notes that the critical reader must be able to find and state the problem in the passage he is reading.³³

Several other authors mention these same essentials or needed skills. Bond and Wagner note that "the child will get

²⁹Eller, loc. cit.

³⁰Bond and Wagner, op. cit., p. 218.

³¹DeBoer, loc. cit.

³²Triggs, loc. cit.

³³Dale, loc. cit.

into difficulty . . . if he is unable to understand the problem which faces him, remember the problem while reading, and hold himself to the problem." These authors also note judging the pertinency of the material; understanding the meanings implied as well as stated; evaluating the source from which he is reading; differentiating the important from the unimportant facts; detecting statements of fact as opposed to those of opinion; judging the relative accuracy of conflicting statements; and appraising the authoritativeness and accuracy of the material as essentials for effective critical reading.³⁴ In his Toward Better Reading Spache mentions several of the essentials listed above, adding to them, analyzing semantic variations of words. He concluded his section on this aspect of critical reading by stating that "not only must the reader be aware of propaganda devices, but must remain objective toward the author's presentation." He further states that the reader "must avoid emotional reactions and suspend judgments until he has clearly recognized the author's plan. The critical reader cannot allow his feelings or his tendency to quick judgments to interfere with his analysis of the author's facts."³⁵

Much of the writing of the authors concerned with critical reading deals with the problem of responding critically to propaganda. Not only do they feel that a rich background is necessary in order to help the student be aware of possible

³⁴Bond and Wagner, op. cit., p. 285.

³⁵Spache, op. cit., pp. 89-92.

implications in the writing but also these authors feel the critical reader should be able to understand the difference between the informative purpose and the emotive purpose in writing. McKee feels that the teacher of critical reading should give students "practice in distinguishing in both listening and reading between expressions used informatively and expressions used emotively." He further notes that "such teaching is essential if the pupil is to learn to uncover actual meaning or sense in a given piece of 'mixed' reading matter and protect himself against misleading propaganda of various types."³⁶

McKee asserts that "it is recommended that definite instruction in coping with emotive expressions be given at the sixth grade level if not before that time."³⁷ Robert Nardelli concluded as a result of his study of sixth-grade pupils that not all propaganda devices were equally comprehensible to sixth-grade pupils. "Various devices have certain peculiarities which cause them to be more readily identified, while others are more subtle in nature and pose difficult problems for pupils at this grade level." He notes that the "easiest devices for the pupils to recognize were the Plain Folks and Testimonial devices; the most difficult were the Card Stacking, Glittering Generalities and Transfer devices." Furthermore, he

³⁶Paul McKee, The Teaching of Reading in the Elementary School (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968), p. 76.

³⁷Ibid., p. 393.

states that "while the fact has been established that sixth-grade pupils are able to recognize and identify propaganda, this study does not suggest these pupils are, because of their newly acquired skill, able to resist propaganda in its various forms."³⁸

Many authors note that if the critical reader is not careful, he may acquire the attitude of complete skepticism. Martha Dallman warns that we must be careful not to teach children to become unduly skeptical of everything they read. She states: "If, as a result of training in critical evaluation, the child becomes suspicious of everything in print and out of it, the time spent in helping him read critically has been worse than wasted."³⁹ DeBoer expresses the same concern when he states: "Critical reading does not imply the spirit of indiscriminate skepticism. It implies the use of judgment and the adoption of defensible criteria."⁴⁰

³⁸Robert Nardelli, "Some Aspects of Creative Reading," Journal of Educational Research, Vol. 50 (1957), pp. 495-508.

³⁹Martha Dallmann, "Critical Evaluation," Grade Teacher, LXXV, No. 1 (September, 1957), pp. 46-47.

⁴⁰DeBoer, loc. cit.

CHAPTER IV

FACTORS AFFECTING CRITICAL READING

In order to help students gain critical reading skills or achieve the needed essentials, educators must be aware of the factors which influence critical reading performances. According to Eller and Wolf these "factors are found both within readers and within reading materials, and many of them have negative effects upon critical reading abilities."⁴¹

Probably more studies have been done on the relationship between intelligence and the ability to read critically than any other factor. Eller and Wolf note that Betts⁴² found in his studies that "verbal intelligence tends to be highly related to critical reading abilities in the social studies and in science."⁴³ However, like Marksheffel, most authors agree that although "intelligence is one of the determiners of the degree to which he [a student] can learn to read critically, . . . high intelligence does not guarantee that a student will be a critical reader."⁴⁴ Such a student may have the potential for

⁴¹William Eller and Judith Goldman Wolf, "Developing Critical Reading Abilities," Journal of Reading, Vol. 10, No. 3 (December, 1966), pp. 192-98.

⁴²Emmet A. Betts, "Research on Reading as a Thinking Process," Journal of Educational Research, Vol. 50 (1956), pp. 1-15.

⁴³Eller and Wolf, loc. cit.

