

IMPROVING STUDENTS' ABILITY IN READING EXPOSITORY TEXTS USING DIRECTED READING-THINKING ACTIVITY (DRTA) STRATEGY

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Abstract

Critical thinking can be considered as the ultimate goal in the process of teaching and learning. It is an organized process that needs highly order of mental activities, such as analyzing, associating, distinguishing, interpreting, and summarizing the information in order not to “create” bias in every decision made. Teachers have a paramount task to help the students to develop their critical thinking. One way to build this critical thinking is through reading, introducing one of reading strategies, named Directed Thinking Reading Activity (DR-TA). DRTA extends reading to higher-order thought processes and provides lecturers with a great deal about each student's ideas, thought processes, prior knowledge and thinking skills. DR-TA also contains of activities that encourages critical awareness of the reader's role and active involvement with text through the process of predicting, verifying, judging, and extending thinking about the text material. Hence, it can be promoted to be one of ways to build the critical thinking among the students.

This paper is attempted to answer the issue about how to build the critical thinking among students, one of which is through Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DR-TA).

The need of Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is defined as a systematic process that enables students to formulate and evaluate their own beliefs and claims (Johnson, E.B, 2002). It is also a clear, organized process used in mental activities, such as problem solving, decision-making, persuading, analyzing assumption, and scientific inquiry.

The educational system today applies the contextual teaching and learning that focuses on the active participation of the learners to get significant experiences. These experiences will help the learners to have the habit of reasoning well, to maintain an open mind, to listen to others with genuine interest, to think before acting, to rely on firm evidence for making a conclusion, and to exercise imagination (Browne & Kelly, 1990 in Johnson, E.B, 2002).

The most successful classrooms are those that encourage students to think for themselves and engage in critical thinking (Halpern, 1996; Kurland, 1995; Unrau, 1997). Critical thinking allows us to think about our own thoughts and the reasons behind our points of view. It means that we reflect on our own ways of making decisions or solving problems. Thinking like this means that our thoughts are consciously directed to some goal. Our thoughts and ideas

are based not on our biases or prejudices but on logic and information, we might gather and filter from many sources.

As we think critically, we are always mindful of what and how we are thinking. When we detect an error or a different way to think about a problem, we explore it eagerly. Students who think critically are typically excited about their learning. They see challenges and opportunities for learning in even the most difficult intellectual tasks. These students are mindful of opportunities to use their critical thinking skills and typically engage these opportunities eagerly—whether in the classroom context or in the world of their own communities. These students make teaching enjoyable and exciting.

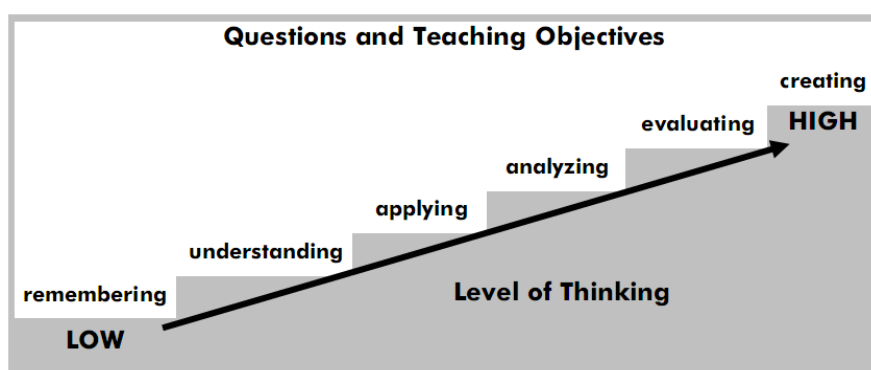


Fig. 1 Level of Thinking versus Questions and Teaching Objectives (Crawford, 2005)

The Eight Question Used in Conducting Critical Thinking

Critical thinking involves thinking well, while thinking well includes thinking process. Eight questions usually come along with the thinking process:

1. What is the real issue, problem, decision, or project being considered?

It refers to find out the real problem happens in the environment. It is important to state the exact subject to be examined. It is not possible to examine a problem until it has been clearly stated.

