

THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING CRITICAL READING SKILLS IN A MALAYSIAN READING CLASSROOM

Norbaiyah Abd Kadir, Roose N Subki , Farah Haneem Ahmad Jamal and Juhaida Ismail

University Technology MARA (UiTM) Pahang, Malaysia

Abstract

In this theoretical paper, the discussion would focus on the importance of reading skills, reading strategies, and metacognitive skills and strategies. These skills and strategies should be given emphasis when teaching reading in schools in order for us to help students develop critical reading skills. Therefore, it is vital for us to understand the theoretical concept of what is meant by these three terms and why is it so important for teachers to adopt them when teaching reading to students. It is hoped that at the end of the discussion, we could see the correlation between reading skills, reading strategies, and metacognitive skills and strategies in our objective to develop critical readers among students in schools. Reading skills, reading strategies, and metacognitive skills and strategies are not to be taught in isolation. With these skills and strategies, students will better understand whatever text given to them. Teachers should employ these strategies in order for the teaching of critical reading skills are more meaningful and beneficial for the students. In other words, when we teach critical reading skills to students we will develop them to be critical thinkers as well because when they do critical reading it will lead to critical thinking (critical reading will come first before critical thinking). Thus, this will not only prepare them to be better critical readers in schools but we also hope we could produce better school leavers who could survive in the real world.

Keywords: *Critical Reading Skills, Reading Strategies, Metacognitive Skills and Strategies*

Introduction

Teachers usually do not emphasize on critical reading skills when teaching reading in schools. They would focus more on word attack skills, comprehension skills, and fluency skills. This should not happen because critical reading skills are important for students to learn so that we can prepare them to be better critical readers in life. Students when they leave school either they choose to further their study or work would face the same challenge that is how to succeed in their life. However, this is not something easy for them to achieve if they do not have the essential critical skills and one of them is the critical reading skills. Therefore, it is imperative for teachers to teach these critical reading skills to students because these skills could help them to survive when they leave schools, especially when they embark in any program at the tertiary level. In order for teachers to produce critical readers, they must expose the students to reading skills (one of the skills is critical reading skills), reading strategies, and metacognitive skills and strategies when they teach reading in schools.

In this conceptual paper, the discussion would focus on the importance of reading skills, reading strategies, and metacognitive skills and strategies. These skills and strategies should be given emphasis when teaching reading in schools in order for us to help students develop critical reading skills. Therefore, it is vital for us to understand the theoretical concept of what is meant by these three terms (reading skills, reading strategies, and metacognitive skills and strategies) and why is it so important for teachers to adopt them when teaching reading to students. It is hoped

that at the end of the discussion, we could see the correlation between reading skills, reading strategies, and metacognitive skills and strategies in our objective to develop critical readers among students in schools. Thus, this will not only prepare them to be better critical readers in schools but we also hope we could produce better school leavers who could survive in the real world.

Before we look at what is meant by reading skills, reading strategies, and metacognitive skills and strategies; let us look at some of the studies done by researchers whose findings have proven the importance of teaching critical reading skills to students and there are also evidences that show critical reading skills have not been emphasized when teaching reading in schools.

Why Teach Critical Reading Skills?

According to Hudson (2007), one of the categories in reading skills is critical reading skills. Critical reading skills are skills that will help students to be able to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate what is read. When teachers expose students to critical reading skills, they will also make students see the cause – and – effect or comparing relationships in the text, or adopting critical stance toward the text. In other words, when we teach critical reading skills to students we will develop them to be critical thinkers as well because when they do critical reading it will lead to critical thinking (critical reading will come first before critical thinking). What is meant here, students need to have fully understood a text where they would analyze, synthesize, and evaluate it, then only they would think critically about the text – choose or reject the ideas put forward, agree or disagree with the issues, and most important of all they know the reason(s) why they do it.

We need to teach critical reading skills to students because we want them to not only know how to convert orthographic symbols to language (word attack skills), use context and knowledge to comprehend what is read (comprehension skills), or see larger sentences as wholes, a process which help students to read fluently (fluency skills) (Hudson, 2007). We know that most students can read but our main concern is whether they could understand the text critically like “reading between the lines” or ” reading for deeper meaning” because if we could help them to develop critical reading skills, they would definitely have good reading comprehension skills and could be successful in schools. Students with good reading comprehension skills could perform well in any subject/course because they have developed the critical reading skills to not only understand but analyze any text given to them. This will also help them to score better in any tests or exams they have to take in schools. What is more crucial here is that we will prepare them to be better students if they embark in any program at the tertiary level.