⁴⁴Marksheffel, op. cit., p. 254.

critical reading, but other factors might prevent him from reaching his potential. David H. Russell makes this same point when he states: "High performance on an intelligence test does not guarantee high scores on a test of critical thinking. The relationship between general intelligence and critical thinking is positive but not high." He further notes that "critical thinking abilities are not acquired automatically as a part of general mental growth; specific provision must be made for their development in all curricula areas."⁴⁵ Robert Karlin asserts this same opinion when he states: "Although intelligence and ability to read critically appear to be related, investigators have found that high performance on an intelligence test does not guarantee equally-high performance in situations which require critical thinking."⁴⁶

Some authors distinctly caution teachers to provide instruction for children with other than high intelligence levels. For instance, J. E. Davis feels that intelligence scores certainly may not be reliable for use as the sole predictors of success in distinguishing between fact and opinion. He maintains that based on his research, those teachers who

⁴⁵Russell, Elementary English, pp. 579-82.

⁴⁶Robert Karlin, "Sequence in Thoughtful and Critical Reaction to What Is Read," Sequential Development of Reading Abilities, ed. Helen M. Robinson, Supplementary Educational Monographs, No. 90. (University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 74-79.

believe that those pupils who have difficulty in reading or are slow learners in general will not profit from instruction in critical reading skills have a belief which is unfounded. He states: "There are strong implications in the results of this study that instruction to develop ability in distinguishing between fact and opinion should be provided for all pupils, not just those pupils designated as 'average or above.'"⁴⁷

One of Davis's most important points concerns the results he achieved when his fact-opinion instrument was administered on an untimed basis. Here he found that "some subjects who had below grade level reading achievement scores and low average to below average IQ scores, when unhampered by a time limit, were capable of distinguishing between fact and opinion as effectively or more effectively than students classified as being at or above grade level in reading ability and average or above average in intelligence."⁴⁸ Edward Glaser states in his Experiment in the Development of Critical Thinking that often children with less-than-average intelligence profited most from lessons in critical reading and thinking.⁴⁹

Burton, Kimball and Wing summarize effectively many of the conclusions based on the preceeding discussion when they state that "intelligence definitely is a factor in thinking

⁴⁷ J. E. Davis, "Ability of Intermediate Grade Pupils to Distinguish Between Fact and Opinion," Reading Teacher, Vol. 22 (February, 1969), pp. 419-22.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Edward M. Glaser, An Experiment in the Development of Critical Thinking, in Strang, McCullough, and Traxler, op. cit., p. 386.

ability. Other things being equal, . . . the higher the level of intelligence, the higher the level of thinking ability." However, they distinctly note that "the ability to think clearly can be improved among individuals of virtually all intelligence levels."⁵⁰

Certainly, intelligence is not the only factor affecting critical reading ability. Several authors discuss the reader's background experience as an important factor associated with his ability to achieve success in critical reading. Earlier in this paper the author cited several sources which emphasized the importance of a broad, rich background of experiences as being an important essential for developing the ability to do effective critical reading. Background experience is essential; therefore, the lack of or possession of such is a factor.

Marksheffel notes that "students must have a wide and varied background of experiences before they can develop the understandings and knowledge necessary for critical reading."⁵¹ In Children's Thinking Russell states: "In general, the more a child knows about the circumstances surrounding a problem, the better his solution will be. Knowledge does not necessarily mean good thinking, but high-order thinking is dependent upon

⁵⁰William H. Burton, Roland B. Kimball, and Richard L. Wing, Education for Effective Thinking (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1960), p. 244.

⁵¹Marksheffel, loc. cit.

knowledge."⁵² Karlin augments this idea when he asserts that if, as Russell states, critical thinking can be defined as "comparing what is read with a known standard,"⁵³ the standard must arise from knowledge or understanding. He further notes that "knowledge is identified with concepts, and vague or tenuous ones may not be used as models for comparison." Therefore, he states that "since many of the ideas with which learners deal are abstract, . . . it follows that real experiences help add substance to them."⁵⁴ Marksheffel agrees with Karlin when he states: "Students must call upon all their previous learning, concepts, and knowledge in order that they have some criteria with which to judge whether the material being read is relevant to the solution of the problem at hand."⁵⁵ DeBoer and Dallmann make the same point when they note that "critical discrimination in reading calls for a wide background of knowledge concerning the subject under discussion." They further note that the word "criticism" means literally the application of criteria and that "such criteria can come only from some previous contact with the subject."⁵⁶ In addition, Bond and Wager maintain that the "broader and richer the

⁵²David Russell, Children's Thinking (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1956), p. 185.

⁵³Karlin, loc. cit.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Marksheffel, loc. cit.

