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Developing critical thinking in classrooms: Teacher responses to a Reading-for-Meaning workshop

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Background: The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study of 2016 lays claim to the need for critical thinking to be developed since, in the South African context, 78% of learners could not even retrieve explicitly stated information (lower-order thinking) from texts, as opposed to 4% in the rest of the world. Critical, higher-order thinking and reading-for-meaning skills development are imperative to allow learners to become active participants in this changing world.

Objectives: The study focused on teachers' responses to a Reading-for-Meaning workshop aimed at empowering teachers with tools or strategies to improve learners' comprehension through developing critical, higher-order thinking skills.

Method: The research is an interpretative, qualitative study which aimed at understanding how critical thinking is integrated into reading for meaning in classrooms. The Microsoft program Teams was used as the online platform to present the workshop which facilitated synchronous e-learning. Purposive sampling was applied and 36 intermediate and senior phase teachers teaching from grades four to nine solicited. Data were collected from a Telegram chatroom and a web-page questionnaire which was inductively analysed.

Results: Teachers experienced all the strategies positively and, on implementation in their classrooms, found that these strategies encouraged learner engagement, improved interpretation, boosted confidence and led to meaningful engagement with texts and deeper thinking which allowed them to think more critically.

Conclusion: The Reading-for-Meaning workshop provided the tools which teachers used to encourage learners to express their opinion and answer more critical questions based on predictions, make inferences, make connections, clarify, summarise and paraphrase, and so develop critical thinking skills and subsequently improve comprehension skills.

Contribution: On a conceptual level, the article has established a connection between the theories of critical thinking and pedagogical strategies. This opens up new directions for research for scholars in the field of literacy and education.

Keywords: critical thinking; higher-order thinking; anticipation guide; Philosophy for Children; my turn, your turn; reading for meaning; critical pedagogy.

Introduction

For many generations, learning content was deemed enough for learners to enable them to succeed in life. Learners themselves thought it was enough to learn the way their parents did (Murawski 2014). With education evolving and the paradigm shifting to the management of 'instant communication, 24/7 news cycles and the desire to know as much as possible as quickly as possible' (Murawski 2014:27), there is the realisation that instant adaptation is needed. Knowledge is no longer enough. De Bono (2004:6) states, 'creative, constructive design and operating aspects of thinking are just as important as knowledge'. Learning critical skills has now become imperative so learners can become 'both the inventors and the critics of the new information' (Murawski 2014:27), to enable them to participate in this rapidly changing world.

From an educational perspective, critical thinking often relates to the learners' acquisition of the three highest skills levels in Blooms taxonomy which include analysing (breaking down ideas into components), evaluating (to judge evidence) and creating (placing components together to create an original, coherent whole) when reading a text (Van der Zanden et al. 2020). From a cognitive perspective, critical thinking refers to the learners' ability to use texts to make inferences, calculate likelihoods and make informed decisions or judgements.

In the South African context, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2016 results lay claim to the need for critical thinking to be developed, since the evidence show that 78% of South African learners in grade 4 did not reach the lowest benchmark, as opposed to the 4% rate internationally (Howie et al. 2017). The lowest benchmark is the first level of comprehension skills which is the explicit retrieval of information. This is evidence of the low level of reading-for-meaning skills in South African schools. Therefore, there is a need for developing teachers by empowering them with strategies to teach reading-for-meaning skills with the aim of improving learners' comprehension skills and critical thinking.

To ensure that teachers are able to differentiate between ordinary thinking and critical thinking, there must be a clear understanding of the 'processes that constitute critical thinking' (Behar-Horenstein & Niu 2011:27) and teachers need to 'employ instructional strategies aimed at developing these processes' (Gul et al. 2014:46). Murawski (2014) implies that the development of critical thinking in classrooms does impact learning in the future, promoting deep and critical thinking about decision-making later in life. For this purpose, it is vital to ask the question: How critical thinking is developed in the classroom and which strategies can be used to assist teachers to develop learners' critical thinking skills?

Literature review

The literature review gives an overview of the strategies taught to improve reading for meaning through the development of critical thinking. The discussion focuses on critical higher-order thinking skills and a discussion of the three strategies used: Anticipation guides; 'My turn, your turn', and P4C thinking moves.

