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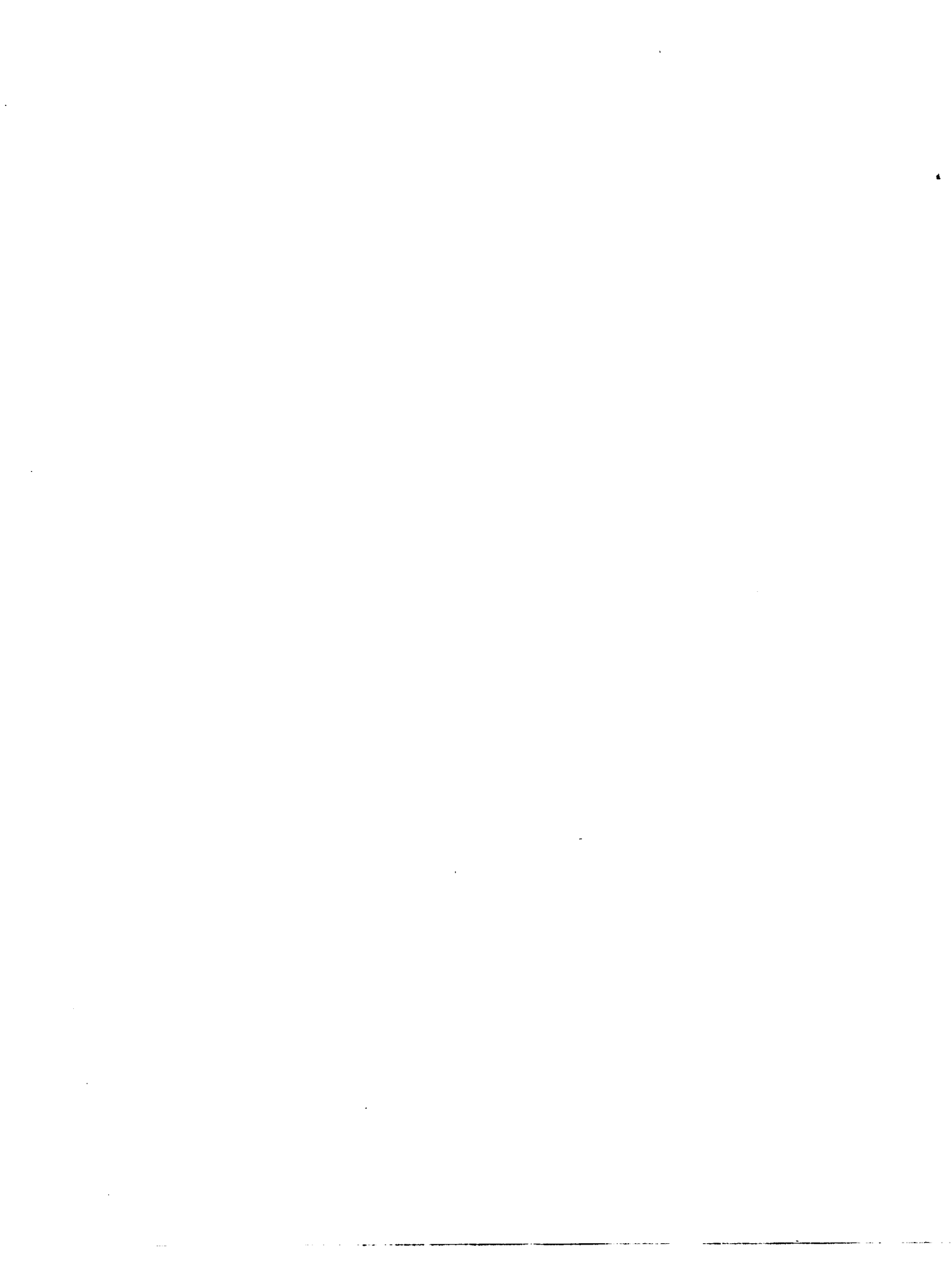
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**Teaching literature with a specific emphasis on critical thinking:
An interpretive investigation of student perceptions**

Dickson, Myra Alice, Ed.D.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1991

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TEACHING LITERATURE WITH A SPECIFIC EMPHASIS
ON CRITICAL THINKING: AN INTERPRETIVE
INVESTIGATION OF STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

by

Myra A. Dickson

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the Faculty of the Graduate School at
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Approved by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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The purpose of this study was to examine and interpret students' impressions and attitudes toward a study of literature which emphasized critical thinking. The following questions guided the inquiry: (a) How do students perceive the study of literature based on previous experience? (b) How does an emphasis on critical thinking affect students' feelings about the study of literature? (c) To what extent do students feel that an emphasis on critical thinking affects their approach to literature?

Data were obtained through observations, interviews, and reading attitude assessments. All data were reviewed and interpreted in response to the questions posed. Themes were identified using triangulation procedures with particular attention to changes in impressions and attitudes over time.

Analysis of data revealed that (a) students generally considered the study of literature to be important, (b) they felt that secondary literature study was typically prescriptive, (c) they viewed literature study as usually teacher-centered, (d) they did not change their attitudes toward literature as a result of completing critical thinking activities, and (e) they did adjust their approach to the study of literature because of the critical thinking activities.

Implications for the study of literature at the secondary level suggested by the findings of this study included the following: (a) an emphasis on critical thinking can encourage students to interact more with the literature they are studying, (b) the study of literature with an emphasis on critical thinking can encourage students to broaden their focus relative to the study of literature, (c) completing critical thinking activities can cause students to adjust their approach to the reading and studying of literature, and (d) English teachers need to accept the teaching of critical thinking as their highest priority in order to restructure their literature study to emphasize critical thinking.

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CHAPTER I

OVERVIEW

Quality of life is directly tied to our ability to think clearly amid the noise of modern life, to sift through all that competes for our attention until we find what we value, what will make our lives worth living. What we value is seldom on the surface and, when it is found, can seldom be defended from the incursions of the trivial without sustained efforts to understand it more deeply....A society in which the habits of disciplined reading, analysis, interpretation and discourse are not sufficiently cultivated has much to fear. (TheodoreSizer, 1984, p. 58)

During the decade of the 1980s the business community, the general public, and many educators realized that the development of any country depends on the intellectual development of its people (Costa, 1985a). It is increasingly apparent that the problems of an information society cannot be resolved with solutions from the fading industrial society. In the United States the decade of the 1980s, in particular, witnessed a surge of concern about critical thinking. In 1985 in an article entitled "Teaching Critical Thinking, Part I: Are We Making Critical Mistakes?," Robert Sternberg gave several reasons for this surge. First, he pointed to declining scores on tests of scholastic aptitude which have begun to inch upward in the last several years. Second, Sternberg said that numerous national reports assessed the thinking ability of students and found students lacking the necessary skills to cope with

today's complexities. In 1981, for example, the National Assessment of Educational Progress reported the following:

Between 1979 and 1980, both 13- and 17-year-olds became less likely to try to interpret what they read and more likely to simply make unexplained value judgments about it. One way of characterizing the change during the 1970s is to say that 17-year-olds' papers became somewhat more like 13-year-olds' papers. (Sizer, 1984, p. 58)

As Theodore Sizer (1984) stated in Horace's Compromise:

What is especially troubling is the low level of their reasoning skills, the abilities of analysis and synthesis. While students seem to be improving in rote-level, concrete learnings--vocabulary recognition and, in mathematics, simple addition, for example--their ability to think critically and resourcefully is lamentably weak and is continuing to weaken. (p. 58)

A Nation at Risk (1983) reported that almost "40 percent [of 17-year-olds] cannot draw inferences from written material; only one-fifth can write a persuasive essay; and only one-third can solve a mathematics problem requiring several steps" (p. 9). In A Place Called School Goodlad (1984) concluded that based on the schools whose programs he and his colleagues had observed, the intellectual abilities of students were not being developed (pp. 216, 236). While no one likes the negative results of such reports, they have served as catalysts for further study. Also, many educators and laymen have begun to place critical thinking at the top of their agenda of abilities all students must develop. For example, of the four essential goals stated in Ernest

Boyer's High School, first among them was that "the high school should help all students develop the capacity to think critically and communicate effectively through a mastery of language" (1983, p. 66).

A third reason given by Sternberg for the surge of interest in critical thinking in the early 1980s was the availability of "more promising" programs for teaching critical thinking. Recognized experts in the field of critical thinking promoted their own programs. Fourth, he cited a now-defunct Ministry for the Development of Intelligence in Venezuela which "showed that the teaching of critical thinking can be implemented on a massive scale with some success" (p. 194). Finally, he said that educators "have tried pretty much everything else to no avail [to improve students' thinking], so that the time to teach critical thinking directly is surely at hand" (p. 194).

The fostering of critical thinking is so much a part of discussions about the status of education today that to be opposed to it would be viewed as heresy by many. As Robert McPeck (1981) stated: "Being in favour of critical thinking in our schools is thus a bit like favouring freedom, justice, or a clean environment: it meets with general approval from the outset" (p. 1). Teaching students to think critically has become the "new" educational ideal/goal/aim/task/objective. Although he used a different term, "reflective thinking," John Dewey (1933) believed that

critical thinking should be an educational aim. Others followed his lead (Baron, 1987; Ennis, 1962; Glaser, 1985; Hudgins, 1977; Kownslar, 1985; McPeck, 1981; Norris, 1985; Paul, 1990; Scriven, 1985; Siegel, 1980). If students are to cope with the intellectual demands of current society and prepare for more sophisticated demands in the future, teachers must provide them with the materials and strategies to refine the critical abilities they already possess and to develop new ones. Teachers must allow students to discover the advantages of being a learner rather than a "finisher" (Keeley, 1988).

This change will not and should not come quickly, lest critical thinking become another educational bandwagon. "The process of learning to think critically takes time" (Paul, 1985, audiotape). Many teachers, students, and taxpayers must move beyond lipservice to the value of fostering critical thinking and assume their share of the vision. The only alternative is to fall farther behind as individuals and as a nation. As Neil Postman (1985) stated, "There can be no liberty for a community [person, country, world] which lacks the critical skills to tell the difference between lies and truth" (p. 4). People must learn to think individually but in conjunction with others (Freire, 1979). As Sternberg (1985a) wrote:

The current concern of educators with critical thinking offers students a new chance for developing critical

thinking skills. This chance will come to naught, however, if the concern proves to be nothing more than a brief infatuation, if training in critical thinking is not brought into all aspects of classroom endeavor, or if the concern stays only a concern and is not followed through with large-scale interventions. Training in critical thinking should not be the privilege of a selected intellectual minority or the luxury of the upper class. It should be the right of every student, and it is our responsibility to all our students to enable them to exercise this right. (p. 64)

Focus of the Study

Much of the literature suggested that critical thinking is not a by-product of content (Anderson, Marcham, & Dunn, 1944; Frank, 1969; Glaser, 1941; Hudgins, 1977; Nickerson, 1987) and is most enhanced when taught in conjunction with content which is relevant to the student (Collison, 1987; King, 1985; Kownslar, 1985; Marzano, Brandt, Hughes, Jones, Presseisen, Rankin, & Suhor, 1988; Paul, 1990; Paul, Binker, Martin, & Anderson, 1989; Sadler, 1987; Tchudi, 1988).

A neglected area in English education research seemed to be that of the effect of infusing critical thinking into the study of literature on the perceptions of secondary students concerning literary study. English teachers are in constant search of better methods for teaching literature, particularly at the secondary level. Authorities on critical thinking spoke generally about the positive effects of critical thinking on students' handling of content, but their emphasis was clearly on teaching critical thinking directly or infusing critical thinking into the curriculum

and not on students' particular perceptions and attitudes in relation to specific content.