2. What is the point of view?

It refers to the ability to see a problem from different angles. A certain point of view may guide us to be subjective. This subjective feeling will cause bias judgement.

3. What reasons are offered?

It is related with considering good reasons. Good reasons are based on reliable information and are relevant to the conclusion. Therefore, to come up with a critical conclusion, we must see any reasons behind the problem and are be able to relate one to another.

4. What assumptions are made?

The assumptions are ideas that we consider as a truth. However, an assumption does not have to be the general truth. It invites debate. It tends to be accepted if it is clear, logical, and based on the facts. When an assumption is questioned, it means of replacing it with a new truth.

5. Is the language is clear?

If there are any differences in language used in explaining a certain term, for example, among different groups of people, we have to find out the closest meaning to our language to avoid misunderstanding.

6. Are the reasons based on convincing evidence?

Evidence refers to the accuracy and reliability of information. It can be used to strengthen generalizations, to distinguish knowledge from belief, to support and prove a conclusion.

7. What conclusion is proposed?

A good conclusion must be based on good reasons, logic, accuracy and reliable evidences. It must be consistent with the reasons.

8. What are the implications of these solutions?

It refers to consider the effects of accepting the solutions, both the good or bad side; the strengths and weaknesses. Thus, all the bad effects and the weaknesses can be minimized.

DR-TA

DR-TA stands for Directed Reading Thinking Activity. It is one of reading strategies that was designed and developed by Stauffer in 1969.

DR-TA contains of activities that encourages critical awareness of the reader's role and active involvement with text through the process of predicting, verifying, judging, and extending thinking about the text material (Mason & Au, 1990; Vacca, et al., 1999; Abi Samara, 2006).

According to Tankersley (2005), DRTA extends reading to higher-order thought processes and provides lecturers with a great deal about each student's ideas, thought processes, prior knowledge and thinking skills. In line with the previous opinions, Blachowicz and Ogle (2008) states that the purpose of this teacher-guided reading of the text is to help students think actively and become personally engaged in the reading.

This strategy serves several purposes: (a) Elicits students' prior knowledge of the topic of the text, (b) Encourages students to monitor their comprehension while they are reading, and (c) Sets a purpose for reading; students read to confirm and revise predictions they are making. Harps (in Burn, 1996) also states that in the DRTA, students actively read and predict the text content, why they think of it, and try to find out the way of proving it based on their experience and knowledge.

The Steps of DRTA

The basic DRTA involves the teacher working with a small group of students (6–12). The activity focuses on reading a short story or selection, pausing at teacher-selected stopping points to think and predict, and revising or verifying the predictions made. Basically, administering DR-TA follows the three steps below:

Step 1: Begin with one or two anticipation activities designed to motivate students and to activate or install needed background knowledge, including new vocabulary, and to make a prediction from terms to apply knowledge of additional vocabulary from the story.

Step 2: Before beginning the Directed Reading Thinking Activity, the teacher should divide the text into manageable pieces for the students to read silently. Then the teacher should prepare one or two comprehension-level questions for each part of the text to be read by the students.

1. Parts text with stops to support comprehension
2. Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DR-TA) to guide silent reading with higher order questions
3. Discussion of responses to questions, with evidence provided through brief oral reading

Step 3: Provide a culminating activity that allows students to review their understandings of the text and to apply them. In many lessons, this may be provided as a home task.

1. Think-Pair-Share activity to share new knowledge about characters
2. Completion of character map to share new knowledge (graphic organizer)
3. Predictions about characters based on character traits

During the reading activity, teachers will notice that comprehension improves quickly when students focus on finding answers to comprehension-level questions instead of just reading

aloud. They enjoy the discussion of their answers because there is usually more than one correct answer or more than one opinion about the correct answer.