Critical and higher-order thinking and reading for meaning

The mastery of reading comprehension in the 21st century requires students to develop their critical comprehension skills. This would allow them to think more deeply about texts, enabling them to answer more complex questions which 'calls for independent integration, interpretation, critique and evaluation of texts' (Ortlieb 2013:145). The introduction of various strategies to create meaningful reading experiences is necessary to promote lasting and continual growth and development in reading (Ortlieb 2013), as well as further improve the academic performance of learners (Fatyela 2021). In their study, Roozkhoon and Samani (2013) found that deficient readers lack critical reading and thinking skills and concurred that the use of reading strategies can lead to proficient reading and promote academic success. In this project the researcher presents three instructional strategies used to assist teachers in developing critical thinking and comprehension skills in their classrooms, namely anticipation guides; My turn, your turn; and P4C thinking moves. In these three strategies learners are required to respond to questions and at the same time learn to question thoughts and ideas that have been taken for granted. These questioning techniques play a vital role in developing higher-order thinking skills (Alsaleh 2020). Learners are expected to disrupt the common way of thinking, engage in more thoughtful ways, dig deeply and develop the ability to inquire and be more reflexive in their thinking (Lewison, Leland & Harste 2015). This critical stance is an attitude that needs to be nurtured continually as they interact with texts and, at the same time, with life more generally.

Teachers' understanding of critical thinking in the classroom

In a study conducted by Choy and Cheah (2009:200) teachers defined critical thinking to be 'the impetus to facilitate thinking among students in the classroom and enable students to enjoy the process of learning … involves analysing information', but suggest that students apply critical thinking only some of the time. However, Choy and Cheah (2009) propose that the lack of understanding, in their definition of critical thinking, implies that teachers themselves struggle with understanding the concept of critical thinking. Dwee et al. (2016) indicate that a student's response to critical thinking depends largely on how teachers understand and approach criticality in the classroom. When students are not actively involved in classroom activities, passive behaviour results from teacher-centredness if skills of critical thinking are not developed. Teachers also allude to constraints that hinder the development of critical thinking which include 'lack of time for designing and developing critical thinking activities' (Toshpulatova & Kinjemuratova 2020:52) and because of a 'lack of understanding of how to develop tools for fostering criticality they find integration difficult' (Choy & Cheah 2009:198). Teachers do, however, relate the importance of teaching critical thinking throughout the curriculum and with a focus on the use of effective teaching strategies (Toshpulatova & Kinjemuratova 2020).

Anticipation guide

An anticipation guide is a metacognitive strategy (Valle et al. 2020) and is effective in 'activating prior knowledge, highlighting misconceptions and promoting reflection while learning … which provides a foundation for the assimilation of new knowledge' (Evans, Kodela & Khan 2022:1). In addition to these skills, the anticipation guide encourages learners to improve critical thinking through increased engagement, making predictions, arousing curiosity, comparing beliefs and making assumptions.

The anticipation guide is a pre-reading activity which engages students in discussion in the class about a text, allowing them to examine their own thoughts and opinions about it (Roozkhoon & Samani 2013). The aim, according to Ortlieb (2013), is to provide a purpose for reading which results in increased comprehension. The knowledge of what to expect in the text before reading it, motivates learners to brainstorm possible or anticipated outcomes. After this process learners can check whether their thinking about the text is aligned with what actually occurs in the text. This

thinking and anticipation about the text ensures that critical connections are made (Frankel, Jaeger & Pearson 2013).

The implementation of the anticipation guide occurs in groups of four or five learners. The anticipation guide is based on a particular text. A series of statements related to the text are developed. The statements must allow for deeper thinking and should encourage arguments or debates. Each group is provided with a template of certain statements. Valle et al. (2020), Evans et al. (2022) and Fatyela (2021) explain that these statements are read by learners using previous knowledge to evaluate them, potentially challenging their own beliefs and assumptions (Evans et al. 2022). Learners are expected to share with their groups whether they agree or disagree with these statements, or choose whether the statements are true or false. A justification must accompany each answer and this leads the discussion in the groups (Roozkhoon & Samani 2013; Valle et al. 2022). There is no right or wrong answer because learners are expressing their opinions. This process is facilitated by the teacher in the classroom. As learners connect the text to real life and personal experiences (Fatyela 2021), they become more critical in their thinking and are able to understand different kinds of information (Roozkhoon & Samani 2013) and they 'tend to integrate the new information they have received with the prior knowledge to form modified beliefs' (Sari & Sari 2019:52). This results in learners fully engaging with their peers and teachers, defying the notion of banking education and passive learning (Freire 1998), enhancing criticality and increasing comprehension.