⁵⁶John DeBoer and Martha Dallmann, The Teaching of Reading (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1960), p. 124.

background, the freer from prejudice will be the reader, and the more adequate will be his judgments. In order to enable the children to read critically, the teacher should be concerned with building backgrounds and with eliminating prejudices."⁵⁷

The effect of attitudes, prejudices, and biases has been suggested by many authors as an important factor which influences critical reading. Marksheffel maintains that there is "no question that a student's attitudes, biases, and prejudices determine what he reads and how he reacts to the reading."⁵⁸ Karlin asserts this same opinion when he states: "Prejudices toward or against persons, ideas or topics have been shown to interfere with the reader's performance in evaluating printed matter."⁵⁹ Burton, Kimball, and Wing state that "values, prejudices, and biases influence thinking. Problem solving is significantly distorted by emotionally toned materials or by majority pressures which run counter to the solution advanced by the individual."⁶⁰ Eller and Wolf maintain that the "research leaves almost no doubt that a reader's attitudes and prejudices affect his ability to evaluate critically"⁶¹

The work of many researchers substantiate the previously stated opinions. Gray reports that when working with eleventh-

⁵⁷Bond and Wagner, op. cit., p. 218.

⁵⁸Marksheffel, op. cit., p. 255.

⁵⁹Karlin, loc. cit.

⁶⁰Burton, Kimball, and Wing, op. cit., p. 251.

⁶¹Eller and Wolf, loc. cit.

grade pupils, A. S. McKillop⁶² found that attitudes and values were important factors in determining evaluative responses.⁶³

Gray states that in her study McKillop notes that "a disconcerting characteristic of the responses of the students was their tendency to label as false or stupid a passage which did not fit in with their attitudes." She further notes:

The present study shows that the reader's attitude should be considered one of the factors which may influence his reading, particularly when the reading involves value judgments of the author or of the passage as a whole. Teachers should be aware of this attitude factor in interpreting individual pupils' responses to emotionally charged articles and should be especially alert to possible influences of attitude on inferences, evaluations, and general impressions based on the reading of this kind of article.⁶⁴

M. M. Gray notes that Piekarz⁶⁵ concluded that "students must learn to differentiate between their own attitude and emotions and those exposed by an author in reading materials of an emotive nature."⁶⁶ Gray reports further that Piekarz⁶⁷

⁶²Anne S. McKillop, The Relationship Between the Reader's Attitude and Certain Types of Reading Responses (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1952).

⁶³M. M. Gray, "Research and Elementary School Critical Reading Instruction," Reading Teacher, Vol. 22, (February, 1969), pp. 453-59.

⁶⁴McKillop, loc. cit.

⁶⁵Josephine Piekarz, "Attitudes and Critical Reading," Proceedings of the Annual Education and Reading Conference, ed. R. G. Stauffer, 1964, 2, pp. 134-44.

⁶⁶M. M. Gray, loc. cit.

⁶⁷Josephine Piekarz, "Getting Meaning from Reading," Elementary School Journal, Vol. 56 (1956), pp. 303-309.

matched two students with Weschler I. Q.'s of 129 and 127. Piekarz found that one student was a critical reader but concluded that the other student "was affected by her attitudes which prevented her from reading critically."⁶⁸

In a study of college freshmen C. Gratton Kemp attempted to study the influence of dogmatism on critical thinking. He found that high dogmatism or closed-mindedness decreased efficiency and that the "more open-minded perceptively examine all aspects of the experience, try to clarify the ambiguity, and strive to see the relationship among parts."⁶⁹ Furthermore, he contends that improvement in critical thinking is not likely to take place in the usual classroom situation since that environment does not usually encourage open-mindedness.⁷⁰

Eller and Wolf report that the findings of the Yale Studies in Attitude and Communication⁷¹ provide strong evidence that the young reader tends to make judgments which agree with the apparent commitments of the group with which he is identified.⁷² Hovland contends that "people 'identify' as they

⁶⁸M. M. Gray, loc. cit.

⁶⁹C. Gratton Kemp, "Improvement of Critical Thinking in Relation to Open-Closed Belief Systems," The Journal of Experimental Education, Vol. 31, No. 3 (March, 1963), pp. 321-23.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Carl I. Hovland and Irving L. Janis (ed.), Yale Studies in Attitude and Communication (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959).

⁷²Eller and Wolf, loc. cit.

read for self-esteem and prestige and they often read only what agrees with their preconceived opinions or to reinforce and gain support for opinions held."⁷³

The student's attitude toward the content type of material read was the subject for a study by Patrick Groff. He found that among the fifth- and sixth-grade students studied there was a significant correlation between their attitudes toward content and the results of the critical reading test he used.⁷⁴ Karlin reports on a study done by Patricia Kendall and Katherine Wolf⁷⁵ which indicates that "the reader's understanding may be impaired when his attitude toward the subject matter is negative."⁷⁶ Kendall and Wolf found in their study that the reader whose attitudes were favorably identified with ideas expressed in cartoons was able to react positively to them while others whose views differed from those same ideas misinterpreted them.⁷⁷

⁷³Carl I. Hovland, "Effects of the Mass Media of Communication," Handbook of Social Psychology, ed. G. Lindzey, in M. M. Gray, loc. cit.

