

## INTRODUCTION

**Lêda Maria Braga Tomitch**

The idea of organizing an issue of *Ilha do Desterro* on *Critical Reading* arose from discussions in the Reading courses given at our Graduate Program in English at UFSC. As a teacher I noticed that our classroom discussions on many topics of the course were always very rich and fruitful, but especially when master and/or doctoral students working in the area of critical discourse analysis brought their perspective to the discussions. I then decided to invite researchers from the two areas of study—*reading* and *critical discourse analysis*—to contribute to an issue of our journal which would be entitled *Critical Reading/Leitura Crítica*. Not much was said to contributors about the issue, except the title. The purpose was to see how researchers in each area of study would perceive *critical reading*.

Before I comment on the perspectives that came out, I would like to discuss the use of the terms in the literature. First of all, if one enters the keywords *critical reading* in searching tools for main libraries, one will see that very little is going to come out using these actual words, but a lot more including the terms *critical thinking*. Indeed, as noted by Taglieber in the first article of this issue, the definitions given for *critical reading* share many similarities with those given for critical thinking, and as she observes, many of the skills listed as critical thinking skills,

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as for example, *questioning*, *inferring*, and *predicting*, are also included in critical reading textbooks.

In fact, *critical thinking* is a more general term used in different areas of human activity, one of them being reading (see, for example, Collins & Mangieri, 1992; Smith, 1990; Manlove, 1989). As stated by Beck and Dole (1992), “although thinking... is related to what has been traditionally called reading comprehension, it is more than that” (p.3). The two authors quote Resnick(1987) to contend that what they understand by thinking involves “elaborating, adding complexity, and going beyond the given” (Resnick, 1987, in Beck & Dole, 1992:3). It is interesting to note that the skills mentioned in the quotation above are all part of the definitions given for *critical reading*, as the reader will be able to see throughout this volume. It seems that, in agreement with Beck and Dole, critical thinking cannot be equated with what has been traditionally called reading, involving no more than the literal comprehension of written words. However, it may have a lot to do with a view of reading that is more accepted today and which implies going beyond the surface words in the text. In this view, the reader has to reflect, to analyze, to evaluate, and thus to think critically, to read critically, which is the perspective taken in this volume called *Critical Reading*.

Again, prior to giving a preview of the articles, I would like to comment on the results obtained in terms of the two areas of study. In order to help me lay out the two perspectives, I went to each of the texts and tried to pick up keywords or phrases which could portray their controlling ideas. The results appear in Table 1.

Author	Keywords or Phrases
Taglieber	‘critical reading’, ‘critical thinking’, ‘higher level thinking skills’, ‘evaluate critically’, ‘analytical habits’, ‘go beneath the surface of expressions’, ‘understanding the social context’, ‘discovering the deep meaning’, ‘interactive process’, ‘analysis, synthesis, evaluation’, ‘predicting outcomes, formulating questions, responding to text’, ‘inferring’, ‘recognizing bias’.

Oliveira	‘think critically’, ‘independence’, ‘autonomy’, ‘judge relevance’, ‘filter’, ‘knowledge construction process’, ‘take(s) over responsibility’, ‘asking questions’, ‘constructing interpretations’, ‘comparing’, ‘classifying’, ‘summarizing’, ‘interpreting’, ‘evaluating’, ‘predicting’, ‘analyzing’, ‘synthesizing’, ‘abstraction’, ‘deep-level knowledge’, ‘critical judgment’, ‘think and search’, ‘high-level abstraction’, ‘transfer new information’, ‘making connections’.
Bejarano & Klein-Wohl	‘thinking aloud’, ‘independent skillful readers’, ‘metacognitive awareness’, ‘constructive process’, ‘problem-solving process’, ‘monitor comprehension’, ‘comprehension seeking process’, ‘strategic reading’, ‘analyzing’, ‘regulate’, ‘apply reasoning’, ‘plan’, ‘check’, ‘monitor’, ‘revise’, ‘evaluate’, ‘reflect’, ‘participation’, ‘engagement’, ‘discussing’, ‘questioning’, ‘interpreting’, ‘organizing’.
Tomitch	‘active behavior’, ‘active reading tasks’, ‘interactive reading’, ‘contextualize reading’, ‘analytical manner’, ‘global perspective’, ‘active contributors’, ‘construction of meaning’, ‘anticipate’, ‘compute relationships’, ‘checking hypothesis’, ‘discussing possible interpretations’, ‘active and evaluative position’, ‘establishing connections’, ‘dynamically participate’, ‘bringing relevant knowledge into play’, ‘analyze’, ‘evaluate’, ‘question’, ‘compare’, ‘construct’, ‘discuss’.
Busnardo & Braga	‘critical cultural reflection’, ‘ideological questioning’, ‘critical reader’, ‘language and context’, ‘construct meaning’, ‘learning to learn’, ‘the learner’s autonomy’, ‘conscious control’, ‘critical stance in reading’, ‘action and social change’, ‘comparing’, ‘self-perception’, ‘cultural reflection’, ‘the learner’s voice’, ‘the learner’s perception and experience’, ‘critical detachment’, ‘questioning’, ‘contextualizing the text’, ‘criticism’, ‘dialectic pedagogy’, ‘pluralism’, ‘dialogue’, ‘resistant reading’, ‘preferred reading’, ‘negotiated reading’, ‘opposition reading’.
Heberle	‘language and society’, ‘sociopolitical and cultural aspects of language’, ‘social cognition’, ‘ideological message’, ‘resistant or subversive point of view’, ‘reading with a suspicious eye’, ‘standing back momentarily’, ‘become aware’, ‘the text, the discursive practice, and the sociocultural practice’, ‘critical perspective’, ‘gender roles and identities’, ‘awareness’, ‘students’ experience’, ‘recognition of different cultural, institutional and ideological contexts’, ‘develop sensitivity’, ‘manipulate and criticize’.