My turn your turn

According to Nomlomo (2010), the strategy 'My turn, your turn' is a pedagogical approach which is necessary in classrooms, to be used in any subject, since it encourages learner engagement. However, for turn-taking to be effective, four components are to be considered which include knowledge of students, knowledge of context, knowledge of pedagogy and knowledge of subject matter. These components are integral in creating an interactive environment within which turn-taking can flourish (Appleton & Harrison 2001:2). Dewi, Suharsono and Munir (2018) agree and state that 'turn-taking as interactional patterns of interactions might be influenced by the context where it is employed … [*which will*] influence the process of interaction production'.

Ryan and Forrest (2021:3) describe turn-taking to be a greatly unappreciated strategy, since it 'allows speakers to draw from a number of resources to project and co-ordinate turns to talk, enabling gaps, interruptions and concurrent talk to be minimised'. In the workshop the strategy of 'My turn, your turn' started with the teacher reading a text. Nomlomo (2010) posits that turn-taking ('my turn, your turn') uses allocation and acquisition to manage the strategy. The allocation refers to giving a learner a turn to speak, while acquisition informs the speaker to act when it is their turn. Small bits of the text are revealed at a time with the teacher modelling a reaction using the cue – My turn, for example: 'What do you think the character will do next?' My turn [*teacher responds*]: 'I think he will go home …' – Your turn [*cue for learner response*] 'What do you think?' … the teacher expects learners to share their thoughts and ideas about possible answers to the question. The use of reasoning words like 'think', 'because', 'agree' and 'might' are words that prompt higher-order thinking (Heron & Palfreyman 2021). The modelling of the strategy is effective because learners will learn from teachers who share their thinking (Calo 2011). The questions posed are pre-prepared and focus on specific higher-order and critical thinking skills. The questioning encourages learners to: predict, infer, connect, clarify, summarise and paraphrase. Using higher-order question types will encourage active thinking during reading and promote deeper thinking about texts (Schmidt, Condy & Tiba 2020). Heron and Palfreyman (2021) state that thinking and thoughts emerge through talk, so creating opportunities for learners to engage in discussion, questioning hypothesis, arguing and debating will support higher-order thinking in classrooms.

Philosophy for children: Thinking moves

Reading for meaning requires learners to be able to critically analyse, infer, synthesise, interpret, integrate, evaluate and question what they read. Murris (2014) questions whether teachers are equipped with the skills and knowledge to be able to develop these skills in learners. All learners have the ability to think, but the potential they have, needs to be nurtured into actual use. Lipman's philosophy for children (P4C) makes use of thinking tools or moves which teachers may use to get learners to engage in dialogue as they learn how to think, how to talk with others and explore ideas together (Green, Condy & Chigona 2012).

Daniel, Belghiti and Slusarczyk (2017) suggest three important steps to implementing the P4C strategy in the classroom. The first step is to provide a suitable catalyst. The catalyst is a philosophical text which may be a book, image, photograph or film adapted to the learners' age. The catalyst should include possible paradoxes and ambiguities that will captivate the learners' curiosity and lead them to ask questions. Learners work in smaller groups constituting a community of inquiry. The text will be read out aloud and learners will then take turns to read.

In the second stage questions are collected. Learners formulate questions based on the ambiguities in the text. This is a fundamental step since the learners take ownership of the lesson content and it empowers them, because they are taking on the role of the teacher. This means that the learners are 'persons-who-think-and-question' (Daniel et al. 2017). The third step is the dialogue within the communities of inquiry (Daniel et al. 2017). In this step learners are asked to choose the questions they want to answer within their communities. Learners attempt to answer the questions and group members respond by using 'thinking moves'. Sutcliffe (2003) describes 'thinking moves' as an opportunity for learners to be:

> [*A*]sking for reasons for beliefs, building on each other's ideas, offering counter examples to the hypothesis of others, pointing

> out possible consequences of particular ideas, utilising specific criteria to make judgements and cooperating in the development of rational problem-solving techniques. (p. 73)

According to Zulkifli and Hashim (2020:32), Lipman (1988), believed that 'children's existing literary experience lacked intellectual stimulation, causing the link between reading and thinking to be disconnected'. Using this strategy stimulates learners intellectually and reading will become more than just words being read. If events in stories relate to their personal experience, they will be motivated to inquire and think about them and will be able to discuss and contest them (Zulkifli & Hashim 2020). This is more than just ordinary thinking. Naseri et al. (2017:108) reference critical thinking as different to ordinary thinking: 'Ordinary thought is simple and without any criterion but critical thinking is more complex and has objective dimensions'. P4C is aimed at developing critical thinking which would enhance higher order comprehension skills.