The purpose of this inquiry, therefore, was to examine and interpret students' impressions of and attitudes toward a study of literature which emphasized critical thinking. More specifically, the following questions were used to guide the inquiry:

1. How do students perceive the study of literature based on previous experience?
2. How does an emphasis on critical thinking affect students' feelings about the study of literature?
3. To what extent do students feel that an emphasis on critical thinking affects their approach to literature?

Significance of the Study

Helping students increase their ability to think critically should be of primary concern to educators as well as the general public. At the same time, teachers must expose students to specific content which meets the curriculum requirements provided by state departments and/or school districts. Considering the current atmosphere in which schools must function and the proliferation of so-called cures proposed by persons inside and outside the classroom, it seemed advisable to ask students for their perceptions.

This study focused on examining and interpreting students' impressions of and attitudes toward a study of literature which emphasized critical thinking. Although the study involved a small number of students and covered a relatively short period of time, its depth of inquiry provided insights which may serve English education as well as other disciplines in meeting the thinking and content needs of students. An underlying purpose of this study was to observe the effectiveness of literary lesson plans redesigned to emphasize critical thinking.

Basic Assumptions for the Study

Four basic assumptions that were accepted and not investigated as part of this study were acknowledged as follows:

1. The impressions and attitudes of students concerning reading and the study of literature can increase the understanding of English teachers who want to engage their students more meaningfully in the study of literature.
2. Critical thinking is not a by-product of the study of literature.
3. Students will be open and honest if assured that their participation in the study will not have a negative effect on their grades.

4. Taped interviews, reading attitude assessments, and observations will provide description of student impressions and attitudes.

Research Design

The investigator borrowed techniques from qualitative or ethnographic research and utilized them in varying degrees as befitted an emergent study. Much of the scientific research has failed to impact upon the realities of classroom teachers (Calkins, 1985; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989; Kantor, Kirby, & Goetz, 1981). "Research which is not understandable and ultimately relevant to these professionals fails to serve English education" (Kantor et al., 1981, p. 294). Researchers need to conduct more ethnographic research concerning the study of literature, particularly at the secondary level. Thus, this investigation focused on the perceptions of 16 academically gifted 11th-grade students over a six-week period.

Procedures

The investigator discussed the procedures for this study under three major headings: (a) subject selection, (b) data collection, and (c) data analysis.

Subject Selection

The investigator obtained permission from the principal of South Caldwell High School to conduct the study.

Seventeen students in an 11th-grade academically gifted class were asked to participate. The investigator sent a letter to the parent(s) of each student to inform them of the proposed study. Because all students were under the age of 18, parents granting permission signed a permission form. Sixteen students received parental permission to participate. The investigator informed them of the purpose and preliminary organization of the study.

Data Collection

The three sources of data collection used in the study were a modified form of participant observation, interviews, and a reading attitude assessment. The investigator conducted interviews and administered reading attitude assessments at the beginning and end of the study.

Data Analysis

The investigator reviewed and interpreted all data resulting from participant observation, interviews, and the two administrations of the reading attitude assessment in response to the research questions posed. Themes were identified using triangulation procedures with particular attention to changes in impressions and attitudes over time (Burgess, 1984; Calkins, 1985; Fetterman, 1989; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1980; Rist, 1982; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984; Worthen & Sanders, 1987). The investigator attempted to describe accurately and to

interpret fairly all data collected while seeking to inform classroom practice.

Conclusions

Although most of the students who participated in this study considered the study of literature to be important, they felt that literature studies in high school were too prescriptive. Too often teacher-centered rather than student-centered, literature studies rarely allowed them the opportunity to select the literature to be studied. Also, most students said that teachers generally assumed the primary responsibility for explaining the literature, while students absorbed information. The data suggested that an emphasis on critical thinking activities based on specific pieces of literature had no perceptible effect on students' attitudes toward the study of literature. Rather, the nature of the literature seemed to shape students' attitudes. Students did report that the use of critical thinking activities made them adjust their approach to the study of literature. Generally, students indicated that they interacted more with the literature used for the study because of the critical thinking activities.

Summary

Chapter 1 presented an overview of the study. Chapter 2 provided information concerning the history of critical thinking; various concepts of critical thinking;

teaching critical thinking, particularly in relation to English instruction; and, assessment and transfer of critical thinking. Chapter 3 described the three methods of data collection--participant observation, reading attitude assessments, and interviews--and the use of literature-based writing assignments redesigned to emphasize critical thinking. Chapter 4 provided an analysis of data to determine themes in students' perceptions. Chapter 5 presented conclusions and implications of the investigation as well as recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine and interpret students' impressions of and attitudes toward a study of literature which emphasized critical thinking. The investigator reviewed a portion of the literature concerning critical thinking and the teaching of critical thinking through literature to gain insight into five major areas: (a) the history of critical thinking and related material about the study of critical thinking, (b) defining the concept of critical thinking, (c) teaching critical thinking, (d) teaching critical thinking in an English class and particularly through literature, and (e) assessment and transfer of critical thinking. These five areas provided important background for this study.

Historical Overview

The history of critical thinking has not been one of continuous enlightenment. However, there were individuals who sporadically sounded the call for critical thinking prior to the major resurgence of interest in critical thinking since 1980. Athens, the center of early cultural and intellectual development, witnessed the emergence of the

idea "that habits of critical thinking are dynamic elements in personal and social progress" (Hughes, 1970, p. 167). However, those concerned only with maintaining the status quo saw this new idea as a threat. The Athenian government accused Socrates of "poisoning" the minds of youth because he taught them that it was necessary to question even the sacred institutions of their society. Men like Voltaire, John Henry Newman, John Stuart Mill, and William Graham Sumner wrote about the importance of critical thinking (Paul, 1985b, p. 2). The Puritan tradition of early America was not conducive to the fostering of critical thinking. Had America heeded the religious tradition of St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Rene' Descartes, and Immanuel Kant, Richard Paul concluded, "perhaps the emphasis on the attainment of critical-thinking skills might have been different" (p. 3). Barbara Presseisen (1986) wrote that

practically speaking, as a general goal of education for American society, the concept [of critical thinking] was introduced well into the twentieth century and was tied to particular documents or to the work of various individuals in several areas of educational pursuit. (p. 3)

A 1938 NEA report, The Purposes of Education in American Democracy, stated the need for critical judgment in order to produce civic responsibility (p. 3). The 1941 publication of Edward Glaser's work, An Experiment in the Development of Critical Thinking, is still considered as the primary

catalyst of the critical thinking movement in this century. Between 1938 and 1960, Presseisen stated, "critical thinking became an objective of the English curriculum and even of mathematics classes" (p. 4). In the 1950s several important projects were conducted at universities such as those of B. D. Smith at the University of Illinois and Robert Ennis at Cornell University (p. 4). Also during the 1950s the "American Council on Education initiated the Cooperative Study of Evaluation in General Education and explored the application of critical thinking as a new goal of schooling" (p. 4). Researchers emphasized rules of logic and "careful deliberations about the ways factual data interacted with the classic rules of reason was [sic] a major concern for many of the early researchers on critical thinking" (p. 5).

A new era in the history of critical thinking began in 1961. Robert Ennis's article on critical thinking in the Harvard Educational Review in 1962 provided a major impetus to the study of critical thinking (p. 5). The 1960s saw more extensive application of critical thinking to methods of teaching and in specific subjects (p. 8).

The test data showed positive statistical improvement in critical thinking for the experimental group. The results were used to support the hypothesis that critical thinking can be improved with only one semester's instruction and systematic treatment of critical thinking. (p. 9)

By the end of the 1960s the cognitive development approach

was represented in the literature by such men as Kurfman, Eisner, and Bruner (p. 9).

Presseisen called the period before the 1970s "an era in search of definition" (p. 10). After 1970 there were at least three discernible approaches to the conception of critical thinking--as evaluation, as inquiry, and as an act including critical and creative abilities (pp. 10-11). During the 1970s there were "many new curricular programs," some designed for particular subjects and others emphasizing critical thinking in particular (p. 10). The work of Louis Raths and his associates was particularly noteworthy as was the work of Ennis, Hudgins, Kohlberg, and Furth and Wachs (p. 10).

Various reports published in the first half of the 1980s criticizing the schools for producing students who are poor thinkers have prompted "a rebirth of interest in critical thinking" (p. 12). The developments in the study of cognitive and developmental psychology since World War II have influenced the attitude that everyone is capable of becoming a better thinker (p. 14). The current thinking is that students can be guided and instructed in ways that will improve their ability to think. To that end materials have inundated the education marketplace. Critical thinking, in particular, has become an educational ideal (Baron, 1987; Glaser, 1985; Kownslar, 1985; McPeck, 1981; Norris, 1985; Paul, 1990; Scriven, 1985; Siegel, 1980). The writers and

publishers of textbooks have revamped their materials to reflect the renewed interest in critical thinking, while well-known individuals in the critical thinking field have continued to devise and promote their own programs. While recognized leaders in critical thinking have demonstrated more consensus than disagreement, much discussion has occurred concerning how to define critical thinking and how to teach it.

Critical Thinking Defined

Definitions of critical thinking and lists of inherent skills and student behaviors abound. In the book resulting from his 1941 experiment, Glaser stated that the ability to think critically involves three things:

- (1) an attitude of being disposed to consider in a thoughtful way the problems and subjects that come within the range of one's experiences, (2) knowledge of the methods of logical inquiry and reasoning, and (3) some skill in applying those methods. (pp. 5-6)

Glaser also said:

Reasoning requires a greater degree of intellectual development than mere ability to learn. Critical or reflective thinking involves a higher order of intellectual development, in which the ability to reason is included. (p. 37)

Louis Rath's approached thinking holistically. He stated that "it embraces imagination, it includes thinking to some purpose, it invites the expression of values, attitudes,

feelings, beliefs, and aspirations" (Raths, Wasserman, Jones, & Rothstein, 1986, p. xxiii). Since Glaser's experiment and the work of Raths, critical thinking proponents have sought to define critical thinking both formally and simply. Many sets of skills and strategies and lists of student behaviors and/or attitudes can be found throughout the literature.

Regardless of whether they believe that a definition of critical thinking is arbitrary (Halpern, 1984, p. 4) or that the field needs an "accurate, commonly accepted definition" (Beyer, 1985b, p. 270), the experts have tried to define the concept of critical thinking. Halpern used the term "directed thinking" to describe thinking that is "purposeful and goal directed" (p. 3). She elaborated through a list of critical thinking behaviors:

Learning the skills of clear thinking can help everyone to recognize propaganda and thus not fall prey to it, to analyze unstated assumptions in arguments, to realize when there is deliberate deception, to consider the credibility of an information source, and to think a problem or a decision through in the best way possible. (p. 4)

Some in the field drew upon John Dewey's term of reflective thinking in formulating their definitions. Donald Nolen (1985) called critical thinking "the art of reflection, stepping back, showing our students to see the world as well as to argue good" (audiotape). McPeck (1981) said that critical thinking is "the appropriate use of

reflective skepticism within the problem area under consideration" (p. 7). In an earlier elaboration he stated:

On the surface at least, perhaps the most notable characteristic of critical thinking is that it involves a certain scepticism, or suspension of assent, towards a given statement, established norm or mode of doing things. This scepticism might ultimately give way to acceptance, but it does not take truth for granted. Instead, it considers alternative hypotheses and possibilities.... In part, critical thinking involves seeing when a certain common procedure is fruitless by entertaining alternatives to it. (p. 6)

Having abandoned his previous concept of critical thinking, Ennis (1985c) wrote that "critical thinking is reasonable, reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do" (p. 54). He also formulated his own list of dispositions and abilities.