	...different kinds of texts', 'authentic texts', 'language awareness', 'consciousness-raising activities', 'critical pedagogy', 'more committed citizenship'.
Figueiredo	'critical awareness', 'social practices', 'linguistic practices', 'consciousness-raising, emancipation and empowerment', 'text, interaction and social context', 'discursively equipped', 'accepting or challenging ideologies', 'challenging both the propositional and the ideological assumptions', 'assertive position', 'effective reading', 'approaching texts provocatively', 'go beneath their (texts) surfaces', 'socially situated activity', 'establish a dialogue with texts', 'reconstruct the discourses', 'experiential meanings', 'interpersonal meanings', 'textual meanings'.
Meurer	'critical reading', 'attribute meaning and coherence', 'macrostructure', 'social action', 'cognitive dimension', 'social dimension', 'discursive practices', 'social practices', 'dialectal relationship', 'uncover implicit agendas', 'critical awareness', 'perceiving different functions of language', 'evaluate', 'question', 'challenge', 'change', 're-constructing social relationships and social identities', 'function ideologically'.

As already expected, there are more similarities than differences between the two perspectives, and they are by no means in opposition to one another, but complementary instead. I think that what characterizes each one as being part of a *reading* perspective of *critical reading* and a *critical discourse analysis* perspective of *critical reading* is the degree of stress on the cognitive and social aspects involved in reading comprehension. As can be seen in Table 1, reading specialists give more salience to the cognitive aspects involved in the process of reading critically (e.g. "higher level thinking skills", "discovering the deep meaning", "inferring", "asking questions", "classifying", "summarizing", "synthesizing", "problem-solving process", "monitor comprehension", "apply reasoning", "plan", "check", "anticipate", "compute relationships", "bringing relevant knowledge into play"). However, they do not forget the social aspects involved in the process (e.g. "understanding the social context", "independence", "autonomy", "independent skillful readers", "contextualize reading", "evaluate", "discuss"). Critical discourse analysts, on the other hand, emphasize

the social aspects involved in reading (e.g. “sociopolitical and cultural aspects of language”, “ideological message”, “challenging both the propositional and the ideological assumptions”, “resistant or subversive point of view”, “more committed citizenship”, “socially situated activity”, “constructing social relationships and social identities”), but they also bring the cognitive aspects involved (e.g. “attribute meaning and coherence”, “macrostructure”, “cognitive dimension”, “linguistic practices”). It is interesting to note that some reading researchers who have been working with *critical reading pedagogy* have assumed a position that is more similar to that of critical discourse analysts. By looking at Table 1 we can see that the keywords/phrases found in Busnardo and Braga also give an emphasis to the social aspects involved in reading (e.g. “critical cultural reflection”, “ideological questioning”, “action and social change”, “resistant reading”, “preferred reading”, “negotiated reading”, “opposition reading”).

What seems clear is that for both lines of research, *reading critically* means going beyond the individual words in a text, far beyond the literal meaning of sentences and even beyond text integration. It implies engaging in a critical dialogue with the text and being able to re-create the context of text production and seeing how it relates to the context of its reception, to the reader’s own knowledge of the world, his/her values and beliefs and the world around him/her.

