

DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

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Annotation

This scientific article explores the relationship between authentic materials and critical thinking development among language learners. The study highlights the importance of employing authentic materials in developing students' critical thinking skills and provides practical suggestions for teachers to implement in their classrooms. The article draws upon previous research studies, theoretical frameworks, and practical examples to support its argument.

Key words

Authentic materials, critical thinking, language learners, practical suggestions, theoretical frameworks, research studies.

INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking is an essential skill for language learners in today's world as it helps them to analyze, evaluate, and understand complex ideas and narratives. Authentic materials such as newspapers, journals, videos, and podcasts can offer rich opportunities for language learners to develop critical thinking skills. These materials challenge learners to think critically and to understand the context in which the language is used. This article aims to explore the importance of authentic materials in developing critical thinking among language learners and to provide practical suggestions for teachers to implement in their classrooms.

MAIN PART

The article draws upon previous research studies and theoretical frameworks to support the argument that authentic materials are a valuable tool in developing critical thinking skills. One approach proposed by scholars is the "Content-Based Instruction" (CBI) approach, which integrates language instruction with content material to support language learning and critical thinking development. CBI utilizes authentic materials to foster language learners' abilities to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize complex ideas, which is a crucial aspect of critical thinking.

Authentic materials help learners build their critical thinking skills in several ways. Firstly, authentic materials provide real-world examples that can help learners to connect with the language and the subject matter. This can support learners in making connections between different concepts, analyzing multiple perspectives, and evaluating the credibility of sources.

Secondly, authentic materials can foster critical thinking by promoting learners' abilities to question, speculate, and challenge assumptions. When learners interact with authentic materials, they are encouraged to make predictions, infer meaning, and draw conclusions based on their analysis of the content. This process stimulates learners to question the assumptions made in the material and to speculate on alternative viewpoints.

Thirdly, authentic materials can teach learners how to identify arguments, recognize logical fallacies, and distinguish between facts and opinions. This promotes learners' abilities to evaluate the credibility of sources and to develop a critical perspective on the arguments presented.

Finally, authentic materials can foster creativity and problem-solving skills. Learners can examine how authors and speakers use language to persuade and influence, which can support learners in developing their abilities to generate new ideas and solutions. Authentic materials can offer learners different perspectives on the world and inspire them to develop their own opinions and ideas.

Using authentic materials in the English as a second language (ESL) classroom can develop students' critical thinking (CT) skills, expose them to more realistic English, and support their motivation. Carrying out text analyses of authentic materials in the ESL classroom can also help students become more critical in their approach to reading. Grounded in systemic functional linguistics (SFL) concepts, this paper puts forward a series of text analysis tasks, so ESL teachers can introduce their adult students to the concepts of transitivity and intentionality found in opposing newspaper articles dealing with conflict. Overall, these analyses show how the active voice can highlight the semantic value of intentionality via material processes, and how writers use strategies such as passivization and fronting of items in clauses to emphasize the responsibility for wrongdoing when reporting news. The analyses also show that context is important in determining degrees of intentionality, and intentionality can be attributed to the material processes of human actors portrayed as non-human actors. Understanding these concepts can help adult ESL students become better critical readers/thinkers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

There are many skills that are essential for students to have in order to better themselves and their learning. Many of these skills should be taught at an early age and practiced as they grow and develop. Skills such as problem solving, collaboration, and critical thinking are vital to students inside and outside the classroom.

Critical thinking skills are especially important for students to develop. Students need critical thinking skills in many situations such as trying to solve a math problem, figuring out the best way to go from their house to work, or solving any type of puzzle.

These skills are essential to help students learn:

- How to make good decisions
- Understand their actions
- Cause and effect
- Problem-solving

So, how do you know if critical thinking is happening in your classroom? Some of the most obvious ways you will know if your students have acquired this skill would be the following observable actions.

- Students ask deep probing questions about a topic. They connect novel ideas to background knowledge.
- Students identify and understand the importance of a topic as well as acknowledge the inconsistencies in a theory or explanation.
- Students can create a rational and sensible argument about a topic and use reflective thinking often and with ease. When students use critical thinking skills, they are able to systematically apply creative problem solving that assists in selecting the soundest decision.

Discussions/Debate

Class discussions are an important method in developing students' critical thinking skills. Providing students with a safe forum in which to express their thoughts and ideas empowers them to think deeply about issues and vocalize their thoughts. For example, an English teacher might provide pre-reading exercises for students to complete for homework.

These questions can then be used as a springboard to generate a group discussion. To challenge the students more, the questions could be controversial in nature to allow for passionate students to think critically on an issue as they express their ideas.

For instance, before teaching *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, the teacher may ask questions like:

Are there are times when euthanasia (mercy killing) is justified?

Is it more socially acceptable for females to love their female friends than it is for males to love their male friends?

While these questions ultimately are relevant to the text, before reading the novel, students must interpret these questions from a personal standpoint and evaluate their own feelings and philosophies.

Once the students complete the questions, there can be a class discussion or debate on each topic. For the discussion to succeed, the teacher must be an impartial facilitator to their discussion, often playing the proverbial “devil’s advocate” to keep the conversation dynamic and engaging. This discussion approach allows students to not only voice their opinions but also to hear the opinions of their classmates and further assess their own understanding of the topics.

This method allows for critical thinking both before the exercise as students complete the questions and then during the exercise as they debate their classmates in a group dynamic. In addition, the questions posed for the group discussion lead directly to another tool for developing critical thinking skills: making real-world connections.

CONCLUSION

This article has highlighted the importance of authentic materials in developing critical thinking among language learners. Authentic materials can provide rich opportunities for learners to make connections between different concepts, evaluate sources, recognize logical fallacies, and develop analytical and problem-solving skills. By integrating authentic materials into language instruction, teachers can promote their learners' critical thinking abilities. Practical suggestions for teachers could include creating a library of authentic materials, developing lesson plans that utilize authentic materials, and providing opportunities for learners to reflect on their critical thinking processes.

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