Other definitions in the literature fall somewhere on a continuum between broad and specific. In the glossary of terms in Costa's Developing Minds, critical thinking was defined as "using basic thinking processes to analyze arguments and generate insight into particular meanings and interpretations" (1985, p. 310). In his article, "Critical Thinking: What Is It?," Beyer (1985b) provided a list of ten operations intended as a synthesis of several lists. He believed that this list represented "a consensus that has been developed out of scholarly reflection, learning research and classroom experience over the past 30 years or so" (p. 272). He went on to define critical thinking as

the process of determining the authenticity, accuracy, and worth of information or knowledge claims. It consists of a number of discrete skills, which one can use and is inclined to use to determine such authenticity, accuracy, and worth. (p. 276)

More broadly, Sternberg (1985a) stated that "critical thinking comprises the mental processes, strategies, and representations people use to solve problems, make decisions, and learn new concepts" (p. 46). Reminiscent of McPeck's term, "reflective thinking," Petrosky (1986) wrote that the people involved in his project "came to understand critical thinking as a speculative or questioning stance towards knowledge and experiences" (p. 3).

Swartz and Perkins (1989) interpreted critical thinking "to concern the critical examination and evaluation--actual and potential--of beliefs and courses of action" (p. 37) and listed critical thinking behaviors (p. 38). Walsh and Paul (1985) talked about the "critical spirit" which they described as

composed of attitudes (or dispositions) and skills, both of which are essential to the process. Simply mastering a set of discrete thinking skills (recognizing assumptions or drawing conclusions, for example) does not a critical thinker make. This would be critical thinking in the "weak sense" merely learning the micro-skills. Critical thinking in the "strong sense" occurs when both the skills and dispositions are integrated and intrinsic ultimately to the character of a person. It is knowing not only how, but when to question something and knowing what kinds of questions to ask. (p. 8)

All definitions in the literature contribute to any

understanding of critical thinking. While authorities in the field should look for points of agreement, they should see the points of disagreement as opportunities to think critically about critical thinking. Even if it could be achieved, agreement on specifics would prove too prescriptive. As Walsh and Paul (1985) wrote, "Critical thinking...cannot be reduced to a formula or list of steps to follow because it is also generative and creative" (p. 8).

Paul et al. (1989) provided the basic definition used to guide this study. They defined critical thinking as follows:

1) Disciplined, self-directed thinking which exemplifies the perfections of thinking appropriate to a particular mode or domain of thinking. 2) Thinking that displays mastery of intellectual skills and abilities. 3) The art of thinking about your thinking while you are thinking in order to make your thinking better: more clear, more accurate, or more defensible. Critical thinking can be distinguished into two forms: "selfish" or sophistic, on the one hand, and "fairminded," on the other. In thinking critically we use our command of the elements of thinking to adjust our thinking successfully to the logical demands of a type or mode of thinking. (p. 361)

This definition provided a flexible framework, viewing critical thinking as including skills and abilities as well as having the "generative and creative" nature referred to earlier by Walsh and Paul (1985). It proved directive and instructive without being restrictive. For reference, the investigator used the list of 35 critical thinking dimensions found in Paul et al. (1989) because each

dimension was clearly discussed as a principle followed by an accessible application. Each strategy section ended with a list of lesson plans which utilized the strategy and which were also in the text.

Teaching Critical Thinking

"The more a man thinks the better adapted he becomes to thinking, and education is nothing if it is not the methodical creation of the habit of thinking" (Dimnet, 1928, p. 58). Although critical thinking has long been a goal of education, the degree to which teachers have fostered it in the nation's classrooms has been disappointing. Today much material exists about how to make critical thinking a part of the curriculum. Should critical thinking be taught directly or indirectly, if, indeed, it can be taught? Does a teacher really teach critical thinking or facilitate it? Is it studied separately or as a part of course content? Is there a particular order in which critical thinking skills should be studied or should they be studied as they are needed? Nolen (1985) stated that

the general picture of school instruction in thinking is eclectic, slapdash, and uneven. There's little doubt that most of what passes for teaching thinking is superficial, nontransferable pabulum. (audiotape)

He questioned why teachers bombarded with a plethora of programs have not been more skeptical when skepticism about new programs has been their traditional stance (1985).

Glaser, as well as others, did not need the highly publicized reports on the state of education published in the 1980s to conclude that most people were not capable of thinking critically. In his 1941 landmark book Glaser stated:

Our public education has not resulted....in the development of a sufficient proportion of citizens who can evaluate critically what they read, and who possess that degree of social understanding and critical-mindedness necessary to make intelligent judgments about public issues. (p. 173)

Unfortunately, the reports of the 1980s substantiated the lack of progress in critical thinking that many had expected. In spite of the reports, Presseisen (1987) asserted that "there has been interest in critical thinking as part of the school curriculum for over 40 years" (p. 29). Thus, the literature suggested that while the years since Glaser's experiment have witnessed an increased interest in critical thinking and the development of a variety of materials, that interest and those materials have yet to make a significant impact on the teachers and students in the nation's classrooms. Too many educators have failed to recognize the connection between critical thinking and education. McPeck (1981) concluded:

Critical thinking, then, is not just a frill or dietary supplement to be added to education, but is logically entailed by it....Critical thinking must, therefore, command a place in any institution committed to the pursuit of education because critical thinking is a necessary condition of it. (p. 37)

The belief that instruction in critical thinking is possible dates from the time of Socrates and the Sophists who wished to "teach definitely and specifically to develop their pupils into intelligent citizens" (Hughes, 1970, p. 168). To its detriment education has not maintained in linear fashion its ancient educational objective of teaching critical thinking. The renewed interest in critical thinking since Glaser's experiment and the number of workshops, conferences, and available materials confirmed the belief that instruction in critical thinking is possible (Baron, 1987; Glaser, 1941; Glaser, 1985; Goldmark, 1966; Gotesky, 1966; Grottenthaler, 1967; Halpern, 1984; Mehl, 1956; Munro & Slater, 1985; Paul, 1990; Sabini & Silver, 1985; Sizer, 1984; Smith, 1953). Instruction is required because thinking critically is not a by-product of any particular study. In a summary of studies concerning training in critical thinking, Glaser (1941) stated that "all point to the conclusion that the content alone of any subject is not likely to give general training to the mind, and is not likely to develop a generalized ability to think critically" (p. 69). Glaser reiterated:

There is no evidence that students acquire skill in critical thinking as a necessary by-product of the study of any given subject. On the other hand, almost any subject or project can be so taught as to put pupils on guard against hasty generalization, contradictory assertions, and the uncritical acceptance of authority. (p. 69)

Contrary to what many classroom teachers believe, improved critical thinking ability probably will not result naturally from the study of a subject (Anderson, Marcham, & Dunn, 1944; Frank, 1969; Grottenthaler, 1967; Hudgins, 1977; Nickerson, 1987; Raths et al., 1986).

Whereas some authorities in the field specifically stated that critical thinking should not be taught separately as subject matter (Furth & Wachs, 1974; Harnadak, 1976; McPeck, 1981; Nolen, 1985), most approached the method of teaching by stating that critical thinking is best approached through subject matter. Thus, subject matter becomes the vehicle through which to foster critical thinking. How much, if any, direct teaching of specific skills, if specific skills can be delineated, should take place remains an extremely debatable topic as materials on the market illustrate. There are those who would agree with Hudgins's statement that "the main problem with specificity is its specificity" (1977, p. 202). Hudgins went on to say that critical thinking should be viewed as "a complex, integrated set of intellectual performances" rather than "a series of discrete skills" (p. 203).

There was general agreement, however, that critical thinking should be fostered in some way within a subject area framework. McPeck (1981) wrote:

I would add, however, that because there is no universal skill nor curriculum subject that is properly

called critical thinking, it should therefore be taught as an integral part of other subjects. Not to do so is like teaching a person to type on a typewriter with an unknown alphabet a language that is foreign to him. (p. 18)

The literature of the 1980s reflected the importance of using appropriate content to help students enhance their critical thinking (Collison, 1987; Jones, Palincsar, Ogle, & Carr, 1987; Joyce, 1985; King, 1985; Kownslar, 1985; Marzano, et al., 1988; Sadler, 1987; Tchudi, 1988; Whimbey, 1984). The last few years of the decade, in particular, witnessed a greater emphasis on restructuring or redesigning traditional materials. Paul (1988) and Swartz and Perkins (1989) were representative of this emphasis which has continued into the 1990s.

Another emphasis in the 1980s concerned the relationship of personality and individual attitudes to the improvement of critical thinking. Again, Glaser (1941) dealt with this aspect when he said that a high level of intelligence does not guarantee critical thinking, but

attitudes of openmindedness, intellectual responsibility, and a desire to have evidence for one's beliefs, as well as knowledge of the principles of logical reasoning and specific skills in applying those principles, are susceptible to appreciable improvement. (p. 71)

Glaser (1985) reiterated the importance of attitude when he made it one of the three principal elements of critical thinking. Likewise, Hudgins (1977) stated that any effort

to define critical thinking would have to include a reference to "an attitude or a disposition to search for evidence" (p. 178). Siegel (1980) reiterated:

A critical thinker must have a willingness to conform judgment to principle, not simply an ability to so conform. One who possesses the critical spirit has a certain character as well as certain skills: a character which is inclined to seek reasons; which rejects partiality and arbitrariness; and which is committed to the objective evaluation of relevant evidence. (p. 9)

Meyers (1986) said that developing critical thinking skills is not "a dispassionate learning process" (p. 96), but an experience which must be taken personally. Numerous authorities in the field discussed the importance of teacher disposition as well as student disposition to the improvement of critical thinking (Costa, 1985a; Costa & Lowery, 1989; McPeck, 1981; Raths et al., 1986; Sternberg, 1987c; Swartz, A. M., 1987). The prevailing view seemed to be that for critical thinking to be fostered, both student and teacher must possess the task of improving critical thinking. The teacher bears the primary responsibility for creating a critical thinking classroom environment through physical design and instruction, while the student bears the primary responsibility for perhaps learning to perceive in a new way.

Critical Thinking and English Instruction

Much has been written about the thinking/writing connection and the reading/writing/thinking connection, but

more study needs to be undertaken in the area of literature and critical thinking, particularly in relation to the secondary English program. This investigator fears that English teachers too often mistakenly assume that critical thinking is a natural by-product of their teaching because they do delegate such a large portion of their curriculum to reading and writing. As a group, English teachers need to be made aware that they must create a classroom atmosphere that encourages critical thinking and design a curriculum that facilitates critical thinking.

Unlike ancient or classical man, modern man does not necessarily equate reading with thinking. Even many higher level students tend to approach the reading of a piece of literature as a task that is performed quickly and without much thought. Unfortunately, the pace of the modern world leaves modern man little time to reflect. The scenario suggested by Dimnet's words seems almost idealistic today even to secondary English teachers who are confronted more often than not by students who see little if any need to read and write and think about literature in preparation for their technical and computerized futures:

Nobody can think our thoughts for us, and nobody can tell us what will act as dew or sun on our thinking. The book that makes us think is the book we cannot shut again after we have read one page, because we are entranced by what it says to us; or it is the book we drop on our knee after reading one page, because what it says starts us irresistibly questioning, contradicting, or supplementing. (1928, p. 127)

English teachers, especially, must help students realize that reading a piece of literature, and, hopefully, any piece of written communication, is a beginning and not an end in itself. "Whatever we read we must first comprehend and, when we have comprehended criticize" (p. 144). The all too typical classroom described in several of the national education reports of the early 1980s showed a secondary teacher too often dispensing information, judgments, and interpretations, while students sat passively copying whatever was deemed necessary to pass the test. The students' view of their role in secondary education was to listen and absorb in order to memorize and reproduce later what the teacher had said. This pattern is all too familiar even in the English classroom where students enter having already learned or soon to learn that the teacher will interpret the poem, short story, or novel for them because that is the goal.