Wallace (2003) states that there are three personal reasons for reading: we read to survive (reading for survival), we read to learn (reading for learning), and we read for pleasure (reading for pleasure). When we teach reading to students, and try to understand their personal reasons for reading we will try to make reading process a meaningful one. For example, when we engage students in reading for learning we must not all the time carry out reading activities which have little to do with facts or opinions like what Goodman (1984) sees as ‘ritualistic’. One good example of these reading activities is the reading aloud activity which Wallace (2003) finds this kind of reading activity may only have a ‘display’ function rather than offering evidence of learning or reflection. However, this is what happening in most reading classes in schools. We do not employ any critical reading skills here because such an activity imposes little understanding of its content to students. Therefore, we need to minimize on such reading activity in our reading class if we want to help our students to develop critical reading skills.

A case study conducted by Radha M.K. Nambiar (2007), found that...

...”learners tended to rely heavily on the cognitive strategy of using the dictionary to help them read and understand a text. They rarely made an effort to understand the unfamiliar word using contextual clues and were quick to look into the dictionary and this hampered the reading process. To quote from one learner, “If the word is difficult, I take the dictionary book and find out the meaning”. This strategy was often used together with the cognitive strategy of using emphasis by the learners. For instance, whenever they came across an unfamiliar word they would underline or highlight the word and write the meaning in the text, after consulting a dictionary. For many learners the importance of vocabulary, especially understanding unfamiliar words was indicated in the markings on the text. To quote from the learners,

“I underline what I think is important”

“Usually I write the meaning of the word on top of the word to help me read and understand”.

Learners find the kinds of academic texts they have to read in university conceptually and syntactically difficult. In addition, their poor understanding of vocabulary hampers their reading ability “... (Radha Nambiar, 2007)

From the findings above we could conclude that learners (first year undergraduates majoring in English Language Studies) are not analytical or critical when they read and tend to use surface level processing of text all which suggest they are not ready to cope with academic literacy. They tend to resort to using the dictionary if they could not understand the text instead of trying to make an effort to use contextual clues or read between the lines for deeper meaning. This may indicate that the teachers in schools have not really prepared them to be critical readers or in other words they are lacking in critical reading skills. If they possess critical reading skills they would definitely be able to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate what they read, and try to use critical thinking skills for example, to accept or reject the ideas in the text. Therefore, it is imperative for critical reading skills be taught to students in schools to prepare them for tertiary education.

One important thing that teachers tend not to stress when teaching reading to students and this may lead to not teaching the critical reading skills is when they do not teach students to construct meaning from the text during the reading process. Wallace (2003) has used the word ‘discourse’ to describe the meaning that we get from a text. According to Fairclough (1989) there is not just a single discourse but many discourses which readers could get from any text. Students need to be taught on this reading and discourse because it is important for them to know that they could derive not one meaning but many meanings from a text they read. When our students are engaged in such reading process we are helping them to develop critical reading skills. However, this has been neglected in our reading class. Therefore, we need to teach students that they could come out with many discourses from any text they read so that we could encourage them to think critically where they need to evaluate and synthesize the text read.

Another issue when talking about teaching reading to students in schools is exposing them to the term ‘genre’. This term is not much being exposed to students in the reading process and thus, they could not relate the text they read to any genre they know. If they know the right genre they would be able to understand the text better. We must bear in mind that genre and discourse (which have been discussed earlier) are closely related (Wallace 2003) and (Kress 1985) emphasize that ‘discourse carries meanings about the nature of the institution from which it derives; genre carries meaning about the conventional social occasions on which texts arise’. When we teach critical reading skills to students we will be expected to touch on genre and discourse. When students understand what is meant by genre and discourse in a text they could argue more about the text and thus, in turn they will use their critical reading skills and critical thinking skills to evaluate the text more. Therefore, it is imperative for teachers to teach critical reading skills because when doing this they will expose students to new terms such as genre and discourse.