Theoretical framework

In this study critical pedagogy has been adopted, as its theoretical framework focuses on Freire's (1998) suggestions for the development of critical thinking in schools. Freire promoted critical thinking as a way to mitigate the oppression of those who are underprivileged. Through critical pedagogy and engagement in 'critiquing personal, social and cultural forces', those that are oppressed can be emancipated (Uddin 2019:111). The current economic, social and cultural problems the world experiences need transformation and this is possible through conscientisation in which learners are taught to think critically, through participatory learning, and work towards creating a just and equitable society (Rugut & Osman 2013).

Freire's notion of banking education resonates with the preconceived idea that learners know nothing, and that teachers need to fill learners' heads with knowledge and that learners passively allow this to occur without question. This makes education 'worthless and reasonless', according to Namita (2018), and buys into the idea that just having the knowledge is enough.

Abraham and Lektor (2013) list some of the attitudes and practices of Freire's banking education to be:

> The teacher knows everything and the learner knows nothing;
>
> The teacher talks and the learner listens, meekly;
>
> The teacher chooses and enforces his choice and the students comply;
>
> The teacher chooses the programme content and the learner adapts to it (without consultation); and
>
> The teacher is the subject of the learning process, while the learners are mere objects. (p. 9)

This notion of banking education relies on a pedagogy that is void of consciousness, communication and critical investigation. It suggests that any person who possesses knowledge can teach (Namita 2018). Freire (1998) does propose the dialogical method to effect the movement away from banking education; greater focus is placed on the relationship between the teacher and the learner. Opportunities must be created for more dialogue between teacher and learner in the teaching learning process (Abraham & Lektor 2013) and participation by all stakeholders is key. Learners should be given the freedom to, together with the teacher, take responsibility for their learning, be part of discussions and reflections and be part of transforming their reality because education is not isolated from the world or society – rather what is happening in the world influences what and why we learn.

Many teachers are steered away from engaging learners meaningfully in the process of learning, because they are busy preparing them for high-stakes tests, focusing on strategies that will improve test results and not considering critical thinking (Uddin 2019). Learning to be critical through questioning, debating, discussing and arguing issues in which the teacher is more of a facilitator, will lead to learners being motivated to think beyond and predict, infer, calculate likelihoods, make informed decisions and judgements which will effect transformation (Abrahams & Lektor 2013). The focus of the Reading-for-Meaning workshop in this research project was aimed at developing teachers in order to apply more critical thinking strategies through including opportunities for learners to participate, engage and think about knowledge rather than just accept it. This focus on the dialogical method will give learners a voice, 'a technique to break the silent nature of students and the monologue of the teacher' (Uddin 2019:113), which for a long time have been stifling learner thoughts and expressions.

Research methods and design

An interpretative, qualitative study aimed at understanding how critical thinking is integrated into the Reading-for-Meaning classes, as well as identify which strategies to teach critical thinking will best suit the needs of teacher and learner.

Site

Teams was used as the online platform to present the workshop which facilitated synchronous e-learning. There were eight sessions which spanned four weeks. This online platform allowed sessions to be interactive, with participants engaging in discussions, and allowed questions and answers to be dealt with in real time. This benefitted participants, since they felt part of the learning community with reduced feelings of isolation and frustration (Poston, Apostel & Richardson 2019). Participants were able to use the chatroom to communicate with presenters as well. All workshops were recorded to allow participants who were unable to attend, to watch the videos in their own time and keep up to date with the workshop presentations. Teams provided a safe and private space for all teachers who participated in the workshops (Poston et al. 2019).

