

CRITICAL READING

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Skill Development Course

What is the difference between being “well read” and “reading well”?

What should a reader be to be a “good reader”?

- The reader should belong to a book club
- The reader should identify himself/herself with the hero or heroine
- The reader should concentrate on the socio-economic angle
- The reader should prefer a story with action and dialogue to one with none
- The reader should have seen the book in a movie
- The reader should be a budding author
- The reader should have imagination
- The reader should have memory
- The reader should have a dictionary
- The reader should have some artistic sense

Othello (Act 2, Sc 1)

IAGO

Lay thy finger thus; and let thy soul be instructed. Mark me with what violence she first lov'd the Moor, but for bragging and telling her fantastical lies. To love him still for prating—let not thy discreet heart think it. Her eye must be fed; and what delight shall she have to look on the devil? When the blood is made dull with the act of sport, there should be, again to inflame it and to give satiety a fresh appetite, loveliness in favor, sympathy in years, manners, and beauties—all which the Moor is defective in. Now for want of these requir'd conveniences, her delicate tenderness will find itself abus'd, begin to heave the gorge, disrelish and abhor the Moor; very nature will instruct her in it and compel her to some second choice. Now, sir, this granted (as it is a most pregnant and unforc'd position), who stands so eminent in the degree of this fortune as Cassio does? A knave very voluble; no further conscionable than in putting on the mere form of civil and humane seeming, for the better compass of his salt and most hidden loose affection? Why, none, why, none—a slipper and subtle knave, a finder-out of occasion; that has an eye can stamp and counterfeit advantages, though true advantage never present itself; a devilish knave. Besides, the knave is handsome, young, and hath all those requisites in him that folly and green minds look after; a pestilent complete knave, and the woman hath found him already.

4 Tools of Critical Inquiry

- Problem posing
- Reflective skepticism
- Multi perspectivity
- Systemic thinking

Problem posing

- “The essence of critical thinking is to be outraged by outrageous things and ask why.” (Alfie Kohn)

Problem Posing

Driving questions

- Why does this matter?
- What does this mean?
- Does this make sense?
- How is this possible?
- What is missing here?
- Is this fair?
- Who does this serve and harm?
- Could it be different?

What does the tool do? (Core operations)

- Epistemic questions about truth and meaning
- Ethical questions about fairness and welfare

Importance of problem posing

- Confronts ideological mystification
- Challenges conformity with habits and traditions
- Cultivates, purposeful, relevant and significant knowledge
- Connects past-present, self-society
- Nurtures capacity for living an “examined life”
- Protects from intellectual and moral closure

Reflective Skepticism

- “Inquiry is the struggle to believe once the beliefs we had previously relied upon have been corroded and dissolved by doubt. It is doubt that signals to us that we are in a problematic situation, and it is inquiry that we engage in to get some orientation within the gloom.”

(Matthew Lipman)

Reflective skepticism

Driving questions

- Is this statement accurate?
- Is the data relevant?
- Is this explanation plausible?
- Is this account credible?
- Is there evidence to support it?
- Does the story hang together?

Core operations

- Scrutinizes arguments and thinking
- Examines underlying assumptions
- Reveals and corrects distortions

Multi perspectivity

- “A social perspective is a standpoint that implies certain ways of being sensitive to particular aspects of social life, meanings and interactions, and perhaps less sensitive to others. It is a form of attentiveness that brings some things into view while possibly obscuring others.”

(Iris Marion Young)

Multi perspective

Driving questions

- How did different actors experience these events?
- Who has a stake in this problem and its solution?
- What are other ways to think about this issue?
- How do others experience my ideas/choices?

Core operations

- Identifies, reconstructs and coordinates perspectives
- Cultivates sense of personal responsibility
- Cultivates tolerance through reflective dialogue

Systemic thinking

“How people act and live is shaped by the circumstances in which they find themselves. These circumstances can be changed, their limits attenuated through action.”

(Cornell West)

Systemic thinking

Driving questions

- Why did this happen?
- How does this work?
- Has it always been the same?
- How may it change?
- How does this fit in the bigger picture?
- What are the impacts?
- Who gains and who loses?

Core operations

- Represents totality and complexity of phenomena
- Reconstructs causal processes and mechanisms
- Confronts short sightedness and naturalization of social phenomena
- Cultivates understanding of societal and historical responsibility