⁷⁴Patrick Groff, "Children's Attitudes Toward Reading and Their Critical Abilities in Four-Content-Type Materials," The Journal of Educational Research, Vol. 55, No. 7 (April, 1962), pp. 313-18.

⁷⁵Patricia Kendall and Katherine Wolf, "The Analysis of Deviant Cases in Communications Research," Communications Research, ed. P. Lazarsfeld and F. Stanton (New York: Harper and Bros., 1949), pp. 152-179.

⁷⁶Karlin, loc. cit.

⁷⁷Kendall and Wolf, loc. cit.

Helen Crossen studied the impact of attitudes toward racial and ethnic groups. She reports that there is a positive relationship between adolescents' ability to read critically material about minority groups and their attitudes toward these same groups.⁷⁸

Sex is a factor which some researchers contend affects critical reading ability. M. M. Gray notes that Eller and Wolf report that the Yale University Studies had research showing "significant sex differences in resistance to agreement with boys being less persuasible than girls."⁷⁹ Groff, too, reports that his study "pointed up the significant difference in attitudes toward reading due to sex characteristics."⁸⁰

William Eller and Judith Wolf present an excellent review of literature concerning factors which influence critical reading. In addition to the factors already mentioned they note that researchers provide "strong evidence that young readers tend to make judgments which agree with the apparent commitment of the groups with which they are affiliated."⁸¹ Too, they note the importance of social class as a factor when they cite research which involved reactions to ideas

⁷⁸Helen Crossen, "Effects of the Attitudes of the Reader Upon Critical Reading Ability," The Journal of Educational Research, Vol. 42 (1948), pp. 289-98.

⁷⁹M. M. Gray, loc. cit.

⁸⁰Groff, loc. cit.

⁸¹Eller and Wolf, loc. cit.

presented by motion pictures rather than by the printed word. The studies cited provide evidence that "lower class pupils are less critical in their responses than learners of higher social positions."⁸² However, Eller and Wolf maintain that scrutiny of the studies cited "leads to the conviction that social class was interwoven with other personal characteristics of the pupils; thus the observation that pupils of higher social status are better critical thinkers -- though true -- may be an oversimplification."⁸³

The effect of certain characteristics of the reading material or the reading situation on the critical reader is also discussed by Eller and Wolf. They assert that "several workers have shown that readers and listeners tend to respond more favorably to communicators whom they view as credible or endowed with prestige than to less esteemed communicators." Furthermore, they state:

Quite a number of aspects of the message itself are known to influence the reader's receptivity to a stated point of view: the order of presentation of arguments, the number of viewpoints presented, the specificness of the message, the amount of emotion in the appeal and the intensity of fear used as motivation.⁸⁴

It would seem that general reading comprehension power should be a factor which heavily influences critical reading

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid.

ability. However, several researchers have conducted studies in which intelligence was held constant and have found that critical reading abilities are nearly independent of general comprehension. Ethel Maney found in an experiment involving science materials "that ability to read critically in science seems to be independent of ability to read literally in that field or of general reading ability."⁸⁵ In a study of fifth- and sixth-grade pupils Emma Sochor found that "literal and critical reading comprehension in social studies appear to be relatively independent abilities when intelligence is held constant."⁸⁶ Eller and Wolf note that the data in a study conducted by Glaser⁸⁷ indicated "little or no relationship between some of the individual critical reading and thinking skills" and literal reading ability. Eller and Wolf continue their discussion of this factor by stating the following:

From the standpoint of the practical classroom teacher, these findings do not indicate that literal and general reading comprehension skills are unimportant to the instructor of critical reading. Rather they suggest that the critical skills are somewhat independent, that they cannot be assumed or predicted on the basis of the literal or general comprehension skills, and that

⁸⁵Ethel Maney, "Literal and Critical Reading in Science," Journal of Experimental Education, Vol. 27 (September, 1958), pp. 57-64, in Strang, McCullough, and Traxler, op. cit., p. 172.

⁸⁶Emma Elona Sochor, "Literal and Critical Reading in the Social Studies," Journal of Experimental Education, Vol. 27 (September, 1958), pp. 49-56.

⁸⁷Glaser, op. cit., p. 199.

at some point in the twelve-year or college curriculum teachers should expect to give specific instruction to develop the critical skills.⁸⁸

After reviewing the studies done in the area of factors which influence critical reading ability, one can appreciate the truth of the following statement by Eller and Wolf:

"Because so many factors . . . influence the evaluative thinking processes, nobody is an ideal critical reader at all times or in all subjects; therefore, curriculum committees and individual teachers should plan, not for mastery, but for continuing development and improvement of critical reading power."⁸⁹

⁸⁸Eller and Wolf, loc. cit.

⁸⁹Ibid.