Based on what was said above, one might ask: Is there is any other possibility for the reader but to read critically? Shouldn’t s/he be all times engaged in the type of reading described above? If this is the case, and I do believe so, this volume would better be called *Reading Critically* or better, simply *Reading*. However, we do know that the situation described above is the ideal one, and unfortunately, it is not yet the one we find in our educational and social contexts, be it in the L1 or in the L2. For this reason I decided to call this volume *Critical Reading*, the *critical* being a reminder to both researchers and teachers that this should be an aim to be reached in the near future.

This issue includes eight articles and two book reviews organized in the following way: five articles from researchers in the reading area

and three from researchers in the critical discourse analysis field. Of the two book reviews, one lies specifically in the area of reading comprehension and the other in the more general area of learning, both strongly related to the thematic subject of this issue.

*Loni Kreis Taglieber* discusses the concepts of critical reading and critical thinking as they are used in the field of reading and writing today, bringing us a state of the art which can be of great value to both researchers and teachers involved in the area. The author stresses the importance of higher-order thinking skills in all areas of human activity and contends that the university has an important role in terms of providing individuals with the appropriate skills to help them “act independently and autonomously.”

*Sara Oliveira*’s paper is concerned with the type of questions found in Brazilian-Portuguese reading textbooks. She maintains that question-asking is an important way to foster critical thinking and thus materials writers and teachers should be worried about helping students to ask the “important, relevant” questions which will stimulate higher-order thinking skills.

*Yael Bejarano* and *Esther Klein-Whol* investigate the effects of thinking aloud protocols in raising students’ metacognitive awareness in L2 and thus improving reading comprehension. The authors believe that by raising students’ awareness in terms of the use of strategies we may help them become more proficient and independent readers.

*JoAnne Busnardo* and *Denise Bértoli Braga* present a view of critical reading pedagogy that involves the construction of a space in the classroom where the constituent voices—those of the students and of the teacher—can emerge. The authors argue that in order for the reader to be critical s/he has to be linguistically competent, although, as they say, linguistic competence does not necessarily translate into critical reading.

*Lêda M. B. Tomitch* provides alternative possibilities for reading activities using Davies’s (1995) framework of “active versus passive reading tasks”. Although Davies (1995) does not explicitly use the terms

*critical thinking* or *critical reading* when describing active tasks, a relationship can easily be traced between them, as the reader will be able to see when looking at the characteristics of active reading tasks.

Viviane M. Heberle's contribution deals with a CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) perspective to Critical Reading, emphasizing the cultural, sociopolitical and ideological aspects involved in the process. The author presents a rich framework for asking questions that can be very helpful for actual use in the classroom. The questions focus on a variety of different aspects such as establishing the social context, lexical choice, grammar, visual elements, and gender.

Débora de C. Figueiredo, also using a CDA perspective to reading, remarks that readers should approach texts "discursively equipped" and should assume an "assertive position", going beyond the surface of the text. The author suggests that teachers can help their students become critical readers by exposing them to a wide variety of texts and always approaching texts in a provocative way. She offers some alternatives to be used as pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading tasks.

José Luiz Meurer analyzes a personal narrative from the perspective of CDA and Genre Analysis in order to show what he considers to be a critical reading and a non-critical reading of a passage. The author goes beyond the literal meaning to focus on the social dimension of text and its implications for critical reading, discussing aspects such as "recognizing discursive practices", "re-constructing reality representations" and "re-constructing social relationships and social identities."

Sônia M. G. Ferreira provide a thorough review of Florence Davies's (1995) book *Introducing reading*. Although it has been on the market for some time now, this book is still a very important reference for both teachers and researchers interested in reading comprehension, and more specifically, in the aspects involved in reading critically.

Mailce B. M. Fortkamp gives us a detailed critical evaluation of *Learning and Awareness*, a book by Marton and Booth (1997). Inserted

in the more general field of learning, this book fits perfectly well with the idea of critical thinking, since it is concerned with “how we gain knowledge about the world.”

I am grateful to all the contributors to this issue, who immediately responded to my call and, with their vast knowledge and expertise, produced high-quality work that is able to portray the current issues involved in critical thinking and critical reading today.

### Note

- \* This introduction was written while in Post-Doctoral studies at Carnegie Mellon University, in Pittsburgh-PA, USA. I am grateful to CAPES for supporting my research in that period.

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