What Kind of the Questions Used In Directed Reading Thinking Activity?

What kinds of questions should the teacher ask in the Directed Reading Thinking Activity to guide the readers' thinking? Research has shown that questions are most helpful when they follow the format and genre of the text. Therefore, the questions should help readers follow the presentation of information that is particular to the kind of text the students are reading. The examples of questions in DR-TA focus on work of fiction, so the following discussion of questions will focus on fictional or narrative texts.

Narrative texts come in subcategories such as realistic fiction, historical fiction, folk stories, fantasies, legends, and works of magical realism or science fiction. It can be useful to remind readers of the category of story they are reading, and what kinds of possible actions they can expect from it. For example, in realistic fiction the events will be drawn from what is possible in real life, but in a work of fantasy or a folk tale magic can happen. In science fiction, impossible actions may occur, so long as they are derived from a logical extension of what is possible. Narrative texts usually contain a predictable set of elements: the setting, the characters, the problem, attempts at solutions, the consequences of the actions, and the theme or message of the story.

Questions about settings may lead students to visualize the setting, to notice how the author created it in her or his imagination, and to reflect on what kinds of actions and issues the author expects from the setting.

Questions about characters similarly call attention to how the author helps the reader know the characters, sense the tensions between the characters, and understand the kinds of problems the main character might have, as well the resources with which that character faces the problems.

Questions about the problem, the attempts at solutions, and the consequences of the actions can guide readers to follow the plots of stories. Readers can be asked to note the main character's problem and to predict how she or he will attempt to solve it, given what they know about the character (and what they could predict from the kind of story they are reading). They can also be asked about the consequences of the actions, and how the situation at the end of the story differs from the situation at the beginning.

Themes or messages of stories can be asked about in several ways. Students can be asked what the story meant to them. They can also be asked why they would or would not agree with the message the story seems to convey—because many popular stories suggest ways of living to which we should not readily subscribe, that one must be beautiful or very aggressive in order to be successful, for instance.

The Scenario of DR-TA in the Classroom Using Narrative Text

In brief, the scenario for conducting DR-TA in the classroom using narrative text is explained in the table below:

Steps	Teacher	Students	Purpose
Pre-reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tells the students that they will read a short story called “A shilling” by Liam O’Flaherty silently Draws a mind mapping line (see fig. 2) Writes the word yacht in the centre Asks the students to share knowledge they have about the term yacht (The vocabulary term “yacht” was selected for this activity because it might not be familiar to the students) Asks the students to predict the relationship between a coin, a yacht, a coiled rope, and a yellow muffler Explains to the students the steps of DR-TA: (1) reading silently with stops for getting the answers of the questions given by the teacher, (2) pausing to discuss the answers in every few paragraphs with convincing supporting data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get ready Share what they know about ‘yacht’; talk about “yacht” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To build the students' prior knowledge about the words that relate to the story