Fillion (1981) wrote about an approach to literature which he said could result in reflectiveness, "the willingness and ability to contemplate the literary experience" (p. 41) in order to improve daily living. In explanation he said:

It is perhaps through a growth in reflectiveness that learners of literature benefit most. That is, in addition to what one derives from the literature itself--which is in any case limited to the relatively small body of literature one happens to read--one also develops a way of dealing with experience. Through the

consideration of the literary experience, we learn to consider other experiences as well. Learning literature may not be the only way to develop this reflectiveness, but it is certainly one way. The reflective ability which is necessary for the consideration of literature is also necessary for consideration of life--the adoption, as it were, of a "poetic stance" toward life, reflection on the human meaning of experiences, to balance the "scientific stance," which closely analyzes the experience in objective terms. (p. 41)

This reflectiveness or critical thinking has long been emphasized by authorities in the field of English (Grottenthaler, 1967). Evidence gleaned from many English classrooms during recent decades suggests that this emphasis has failed to make a significant impact on the typical classroom. It is only the most recent literature textbooks, for example, that reflect the current emphasis on critical thinking.

Dimnet (1928) attached "the greatest value to the school exercise called literary analysis" (p. 145) because of its impact on critical thinking ability. West (1970) saw the problem differently, believing that emphasis should first be placed on improving a student's critical thinking ability since processes such as reading, writing, listening, and analyzing require critical thinking ability. Both Dimnet and West saw the need for critical thinking ability in order to read critically. Whimbey (1975), in describing the poor reader, delineated the major attributes of the good reader when he stated:

When the inferior reader tries to read, what he really does is skim the material in a manner that resembles inattentive perusal. However, this is his habitual pattern, rather than the result of a temporary loss of motivation. Such habitual skimming leaves him unable to follow involved arguments that require detailed thought, and so he comes away from a reading selection with only its more evident facts and concrete descriptions. The poor reader has not learned to analyze and construct meaning. Instead, when he answers reading comprehension questions, he draws from his superficial understanding of the material and combines this with his prior opinions on the topic. (pp. 80-81)

Whimbey went on to say that in order to improve, "the poor reader must be taught the features of good comprehension. He must have the minute details of complete understanding demonstrated and illustrated to him" (p. 91). More important than the level of understanding achieved is the concept or attitude that each student can be helped to improve his or her ability to read critically.

As recently as 1985 Tymoczko stated:

Literature is rarely put forward as a vehicle for teaching critical thinking, yet it is as capable of teaching students to think well as the disciplines most often credited with promoting these skills: mathematics, science, logic, and philosophy. (p. 246)

She went on to say that "for teaching critical thinking as a whole it [literature] is one of the most flexible disciplines in the academy" (p. 247). She illustrated how four types of critical thinking--induction, deduction, constructing sound arguments, and model making/theory building--could be used in the study of literature. Bushman

and Bushman (1986) and Bezerra and Nader (1987) concurred that literature is an appropriate vehicle for improving critical thinking ability. Marx echoed Dimnet (1928) when he called literature "the key subject for critical thinking" (Marx, Raskin, & Lazere, 1988).

Writing about the symbiotic relationship between critical thinking and the study of literature, Yeager (1987) stated:

The teaching of thinking and the study of literature can be combined to the enhancement of both. Examples from literature will motivate students in the development of critical thinking skills, and using those skills will lead to a deeper understanding of literature. (p. 134)

Because of the nature of literature and the English curriculum overall, critical thinking instruction in English classes could avoid the fragmentation and regimentation of other more scientifically oriented programs (Tchudi, 1988).

Extending the literary experience through writing could enhance critical thinking ability (Bushman & Bushman, 1986; McGonigal, 1988; Tierney, Soter, O'Flahavan, & McGinley, 1989). "Students who write in conjunction with reading literature seem to be more critical of their own thinking, as well as of the thinking of the authors they are reading" (Tierney et al., 1989, p. 137). Tierney et al. emphasized the "mobilizing effect of writing, the generative process of accessing knowledge, followed by an attempt to organize this

knowledge into communicable form" (p. 166). Sizer (1984) reiterated, "Writing is a good way to record one's thinking so that it can be analyzed" (1984, p. 103). Olson (1984) agreed. More emphatically, Boyer (1985) said, "I urge good writing because it is the means by which critical thinking--the essence of good education--can be pursued" (p. 33).

About thinking and writing Glatthorn (1985) stated, "Writing helps to facilitate and shape the ability to think propositionally" (p. 68), thus improving communicative and analytic competencies. Concerning his study using essay writing, Newell (1986) wrote:

Since essay writing creates a context in which ideas must be marshalled and arguments constructed from content-area information and students' previous learning, they are able to take a more active role in shaping their understanding of the topic. They are more likely to extend their ability to think carefully about the meaning and significance of the specific ideas written about rather than review a general body of information that might include information such as dates, specific events, etc. (p. 16)

In discussing a three-year critical thinking project that he directed, Petrosky (1986) said that "extended, disciplined response (like writing an essay or engaging in a discussion), where the response is interpretive, is an important, if not THE important, act of critical thinking" (p. 3).

Swope and Thompson (1986) and Fulwiler (1986) proposed the use of journals to help students read literature more closely. Fulwiler stated:

When readers write in journals, in addition to underlining and making margin notes, they increase their chances of seeing patterns, connections, and meaning in their texts. It is harder for the facts to remain in isolation when a writer works them into sentences and then paragraphs, making the reading both more meaningful and memorable. Journals help readers as well as writers find focus. (p. 8)

Bland and Koppel (1988) and Bratton (1988) agreed that fostering thinking through writing in the content areas could produce positive results.

In comparison to many areas of study in the field of critical thinking, relatively little has been written about the fostering of critical thinking through the study of literature in the secondary English curriculum. Sometimes an individual in another discipline has offered a suggestion concerning critical thinking and the English curriculum. In discussing the teaching of critical thinking through the study of United States history, for example, O'Reilly (1985) said that American literature provided "ideal grist for developing critical thinking skills in the secondary school" (p. 281). Before English teachers can take full advantage of the literary materials they have been teaching for decades, however, they will need an attitude adjustment and training in fostering critical thinking.

Critical Thinking Assessment and Transfer

Numerous tests exist purporting to test critical thinking. The results gathered from such tests have been

used to discuss the extent to which the ability to think critically transfers from one area to another. Some critical thinking proponents preferred teacher-made and/or discipline-specific critical thinking tests to the generalized and standardized critical thinking tests on the market. Others preferred using less restrictive methods of evaluating critical thinking. Beyer (1985b) stated:

When discussing critical thinking, especially in terms of testing, one must thus be most cautious. Whether or not an individual is proficient in critical thinking clearly depends on whose test or model or inventory of critical thinking is used as a standard of measurement. (p. 274)

In his criticism of the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal and the Cornell Critical Thinking Tests, McPeck (1981) argued that the tasks and results were not significantly different from those of intelligence tests and that the format of the tests was too restrictive to test critical thinking. He stated, however, that it was possible to have a good critical thinking test based on the following minimal conditions:

1. That the test be subject-specific in an area (or areas) of the test taker's experience or preparation. This is required because knowledge and information are required ingredients of critical thinking.
2. That the answer format permit more than one justifiable answer. Thus an essay might better fit the task, awkward and time-consuming as this might be.

3. That good answers are not predicated on being right, in the sense of true, but on the quality of the justification given for a response.
4. That the test results should not be used as a measure of one's capacity or innate ability, but as a learned accomplishment--which is usually the result of specific training or experience.
(p. 149)

Observation of behavioral changes or critical thinking behaviors was promoted by some experts as a better method of evaluation than testing (Baron, 1987; Beyer, 1985b; Halpern, 1984; Paul, 1982; Siegel, 1980; Swartz & Perkins, 1989). A list of behaviors of nonthinkers such as those of Raths et al. (1986) could be used in conjunction with the various lists of critical thinking behaviors available in the literature. Discussions (Baron, 1987; Swartz & Perkins, 1989) and writing (Baron, 1987; Goldmark, 1966; Swartz & Perkins, 1989) were other nontraditional means of evaluation discussed in the literature.

Transfer of critical thinking into students' everyday lives was discussed as the overall goal of critical thinking instruction (Paul, 1982), but it was considered difficult to attain (Sternberg, 1985a).

Exercises in critical thinking should not stop when students leave high school, but should continue when they read newspapers, advertisements, or suspected propaganda, listen to news broadcasts, political speeches, or even gossip, prepare to vote in public elections, attend college, get a job, decide on marriage, buy a car or home, encounter moral or controversial issues, raise children and the like. (Kownslar, 1985, p. 304)

Determining the transfer of critical thinking ability to other areas of life or other subjects was considered difficult because of a lack of criteria (Ennis, 1985b).

Although directly assessing critical thinking ability was not the purpose of this study, evidence of critical thinking was observed during class discussions and was the primary basis on which grades were assigned to individual critical thinking activities. Using the 35 critical thinking dimensions found in Paul et al. (1989), the investigator was able to summarize those dimensions generally exhibited in the activities which received higher evaluations and not exhibited or insufficiently exhibited in the activities which received lower evaluations.

Predictions

Several expectations for this investigation were suggested by this review of literature. First, the literature suggested that an emphasis on critical thinking through the study of literature in the secondary English classroom would result in an awareness among students that the ability to think critically was necessary for their successful interaction with every aspect of living in the information society in which they would participate for all of their adult lives. In addition, the literature suggested that students would come to view the strengthening of critical thinking ability as a desirable goal of their traditional education programs and of their lifelong

education. The literature also suggested that students would learn to use or improve their ability to use various dimensions of critical thinking and that literature was an appropriate vehicle for learning and practicing critical thinking strategies. A final expectation stemming from the literature but not directly suggested by it was that students would develop a more positive attitude toward the study of literature if the primary emphasis was shifted from learning literature for its own sake to improving critical thinking ability through an essentially prescribed literature curriculum.

Summary

Thinking skills in general and critical thinking in particular have been topics of more educational literature than even the most conscientious reader can consume. However, such an abundance has provided for comparison of ideas and, thus far, has prevented critical thinking from going the way of many other educational reforms.

Historically, the art of critical thinking is at least as old as Socrates, but, sadly, it has been viewed by many teachers as the latest phrase on the lips of school board members and central office personnel and as a major selling point for new textbooks. More than rhetoric and textbooks, classroom teachers need a grounding in theory and practice in reorganizing their own subject matter to foster critical

thinking. Until teachers can see that teaching for critical thinking has the potential to improve teaching and learning, they will continue to ignore it or will feel that it is one more thing they are being asked to do. Study of the five areas discussed in this chapter--the history of critical thinking; defining critical thinking; teaching critical thinking; teaching critical thinking in a specific discipline, in this instance through English; and assessment and transfer--would provide important background and practice in critical thinking.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This investigation centered on an examination and interpretation of secondary students' impressions of and attitudes toward a study of literature which emphasized critical thinking. The investigator administered a reading attitude assessment to each student and interviewed each student at the beginning and end of the study. During a six-week study of literature students completed critical thinking activities based on works by particular early American authors. The investigator used a modified form of participant observation during some writing sessions and discussions to collect data relating to students' attitudes toward the literature and the critical thinking activities. The data were treated as follows:

1. The data collected from the reading attitude assessments were analyzed to determine attitudes toward five types of reading.
2. The data collected from interviews were analyzed to determine themes in impressions of and attitudes toward the study of literature which emphasized critical thinking.
3. The writing assignments were analyzed to assess

generally students' handling of redesigned literature lessons.