Critical reading skills could help students become better readers and thinkers because they will be looking at reading as a process rather than a product. This has been agreed by Alderson and Urquhart (1984) where they point out, a product view relates only to what the reader ‘got out of’ the text while a process view investigates how the reader may arrive at a particular interpretation. Frank Smith (1971) was one of the earliest researchers in reading who has characterized reading as process by charting the reader’s path through a text rather than making judgments of comprehension based on reading outcomes. He looked at reading as ‘the reduction of uncertainty’, as readers progress through a text, their choices of what to select are constrained, both by features within the text itself and those external to it (Frank Smith 1971). Again, we need to stress that teaching critical reading skills should be given emphasis when teaching reading in schools especially when this will help students to be more analytical when they engage themselves in any reading activity. This in turn, will definitely help us to produce better students in the near future.

Therefore, critical reading skills should be taught to students because if we neglect teaching these skills, students will not be able to think outside of the box and they might become passive learners, always agreeing to the ideas in the text given to them. We want students who could challenge the writer’s view/s and come out with valid and sound arguments. We do not want them to be submissive readers all the time. Scholes (1985) stresses that in the

reading of both literature and other texts the eventual goal must be critical reading and concludes that in an age of manipulation, when our students are in dire need of critical strength to resist the continuing assaults of all media, the worst thing we can do is to foster in them an attitude of reverence before texts. He implies that even students of literature may need a fair degree of guidance in order for them to be critical readers. This shows how important it is for teachers to teach these critical reading skills when teaching reading in schools. We cannot expect the students to develop these skills on their own without exposing and teaching them the skills.

In order to help teachers understand better how critical reading skills should be taught, they must first understand what is meant by reading skills, reading strategies, and metacognitive skills/strategies. I hope by giving the definition and explanation about these three terms would help teachers see the correlation of these skills and strategies to help them teach critical reading skills to students in a reading class.

Reading Skills

Let us first look at the definition of skill, before we go into explaining reading skills. Hudson (2005) quoted Proctor and Dutta (1995):

First, skill is acquired through practice or training. A defining characteristic of the skills discussed here is that they are not innate but must be learned. Second, skilled behavior is goal directed. Skill develops in response to some demand imposed by the task environment on the organism, although some learning may occur that is incidental to that demand. Third, skill is said to have been acquired when the reading behavior is highly integrated and well organized. Through experience, the components of behavior are structured into coherent patterns. Finally, cognitive demands are reduced as skill is acquired; freeing limited mental resources for other activities. From these characteristics, we derive our definition of skill: Skill is goal-directed, well organized behavior that is acquired through practice and performed with economy of effort. (Proctor and Dutta 1995)

As stated earlier in this paper, reading skills can be divided into four broad categories (Hudson 2007):

Word attack skills: These skills help students to convert orthographic symbols into language. Here, students could recognize that the script represents units of language, such as phonemes, syllables, and words. There are some sub skills in word attack skills which students should be taught to recognize such as recognizing syllable patterns, converting strings to sound on occasions, recognizing upper- and lower-case letters and recognizing word boundaries.

Comprehension skills: These skills help students to use context and knowledge to derive meaning from what is read. Examples of comprehension skills would be grammatical competence and knowledge of morphology, syntax, mechanics, using context to gain meaning, using schemata as aids, using metacognitive knowledge, recognizing text structure, and predicting what will come next in the text.

Fluency skills: These skills help students to develop abilities such as sight word recognition and recognizing high-frequency letter clusters, rapid reading, and possessing an extensive vocabulary.

Critical reading skills: These skills help students to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate what is read. However, in order for students to acquire these skills, they need to be exposed and taught how to be critical readers. (Will be discussed later on suggestions to teach critical reading skills)

In any reading class in Malaysian schools, we are not worried of the word attack skills, comprehension skills, and fluency skills not taught in schools because most teachers would teach these skills but we are more concern with the critical reading skills which seem to be neglected by teachers.

