

Effective Strategies for Teaching Young Children Critical Thinking Through Picture Book Reading: A Case Study in the New Zealand Context.

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Effective Strategies for Teaching Young Children Critical Thinking Through Picture Book Reading: A Case Study in the New Zealand Context

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Abstract:

Critical thinking is a life skill that empowers people to participate fully in everyday life and to make reasonable judgments and inferences on important issues. Critical thinking is not viewed as an individual, fixed entity, but instead malleable and influenced by the social and cultural contexts of the learner. This study explored teaching strategies used by primary school teachers to promote young children's critical thinking, and their rationales for those strategies. It also investigated children's responses to picture book reading, including their opinions and behaviours. A qualitative case study approach was used to investigate the development of critical thinking skills during picture book reading lessons with junior primary children. Four teachers in two schools and 22 children, aged five to six years participated in this study. Methods included observations of picture book reading lessons, individual interviews with teachers, paired interviews with children, and collection of documents. These data were used to collect data about teaching strategies, and to obtain an insider's view of the teachers and children. Data were analysed within and across reading lessons using a content analysis approach, and the children's responses were analysed against the Four Resources Model (Luke & Freebody, 1999a) framework. Six teaching strategies were found to be effective in promoting critical thinking in children. These strategies reflected a sociocultural approach to teaching and learning. The children's reading of picture books showed that the majority of these young children engaged in the practices of breaking the code of texts, of participating in the meanings of texts, and of using texts functionally, with a minority engaged in the practice of critically analysing and transforming texts. This study suggests that to foster critical thinking there is a need for teaching practices that focus on nurturing children to be text analysts and encouraging children to be active questioners.

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