<p>Whist-reading</p>	<p>Building Knowledge: DR-TA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives a question related to the first two paragraphs: How did the old men know that the yacht was expensive • Asks the students to read the first two paragraphs of the story silently • Repeats the question: How did the old men know that the yacht was expensive? • Asks the students to provide their answers with the information to support their answers • Gives a question about how the students' opinion toward a character, Patsy Connor, in the story • Asks the students to read the second two paragraphs of the story silently • Repeats the question about their opinion toward a character, Patsy Connor, in the story • Asks the students to provide their answers with the information to support their answers • Gives a question of what happened that had caught the men's attention • Asks the students to read the third two paragraphs of the story silently • Repeats the question of what happened that had caught the men's attention • Asks the students to provide their answers with the information to support their 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the first two paragraphs silently • Answer the question • Identify, describe, show, and quote the information that supports their answers • Read the second two paragraphs silently • Answer the question • Identify, describe, show, and quote the information that supports their answers • Read the third two paragraphs silently • Answer the question • Identify, describe, show, and quote the information that supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To raise the students' awareness of being critical in thinking • To train them to analyze the data for getting certain information • To train them to rationale every information they get; to select the information needed out from other information
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	<p>answers and predict what happened next</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives a question about the reason why Patsy was so quiet as the men sat on the iron ladder • Asks the students to read the fourth stop of the story silently • Repeats the question about the reason why Patsy was so quiet as the men sat on the iron ladder • Asks the students to provide their answers with the information to support their answers • Gives a question about how the writer showed that Patsy Conroy was the smartest man among the three men. • Asks the students to read the last stop of the story silently • Repeats the question about how the writer showed that Patsy Conroy was the smartest man among the three men • Asks the students to provide their answers with the information to support their answers <p><i>(note: Teacher may ask the students to make their prediction and verifying it in a worksheet (see appendix 3))</i></p> <p>Consolidation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructs the students to construct a character map in pair (see fig. 3) • Asks the students to make a prediction, based on the 	<p>their answers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the fourth stop silently • Answer the question • Identify, describe, show, and quote the information that supports their answers • Read the last paragraphs silently • Answer the question • Identify, describe, show, and quote the information that supports their answers • Work in pair to describe the traits of each character in a map • Write down their 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To train the students to associate the information they have in order to
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	character map they constructed, the action of Patsy and the other character in the following situation: (1) they are lost in the forest, (2) they find a valuable lost dog, (3) they are caught in the rain with only one umbrella	prediction of what the characters will act in the story do in the situation given	predict what will happen
Post-reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asks the students to make a self-reflection of what they have done by answering the question: (1) what did they feel toward the activity? (2) What kind of thinking did they do? (3) What will they carry away from the lesson? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Answer the questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To make a self-evaluation of what they have done

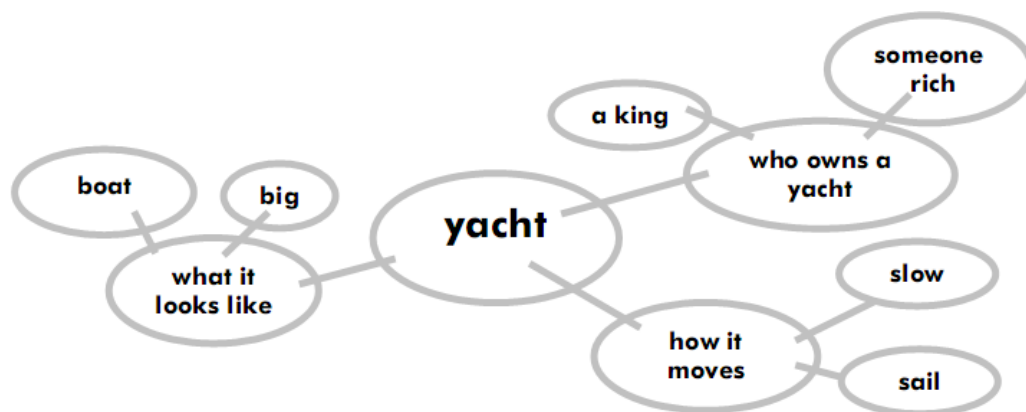


Fig. 2 The Mind Mapping for describing “Yacht”