Wallace (2003) sees early reading skills as a performance on certain kinds of motor skills, the ability to discriminate shapes and patterns, and phonic and word recognition skills. 'Phonics' involves the ability to match up letters (or 'graphemes') to some kind of sound representation and phonic skill can be displayed by the ability to read aloud

with a 'good' native-like standard English pronunciation. This phonic skill seems to one popular method in teaching reading in schools. However, the question here is students will only read but rarely use their cognitive ability to 'interact' with the text and try to analyze it. If students are exposed to this type of reading skill all the time, it is difficult for them to be critical readers and if this happens the teaching of reading is more on just sounding and recognizing English words. What teachers should do in their reading class is to use all four reading skills which have been categorized by Wallace (2003). They must not concentrate on only one or two reading skills but try to integrate all four reading skills, paying more attention to the critical reading skills. When discussing about these four broad categories of reading skills, there are researchers who look at these skills as being separable and can be narrowed down into sub skills but these have been debated because there are skills that overlap.

When examining reading skills in pedagogical circles, Rosenshine (1980) after investigating five authoritative educational sources has found out that there are common general reading skill categories which fell into three different types of skills that associated with comprehension skills. The three types of skills are:

Locating detail: This is the simplest of skills where students merely involve in the recognition, paraphrase and/or matching.

Simple inferential skills: This second type of skill is where students use skills as understanding words in context, recognizing the sequence of events, and recognizing cause and effect relationships.

Complex inferential skills: This is the third type of skill and it requires students to work with longer texts compared to the in the second type of skill.

Rosenshine (1980) concludes that reading involves at least the following seven sub-skills across the three general reading skill categories. The seven sub-skills are:

1. Recognizing sequence
2. Recognizing words in context
3. Identifying the main idea
4. Decoding detail
5. Drawing inferences
6. Recognizing cause and effect
7. Comparing and contrasting

In addition to this, Rosenshine agrees that these sub-skills might also reflect the recognition of different clues in reading, such as recognizing synonym or antonym clues, summary clues, or clues provided by tone, setting, and mode. Therefore, it is imperative for teachers to stress on these seven sub-skills when teaching reading in order to prepare students to be critical readers in the future.

In another view, Gordon (1982) notes that there are three distinct sets of competencies that a student must develop in order to become an effective reader: reading skills development, reading comprehension, and reading research and study skills. Here, Gordon has separated 'reading' skills from 'comprehension' skills because he sees that reading skills are focused on letter-sound correspondence. In order for students to be effective readers and thus could be critical readers, teachers need to concentrate more on the 'comprehension' skills which is termed as the higher-level skills.

Reading skills especially critical reading skills are important for students to learn because they need these skills to be good critical readers but they need to also employ some reading strategies when doing reading in order for them to be better critical readers. What are reading strategies?

Reading Strategies

Earlier we have discussed what is meant by reading skills and now let us look at reading strategies as to help students become better critical readers. Before we look at what are reading strategies, it is good for us to differentiate the two terms 'skills' and 'strategies'. According to Richards, Platt, and Weber (1985) quoted from Hudson (2007) define strategy as:

... procedures used in learning, thinking, etc. which serve as a way of reaching a goal. In language learning, learning strategies ... and communication strategies ... are those conscious or unconscious processes which language learners make use of in learning and using a language. (Richards et al 1985)

Reading skills/strategies are viewed by Paris, Wasik, and Turner (1996) as:

Skills refer to information-processing techniques that automatic, whether at the level of recognizing phoneme-grapheme correspondence or summarizing a story. Skills are applied to text unconsciously for many reasons including expertise, repeated practice, compliance with directions, luck, and naïve use. In contrast, strategies are actions selected deliberately to achieve particular goals. An emerging skill can become a strategy when it is used intentionally. Likewise, a strategy can go 'underground' ... and become a skill. Indeed, strategies are more efficient and developmentally advanced when they become generated and applied automatically as skills. (Paris, Wasik, and Turner 1996)

When discussing about reading strategies and reading skills, Hudson (2007) concludes that a reading strategy can be described as any interactive process that has the goal of obtaining meaning from connected text, and reading skills operate within the context of such reading strategies. Therefore, the strategies of predicting, confirming, monitoring, reflecting, and evaluating can be consciously supported and thus, strategies could also help to lessen demands on working memory by facilitating comprehension processing.