CHAPTER V

OBSTACLES TO CRITICAL READING

Marksheffel maintains that many reasons for Americans⁹⁰ not being more critical in their reading can be traced to faulty practices by classroom teachers at all grade levels.⁹⁰ Marjorie S. Johnson asserts this same point when she states:

Perhaps, in some ways, schools have created such problems in this area. When attempts have been made to develop critical reading and thinking abilities, they have frequently been concentrated in certain lessons and usually placed in the higher grades. The program seems to have been built on this erroneous concept: 'Having learned to think, the pupils can now learn to think critically.' No systematic program, starting when and before reading achievement started, has led to the aim of a thinking reader.⁹¹

Paul McKee, like Johnson and Marksheffel, believes that certain practices by the teachers leads to a lack of critical reading or what he calls verbalism, the ability to recognize the form of a printed word or a group of words as a symbol and to think, write and speak the pronunciation for which that symbol stands without having a correct or clear understanding of what the symbol means in the setting in which it is used. He feels that this practice is "rampant in our schools at most

⁹⁰Marksheffel, op. cit., pp. 255-56.

⁹¹Marjorie S. Johnson, "Readiness for Critical Reading," Education, Vol. 73 (February, 1953), pp. 391-96.

educational levels and in most fields of learning."⁹² Furthermore, he states:

. . . As the educational level advances, the meanings presented become increasingly numerous, remote, abstract, and unrelated to the learner's interests, needs, and experience, until, at the college level, most textbooks deal almost exclusively with matters that are completely remote, abstract, and of little, if any, concern to most college students. Furthermore, the first grade teacher, relatively conscious of the limitations of the first grade children, takes time to see that strange meanings which she or the text present to pupils are clarified and organized by those pupils. Teachers at higher levels, including the college, less conscious of the learner's limitations and more eager to accept his reproduction or paraphrasing of symbols as evidence that he understands what is meant, do not recognize the need or are not willing to take the time to help students to clarify and organize the strange meanings presented. It is quite possible that presentation of too many strange meanings to students in too short a time, failure to help students to clarify and organize those meanings, and the teacher's willingness to accept the learner's reproduction of symbols as evidence that he understands adequately encourage the student to resort to verbalism as a haven from failure and to believe that he is not expected to understand much of what is said in his textbooks.⁹³

Sochor agrees with McKee and contends that the situation can be helped by investigating "measures for appraising and techniques for developing the various aspects of literal and critical interpretation in reading."⁹⁴

⁹²McKee, op. cit., p. 76.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Sochor, "Literal and Critical Reading in the Social Studies," pp. 49-56.

In his paper, "Fundamentals of Critical Reading," William Eller includes the following in his list of obstacles to critical reading: reliance on the single-textbook approach; the halo effect of the printed word; avoidance of controversial subjects in the classroom; emphasis on conformity; mistaken stereotypes; religion; and acceptance of an authority on faith.⁹⁵ The overcoming of some of these obstacles may be difficult for educators. For instance, there may be little that classroom teachers can do about the practice of some religions which forbids members to read philosophies which differ from their prescribed views.

However, educators can influence the overcoming of some of the obstacles mentioned by Eller. For instance, teachers can aid the critical reader by helping him to understand the pitfalls of using only one textbook as an almost unchallengeable authority. Eller states: ". . . The single-textbook methodology errs both in developing too much respect for one authority, and in depriving the students of the intellectual exercise necessary to a comparison of different points of view."⁹⁶ Too, Eller maintains that students would develop less of a halo effect for the printed word "if occasionally they read something that could be disproved on the basis of their

⁹⁵Eller, loc. cit.

⁹⁶Ibid.

own experience. . . ."97 He notes that "beginning in the primary grades, pupils are told to 'find out what the book says,' when they raise questions. This is, of course, desirable in its main effect, but it includes a by-product of too much trust in the printed word."98 McKee declares the same opinion when he states that ". . . the great majority of boys and girls believe that any statement appearing in a school book must be true because it is in that book."99

The tendency of many teachers to avoid topics involving controversial issues is listed as a reason for limited accomplishment in the teaching of critical reading not only by Eller but also by King, Ellinger, and Wolf.¹⁰⁰ Eller states that the "best backgrounds for teaching critical reading are provided by controversial issues such as race problems, politics, and labor-management conflicts, but a great many teachers steer away from these topics. . . ."101 Ruth Strang and Dorothy Bracken readily agree with Eller when they claim that "critical thinking is stimulated by

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹McKee, op. cit., p. 460.

¹⁰⁰Martha L. King, Bernice D. Ellinger, and Willavene Wolf, (eds.) Critical Reading (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1967), pp. V-VI.

¹⁰¹Eller, loc. cit.

having vital problems to solve. This creates a readiness for critical thinking which cannot take place in a vacuum."¹⁰²

Another characteristic of some readers which reduces their critical reading effectiveness, the acceptance of an authority on faith, can be dealt with through school reading programs. Teachers of critical reading can instruct their pupils in the techniques of weighing, of evaluating, of seeking proof. Eller states: "Acceptance on faith requires no such scientific probing; in fact, it is opposed to investigation, sometimes just on the basis of method, sometimes because the object of the faith would not survive examination."¹⁰³

In addition to the lack of controversial issues discussed in a school's classroom, Gray notes that King, et. al., mention several other causes to which they feel limited accomplishments in the teaching of critical reading can be attributed. The following are listed: (1) "the inadequate treatment of this aspect of reading in college methods courses," (2) "the paucity of materials and practical teaching techniques available to teachers," (3) "the general neglect of the area by reading researchers," and (4) "the considerable confusion that surrounds the concept."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰²Ruth Strang and Dorothy Kendall Bracken, Making Better Readers (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1957), p. 148.