Participants

Purposive sampling, a non-random technique, was applied to select people who were able to and were willing to participate in the research (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim 2016). According to Robinson (2014), researchers purposefully sample participants, based on their specific knowledge in order to collect rich data. The research focused on improving reading for meaning skills and critical higher-order thinking. The researchers approached a teacher union and offered the Reading-for-Meaning workshop to all teachers teaching in the intermediate and senior phase (InterSen) nationally. The InterSen phases include teachers of grades four to nine. The participants had to meet the criterion of teaching in the InterSen phase. There were no incentives provided. An invitation was sent to all union members who were teaching in that phase and all participants readily available, were selected (Showkat & Parveen 2017). Thirty-six teachers volunteered to participate in the workshop. The only motivation for participants was that the course would assist with their day-to-day teaching and that the workshop was offered online over 18 h.

Data collection

A Telegram group was created and all participants were added to the messaging app. Telegram is an instant messaging programme, very popular and easy to use by the teachers who were participants in the workshop (Nurvembrianti, Arianti & Noftalina 2022). Telegram's main feature was the 'forwarding of messages from one group to another … and collecting data from these communities for close reading and mapping information sharing practices' (Peeters & Willaert 2022). On this platform teachers were allowed to share reflections on their teaching and post video clips and photographs depicting the work done by learners after each session. Discussions expressing their experiences during and after the implementation of the strategies in their classrooms were posted on the platform and extracted as data. In addition, data were also collected from a web-based questionnaire which was completed by the participants to give a general overview of the experiences and learning at the end of the workshop sessions. Web-based questionnaires are more beneficial when compared to other collection tools in terms of 'response speed, costs, response rate and variable costs' (Vasantha Raju & Harinarayana 2016:2).

Data analysis

Selected data relating to the themes on Telegram and all the web-page questionnaires were printed as transcripts. After preparing and organising the data for thematic analysis, the transcripts were read and reread to become familiar with the data. The data were coded, connected to all reflections, statements and experiences and eventually categorised (Lester, Cho & Lochmiller 2020). Thematic analysis is useful since it allows the researcher to examine all the perspectives of the participants, 'highlighting the similarities, differences and generating unanticipated insights' (Nowell et al. 2017). The themes which emerged from the categories were finally chosen and named. The four themes that emerged were: Anticipation guides; 'My turn, your turn'; P4C; and lastly, the final reflections of all participants at the end of the workshop. To ensure trustworthiness the researcher used the actual words with the grammatical conventions of the participants as they appeared in the Telegram messaging box to which all participants gave consent.

Ethical considerations

A research ethics clearance certificate was obtained from the institution concerned with the approval number: EFEC 3-2/2020. All the participants signed consent forms. They were assured that their identity would not be revealed, so pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. They were informed that if they did not want to participate, the researchers would exclude their responses from the research and that they could withdraw at any time. The data were stored on one of the researchers' portable hard drives and protected with a unique password.

Results and discussion

This research sought to examine teacher responses to the explicit teaching of three reading and comprehension strategies for the development of critical thinking skills in classrooms. The results are presented in the Boxes.

Strategy 1: Anticipation guide

The first strategy taught was the anticipation guide. Teachers implemented the strategy in their classrooms and Box 1 shows responses that emerged.

The anticipation guide strategy was presented as a pre-reading activity using an English first-language text. Teachers had the opportunity to ask questions for clarification to ensure that they understood the strategy well. One teacher remarked that she had 'learnt to look at storybooks or written texts differently' and that she would plan her lessons differently after learning this strategy.

BOX 1: Teacher reflections on using Anticipation guides.

LC: Female; Gauteng, English (HL): I did an anticipation guide with my grade 3 class today … we really had a great session and the learners really enjoyed it. Their justifications surprised me as children often struggle to articulate their thoughts and opinions but this lot were quite good!
AB: I have been implementing the … anticipatory approach. My students … are having confidence daily to speak up more spontaneously daily. Speaking, especially my introverted students.
SS: Female; WC, English (HL) I did an anticipation guide for my poem that the learners will start on tomorrow and they LOVED it! … the engagement was amazing! We did a lot of discussion in English but I told my learners that next time we will do more in Afrikaans …
EM: … I was very reluctant to try the strategy with my grade 1 learners … This week I decided to try the anticipation guide. I had three questions … it was amazing how they were discussing the questions and reminding each other of the instructions … What stuck with me was the question: May we please do it again?
SW: I have learnt to look at a storybook or written text differently … so many possibilities. Looking forward to planning lessons a little differently for term 2.
EM: Yes, it enabled them to think differently so that they can answer and think for themselves. They formed their own opinions.
KR (Female, KZN; English [HL]): I listened to your video LC (of lesson using anticipation guides) … I like the way your learners disagreed with the statements and provide justifications … they stayed on track …