4. Selective data from observations of writing sessions and discussions were used to enhance selective data from the interviews.
5. Data from interviews, reading attitude assessments, and observations were examined to reveal any changes over time.
6. Data from participant observation, reading attitude assessments, and interviews were used to respond to the basic research questions outlined in chapter 1:
 - a. How do students perceive the study of literature based on previous experience?
 - b. How does an emphasis on critical thinking affect students' feelings about the study of literature?
 - c. To what extent do students feel that an emphasis on critical thinking affects their approach to literature?

The teacher of AG English III at South Caldwell High School in Hudson, North Carolina, conducted this investigation. AG English III is a yearlong course provided for high school juniors who are identified as academically gifted. Those who qualify may choose to take the course, but they are not required to do so. The course integrates literature, composition, vocabulary, grammar and mechanics,

and speaking. The literature strain is organized as a chronological study of American literature through various genres. State adopted and supplementary texts are used throughout the course.

After obtaining permission from the principal of South Caldwell High School to conduct the study, the investigator sent a letter to the parent(s) of each student in the class. Because all students were under the age of 18, parents granting permission for their teenagers to participate signed a permission form. The parents of 16 of the 17 students in the class granted permission for their teenagers to participate. The investigator informed students of the purpose and preliminary organization of the study. Also, the investigator assured students that participation in the study was voluntary and that grades would not be negatively affected if they did not participate. All names were changed in reporting this investigation. Of the 16 students, 5 were female and 11 were male. Data were described and analyzed and conclusions were drawn from the information as it pertained to the students collectively.

Participant Observation

As a teacher the investigator was a kind of participant observer by identification (Pollard, 1985). Representative sources were reviewed concerning participant observation (Bruyn, 1966; Burgess, 1984; Center for New Schools, 1976;

Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Wilson, 1977; Worthen & Sanders, 1987). The investigator kept notes of observations made during some class discussions and writing sessions concerning students' attitudes.

Reading Attitude Assessments

The investigator collected additional information about participants' attitudes through the administration of the Rhody Secondary Reading Attitude Assessment at the beginning and end of the study (Tullock-Rhody & Alexander, 1980). This instrument is a summated rating scale. The items on the assessment can be grouped in five clusters as follows: school related reading (2), reading in the library (2), reading in the home (2), other recreational reading (5), and general reading (14) (p. 613).

The authors of the assessment noted three indicants of validity. First, the items on the assessment were derived from statements gathered from secondary students. Second, the scale did discriminate between students designated by their teachers as having negative attitudes toward reading and those designated as having positive attitudes toward reading. Third, the individual items on the final version of the scale "correlated at an acceptable level with the total scale" (p. 613). Using the test-retest method, the authors established a reliability coefficient of 0.84, an acceptable level of reliability (p. 613).

The data from the two administrations of the reading attitude assessment were analyzed and integrated with other data to support recurring themes as well as incidents of unique difference.

Interviews

The investigator interviewed each student on two separate occasions. Conducting interviews was reviewed in several sources (Calkins, 1985; Fetterman, 1989; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1980; Rist, 1982; Spradley, 1979; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The initial interview took place prior to the administration of the first reading attitude assessment and the literature study emphasizing critical thinking. The final interview occurred after the completion of the critical thinking activities and the second reading attitude assessment. Although certain questions were used to organize each interview, any related dialogue was encouraged.

The initial interview questions were designed primarily to elicit students' attitudes toward English as a required subject and toward required and recreational literature. The final interview questions were designed primarily to elicit students' attitudes toward the study of literature with an emphasis on critical thinking.

The investigator recorded questions and responses on audiotapes and later transcribed them to provide an accurate record. The following questions were common to all initial and final interviews:

Initial Interview Questions

1. What is your general attitude toward school?
2. What is your opinion of the courses you have taken in high school?
3. What is your attitude toward English?
4. If you read for pleasure, what kind of literature do you choose?
5. How do you think literature used in English classes is chosen?
6. What is a memorable piece of literature that you were asked to read outside of class?
 - a. What kind of assistance did the teacher provide?
 - b. How did you approach or try to understand the piece of literature?
 - c. How would you assess your degree of success with the piece of literature?
 - d. How could this experience have been made more successful?
7. What activity/aspect do you perceive as most important in any English curriculum and why?

8. What activity/aspect do you perceive as less important in any English curriculum and why?
9. Can you determine any specific purpose or purposes for reading and studying literature?

Final Interview Questions

1. Is there a piece of literature you studied during the previous grading period that is particularly memorable? Why?
2. Is there any activity that you did that you particularly liked or with which you were successful? Why?
3. Is there any activity that you did that you particularly disliked or with which you were unsuccessful? Why?
4. Did the activities cause you to change your usual approach to understanding a piece of literature? If so, how?
5. In what way or ways, if any, did the activities affect your understanding of the literature?
6. Can you determine any purpose or purposes for the kind of writing assignments you were asked to do?
7. Can you determine any specific purpose or purposes for reading and studying literature?
8. Are there any strategies that you learned through the writing activities that you could use in other subjects or other areas of your life? If so, what strategies in what subjects and/or areas?

Responses were analyzed to determine recurring themes as well as incidents of unique difference.

Literature-Based Critical Thinking Activities

Before beginning a study of literature using critical thinking activities, particularly writing assignments, students received specific information concerning critical thinking. Initial discussion centered on what students thought was involved in critical thinking followed by a discussion of the definition of critical thinking from Critical Thinking Handbook: High School (Paul, et al., 1989, p. 361). Also, the investigator introduced students to a list of 35 critical thinking dimensions from the same text (p. 56). Further discussion concerned excerpts from sections entitled: "Thinking Independently" (p. 57), "Thinking Precisely About Thinking: Using Critical Vocabulary" (p. 91), "Reading Critically: Clarifying or Critiquing Texts" (p. 83), and "Listening Critically: The Art of Silent Dialogue" (pp. 84-85). The students used these sections for reference throughout the study. Discussion of critical thinking vocabulary took place as needed.

The investigator used Critical Thinking Handbook: High School to design activities that required critical thinking. In addition, The American Experience (1991) and the accompanying Teaching Portfolio were sources of activities.

The text issued to students, Adventures in American Literature (1985), was the source of most pieces of literature. The investigator issued paperback copies of "Rip Van Winkle" (1979) and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1980) to students during the study of Washington Irving.

Although all critical thinking activities were analyzed, primary emphasis was placed on the short and extended responses based on the selected writings of three early writers studied in the course--Michel-Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur, Washington Irving, and William Cullen Bryant. Representative assignments are as follows:

1. Write an essay in which you explore the ways in which America is still a land of "new beginnings."
(Assigned after reading an excerpt from Letters from an American Farmer by Crèvecoeur)
2. Using the excerpt from Letters from an American Farmer, discuss Crèvecoeur's depiction of what we now refer to as the American dream and compare his depiction to that of the Puritans.
3. Characters often undergo dramatic changes during the course of a literary work. Yet in some cases a character's personality remains unchanged despite dramatic changes in his or her situation. Write an essay in which you explain how Tom Walker's personality remains unchanged despite the changes in his situation. Develop your explanation by

citing details from the story. (Assigned after reading "The Devil and Tom Walker." Teaching Portfolio, p. 281)

4. Discuss Washington Irving's portrayal of women based on the female characters in "The Devil and Tom Walker," "Rip Van Winkle," and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." Cite specific evidence from the three stories.
5. Do you agree with Bryant that death is something to be accepted as part of the natural order of things? Or do you believe, like the Irish poet Dylan Thomas, that human beings must fight against death to the very last? Explain your point of view. (Assigned after reading William Cullen Bryant's "Thanatopsis." Teaching Portfolio, p. 303.)

The investigator designed the literature study to illustrate the use of traditional or mandated curriculum to emphasize critical thinking. Rather than creating new curriculum or adding more for the classroom teacher to handle, the infusion of critical thinking into course content represented a different and, hopefully, more efficient approach which could prove more productive. Thus, the literature study was based on a major concept in the critical thinking literature--critical thinking is best fostered through course content.

Analysis

Interviews, observations, and reading attitude assessments produced data which the investigator reviewed and interpreted in response to the research questions posed in chapter 1. Using data triangulation procedures with particular attention to changes in impressions and attitudes over time, the investigator identified themes (Burgess, 1984; Calkins, 1985; Fetterman, 1989; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1980; Rist, 1982; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984; Worthen & Sanders, 1987). Triangulation using "different data collection modes" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 306) was used to determine evidence of themes in more than one source of data. Limitations which could have resulted from utilizing one source of data were lessened by using a variety of sources.

Using a variety of sources helped the researcher "build on the strengths of each type of data collection while minimizing the weaknesses of any single approach" (Patton, 1980, p. 158). Triangulation "works with any topic, in any setting, and on any level....[It] can occur naturally in conversation as easily as in intensive investigatory work" (Fetterman, 1989, p. 90). Triangulating data sources allowed for "comparing and cross-checking consistency of information derived at different times and by different means within qualitative methods" (Patton, 1980, pp. 330-331). The investigator compared observational and interview

data to reveal consistency of major themes. Also, the investigator also looked for consistency over time and between public and private comments. Although "triangulation of data sources within qualitative methods will seldom lead to a single, totally consistent picture," (p. 331), the investigator attempted to delineate the major themes and to provide explanation of differences. The investigator made every attempt to provide "thick description" (Geertz, 1983). Incidents of uniqueness were reported as well as incidents of commonality. The primary goal of analysis was to inform classroom practice.

The investigator tabulated responses on the two administrations of the Rhody Reading Attitude Assessment according to procedures provided by the authors of the scale (Tullock-Rhody & Alexander, 1980, p. 612). A very positive response received a score of 5, and a very negative response received a score of 1. On 13 of the 25 items, a response of "strongly agree" indicated a very positive attitude and received a score of 5. On the remaining 12 items, a response of "strongly disagree" indicated a very positive attitude and received a score of 5. Therefore, on a positive item, "strongly agree" received a 5, "agree" received a 4, "undecided" received a 3, "disagree" received a 2, and "strongly disagree" received a 1. The pattern was reversed on the negative items. The possible range of scores was $5 \times 25(125)$ to $1 \times 25(25)$. The authors did not

provide a placement of scores on a positive to negative continuum.

Although the scale assessed general reading attitudes rather than attitudes related directly to the literature typically studied in secondary English classes and particularly studied by the participants in this study who read only early American literature, data which resulted from the first assessment enabled the investigator to relate more effectively to individual participants during the study. Data which resulted from the second assessment allowed for determination of change over time and were also compared with data resulting from the interviews and observations.

All interview tapes were transcribed and compared to any notes taken during the interviews. Answers to individual questions were carefully analyzed to determine recurring as well as unique attitudes or perceptions. Two questions used in both sets of interview questions were specifically designed to assess changes over time concerning the purposes for reading and studying literature and approaches used in understanding literature.

Notes that resulted from a modified form of participant observation conducted by the teacher/investigator were analyzed in an attempt to determine if students were "reacting to a curriculum innovation in the manner intended" (LeCompte, 1980, p. 42). The "curriculum innovation"

introduced during this study entailed the use of critical thinking activities requiring responses of various lengths from the students. The critical thinking activities were based on pieces of early American literature. During writing sessions and class discussions the investigator attempted to note themes in students' comments and questions concerning attitudes toward the kind of activities being assigned and the kind of literature being studied. Time allotted for writing sessions and discussions was limited because of the length of the study and the completion of other activities related to the course. Themes related to students' attitudes toward the study of literature emphasizing critical thinking gathered from participant observation were compared to themes that resulted from interviews and reading attitude assessments.