¹⁰³Eller, loc. cit.

¹⁰⁴M. M. Gray, loc. cit.

CHAPTER VI

IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

When one examines the foregoing discussion, he will undoubtedly conclude, as has Marksheffel, that "critical reading is learned only from adequate, systematic, continuous guidance."¹⁰⁵ Triggs maintains that "critical reading should be taught at every developmental level."¹⁰⁶ Barnes claims that all teachers, not just English teachers, share the responsibility of teaching critical thinking in reading and listening.¹⁰⁷ Roma Gans in A Study of Critical Reading Comprehension in the Intermediate Grades states that she "discovered that children who scored well on the usual standardized tests in reading performed poorly on a test of critical reading. She concluded that the ability to read critically requires systematic teaching."¹⁰⁸ DeBoer goes on to note that "in a controlled study, carried on shortly afterward, Edward Glaser found that systematic teaching definitely improved high school student's ability to think

¹⁰⁵Marksheffel, op. cit., p. 251.

¹⁰⁶Triggs, loc. cit.

¹⁰⁷J. T. Barnes, "To Read, To Listen . . . Perchance To Think," The Clearing House, Vol. 42 (1968), pp. 300-304.

¹⁰⁸Roma Gans, A Study of Critical Reading Comprehension in the Intermediate Grades in DeBoer, loc. cit.

critically."¹⁰⁹ J. E. Davis agrees when he states that pupils need encouragement and opportunity for the application of the many skills we have previously mentioned. He further notes that "above all, pupils need time to think. The development of critical reading abilities cannot be scheduled to a given class period or rushed through in a 'once over lightly' manner."¹¹⁰ Dechant makes the specific point that "a knowledge of critical reading is not enough for its application. The child needs training and guidance" in applying critical reading skills.¹¹¹

Most authors agree that training and guidance are necessary. However, the teacher of critical reading should keep in mind his purpose in this instruction. Spache best clarifies this point when he states:

Training in critical reading is an attempt to improve the student's thinking processes while reading, not necessarily to modify his personality or his beliefs. Such changes in a student may come as a result of his reading but these are side effects of the bibliotherapeutic process, not the primary purpose of a program in critical reading.¹¹²

It is the contention of most authors that critical reading instruction should not be postponed to teaching in

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Davis, loc. cit.

¹¹¹Emerald V. Dechant, Improving the Teaching of Reading (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), p. 372.

¹¹²Spache, op. cit., p. 86.

secondary schools. Wolf, King and Huck state the following:

. . . Research in child development indicates that very young children of three and above are capable of critical reasoning and that five- and six-year-old children can use all their thinking abilities. If children are capable of such reasoning, it would seem important to begin instructing them in critical reading skills as soon as possible. Psychological research has shown that once habits are established, it is difficult to change them. The emphasis on word recognition skills and literal comprehension that characterizes reading instruction in the lower and intermediate grades may encourage naive acceptance of anything that appears in print. Through postponing instruction in critical reading, the habit of indiscriminate acceptance of printed material may become so well established that late instruction in these skills would be extremely difficult.¹¹³

Frances G. Smith voices the same opinion when she states that "it is imperative that children be taught at an early age to think for themselves." Furthermore, she maintains that teaching a child to think for himself should be a part of his training "from kindergarten days and not something to be postponed until he reaches the secondary school."¹¹⁴ Russell G. Stuafter agrees with the authors cited above. He states:

Children can read and think critically about matters relating to their experiences. This is as true of six-year-olds, as it is of ten-year-olds or sixteen-year-olds. A six-year-old may not be motivated, or intellectually able, to comment on the validity of historical doctrines, such as the

¹¹³Willavene Wolf, Martha King, and Charlotte S. Huck, "Teaching Critical Reading to Elementary School Children," Reading Research Quarterly, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Summer, 1968), pp. 435-98.

¹¹⁴Frances G. Smith, "Teaching Children to Evaluate," Elementary English, Vol. 45 (December, 1968), pp. 1075-76.

Marshall Plan, but he may think critically about ideas in a story.¹¹⁵

Many authors have discussed specific suggestions for educators which they feel are warranted based on research which has been done. For example, Eller and Wolf feel that for teachers in all content fields who seek to develop students' critical reading power, research justifies the following suggestions.