Most of the teachers had positive experiences with their learners when implementing this strategy. SS and EM were surprised by the discussion the strategy solicited among their learners, especially the learners who were generally more introverted or shy. In these lessons teachers provided the text but were not the pre-meditators and, therefore, learners could engage as they were not dependent on the teacher (Micheletti 2010). The evidence points to a move away from the notion of banking education in which the learners become mere receptacles of knowledge. This is reflective of Freire's dialogical method in which both the teacher and the learner participate in the learning–teaching process. The answers were not transmitted by the teacher and there were no right or wrong answers; rather they were left to the learners to interpret based on their own experiences. The main focus was the reflection on learners' prior knowledge, skilling them in 'reading the word and reading the world' (Kahn & Kellner 2007). Lewison et al. (2015) agree that it is important for learners to use stories or texts and link these to a local context, adding their own lived experience, but later this should be connected to a more global context in which learners' perspectives include the identification of larger social issues which impact the local ones, representing a more critical level of thinking.

AB felt that the strategy boosted learner confidence and resulted in greater spontaneity. LC and KR responded to the results in LC's lesson with surprise, since they did not expect the level of discussion with justification from the learners. Their comments suggest that in their daily practice they were not used to this level of engagement in their classrooms. It was easier for learners to engage since the lesson was not dominated by the teacher. Independent integration occurred as learners allowed the strategy to activate their prior knowledge and their experiences, and discover that they could personally connect with texts, incorporating new knowledge into prior knowledge (Adams, Pegg & Case 2015). This led to more meaningful engagement with the text and deeper thinking since learners had to analyse and evaluate the statements, make judgements based on the analysis and evaluation, possibly forming new beliefs.

Strategy 2: 'My turn, your turn'

Box 2 presents the responses of teachers after they implemented the 'my turn, your turn' strategy.

Developing critical thinking is a skill that should be modelled. In the strategy of 'My turn, your turn' teachers model higher-order thinking skills by sharing their thinking with learners (Fatyela 2021). Although DA found implementing 'My turn, your turn' difficult at first, she eventually used other means to get learners to focus. AB tried to get learners to do less talking when it was not their turn. The strategy of 'My turn, your turn' promotes discussion between teacher and learner, and among learners themselves. It is used to develop a variety of critical thinking skills which include: predicting, making inferences, making connections, clarifying and summarising/paraphrasing (Ntshikila 2021). However, the above two

BOX 2: Teacher reflections on using My turn, your turn.

AB: I have been implementing 'My turn, your turn' … with hand signals. Less talking and they just respond when it is their turn.
DA: I've also used 'My turn, your turn' with my learners. It has been a bit difficult as my learners love to talk – but I had an idea to use beanbags with numbers on … when I ask a question, I'd give the children with their hands up a beanbag with a number so when it is their turn, they will speak …
EM: I have also used 'My turn, your turn' during this week and my class understood it and enjoyed taking part. I could even use it in other areas … to get their attention and in general for discipline, too…I think being consistent in allowing them to express their feelings and ideas when it is their turn …
MT: I'm really being conscious about how much I speak and allowing (and trusting) the children to have focused discussion time together.
RR: I absolutely loved doing this with my class …
RdT: It has made me aware of how much more the learners must be involved in the lessons, to actually learn. I will definitely implement it in future in all my lessons
CH: I have implemented it in my daily teaching and the quiet learners seem to be more awake, more talkative and more willing to participate.
LA: As a LSEN School we focus a lot on 'My turn, your turn'. Discussion. Visual, verbal and auditory perception and input and output. Communication …

teachers' responses did not articulate the development of critical thinking skills with the use of this strategy, but are rather focused on discipline – learners knowing when to speak and when to listen – and general classroom management. Nomlomo (2010) states that the focus of the strategy 'My turn, your turn' is to create opportunity for social interaction but also emphasises the importance of turn acquisition. In the implementation of this strategy, it is not only considered what knowledge will be exchanged but also how it will be exchanged (Nomlomo 2010). According to Uddin (2019) it is the classroom teacher who should, through various activities like 'My turn, your turn', create constant opportunities for learners to enhance their critical thinking skills and, through those strategies, connect teaching moments to real-life situations with the aim of enhancing reasonableness.