Although evaluating students' handling of redesigned literature lessons using critical thinking activities was not the focus of this study, the investigator felt that some assessment, although rather subjective, would inform classroom practice. Thus, a general analysis of students' responses to the critical thinking activities was made using the 35 critical thinking dimensions of Paul et al. (1989). A collective list of dimensions suggested by responses was made during the final reading of students' papers. Using the definitions and applications of the 35 critical thinking dimensions, the investigator was able to identify major

examples of failure to demonstrate critical thinking as well.

The investigator tried to interpret the implications of students' perceptions concerning literature study in relation to the basic research questions which directed this study. These questions concerned students' perceptions of previous literature study, of literature study emphasizing critical thinking, and of the effects of critical thinking activities on the process of attempting to understand literature. These basic research questions structured the presentation of interpretations and conclusions.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

Procedures described in chapter 3 were used to gather and analyze data from interviews, reading attitude assessments, and participant observation in exploring the following research questions:

1. How do students perceive the study of literature based on previous experience?
2. How does an emphasis on critical thinking affect students' feelings about the study of literature?
3. How do students feel that an emphasis on critical thinking affects their approach to literature?

Reading Attitude Assessments

The assessments produced data concerning five types of reading through the number of items indicated: school related reading (2), reading in the library (2), reading in the home (2), other recreational reading (5), and general reading (14) (p. 613). Individual responses on each reading attitude assessment were tabulated according to procedures described by the authors to produce a score which could range from 25 to 125 (Tullock-Rhody & Alexander, 1980, p. 612). The data were descriptive since no norms were

reported for the assessment. Although the authors did not classify specific scores on a positive to negative continuum, the degree of responses to the 25 items and the point values assigned to those responses led the investigator to conclude that 4 students demonstrated a negative attitude toward reading, while 12 demonstrated a positive attitude at both the beginning and end of the study. The scores on both assessments for each student are presented in Table 1. Prescore average for the class was 95.437 on a 25 to 125 point scale. Postscore average was 95.875.

Concerning school related reading, most students responding positively indicated that they read beyond school and that they prefer to read to gain information than be given information. These students typically reported that they often check books out of the library. In the category of home related reading, most students who demonstrated a positive attitude indicated that they have a large number of books in their rooms, and some indicated that they like to stay at home to read even when other alternatives are available.

In the category of other recreational reading, most students who demonstrated a positive reading attitude agreed that they read during free time and that they like to share their books with friends. These students also reported that they read partially to broaden their interests and to

Table 1

Individual Scores on the Rhody Secondary Reading Attitude Assessment

Student Number	Prescore	Postscore	±Change
1	101	106	+5
2	110	108	-2
3	120	117	-3
4	59	60	+1
5	116	115	-1
6	119	112	-7
7	89	98	+9
8	70	64	-6
9	91	92	+1
10	102	99	-3
11	99	101	+2
12	61	59	-2
13	107	108	+1
14	115	119	+4
15	90	93	+3
16	78	83	+5
Average Scores	95.437	95.875	

Range of scores possible: 25 to 125

improve their vocabulary. Most indicated that they like to receive books as gifts.

The largest category on the reading attitude assessment related to general reading. Most students who displayed a positive attitude indicated that reading is one of their favorite activities, that they get excited about books they have read, and that they like to read books by well-known authors. Also, most indicated that they do not view avid readers as strange and would not make fun of them. Many reported that they sometimes buy a book. Generally, these students said that they read a book rather quickly and that they are avid readers who often read to escape problems.

Since the reading attitude assessment is a summated rating scale, slight shifts in ratings of individual items occurred. Most represented shifts between "strongly agree" and "agree" and between "strongly disagree" and "disagree." These shifts might have been influenced by students' assigning different estimations to qualifiers such as "never," "generally," and "a lot" when they took the assessments which were administered approximately six weeks apart. Thus, scores may not indicate any significant change in attitude. Regardless of the reasons for the slight shifts on individual items, the same students who demonstrated positive or negative attitudes at the beginning of the study demonstrated the same attitudes at the end of the study. It should be reiterated that the reading

attitude assessment does not directly address attitudes toward the literature traditionally included in the secondary English curriculum. However, the resulting data increased the investigator's understanding of individual students in the study and of the 16 gifted students as a select group.

Critical Thinking Activities and Participant Observation

Although some portions of class periods during the time frame designated for this study were devoted to vocabulary study and grammar refreshers, most of the class time was devoted to the study of early American literature. Of the time designated for literature study, more was used for reading and writing than for discussing.

Prior to assigning any critical thinking activities based on the literature study, the investigator provided students with specific information concerning critical thinking from Critical Thinking Handbook: High School (Paul, et al., 1989). Initial discussions during portions of several class periods centered on the definition of critical thinking that was provided (p. 361). As part of the initial defining process students also received a copy of 35 critical thinking dimensions (p. 56). They were given opportunity for comments and questions concerning the definition and the list. The investigator provided general comments about the availability of various definitions and

lists of skills and/or strategies as well as the reasons for choosing Critical Thinking Handbook: High School as the major resource for critical thinking information.

Additional discussion concerned handouts of excerpts from sections of the 35 critical thinking dimensions entitled: "Thinking Independently" (p. 57), "Thinking Precisely About Thinking: Using Critical Vocabulary" (p. 91), "Reading Critically: Clarifying or Critiquing Texts" (p. 83), and "Listening Critically: The Art of Silent Dialogue" (pp. 84-85). This information was referred to frequently throughout the study.

During the initial discussions of the concept of critical thinking, students expressed interest in improving their ability to think critically as well as anxiety that they might not perform well. Two memorable questions asked during these early discussions were "Why has no one ever talked about this before?" and "Are you going to teach us how [to think critically]?"

The investigator asked students to complete some critical thinking activities utilizing the literature being studied but not resulting in responses like those solicited through the writing assignments. The four activities described can be found in the Teaching Portfolio accompanying The American Experience (1991). In relation to an excerpt from Thomas Paine's "The Crisis, Number 1," students had to identify three types of persuasive appeals--

ethical, logical, and emotional--and explain the effect of each (pp. 197-198). These appeals were represented in four quotations from the selection by Paine.

Also in connection with the selection by Paine students had to analyze aphorisms by first identifying which of five statements were aphorisms and then paraphrasing them (p. 201). In addition, a second activity on aphorisms required students to state how each aphorism applied to the situation in the colonies in 1776 and how it represented a general truth (p. 202).

The fourth activity used was based on Washington Irving's short story, "The Devil and Tom Walker." Students had to analyze four passages from the story in order to identify at least one inference about the cultural attitudes of New Englanders during the late 1720s and the early 1730s (p. 279). Students found it necessary to review the concepts of inference and implication.

The primary critical thinking activities used during the literature study consisted of 10 writing assignments requiring responses of various lengths. Students completed four assignments at home and six in class. The investigator used Critical Thinking Handbook: High School by Paul et al. (1989) in redesigning some lesson plans. The American Experience (1991) and the accompanying Teaching Portfolio were sources of some of the writing assignments.

Initial writing assignments produced greater anxiety in some students than did later assignments. At the beginning most students wanted the investigator to read their papers to see if the responses were correct before they turned them in. In discussing their desire for immediate evaluation of their responses, the general consensus was that they felt more adept at handling questions with specific answers delineated in the text or with fairly predictable answers than handling questions that required more thought and a deeper understanding of the literature. They expected the investigator to assume the greater responsibility for analyzing the literature. During the study the investigator frequently stressed the importance of referring to the particular literature selection being used and to the critical thinking material previously discussed. Over time most students demonstrated less dependence on the investigator by not asking for their papers to be read as often, by discussing ideas and questions more often with other students than with the investigator, and by appearing to interact more frequently with the literature.

Although directly assessing students' critical thinking ability was not a purpose of this study, the grades assigned to the writing activities represented subjective evaluations of students' critical thinking on individual questions. Some students received consistently high or low grades, while others tended to fluctuate. Observations indicated

that because the authors used in the study were early American writers, most students assumed that they would have difficulty with the selections and that they would not enjoy reading them. Among the four writers studied, all students disliked the selections by Crèvecoeur and Thomas Paine and either enjoyed or tolerated the selections by Washington Irving and William Cullen Bryant.

Using the 35 critical thinking dimensions of Paul et al. (1989), the investigator was able to determine characteristics which were generally exhibited in the papers that received higher evaluations and characteristics that received lower evaluations. The better papers contained clearly delineated positions supported by clear reasons and/or examples. They exhibited the results of making inferences and intellectually persevering. These writing assignments exhibited the students' willingness to explore beliefs or concepts, to evaluate the credibility of sources, and to analyze and evaluate arguments. The results of comparing and evaluating perspectives were evident as well as those of exploring implications and consequences. Overall, these papers showed the results of reading critically. A teacher estimate of students' success in demonstrating each of 10 critical thinking strategies designated by Paul et al. (1989) is presented in Table 2. Each estimate is presented as a range of percentages in relation to the number of tasks that required a particular strategy.

Table 2

Teacher Estimates of Student Competence in Using 10 Critical Thinking Dimensions (Paul, et al., 1989)

Critical Thinking Dimension	Range of Percentages	No. of Tasks
Clearly delineated position	56%-100%	8
Reasons and/or examples	31%-100%	8
Making inferences	38%-88%	7
Intellectually persevering	38%-88%	6
Willingness to explore beliefs and concepts	56%-100%	3
Willingness to evaluate the credibility of sources	56%-100%	2
Willingness to analyze and evaluate arguments	56%-100%	2
Comparing and evaluating perspectives	56%-100%	3
Exploring implications and consequences	56%-88%	4
Reading critically	38%-100%	8

Writing activities receiving lower evaluations exhibited dependency on generalizations and oversimplifications. They showed students' difficulty with stating positions clearly and a general absence of adequate support. Few, if any, examples of inferring were present. These responses seemed to reflect their authors' negative dependence on past experience and previous knowledge rather than on their critical reading of the literature.

Interviews

Each of the students was interviewed at the beginning and end of the study. All interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed. The initial interview questions primarily solicited students' attitudes toward English as a required subject and toward required and recreational literature. The final interview questions primarily solicited students' attitudes toward the study of literature with an emphasis on critical thinking. All responses to each question were analyzed to produce or support themes as well as examples of uniqueness.

To enhance the investigator's understanding of the students individually and collectively, the investigator asked students about their general attitude toward school and the types of courses they had chosen in high school. Four students indicated that they enjoyed school, and two indicated that school was "beneficial, worthwhile" or

"useful." One student who pointed out the utilitarian function of school joined 10 other students in expressing rather negative attitudes in such terms as "a necessity," "not so bad, I guess," "boring," "childish," something students "have to do."

In reference to the types of courses they had taken, several students said that most courses lacked relevancy either to the world outside of school or to the careers they planned to pursue. Others said that some courses were "too slow and too easy," "hard but interesting," "pretty advanced," or "necessary" to meet requirements for the North Carolina Scholars' Program and/or for college entrance. Some students expressed a desire for "more specific subjects," "more computer programming," "more foreign languages" offered, and time to take courses like drafting and art which often could not be taken by students taking a full load of college preparatory courses. One student criticized some courses on the bases of materials provided and the teaching styles used. He did not like for teachers to provide information and tell students to learn it.

The range of responses to the questions about attitude toward school and types of courses taken during high school reflected, in part, some students' decision not to participate completely in the academically gifted program during their secondary career and the lack of classes for the academically gifted in some major subject areas such as

science and foreign language. Some students expressed regret that they had not elected to take all of the AG classes every year and that AG classes in other academic areas were not available.