According to Paris et al. (1996) there are three text-processing strategies that could promote comprehension which are applied prior to, during, and after reading. These three strategies are termed as pre-reading strategies, while-reading strategies, and post-reading strategies. We could describe these three terms in the table below (adapted from Paris et al. 1996)

PRE-READING STRATEGIES	WHILE-READING STRATEGIES	POST-READING STRATEGIES
1 Establishing a good physical environment	1 Checking comprehension throughout the reading activity	1 Appreciation of text and writer
2 Setting reading purpose	2 Identifying the main idea	2 Revisit pre-reading expectations
3 Accessing prior knowledge	3 Making inferences	3 Review notes, glosses, text markings
4 Asking questions based on the title	4 Recognizing patterns in the text structure	4 Reflect on text understanding
5 Semantic mapping	5 Looking for discourse markers	5 Consolidate and integrate information
6 Skimming for general idea	6 Monitoring vocabulary knowledge	6 Review of information
7 Previewing the text: examining headings, etc.	7 Predicting the main idea of each paragraph	7 Elaborate and evaluate
8 Reviewing instructions	8 Glossing	8 Determining what information is needed
9 Identifying text structure and genre	9 Comparing what is read with what is known	9 Apply new information to the task at hand
10 Determining what is known about the topic	10 Evaluating value of what is being learned	10 Relate the text to own experience
11 Predicting what might be read	11 Rereading text or skipping ahead	11 Critique the text

Table 1 Comprehension strategies (Paris et al. 1996)

Teachers should employ these strategies when teaching reading in schools to help students to comprehend the text better and engage in critical reading. However, we are not so sure whether teachers do employ all of the strategies stated above. Hudson (2007) stresses that in successful reading, comprehension is checked throughout the reading

activity and the realization of this strategy involves the reader as an active agent in the comprehension process. Therefore, if our reading activity is not challenging and strategic enough, students will not be able to develop into skilled readers and thus they will not be able to read critically. It depends on the teachers to help students read critically where they could evaluate, analyze, and synthesize the text based on their strategic reading activities carried out in the reading classes. It is proven in many studies done by researchers that students can be taught to use these effective reading strategies so that they could enhance their reading performance in schools. Reading strategies which can also be seen as strategic approaches to any reading instruction in schools will help us understand better what actually takes place in students' reading process and help them be better critical readers. In addition these reading strategies can be very important teachable tools when teaching reading to students in schools.

Let us now look at metacognitive skills and why it is important for teachers to know the importance of these skills to be taught to students when teaching reading in schools:

Metacognitive Skills and Strategies

John Flavell is said to be one of the earliest researchers in metacognition theory and he defined metacognition as: "In any kind of cognitive transaction with the human or non-human environment, a variety of information processing activities may go on. Metacognition refers, among other things, to the active monitoring and consequent regulation and orchestration of these processes in relation to the cognitive objects or data on which they bear, usually in service of some concrete goal or objective" (Flavell, 1976). In 1979, Flavell then proposed a formal model of metacognition which include metacognitive strategies as one of its classes in this model. According to Flavell, metacognitive strategies "are designed to monitor cognitive progress. Metacognitive strategies are ordered processes used to control one's own cognitive activities and to ensure that cognitive goals (for example, solving a math problem, writing an effective sentence, and understanding reading material) have been met. A person with good metacognitive skills and awareness uses these processes to oversee his own learning process, plan, and monitor ongoing cognitive activities, and to compare cognitive outcomes with internal or external standards. Flavell (1979) stated that a single strategy can be invoked for either cognitive or metacognitive purposes and to move toward goals in the cognitive or metacognitive domains. For example, students may ask themselves questions at the end of a learning unit with the aim of improving knowledge of the content, or monitor comprehension and assessment of the new knowledge.