EM, however, expressed the value of integrating the strategy across the spectrum of other subjects and stated the importance of consistency in allowing learners to 'express their feelings and ideas' through predictions, inferences, making connections, clarifying, summarising and paraphrasing, which require higher-order thinking skills. Getting learners to 'express their feelings' shows evidence of good quality questioning by the teacher during 'My turn, your turn'. Nomlomo (2010) indicates that questions of low-order thinking do not encourage learners to think for themselves and do not encourage discussion and expression of learner's views. LA indicated that learners with special needs are stimulated to participate in discussions, encouraging them to consider input and output, which suggests that they were able to use reason. This, according to Forbes (2018), had more to do with how they were thinking rather than what they were thinking which conceptualises critical thinking.

Strategy 3: Philosophy for Children – Thinking moves

The presenters modelled a lesson using a P4C strategy and the teachers participated in the lesson. The following comments surfaced after the lesson (see Box 3).

BOX 3: Teacher reflections on using Philosophy for children: Thinking moves.

FS: Very enjoyable … we respected each other … while learning from each other …
SS: … interesting discussion … made everyone's opinion count and be valued by all. We were respectful, we listened to each other and gave each person an opportunity to speak. I almost changed my mind about (my answer) …
BVB: I liked the way the question was debated on a friendly and respectful manner, it made everyone think about their own answer.
NK: It encourages participation among learners
RG: A good exercise to respect each other's opinion …
TT: I like that we came up with questions … voted to decide which questions we wanted to discuss …
SR: It allows them (learners) to think of deeper questions that leads to discussion …
T0: I'm embarrassed to say that I think I might have been talking down to my class before. I love seeing how far they can go using thinking problem-solving language.

The teachers found value in the strategy because, firstly, TT felt that the learners were given an opportunity to create their own questions and then vote as a group to decide which questions would be used in the lesson. This step ensured that teachers and learners become co-creators of the knowledge during that lesson, 'integrating the concept of questioning education' and using 'question-based education methods' allowing learners to think dialectically. This promotes learners' self-selection and decision-making (Shih 2018:4). Secondly, SR responded that this strategy allowed learners to 'think of deeper questions that lead to discussion', and thirdly, NK stated that 'it encourages participation among learners'. The strategy embraces many of the critical thinking skills which includes creating original questions, deep thinking about text and the questions, thinking beyond the text and discussions of content in more meaningful ways (Abraham & Lektor 2013). During the implementation of this strategy there is a collaborative dynamic between the teacher and the learner rather than an authoritative one, which becomes an empowering process for both teachers and learners, more especially learners (Shih 2018).

Four of the teachers highlighted that the strategy 'was a good exercise to respect each other's opinions', 'make everyone's opinion count and be valued by all', 'respected each other … while learning from each other' and 'debated in a friendly and respectful manner'. In the use of the strategy philosophy for children, learners are exposed to a range of social circumstances that are used to teach moral lessons, like respecting each other's views and learning how to treat and interact with others which enhances social engagement and critical thinking (Safriyani & Mustofa 2021). Ultimately, the goal of critical thinking is for one to learn ways of thinking more deeply, solving problems better, communicating, collaborating and innovating more effectively in one's personal, as well as organisational life.

Teachers were given the opportunity to do a final reflection on the workshop and the strategies taught specifically, reflecting on the value of the strategies and their impact on learner engagement and critical as well as higher-order thinking (see Box 4). SR expressed that learning the strategies diminished her anxiety around learners not being able to read for meaning, as she now had the tools to assist them in developing their comprehension skills. This revelation is important since Olifant et al. (2021) suggest that attention to comprehension is a neglected area in primary schools in South Africa and that poor reading outcomes result from teachers not being able to develop reading skills well enough. They further relate that there is a need for teachers to be equipped with strategies that will empower them to overcome these challenges.

BOX 4: Teachers' final reflections on the strategies taught during the workshop.