Four major themes emerged during the interviews concerning the study of literature. These were (a) the conflict between student reading preference and traditional English curriculum, (b) the prevalence of teacher-centered classes, (c) the importance of studying literature, and (d) the effect of critical thinking activities on the study of literature.

Student Reading Preferences and Traditional English Curriculum

Whether they read in one area at a time, chose books based on their mood swings, read a mixture of types, or chose "whatever sounds good" at a particular time, the students demonstrated variety in their choices. Adventure and science fiction were the two kinds most often mentioned. Others mentioned more than once were horror, mystery, and romance. Types of literature named once were comedy, classical poetry, historical/war, fantasy, and autobiography. Interestingly, Stephen King was the author most frequently named.

The data from the initial interviews supported data from the reading attitude assessments that most (12) of the students enjoy reading and choose to read when time permits.

However, taken together the data implied a conflict between literature designated as essential by the traditional English curriculum and literature chosen on the basis of student preference. In stating their opinions students demonstrated the attitude that literature as taught in secondary schools was the result of adults' deciding what students should read. It was surprising that rather than viewing the classroom teacher as the primary adult making that decision, students suggested that parents, experts (i. e. professors), school board members, or other adult groups were responsible. The following response reflects this view in the extreme:

I think there is a group of old men and women that sit around a table in Raleigh and...they read through and find the most boring books that you [we] should have to read, and they say that students have to read this, and they give you [us] the stuff that makes absolutely no sense, that nobody can understand. (Joanna, Initial Interview)

Teacher-Centered English Classrooms

When asked about a memorable piece of literature they had been assigned to read outside of class, most students selected works which were memorable because they had proved difficult to understand. For example, students described Great Expectations, which they had read in the ninth grade, as "boring," "slow," "a pretty good story [that] got buried under a lot of words" and as a novel that was "hated." Other traditional works named were Romeo and Juliet, Silas

Marner, and Mythology. Students tolerated these but did not really enjoy them. Titles enjoyed by students were West Side Story, To Kill A Mockingbird, Dacey's Song, and The Wave.

Although in a few cases the student's only assignment was to read a particular book at home, most said that discussions took place throughout the reading of the work. However, these discussions were typically opportunities for teachers to ask predetermined questions, sometimes the ones that had already been printed and distributed to students, and for teachers to give students notes. Teachers stated the basic ideas to be remembered, meaning those necessary for the test, and teachers "explained it [the book] to us." Generally the attitude expressed by students was that teachers controlled the questions and the answers, and the students' task was to get the teachers' notes in order to perform well on the final tests.

Importance of Literature

Despite the rather negative attitude generally expressed by the students toward individual pieces of literature that they had read for previous English courses, many considered literature the most important aspect in any secondary English curriculum. The following excerpts illustrate their reasons:

[Reading literature] has an effect on the way people think. (Hank, Initial Interview)

[In] discussing pieces of literature we sort of get it [an idea] out in the open, and everybody can just sort of add on to other people's ideas. (Richard, Initial Interview)

It [Reading literature] gives us better understanding of language, and it makes us have to think and analyze more. (Jeremy, Initial Interview)

It [Literature] uses all aspects of English [in] understanding how it is written, why the author wrote it that way, and vocabulary increases our reading ability. (Nathan, Initial Interview)

Although an almost equal number of students designated writing as most important, only one student discussed it in connection with literature. Those who chose writing as most important did so, they said, primarily because teachers had told them how necessary it was to be able to write well in college.

Even though every student did not consider the study of literature to be the most important aspect of an English curriculum, most students were able to determine purposes for reading and studying literature in English courses as evidenced by the following selected excerpts from initial and final interviews:

To expand your vocabulary, to broaden your views, the way you think about things. When you read a lot you think more. (Hank, Initial Interview)

It [Literature] touches on a whole lot of things. Not only do you learn more about yourself through the history of literature and the history of the English language, but you just by reading books, can [understand] the history part. Reading and studying literature can help you not only to comprehend what you read but [also] give you a better understanding of

talking and using words and understanding how to express yourself. Because the more you read the more you learn, and the more you learn the better you are. (Rusty, Initial Interview)

I think it [literature] helps you see other people in certain situations, and you see how they cope with it [the situation], and it enables you to look at how you [might] solve your own problems. (Linda, Initial Interview)

I guess you just learn more about human nature [and] people that came before, what they had to teach. (Sam, Initial Interview)

You widen your vocabulary. You learn to talk out better. It [Literature] helps in your writing, and [for] some pieces [you have to] use your mind more. Instead of just doing something else, you have to think about what you read. (Nathan, Initial Interview)

I think it [literature] has an effect on my writing style. I can see reflections of what I have been reading in things I write like the way I put sentences together and the words I use. (Helen, Final Interview)

Students demonstrated uniqueness in each of the following responses:

It [Literature] seems like a waste. You read a piece of literature and [the teacher says] there is all of this symbolism in it and the author has been dead for say 100 years, and there is all of this symbolism, and this symbolizes this and this symbolizes that. How [does the teacher] know that it symbolizes that? How [does the teacher] know that he [the author] just didn't write it for a great story? (Joanna, Initial Interview)

I guess [literature helps us to] learn about our past, but I don't see how it is going to really help me to get into the Air Force Academy to find out about literature. I don't see how it's going to help me to be a pilot. Literature has nothing to do with being a pilot, but I guess we should know about our past. (Mike, Initial Interview)

Critical Thinking Activities and Literature Study

The investigator asked students in both the initial and final interviews about how they try to achieve understanding of a piece of literature once it has been assigned. More specifically, in the initial interviews the investigator asked them to discuss their approach to the piece of literature they had designated earlier as memorable. In the final interviews the investigator asked them to discuss in what ways, if any, the critical thinking activities had altered their approach to understanding literature.

Concerning their individual works, most of the students indicated in the initial interviews that they had read through their selections only once, rereading small portions occasionally. Only two students stated that they had read their pieces of literature more than once. Three students admitted that although they had read their assigned literature, they had depended on other students or the teacher to explain the material to them. One student demonstrated a unique difference when she stated that she had attempted to read the literature in light of ideas discussed prior to the assignment.

In the final interviews a majority of the students stated that they had found it necessary to change their approach to the literature because of the critical thinking activities assigned. The following excerpts from the final interviews illustrate individual changes:

[Critical thinking activities] make me think more when I read it [the literature] because when I used to read, I mean I could read pretty fast just to get it done....Now when I read I kind of think about what I'm reading so I can understand what I read. (Mike, Final Interview)

I tried my best to pay more attention to it [the literature] while I was reading it, so I could pick up on it because I don't pick up on things really quick[ly]....Mostly just reading it slowly, but there were certain parts that if I didn't understand it the first time, I read it back through again. (Jon, Final Interview)

I read more slowly now. I used to fly through them [pieces of literature]....I would start thinking about something else, so I would go back and reread that paragraph if my mind would stray or something, and used to I wouldn't go back and read it. I would just keep going. (Chris, Final Interview)

I had to think a lot more deeply. [I would] reread and read more slowly. Usually I would read through it [the literature] the first time fast and then go back and look at it more carefully. (Helen, Final Interview)

Interpretation

In the first part of this chapter the investigator attempted to describe the data that were collected during the study in a way that would inform classroom practice. The investigator attempted in this section to provide personal interpretations which grew out of the researcher's role as a participant and observer in the class. These personal interpretations provided responses for the following questions which guided this investigation:

1. How do students perceive the study of literature based on previous experience?
2. How does an emphasis on critical thinking affect

students' feelings about the study of literature?

3. How do students feel that an emphasis on critical thinking affects their approach to literature?

Although the students who participated in this study must take four years of high school English, and the courses provided for them must meet state and local curriculum guidelines, it was important to gain insight into students' attitudes toward what they had read and how they had approached the study of literature. Such data were helpful in making inferences and generalizations pertaining to the questions which gave focus to this study. The following sections present the researcher's personal interpretations of students' perceptions of previous literature study, of literature study emphasizing critical thinking, and of the effects of critical thinking activities on the process of attempting to understand literature.

Previous Literature Study

Students' responses concerning their experiences studying literature prior to this study were either positive or negative. Students reported positive experiences primarily in relation to pieces of literature that they perceived as easy to read and understand and which, in some cases, qualified as teen fiction. They reported negative experiences in relation to pieces of literature that they perceived as difficult to read and understand and which they

had heard teachers refer to as "the classics." Students considered some of these classics or more traditional pieces of literature as "boring," "slow," or having a relatively good story "buried under a lot of words."

Students viewed English courses in grades 9 and 10, in particular, as highly prescriptive, allowing students few, if any, opportunities to exercise personal preference in literature selections. It was surprising that students placed the responsibility for the prescriptive nature of English courses on the shoulders of adults they perceived as having more control over curriculum than the classroom teacher such as parents, school board members, college professors, and state level experts.

Specifically in relation to the literature studied in AG English III prior to this investigation, students indicated that while they realized the importance of knowing about their literary past, for the most part they had not enjoyed the selections studied. In essence, they had tolerated what they perceived as the prescribed curriculum provided for the teacher, a curriculum that they would have to endure until the coursework moved into 20th century literature.

Because of their previous experiences, students had come to view the study of literature as a teacher-centered activity. Students reported that their teachers usually constructed questions about the literature to be answered

and provided the answers to be memorized for tests. As one student said, the teacher "explained it [the book] to us." Another student reported that "the teacher gave us questions at the beginning so we would know what was important."

Despite students' primarily negative attitudes toward the study of literature in English courses, many maintained that literature was an important aspect of the English curriculum. However, it could be improved dramatically if students were allowed to determine at least some of the selections used in the courses.

Literature Study Emphasizing Critical Thinking

There was no indication that the emphasis on critical thinking through activities based on specific pieces of literature had any effect on students' attitudes toward the study of literature. Instead, students based their feelings toward the various pieces of literature read during this investigation on the nature of the individual selections. All of the students disliked the selections by Crèvecoeur and Thomas Paine primarily because the pieces were "too much like history." Most students liked the three stories by Washington Irving because they were "more like fantasy" and were "unrealistic." Fewer students liked William Cullen Bryant's poem, "Thanatopsis," but those who did like it based their feelings on the theme of death and the youth of the poet.

Students' attitudes toward the literature emphasizing critical thinking reflected students' attitudes toward literature in general. Most students prefer short stories, particularly ones containing fantasy, to historical pieces or poetry.

Critical Thinking Activities and the Study of Literature

In completing the critical thinking activities, most students realized that they needed to adjust their previous approaches to literature. No longer could they rely on one hasty reading of the selection and on others to explain the text or answer specific questions in preparation for a final test. They had to complete a majority of the assignments in class, primarily working alone. Although they were allowed to ask questions anytime after reading a particular selection, class discussion occurred after all papers had been submitted to the investigator.

Generally, the students realized that they would need to read for ideas and perspectives, for example, rather than reading words or sentences strung across a page. The general nature of the critical thinking activities encouraged students to spend more time interacting with the literature. Some students reported that they had to read more slowly and reread some portions if they discovered their minds wandering, whereas they typically would have continued to read with the only purpose being to complete

the selection. As one student said, "Now when I read, I kind of think about what I'm reading so I can understand."

Students also related that they had sometimes stopped at various points in a particular text to think about what they had read as well as to analyze the text in relation to an individual critical thinking activity. Several students said that they had tried to understand the writing assignment as fully as possible before they read an individual selection, whereas others said that they had preferred to read the selection first, then to study the question carefully, and finally to reread the selection more closely and in relation to the question.

In summary, the students who participated in this investigation continued to view the content of high school literature study as too prescriptive and did not change their attitudes toward the study of literature as a result of completing critical thinking activities. However, most of them said that they had had to adjust their approach to reading and trying to understand the literature because of the critical thinking activities assigned.