1. Critical reading ability cannot be assumed on the basis of good general or literal reading comprehension; the critical skills must be taught specifically.
2. Even when critical reading skills are taught -- and learned -- by formal lessons, these skills may not be applied by students in practical reading situations; thus, students should have opportunities to utilize their critical abilities in classes in content fields.
3. Because students with certain characteristics (such as high verbal intelligence) learn the critical reading skills more efficiently than many of their age-mates, heterogeneous classes may need to be reorganized according to the types of patterns that are used to adjust instruction to individual differences in basis reading abilities.
4. Even if instruction in critical reading has been excellent, a learner cannot be expected to manifest a high level of critical judgment if such judgment would place him in opposition to views of peer groups, or if he lacks confidence in himself. . . .¹¹⁶

M. M. Gray supports many of the ideas stated by Eller and Wolf in his list which follows:

¹¹⁵Russell G. Stauffer, "Children Can Read and Think Critically," Education, Vol. 80 (May, 1960), pp. 522-525.

¹¹⁶Eller and Wolf, loc. cit.

1. Critical reading instruction should begin at the same time as the general reading instruction program.
2. A scope and sequence of critical reading skills should be explored.
3. The many factors affecting critical reading must be considered and made known to students as well as educators.
4. Materials demanding critical reading must be developed and made available for all grade levels.
5. Reading tests should include critical reading and critical thinking.
6. Critical reading and thinking instruction should be emphasized in college methods courses.
7. Teachers may need in-service training in critical reading instruction and perhaps even in critical reading.¹¹⁷

John DeBoer discusses specifically the teacher's responsibility in cultivating critical reading. He states that first, the teacher should help the reader "to clarify his own thinking, to identify his own assumptions." Second, the teacher should help the reader "analyze the issues and assumptions in the reading material." Third, the teacher should help the reader "to broaden the background of knowledge out of which adequate standards to judgment may emerge."¹¹⁸

Marksheffel feels that the study and discussion of controversial issues by students is an excellent way to build experimental backgrounds. He states: "A teacher who allows each student to present evidence and discuss his ideas on controversial issues, in order that all viewpoints may be expressed and evaluated, may tread on some toes; but he is

¹¹⁷M. M. Gray, loc. cit.

¹¹⁸DeBoer, loc. cit.

providing students with experiences that are vital to critical thinking and critical reading."¹¹⁹ Robert Emans agrees with Marksheffel when he states: "Controversial issues are a good, and perhaps crucial, setting for critical reading. Students should have practice in applying their criteria to the information, arguments, and conclusions found in various treatments of controversial issues."¹²⁰

Another of the teacher's responsibilities, providing a wide variety of reading materials, is discussed by DeBoer when he states: "The variety should be great enough to embrace a wide range of interests and ability levels, but if possible it should include also a wide range of viewpoints. Comparison of diverging viewpoints will compel a degree of critical reading which is impossible when the children's chief source is single textbook."¹²¹

Stauffer feels that the teacher's attitude is crucial. He says that the teacher "must recognize the importance of directing reading as a thinking process. She must understand and plan so thoroughly that the dynamics of a directed reading situation allow her to take full advantage of ideas evoked. She must not stress conformity but freedom of thought. She

¹¹⁹Marksheffel, op. cit., pp. 254-55.

¹²⁰Emans, op. cit., p. 17.

¹²¹DeBoer, loc. cit.

must encourage an intellectual boldness and straight-forwardness that will not tolerate mental servitude to anything but the truth."¹²²

Charles B. Huelsmann, Jr. mentions three approaches to teaching critical reading: the functional approach, the direct approach, and the incidental approach.¹²³ Dechant in Improving the Teaching of Reading discusses these three approaches and notes that Kottmeyer experimented with the direct approach. Using the direct approach, Kottmeyer gave the pupils definitions of propaganda techniques and magazines, newspapers, editorials, and cartoons to read critically. They sought to discover the propaganda techniques in the materials read.¹²⁴ The functional approach, according to Dechant, is "one in which class materials are taught with the definite purpose of promoting critical skills." Dechant feels that the least effective approach is the incidental approach, the training in critical reading which may come simply as a by-product of social studies learning.¹²⁵

¹²²Stauffer, "A Directed Reading-Thinking Plan," pp. 527-32.

¹²³Charles B. Huelsmann, Jr., "Promoting Growth in Ability to Interpret When Reading Critically: In Grades Seven to Ten," Promoting Growth Toward Maturity In Interpreting What Is Read, Supplementary Educational Monographs, No. 74 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp. 149-53.

¹²⁴William Kottmeyer, "Classroom Activities in Critical Reading," School Review, Vol. 52 (November, 1944), pp. 557-64, in Dechant, op. cit., pp. 372-73.

¹²⁵Dechant, op. cit., pp. 372-73.