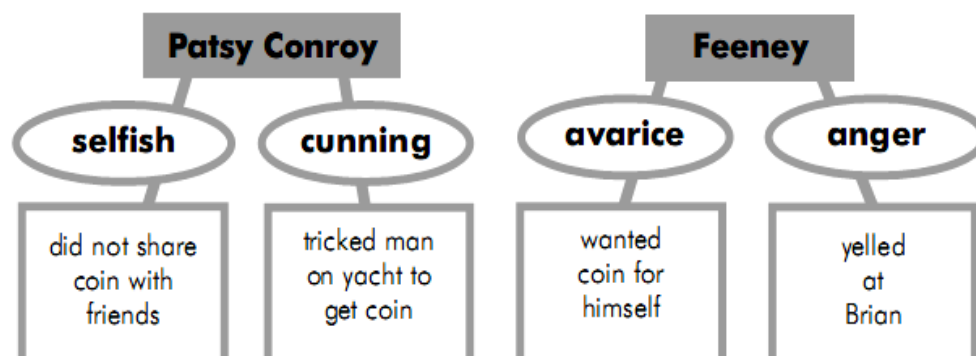


Fig. 3 the characters’ trait using character map

Conclusion

Being critical in thinking is important, since the we will have the habit of reasoning well, maintain an open mind, listen to others with genuine interest, think before acting, rely on firm evidence for making a conclusion, and exercise imagination. It also allows us to be used our mental activity in problem solving, decision-making, persuading, analyzing assumption, and scientific inquiry systematically. Thus, it will avoid us from any misjudgements to any new things happen.

DR-TA may be one way to introduce how to build a critical thinking to the students since its aims are to let the students to let the students to make their predictions, to analyze the evidences, to share their opinions, and to draw a conclusion. These go in line with the needs of being critical in thinking.

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Appendix 1

Teacher's Handout

A Shilling

By Liam O'Flaherty

Three old men were sitting on the splash wall of Kilmillick Pier with their backs to the sea and their faces to the village and the sun. A light breeze came from the sea behind them, bringing a sweet salt smell of seaweed being kissed by the sun. The village in front was very quiet. Not a movement but the lazy blue smoke curling slantwise from the cabin chimneys. It was early afternoon, Sunday, and all the young men and women were in Kilmurragh at a football match. The three old men were telling stories of big fish they had caught in their youth.

Suddenly there was a swish of canvas and a little white yacht swung around the corner of the pier and came alongside. The three old men immediately got to their feet and advanced through the turf dust to the brink of the pier looking down at the yacht. Patsy Conroy, the most active of the old men, seized the mooring rope and made the yacht fast. Then he came back and joined the other two watching the yachtsmen getting ready to go ashore.

"She's a lovely boat," said old Brian Manion, the old fellow with the bandy right leg and the bunion behind his right ear. "Heb," he said, scratching the small of his back, "it must cost a lot of money to keep that boat. Look at those shiny brasses and you can see a carpet laid on the cabin floor through that hatchway.

"Oh boys! I'd like to have her for a week's fishing," said Mick.

1st stop

Feeney breathed loudly through his long red nose. His big red-rimmed blue eyes seemed to jump in and out. He gripped the top of his stick with his two hands and looked down at the yacht with his short legs wide apart.

Patsy Conroy said nothing. He stood a little apart with his hands stuck in his waist-belt. Although he was seventy-two, he was straight, lithe and active, but his face was yellow and wrinkled like old parchment and his toothless red gums were bared in an old man's chin. His little eyes beneath his bushy white eyebrows roamed around the yacht cunningly as if they were trying to steal something. He wore a yellow muffler wound round and round his neck up to his chin, in spite of the heat of the day.

2nd stop

"Where is the nearest public-house?" drawled a red-faced man in a white linen shirt and trousers from the yacht deck. The old men told him, all together.

"Let's go and have a drink, Totty," said the red-faced man.

"Right-o," said the other man.

When the red-faced man was climbing the iron ladder on to the pier, a shilling fell out of his hip pocket. It fell noiselessly on a little coil of rope that lay on the deck at the foot of the ladder. The red-faced man did not notice it, and he walked up the pier with his friend. The three old men noticed it, but they did not tell the red-faced man. Neither did they tell one another. As soon as the shilling landed on the little coil of rope and lay there glistening, the three of them became so painfully conscious of it that they were bereft of the power of speech or of coherent thought. Each cast a glance at the shilling, a hurried furtive glance, and then each looked elsewhere, just after the manner of a dog that sees a rabbit in a bush and stops dead with one paw raised, seeing the rabbit although his eyes are fixed elsewhere.