It is undeniable that if we involve or engage students with metacognitive activities every day they would become successful learners. We would also develop them to be critical readers and thinkers. This is what we want to happen in any reading class, teachers engage themselves with teaching students to use their metacognitive skills and strategies to help them understand better the text given to them. In a simpler explanation about metacognitive, it is also defined as "thinking about thinking" (Pierce 2004). Meaning that we would encourage students to think beyond what they are thinking about the ideas in the text. They may come to a consensus that they may or may not agree with the writer but they must come out with valid and justified reason/s to their answers. If we could produce students to think like this, we are for sure could help them be better people when they leave school. Students who are taught these metacognitive skills and strategies would not afraid to challenge any text they read; therefore they could read between the lines and try to integrate what is read with other ideas not stated in the text. Here, students would try to ensure that they would achieve their goal in reading, for example trying to understand the whole text (to get the meaning), not just reading the words (sounding them) in the text. They would also become assertive readers rather than become submissive readers, thus this would make them be better critical readers. The question is whether teachers are teaching students these metacognitive skills and strategies or not?

According to Flavell, Miller, and Miller (2002), metacognitive skills play a strategic role in such problem-solving cognitive activities like reading comprehension, writing, language acquisition and logical reasoning. Our main concern here is employing metacognitive skills when teaching reading in schools. As Hudson (2007) explains, metacognition in reading represents the planning, monitoring, and evaluating of the reading process, where planning involves the identifying a purpose for reading and selecting particular actions to achieve the reader's goals, monitoring involves regulating and redirecting the reader's efforts during the course of reading to accomplish that goal, and evaluation involves the reader appraising her or his cognitive ability to carry out the task. Hudson

concludes that metacognition acts as a type of executive control over the application of the particular reading strategies that will be employed. Teachers need to know these metacognitive skills that could be focused in the teaching of reading. Below are some of the examples of metacognitive skills (taken from Hudson 2007):

- Understanding the conditions under which one learns best
- Analyzing the problem at hand
- Allocating attention
- Identifying which important aspects of a message apply to the task at hand
- Separating important information from less important information
- Understanding explicit and implicit task demands
- Determining what performance components are important for the particular task
- Determining how to strategically proceed
- Monitoring to track attention and comprehension
- Internal checking to determine success of achieving goals
- Revising, modifying, or terminating activities strategically
- Determining what internal and external feedback to explore
- Initiating and maintaining repair

Metacognitive knowledge is another important thing that teachers need to know when teaching reading. Flavell et al. (2002) indicate that people have knowledge and beliefs not only about politics, football, electronics, needlepoint, or some other domain, but also the human mind and its doings. This metacognitive knowledge is further divided into knowledge about persons, tasks, and strategies. According to Hudson, knowledge of persons includes any knowledge a person has about how people operate cognitively and the awareness a reader has of his or her own characteristics (background knowledge, interest, skills, self-efficacy, and deficits) and how these affect language processing and learning. It is found out that successful readers tend to relate information in the texts to previous knowledge and less successful readers show little tendency to use this kind of knowledge. The reason to this finding is that there are cognitive differences within people, cognitive differences between people, and universal properties of human cognition. Teachers should be aware of these differences in order to understand better students' ability to become better critical readers. Therefore, they need to foster reading activities according to the level of cognitive ability among students.

Teachers need to help students to develop these metacognitive skills by teaching them some strategies that could develop them to be better critical readers. According to Flavell et al. (2002), strategies are used to monitor a reader's cognitive progress and to remedy comprehension failures where the reader must apply strategies to self-regulate his or her own reading process. Flavell et al, state that in applying metacognitive strategies the reader relies on what has been learned in the past about achieving cognitive goals, for example when a student recognizes or realizes that comprehension is suffering from inattention, he or she can apply the strategy of recognizing the need to pay attention and not 'wool-gather'. Flavell et al feel these strategies are not only to remedy comprehension failures but for the readers to self-regulate, and they give another example to explain that is when a reader pauses when reading an article or other text and then scans forward, counting the number of pages left to read, in order to decide whether to continue reading or to find a convenient stopping point that will allow proceeding to another task because of time constraints, the self-regulation is not for repair. They further elaborate that it is rather a strategy to stop at a text juncture that will enhance storage and retrieval when the reader subsequently resumes the reading task, and this indicates that knowledge of strategies would also involve such activities as looking for text structure within the passage. Therefore, teachers need to understand these strategies to teach students to be better critical readers. Students should be taught these metacognitive skills and strategies to help them recognize their strength and weaknesses when undergoing the reading process.