The investigator addressed the implications that students' perceptions and attitudes have for improved English instruction in literature at the secondary level in the concluding chapter of this paper.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Much of the literature suggested that critical thinking is fostered best when taught through content (Collison, 1987; King, 1985; Kownslar, 1985; Marzano, et al., 1988; Paul, 1990; Paul, et al., 1989; Sadler, 1987; Tchudi, 1988). Course content is a vehicle which is already in place. The infusion of critical thinking through available content could result in the improved teaching of content and critical thinking.

More study needs to be undertaken in the area of English and critical thinking, particularly in relation to the study of literature. The use of critical thinking strategies has the potential to produce classroom instruction in literature that is more student-centered. The national reports published during the 1980s described the too frequent passive posture of secondary students. Although students need help in appreciating literature for its own sake, it is more important that they come to view the study of literature as an opportunity to improve their ability to think critically. A neglected area in English education research concerned the effect of infusing critical thinking into the study of literature on the perceptions and

attitudes of secondary students in relation to literary study. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine and interpret students' impressions of and attitudes toward a study of literature which emphasized critical thinking in order to gain insight into the following areas:

1. How do students perceive the study of literature based on previous experience?
2. How does an emphasis on critical thinking affect students' feelings about the study of literature?
3. To what extent do students feel that an emphasis on critical thinking affects their approach to literature?

The investigator used three sources of data collection in the study. They were a modified form of participant observation, interviews, and a reading attitude assessment. The investigator conducted interviews and administered reading attitude assessments at the beginning and end of the study. During a six-week study of literature, students completed critical thinking activities based on works by particular early American authors.

Limitations

As a teacher of English at South Caldwell High School, the researcher felt the need and had the opportunity to investigate students' impressions of and attitudes toward the study of literature, particularly the study of

literature emphasizing critical thinking. Functioning as both teacher and investigator may have been a limitation of this study. Although the investigator made every effort to avoid bias, to ensure that students and parents understood that student participation in the study was voluntary, and to ensure that grades would not be influenced negatively by participation in the study, students probably perceived the researcher as teacher. Another limitation may have been that time did not permit the investigator to determine the long-term effects of literature study emphasizing critical thinking on students' impressions and attitudes. An additional limitation may have been the use of a select group of students, particularly those identified as academically gifted.

Conclusions

Contrary to the belief of many secondary teachers, the ability of students, particularly those identified as academically gifted, to think critically is not intrinsic (Anderson, et al., 1944; Frank, 1969; Glaser, 1941; Grottenthaler, 1967; Hudgins, 1977; Nickerson, 1987; Rath et al., 1986). Too often previous experience has conditioned students to read superficially and to expect teachers to explain the material. Understandably, students so conditioned lack the confidence and ability to think critically. There was general agreement in the literature

that critical thinking should be fostered through content (Collison, 1987; Jones, et al., 1987; Joyce, 1985; King, 1985; Kownslar, 1985; Marzano, et al., 1988; McPeck, 1981; Sadler, 1987; Tchudi, 1988; Whimbey, 1984).

The literature suggested that an emphasis on critical thinking through the study of literature would make students more aware of the importance of improving their critical thinking ability. The restructuring or redesigning of traditional materials was an emphasis which expanded in the late 1980s as represented by Paul (1988) and Swartz and Perkins (1989). Although the students in this study needed much more practice with various critical thinking strategies, they did improve their understanding of critical thinking and did realize that critical thinking ability could be improved. Some students indicated that they were able, for example, to gain more from their reading by using some of the critical thinking strategies to read more critically. By the end of the study students demonstrated an increased awareness of critical thinking vocabulary.

As shown in Table 2, analysis of students' written responses to literature-based writing assignments provided data concerning students' level of competence in handling 10 of the critical thinking strategies identified by Paul et al. (1989) (See Table 2). Teacher estimates of the percentage of success on individual assignments ranged from 31% to 100%. Data from participant observation and

interviews indicated that most students recognized the benefits of reading and thinking critically. They felt that they could handle course content more successfully while improving an ability that was not restricted to one discipline. Although students basically perceived most literature course content as too prescriptive, they began to realize that their major emphasis should be on improving critical thinking strategies. Students began to view improved critical thinking as the goal of literature study and literature as the vehicle for working toward this goal.

Fillion (1981) wrote that students should study literature in a way that will result in reflectiveness, "the willingness and ability to contemplate the literary experience" (p. 41). Typically, students' willingness to try to understand literature is directly influenced by their level of confidence in their own ability to understand literature. Learning specific critical thinking strategies and practicing them through a study of literature not only should give them more confidence in approaching literature, but also should provide them with strategies to use in other contexts as well. As Fillion went on to say, "Learning literature may not be the only way to develop this reflectiveness, but it is certainly one way" (p. 41). Some authorities placed major emphasis on developing critical thinking through reading and/or literary analysis (Bezerra & Nader, 1987; Bushman & Bushman, 1986; Dimnet, 1928; Marx, et

al., 1987; O'Reilly, 1985; Tchudi, 1988; Tymoczko, 1985; Whimbey, 1975). Students in this study exhibited a greater "willingness to contemplate the literary experience," an attitude most often referred to in the literature as the critical spirit (Glaser, 1941; Glaser, 1985; Hudgins, 1977; Siegel, 1980).

Although many of the students in this study felt that the study of literature was important, most recognized a conflict between the traditional English curriculum and their own preferences. Also, they noted the prevalence of teacher-centered literature study. Most English teachers, in their desire to pass on literary heritage through the study of "the classics," have helped to shape students' negative attitudes toward the literature studied in most English classes. Although a course organized as a chronological study of American literature, for example, is by design rather prescriptive, the teacher should attempt to give students some opportunity to choose what pieces of literature they read and study. The teacher should make every effort to strengthen students' awareness of the influence of older literature on more recent literature.

Students' comments suggested also that teachers assume too much of the responsibility for explaining the literature, probably in an effort to make sure that students fully understand the literature being studied and to cover the amount of literature recommended or prescribed by

courses of study. Teachers do not allow students enough time to interact with the literature and do not help students develop the strategies needed to read and understand literature. Some content may need to be eliminated so that students can learn and/or practice critical thinking strategies.

Results of the Rhody Secondary Reading Attitude Assessment indicated that students generally had positive attitudes toward reading at the beginning of the study. At the end of the study, scores were almost identical. The generally high scores shown in Table 1 reflected the ability level of the participants who had been identified as academically gifted prior to the study (See Table 1).

There was no indication that an emphasis on critical thinking through activities based on specific pieces of early American literature had any effect on students' attitudes toward the study of literature. Students' attitudes toward the literature used in this study were shaped by the nature of the literature. No students liked the more historically important pieces by Crèvecoeur and Thomas Paine. For various reasons most students liked the three stories by Washington Irving. Those students who typically responded well to poetry liked William Cullen Bryant's "Thanatopsis."

The use of critical thinking activities encouraged most students to adjust their approach to the study of

literature. Students realized that they could no longer skim the literature for surface details and/or just read words hurriedly to get the reading finished. The use of critical thinking activities pushed them to move beyond recall of information. This change was particularly evident in relation to the writing assignments which emphasized the reading/writing/thinking connection (Boyer, 1985; Bushman & Bushman, 1986; Glatthorn, 1985; McGonigal, 1988; Newell, 1986; Olson, 1984; Petrosky, 1986; Sizer, 1984; Tierney, et al., 1989). Some students reported having to slow down their reading and/or having to reread portions of a selection. Others reported having to stop periodically to think about what they had read.

Because the use of critical thinking activities, especially the writing assignments, encouraged students to interact more with the literature, discussions of selections became more student-centered. The teacher assumed more of a facilitating role.

In summary, data gathered from participant observation, interviews, and reading attitude assessments allowed the investigator to draw conclusions concerning the basic research questions that guided this study. First, students viewed secondary literature programs as too prescriptive, but many viewed literature as the most important aspect of the study of English. Also, students did not change their attitudes toward early American literature because of the

writing activities emphasizing critical thinking. However, the writing assignments encouraged most of the students to alter their approaches to literature. As a result, they understood more of what they read, and they felt more confident about participating in discussions.

Recommendations

The information and increased understanding gained from this study provided a basis on which to offer recommendations for future study and research. Therefore, the following recommendations are offered for further research concerning secondary English students and the fostering of critical thinking:

1. Researchers could examine the extent to which interaction between the teacher and students in the English classroom affects the fostering of critical thinking.
2. Researchers could study the relationship between homogeneous grouping and the teaching of critical thinking.
3. Researchers could compare the perceptions and attitudes of students who have studied literature with an emphasis on critical thinking and those who have not.
4. Researchers could examine the extent to which writing in connection with reading produces critical thinking.

5. Researchers could examine the long-term effects of students' study of literature emphasizing critical thinking.
6. Researchers could study the extent to which students' own experiences affect their handling of literature.
7. Researchers could examine the extent to which students are able to transfer their critical thinking strategies to other subjects and/or areas of their lives.

Implications

The 16 academically gifted students who took part in this study experienced for the first time a study of literature which emphasized the learning and practicing of strategies in critical thinking more than the coverage of literature for its own sake. This shift in focus was new for them, but they began to realize the benefits of such a focus as they changed their approaches to literature. Although the study involved a small number of homogeneously grouped students, it provided insights which contributed to the body of knowledge needed to provide guidelines for redesigning secondary English curriculum in order to provide students greater opportunity to develop their ability to think critically.

To foster critical thinking through the study of literature, secondary English teachers must first accept the fostering of critical thinking as their highest priority. Teachers who do not view the fostering of critical thinking as more important than the teaching of literature itself should have the opportunity to interact with the research and other materials in the field of critical thinking. Then they will need to make a conscious decision to design or redesign their literature lessons to emphasis critical thinking, realizing that their own ability to think critically will change as the ability of their students changes. Others in the field of critical thinking have followed the lead of Paul et al. (1989) in producing materials to assist teachers in the task of formulating lessons which emphasize critical thinking. Assistance is available to help teachers move beyond the use of prescribed texts and the emphasis on recall of information too frequently characteristic of secondary teaching as pointed out by several national studies during the 1980s.

English teachers need to model critical thinking and help students to understand that learning how to think more critically is more useful than learning what to think about a particular piece of literature. Teachers and students must realize that learning to think critically about the literature being studied is more important than coverage of material even within the framework of a prescribed

curriculum. The pace of literature study must allow students ample time to practice critical thinking strategies as they read the literature and as they think and write about the literature. Time to write is essential so that students can frame their thinking more concretely. Unless they have time to think their own way through new ideas or concepts, students cannot move beyond what others believe and communicate to them. Teachers need to encourage them to realize that there is no one perspective on any issue and that perspectives are always changing. Thus, learning to think critically requires a critical spirit as well as an ability to utilize critical thinking strategies.

The literature studied in secondary English courses provides the opportunity for students to improve their ability to think critically and their ability to understand what they read. Critical thinking, particularly in relation to reading, will serve students beyond the classrooms and beyond their high school careers. Although it is important for students in English classes to develop an appreciation for literature, especially literature that reflects their own heritage, it is more important that they practice critical thinking. English teachers should accept their share of the responsibility for fostering critical thinking through course content.

Summary

Any attempt to improve classroom practice should include the perspective of students in the classroom. In relation to the study of literature it is important to know students' previous experiences studying literature. Also, because there is increased emphasis on the infusion of critical thinking into course content, it is important to know how the study of literature emphasizing critical thinking affects students. An understanding of students' perceptions and attitudes can assist curriculum planners and classroom teachers in designing courses that may help students improve their critical thinking ability.

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