3rd stop

Each old man knew that the other two had seen the shilling, yet each was silent about it in the hope of keeping the discovery his own secret. Each knew that it was impossible for him to go down the iron ladder to the deck, pick up the shilling and ascend with it to the pier without being detected. For there was a man who wore around white cap doing something in the cabin. Every third moment or so his cap appeared through the hatchway and there was a noise of crockery being washed or something. And the shilling was within two feet of the hatchway. And the old men, except perhaps Patsy Conroy, were too old to descend the ladder and ascend again. And anyway each knew that even if there were nobody in the cabin, and even if they could descend the ladder, the others would prevent either one from getting the shilling, since each preferred that no one should have the shilling if he couldn't have it himself. And yet such was the lure of that glistening shilling that the three of them stared with palpitating hearts and feverishly working brains at objects within two feet of the shilling. They stared in a painful silence that was loud with sound as of a violent and quarrelsome conversation. The noise Mick Feeney made breathing through his nose exposed his whole scheme of thought to the other two men just as plainly as if he explained it slowly and in detail. Brian Manion kept fidgeting with his hands, rubbing the palms together, and the other two heard him and cursed his avarice. Patsy Conroy alone made no sound, but his very silence was loud and stinking to the other two men, for it left them in ignorance of what plans were passing through his crafty head.

4th stop

And the sun shone warmly. And the salt, healthy smell of the sea inspired thirst. And there was excellent cool frothy porter in Kelly's. So much so that no one of the three old men ever thought of the fact that the shilling belonged to somebody else. So much so indeed that each of them felt indignant with the shameless avarice of the other two. There was almost a homicidal tendency in the mind of each against the others. Thus three minutes passed. The two owners of the yacht had passed out of sight. Brian Manion and Mick Feeney were trembling and driveling slightly at the mouth. Then Patsy Conroy stooped and picked up a pebble from the pier. He dropped it on to the deck of the yacht. The other two men made a slight movement to intercept the pebble with their sticks, a foolish unconscious movement. Then they started and let their jaws drop. Patsy Conroy was speaking.

"Hey there," he shouted between his cupped hands. A pale-faced gloomy man with a napkin on his hip stepped up to the second step of the hatchway.

"What d'ye want?" he said.

"Beg yer pardon, Sir," said Patsy Conroy, "but would ye hand me up that shilling that just dropped out a' me hand?"

The man nodded, picked up the shilling, muttered "Catch," and threw the shilling on to the pier. Patsy touched his cap and dived for it. The other two old men were so dumbfounded that they didn't even scramble for it. They watched Patsy spit on it and put it in his pocket. They watched him walk up the pier, sniffing out loud, his long, lean, grey-backed figure with the yellow muffler around his neck moving as straight and solemn as a policeman.

They looked at each other, their faces contorted with anger. And each, with upraised stick, snarled at the other: "Why didn't ye stop him, you fool?"

Appendix 2

5th stop

Student's Handout

A Shilling

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Three old men were sitting on the splash wall of Kilmillick Pier with their backs to the sea and their faces to the village and the sun. A light breeze came from the sea behind them, bringing a sweet salt smell of seaweed being kissed by the sun. The village in front was very quiet. Not a movement but the lazy blue smoke curling slantwise from the cabin chimneys. It was early afternoon, Sunday, and all the young men and women were in Kilmurragh at a football match. The three old men were

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"Oh boys! I'd like to have her for a week's fishing," said Mick.

Stop reading! Wait until next instruction!

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Appendix 3

DR-TA Worksheet

DIRECTED READING-THINKING ACTIVITY CHART

	WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL HAPPEN?	WHY DO YOU THINK SO?	WHAT DID HAPPEN?
AFTER READING THE TITLE			
AFTER READING THE FIRST PART			
AFTER READING THE SECOND PART			
AFTER READING TO THE END			