Researchers have found that readers adopt many different strategies to be successful readers. However, not all readers are able to use these strategies successfully in their reading process. This is due to some factors like problems in comprehension, uncooperative text is used, or unfamiliar vocabulary, and this mismatch creates a dissonance realized as an unease or feeling of confusion and triggers some form of repair (Hudson 2007). He

stresses that successful readers possess the necessary linguistic knowledge, background knowledge, and strategies, and their metacognitive knowledge selects the strategy or strategies will repair the dissonance. However, according to Hacker (1998), there are some instances of comprehension failure that are not repaired through this metacognitive process. Therefore teachers need to understand these sources of comprehension failure to help students to overcome this problem. Below are some of the sources of comprehension failure indicated by Hacker (1998):

1. Readers lack linguistic or topic knowledge necessary to monitor or control sources of dissonance.
2. Readers possess necessary linguistic or topic knowledge but lack monitoring or control strategies.
3. Readers possess strategies but lack metacognitive understanding about where and when to apply them.
4. Comprehension and/or control are too demanding of the reader's resources, thereby hindering his or her ability to control reading.
5. The standard or standards of evaluation used by the readers are inappropriate for the levels of text representation that need to be monitored.
6. Sources of dissonance are resolved by the incorrect inferences readers make during the comprehension process.
7. Comprehension and/or monitoring are demanding of the reader's resources thereby hindering his or her ability to monitor reading.
8. Although not specifically noted in the model, but implicit in all controlled cognitive processes, readers lack motivation to monitor or control their reading.

Therefore, in order to overcome the comprehension failure as Hacker indicated above, it is imperative for teachers need to teach students critical reading skills, reading strategies, and metacognitive skills and strategies in order for them to develop into better critical readers in schools.

Now let us discuss how we go about teaching critical reading skills in a reading class. According to Wallace (2003), we might want to consider approaches to text selection and task design:

1. Encourage students to be alert to the culture-specific content of texts and tasks and, where possible, active in their own selection or production of texts and tasks.
2. Encourage students to be more aware of their own strategies and roles as readers and how these are socio culturally influenced.
3. Offer learners critical reading strategies which allow them to critique the discourses within texts, that is, to challenge taken-for-granted ways of talking about people, places, and events in order to allow alternative readings to emerge.

One of the critical approaches to text selection is to select texts which could pose problems for students to solve, texts which are of literature base, texts which have cross-cultural material, and texts which could give alternative discourses to students. Students should also be made aware of their own learning strategies and their social role as readers.

Wallace (2003) agrees with Kress (1987), where Kress raises three questions as a starting point for critical reading:

1. Why is this topic being written about?
2. How is this topic being written about?
3. What other ways of writing about the topic are there?

These three questions can be further illustrated in the three phases of teaching reading which are the pre-reading phase, while reading phase, and post reading phase. Below, Wallace (2003) explains and elaborates on the critical reading activities which we can employ in the three phases of teaching reading mentioned above:

Pre-reading activities: In this phase teachers should encourage students to come out with their own questions, statements, or hypotheses rather than answering given questions which dictate a way of reading the texts. In this so called critical approach to reading, students are expected to raise further questions in the course of reading. This is quite different from the usual reading task where the aim is solely for students to find answers.

While-reading activities: In this phase, teachers could offer students alternative readings of a text. Students should be encouraged to think critically as to look at the different discourses which they could gather from the text. They should be taught that there is not only one discourse which can be found in text but there are more than one. Teachers need to be creative enough to devise the reading tasks which could offer students to 'read' the text in many ways. The use of literary texts in a reading class is one example of helping the students to come out with different discourses.

Post-reading activities: In this phase, teachers could carry out activities which help students to think critically on other ways in which the topic of the reading text could have been written about. The use of two texts which deal with the same topic, but draw on different discourses and imply a different model reader can be use in this activity. Teachers could ask students to identify different features of the two texts (two stories can be use here).

Below are two examples of critical reading tasks taken from Wallace (2003) and teachers may adopt them in their reading class:

TASK 92

Aim: To encourage students to reflect on the options writers have in how they choose to write about a topic.

Level: Intermediate and advanced.

Resources: Any non-fiction text.