Hunkins and Shapiro report success with fifth graders in using what they call the "case method" for teaching critical reading. This procedure presents situations designed to stimulate children to think critically and to arrive at a "principle for action." Then the children are required to give reasons for their conclusions based on evidence or data. These researchers feel that "this requirement forces them to think in a critical manner regarding the problems which the case contains."¹²⁶ The "case method" proposed by Hunkins and Shapiro could work effectively only in a classroom in which there was an environment of open-mindedness. C. Gratton Kemp concluded in his study that more efficiency in critical thinking could be expected in small classrooms and in an environment that reduces "the degree of threat, affording as much permissiveness (safety) as the students demonstrate they can handle."¹²⁷

Many authors give very specific ideas and very detailed plans for teaching critical reading. The books and articles which are listed in the bibliography of this report contain suggestions for specific units which teachers could use when teaching critical reading. This author will not list these specific units plans here; however, Arthur W. Heilman includes in his book Principles and Practices of Teaching Reading a list of general procedures which can be used in the teaching of

¹²⁶ Francis P. Hunkins, and Phyllis Shapiro, "Teaching Critical Thinking in Elementary Social Studies," Education, Vol. 88, No. 1 (September-October, 1967), pp. 68-72.

¹²⁷ Kemp, loc. cit.

critical reading by teachers in most content areas. Some of these procedures are listed as follows:

1. Do not violate the principles of teaching reading, which apply particularly to critical reading.
 - a) Diagnosis is essential in order to discover weaknesses before the child has a reaction formation against reading.
 - b) Instruction should be based on pupil's needs.
 - c) Reading is getting meaning.
 - d) Many approaches and techniques are needed.
 - e) Do not ask the child to read over his head. Asking a child to read something he cannot read is unjustifiable and asking him to read it critically is expecting the impossible.
2. Pre-teach difficult, new, or unknown words as they are encountered in reading -- particularly in subject areas. Work on both pronunciation and meaning.
3. Get rid of the idea that reading and the teaching of reading take place during the "reading period" and that during other periods subjects are taught.
4. There should be deliberate effort to study the organization of sentences, paragraphs, and larger units....
5. Teach and expect orderliness, organization, and logic in written work.
6. Use all audio-visual aids available. Concepts are built through sensory experiences. And experiences with word symbols alone is an ineffective way to broaden concepts....
7. Use purposeful study questions in advance of pupil reading. Questions given prior to reading can be most effective in structuring any reading situation. Eventually the student should get in the habit of asking the proper questions for himself, but this takes time and experience.... This is an excellent method of preparing the student and of giving him a motive or goal in his reading....
8. Wide reading on fewer topics, rather than superficial reading on many topics, will permit students more practice in organizing, analyzing, seeing relationships, comparing sources, and determining whether information belongs or is related to the topic under discussion.

9. Teach interpretation of graphs, charts, tables, figures, wherever they occur in any subject area.
10. Explain and teach analogies and how the reader must always make sure the analogy applies.
11. Provide practice in recognizing bias, distortion, and various propaganda techniques....
12. Help children develop a questioning attitude so that they will differentiate between fact and opinion, see cause and effect relationships, and use clues in evaluating the merit of a work....¹²⁸

The responsibilities of educators for teaching critical reading are awesome but are ones which must be assumed. Robert Karlin summarizes this author's feelings based on work done for this report when he states:

To read critically is to read intelligently. Evidence which has been accumulated over the years reveals that such reading does not occur through osmosis nor does it result from chance. Efforts to develop this ability must be made by each teacher at every level of instruction. Only determined teachers can alter the reading behavior of students by helping each to become a thoughtful, careful, and critical reader.¹²⁹

¹²⁸Arthur W. Heilman, Principles and Practices of Teaching Reading (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc., 1961), pp. 316-18.

¹²⁹Karlin, loc. cit.

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TEACHING CRITICAL READING:
A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

by

ELEANOR BRENT

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Today's student is bombarded by both subtle and overt propaganda in many forms, from inane commercials even to his own textbooks. From this he must sort out truth from fiction and editorializing from news reporting. In short, he must become a critical reader.

Authorities in the field disagree on the precise definition of critical reading; however, most agree that the student must be able to judge the validity of that which he reads. Without becoming a cynic or a perpetual skeptic, he must learn to ask the right questions and then formulate the answers.

Many factors influence students' ability to read critically. Basic intelligence is involved, but not all people of high intelligence think or read critically. A person's background -- religious, social educational, or ethnic -- determines the criteria with which written ideas are compared.

Several components of the classroom situation can serve as obstacles to critical reading. Students soon learn to "verbalize" -- to use terms without understanding them. Students are taught faith in the printed word, particularly textbooks -- the "halo effect." A lack of discussion of controversial issues in classrooms fails to give students "real" problems about which to think critically.

Critical reading instruction can start as soon as the student begins to read. Students can be taught to measure material against their own experiences, both inside and out of the classroom. Critical reading and thinking must be made a part of the entire educational experience. It must be taught by well-trained teachers at each developmental level.

It is the intent of this author to examine the definitions of critical reading, the essentials of critical reading, the factors affecting critical reading, and the obstacles to critical reading. With this background the author will discuss the resulting implications for educators with some general suggestions they might use in the teaching of critical reading.