SR: I must say that my level of anxiety around children not being able to read with understanding has diminished tremendously, due to having more and different tools and strategies …
AB: I feel rejuvenated and it's easily implemented immediately. Much needed strategies for all our teachers to teach our learners to become critical thinkers. COVID has affected our children psychologically. One day at school and one day at home. They struggle to remain motivated. I think helping them to become critical thinkers and giving them the scope to voice their own opinions will give them the confidence they need for the future. I'm overexcited to share it with all teachers.
MI: It has given me a broader vision for my lessons when teaching. Lessons have become enjoyable and less about teaching but more about having fun and learning through exploring.
SS: It has influenced me to relook my approach and teaching strategies with regards to reading and comprehension - because many LSEN learners experience major lags with reading and comprehension. I find myself challenging my learners to expand their knowledge and to express themselves more. I've realised that all learners can be taught to read with meaning and understanding.
RK: It has enabled me to step fully into the space that once appeared murky and shine a positive light in the development of reading and getting children to enjoy reading and discussing books and stories as well as creating the environment for critical thinking.
KF: In Social sciences (History), it is becoming more important to interpret sources (images/text etc). These strategies lend itself to that approach. Moreover, it brings greater awareness in teachers of what it means to consider differing views, respecting others' opinions and promoting tolerance and understanding. While we aim to promote critical thinking, such an ideal cannot be achieved if it does not begin with the teacher.

It was important for RK 'to create the environment for critical thinking'. AB discussed the importance of 'teaching learners to become critical thinkers … giving them the scope to voice their own opinions …' and KF felt that it was important that teachers aim to promote critical thinking. All the above participants realised the value of teaching critical thinking which Forbes (2018) refers to as a 'learned skill that can be developed rather than something which is innate'. Murawski (2014:27) concurs that 'critical thinking can be taught and should be taught in a directed manner providing students with practice while evaluating and testing ideas' and the teacher should create the environment to increase learner's participation and practice.

Five of the teachers expressed the opinion that the exposure to the strategies during the workshop resulted in them changing their pedagogies to include strategies that taught their learners to 'explore, have more discussions, express themselves more, interpret sources, consider different views, respect opinions and promote tolerance and understanding'. These strategies can only be effected in classrooms where the role of the teacher also shifts from 'the traditional provider of information to the role of guide, facilitator and learning advisor' (Lombardi et al. 2021:3).

Conclusion

Critical thinking, according to Murawski (2014), is a skill that is fundamental for reading for meaning and is not a natural

by-product of learning but a skill that should be taught to learners. In the Reading-for-Meaning workshop three strategies were taught to teachers to encourage critical thinking and improve comprehension skills: Anticipation guide, 'My turn, your turn' and P4C thinking moves. The strategies were modelled and some of the teachers implemented them in their classrooms.

Teachers experienced all the strategies presented, positively and on implementation in their classrooms found that these encouraged learner engagement, improved interpretation and resulted in greater spontaneity, especially among the shyer, introverted learners. Learner confidence was boosted which led to more meaningful engagement with texts resulting in deeper thinking which allowed learners to be more critical since they needed to analyse, evaluate and finally make judgements on their own. It can be concluded that the increased participation resulted in learners being able to express their opinion and answer, or attempt to answer more critical questions based on predictions, inference, making connections, clarifying, summarising and paraphrasing. Learning was now no longer teacher-centred during these lessons and this new-found freedom empowered learners to think differently. Most of the participants felt that although these strategies encouraged participation, the respect for another's opinion, valuing input from peers and debating in a friendly manner created a collaborative space which enhanced critical thinking and problem solving.

Shih (2018) cites Freire (1998) who stated that it does not matter how shy, introverted, ignorant or how silent their culture might be, everyone can enter into dialogue with another person in a critical mode. All that is needed, is appropriate tools to be provided for this dialogue with others. The conversationists will gradually reach a point where they are able to understand the contradiction between themselves and society, be more aware of the world around them and be able to manage it with a critical attitude. Teachers are responsible for providing learners with these tools in order to create the freedom of educational practice. The availability of the tools will determine the influence of educators on learners developing critical thinking skills and improving comprehension (Murawski 2014). With the PIRLS (2016) results showing that 78% of learners at grade four level are unable to answer higher-order critical thinking skills questions, it is imperative that teachers create classroom communities using strategies that explicitly enable learners to be more creative and think more consciously (Uddin 2019).

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Author's contributions

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Data availability

The author confirms that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

Disclaimer

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