Procedure:

1. As part of pre-reading, ask students to establish, through an initial skim read, what they think the topic of the text is (they may agree or disagree with the actual title or any headings given).
2. Ask them to brainstorm the range of ways this topic might be tackled.
3. As post-reading activity, students can consider which options were, and which options were, and which were not, taken up by the writer.

Evaluation:

1. How far were the students able to think of other kinds of discourses than those selected by the writer?
2. What implications were they able to draw about the discourse choices actually made?

TASK 94

Aim: To encourage students to explore critically the discourse in minimal texts such as advertisements of leaflets.

Level: Intermediate and advanced.

Resources: Advertisements or any interesting leaflets.

Procedure:

1. Take the four key questions (discussed earlier):
 - Why is this topic being written about?
 - How is this topic being written about?
 - What other ways of writing about the topic are there?
 - Who is the text's model reader?
2. Ask the students to use these questions as a basis for:
 - exploring the overall function of the text

- discussing which discourses the text has drawn upon
- considering discourses which might have been drawn upon
- deciding who the text is primarily addressed to.

Evaluation: What insights does this procedure offer second language learners into ways that – of persuasive texts in particular – position readers through the selection of one set of discourses rather than another?

(For further illustrations of the activities, please refer to chapters 11 and 12 of Wallace, 2003).

Conclusion

In this conceptual paper, we have discussed the theoretical framework of teaching critical reading skills to students. Reading skills, reading strategies, and metacognitive skills and strategies are not to be taught in isolation. With these skills and strategies, students will better understand whatever text given to them. Students should be made aware of their learning skills and strategies as to help them be critical and successful students in the future. Teachers should employ the appropriate strategies in their method of teaching reading and they need to be creative and critical in their teaching activities as to help students develop into better critical readers. Thus, students could perform better in any course/subject they are taking. Teachers should ask themselves what they want to achieve at the end of the day, ... it is not about achieving the teaching objectives alone, it is more than that, it is about what our students achieve at the end of the day, and we hope that they could be better critical learners where they could 'think about what they think'

It is hoped that, more researches or case studies to be carried in this area especially in the Malaysian schools as to investigate whether critical reading skills are being emphasized or taught in reading classes. This will help the teachers in schools to understand better the urgent need to teach these skills and strategies to students.

References

- Alderson, J.C., & Urquhart, A. (1984). *Reading in a foreign language*. London: Longman.
- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Media discourse*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Flavell, J. (1976). *Metacognitive aspects of problem solving*. N.J.: Erlbaum.
- Flavell, J. H. (1979). Metacognition and cognitive monitoring: A new area of cognitive-developmental inquiry. *American Psychologist*, 34, 906 - 911.
- Flavell, J.H., P.H. Miller, & S.A. Miller. (2002). *Cognitive development*. (4th. edit). Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall.
- Goodman, K.S. (1984). 'Unity in reading' in *Becoming readers in a complex society. Eighty-third yearbook of the national society for the study of education: Part I*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gordon, W. M. (1982). *The reading curriculum: A reference guide to criterion-based skill development in grades k-8*. New York: Praeger Publishers.
- Hacker, D.J. (1998). *Metacognition in educational theory and practice*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Hudson, T. (2007). *Teaching second language reading*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kress, G. (1985). *Linguistic processes in sociocultural practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Paris, S. G., Wasik, B. A., & Turner, J. C. (1996). *The development of strategic readers*. N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Peirce, W. (2003). Metacognition: Study strategies, monitoring, and motivation. Retrieved April 20, 2012, from <http://academic.pgcc.edu/~wpeirce/MCCCTR/metacognition.htm#1>

Proctor, R.W., & Dutta, A. (1995). *Skill acquisition and human performance*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Radha M.K. Nambiar (2007). Enhancing academic literacy among tertiary learners: A Malaysian experience. *Journal of Language learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 13, 77-94.

Richards, Platt, & Weber (1985). *Longman dictionary of applied linguistics*. London: Longman.

Rosenshine, B.V. (1980). 'Skills hierarchies in reading comprehension' in Theoretical issues in reading comprehension: Perspectives from cognitive psychology, linguistics, artificial intelligence, and education. Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Scholes, R. (1985). *Textual power*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.

Smith, F. (1971). *Understanding reading: A psycholinguistic analysis of reading and learning to read*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Wallace, C. (2003). *Reading*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.