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# APPLYING THE CRITICAL READING PROCESS TO THE FRAY MODEL

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This paper is an attempt to adapt the critical reading process to the Gray model of reading. The four steps of the Gray model (1948) identified as word perception, comprehension, reaction, and integration become in the critical reading process the perception of the connotative power of words, the comprehension of persuasive language, the reaction of judgment, and the integration of monitoring devices by the insightful, discriminating reader. As in the Gray model, the steps are interdependent since the connotations of words influence comprehension as well as the reaction of judgment.

The position maintained by the author is that critical reading is the use of critical thinking. Therefore, critical reading is critical thinking. This view has been emphasized by Russell (1961) and is incorporated in the comprehensive critical reading model by Ennis (1964) and adapted by Hash (1974) to dialogues in narrative form on critical issues. Critical reading is also seen as a cluster of skills that are used in accordance with the content of the material to be read, the characteristics of the reader, and the conditions in which the reading is done.

The four steps of critical reading adapted to the Gray model are described below, and include suggested instructional techniques for the elementary and secondary teacher.

## Step 1. - The Perception of the Connotative Power of Words

In Step 1, the reader goes beyond the pronunciation of words as meaningful units as in the Gray pattern and distinguishes between the denotative and the connotative meanings of words. The word "teacher" has the denotative or dictionary definition of "one who teaches; especially, a person hired by a school to teach" (Morris, 1976). However, the word "teacher" may evoke connotative or associative implications beyond the literal, explicit sense. Connotations may be personal or general (Altick, 1965). Personal connotations reflect past experiences with the referent which may be cumulative or the result of one vivid example. The reader's reaction to the word "teacher" may be an emotional response to one particular teacher or a composite of reactions to several teachers. General connotations manifest a general consensus about the implications of a word, such as the word "Samaritan" which has come to mean a compassionate person who unselfishly helps

another rather than an inhabitant of Samaria. Therefore, words have changed in meaning because of general connotations.

Described below are a few techniques that can be used by teachers to develop the ability of elementary and secondary students to discern the connotative powers of words.

- a) Students state their personal connotations and the reasons for their reactions to such words as the following: child, school, student, teacher, comics, reading, mathematics, spelling, football, baseball

or

nuclear power plants, inflation, the draft, liberal, conservative, the Pentagon, intolerance, socialism, capitalism, the flag of the United States.

- b) Students analyze the associative qualities of brand names, book titles, song titles, names of residential areas, names of restaurants, and names of characters in books.
- c) Students respond to pictures by giving words that appeal to the senses: visual, auditory, tactile, palatal, and olfactory responses. These responses are then incorporated into language experience stories.

- d) Students generate cumulative sentences in accordance with Christensen's (1963) generative rhetoric, using descriptive words and phrases. An example by a sixth grade student, pertaining to a picture of a field of tulips, is given here:

"You see a field of tulips, a carpet  
of color, Flowers with petals unfurled,  
blossoms reaching for the sun."

More concreteness and sensory awareness are noted in the words that comprise the noun clusters.

- e) Students identify and analyze words that they believe were used by the writers of advertisements as suggested by Altick (1965). Example: Sure Disneyland is a (big, great, important, grand) place to visit. But just because you've been there doesn't (mean, say, tell, signify) your tour of Southern California is (ended, complete, closed, finished).

Because only minutes away from Disneyland is California's second (wonderful, noble, greatest, splendid) attraction, Knott's Berry Farm, where you and your family will (take part in, share, join in, have a stake in) experiences that will last a (long time, lifetime, long period of time).

Students discuss the reasons for their selections and whether they felt the rejected words might have been more effective.

- f) Students analyze and compare a choice of advertisements in a field, such as automobiles, as follows:

|                             |                     |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| --selling points            | ---kind of appeal   |
| --special words used        | ---kind of audience |
| -testability of information |                     |

7. Students select and analyze words that appeal to the higher instincts or the lower emotions in editorials. Words in editorials are classified as follows:

## The Power of Words

Words that strengthen,  
feelings of honor,  
courage, nobility  
pride, and sympathy

Words that evoke  
feeling of intolerance,  
vanity, fear,  
jealousy, suspicion  
of new or different

Students discuss the writer's purposes in using these words and then rewrite the editorials using words of minimal connotational value.

Step 2. - The Comprehension of Persuasive Language

As in the Gray model, in Step 2 the reader is concerned with the ideas conveyed by the words and the author's intent in writing the message. Interpretation of persuasive language involves reading between the lines and making hypotheses about the writer's motives and deeper meanings.

The teacher's ability to ask questions that elicit interpretive responses is particularly important at this step. The thinking of students is circumscribed by the anticipated questions of teachers. Also, students should be encouraged to create their own questions and to interrogate teachers and other authorities about language patterns.

An example of an advertisement and suggested questions for interpretation that can be used by elementary and secondary teachers are given below:

ESSENCE, THE FOREVER SOAP, IS YOURS.  
(Picture of bride and groom. The groom is slipping a wedding ring on the bride's finger.)  
ESSENCE, the perfumed soap has twice the fragrance of the number two soap. Twice the perfume that takes the gloom away. And twice the pleasure for you and yours. A delight that is ever-lastingly yours. ESSENCE, the forever soap.

What is the source?

Who is writing

What is the purpose of the ad?

what to whom

What are the facts?

for what purpose

What ideas need to be proved?

and with what

For whom is the ad written?

result?

How does the ad make you feel? Why?

Questions pertaining to the advertisement can also be asked in accordance with Rank's (1976) intensify and downplay schema for

the analysis of communication, persuasion, and propaganda. A few questions under each of the categories of Rank's schema are given:

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><u>INTENSIFY</u></p> <p><u>Repetition</u></p> <p>What ideas are repeated?</p> <p>What words are repeated?</p> <p>What reasons can you give for these omissions?</p> <p><u>Association</u></p> <p>Is there an implied association between the product ESSENCE and any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Progress</li> <li>- Domestic pleasures</li> <li>- Sensual pleasures</li> <li>- The most people (bandwagon)</li> <li>- Security</li> <li>- Other associations</li> </ul> <p>What are the reasons for the associations?</p> <p><u>Composition</u></p> <p>What feelings are evoked by the following phrases?</p> <p>"takes the gloom away"</p> <p>"for you and yours"</p> <p>"everlastingly yours"</p> <p>"the forever soap"</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Why is ESSENCE in capital letters?</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>DOWNPLAY</u></p> <p><u>Omission</u></p> <p>What facts about the product are omitted?</p> <p>About the source?</p> <p>Why were these facts omitted?</p> <p><u>Diversion</u></p> <p>Is there anything that diverts attention from the main idea of the ad?</p> <p>If so, what is the reason for the diversion?</p> <p><u>Confusion</u></p> <p>Does the ad give an immediate or simple solution to a problem? If so, explain.</p> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Editorials and other persuasive discourse can also be analyzed in accordance with Rank's schema. Students need practice in interpreting the specific ideas that words evoke in persuasive language in order to judge effectively the soundness of the arguments given.

### Step 3. - The Reaction of Judgment

Step 3 concerns the reaction of judgment as in the Gray model. Judgments or critical decisions about the soundness of the reasons presented can be based on the following three criteria: (1) standards of logic, (2) empirical research, and (3) personal experience.

Logic is defined as the process of reasoning from assumptions to conclusions. The tool of logic is the syllogism or sequence of assumptions (or premises) and conclusions (inferences). Inferences are valid or invalid. For an inference to be valid, the premises are accepted at face value and assumed to be true. Validity refers to the process of reasoning rather than the truth of the premises. Therefore, premise 1 plus premise 2 equals the conclusion.

Inferences can also be sound or unsound. To be sound, inferences must be valid and also based on premises that are true (Altick, 1965). The following premises and conclusions are based on the advertisement for ESSENCE soap:

Major premise: A leading soap has twice the fragrance of the #2 soap.

Minor premise: Essence has twice the fragrance of the #2 soap.

Conclusion: Essence is a leading soap.

Major premise: People who use Essence soap are not gloomy.

Minor premise: Judy uses Essence soap.

Conclusion: Judy is not gloomy.

Since the major premises cannot be accepted as true, the derived inferences are considered unsound, and the rationality of the advertisement is in question.

To obtain empirical support for a claim the student may subject a testable advertised claim to experimental verification by testing the claim, making observations, drawing conclusions, and reporting the results of the experiment. Reeves (1974) described claim-testing projects undertaken by his students. He noted that the attitudes of the students tended to become more favorable and critical toward the products advertised after the experiments. One student tested the claim of Ivory Liquid that the detergent is so rich and thick "it even whips" and found the claim to be true. The same student also tested the other dish-washing liquids which proved to whip even better than Ivory. She questioned the significance of the capacity to whip as a reason for the purchase of any liquid soap.

Judgments are also based on personal experience. For example, the advertisement for Essence soap would be disregarded by a person who did not like the fragrance of the soap, or the lather did not agree with his or her skin. The prospective customer would decide not to purchase the commodity based on the criteria of personal experience rather than logical criteria or empirical inquiry.

#### Step 4. - The Integration of Monitoring Devices

After discerning the connotative powers of words, comprehending the ideas evoked by the words, and evaluating the soundness of the arguments presented, the reader integrates the processes of critical reading into his or her background of experiences, as in the Gray pattern. The reader assimilates the knowledge of the steps of the process for future retrieval in analyzing persuasive language.

The critical reader has the critical attitude or the critical spirit (Siegel, 1980) reflected in the predisposition to ask questions, to search for sound reasons, and to make independent judgments. This last step reflects an ongoing process by the insightful reader of acquiring internal monitoring devices for making discriminating responses (Baldwin and Readence, 1979).

An attempt has been made to adapt critical reading to the four-step Gray model of the reading process. Suggestions for instruction by elementary and secondary teachers have been presented under the first three steps. The last step, the integration of monitoring devices, is the culmination of the critical reading process since the goal is the development of discriminating readers who independently, habitually, and systematically criticize their own processes of thinking, feeling, and acting in response to patterns of persuasive language.

Milgram (Moritz, 1979) studied the extent to which one person will go in hurting another at the behest of a recognized authority figure and concluded:

A substantial proportion of people do what they are told to do, irrespective of the content of the act and without limitations of conscience, so long as they perceive that the command comes from a legitimate authority (Moritz, 1979:24).

He also maintained that the propensity to obey was a "fatal" human flaw that "gives our species only a modest chance of survival" (Moritz, 1979:25). If this is so, then it is the responsibility of the teacher to provide experiences that will build in students a critical attitude and promote the development of internal monitoring devices for evaluating the language of author and speaker.

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