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Critical Reading

PGCE Induction Workshop 2021

Aims

- To introduce you to the academic expectations of the PGCE programme.
- To give you an opportunity to develop the critical skills that are needed when studying at Masters level.
- To allow you to practise and apply the skill of critical reading before you begin the programme

PGCE Expectations

- Throughout your PGCE programme, you will be expected to critically reflect on your own & observed practice and engage with learning and reading that will inform your reflections.
- You will need to understand the critical role research plays in informing current practice and you will also undertake your own research project.
- To support the vital skill of criticality, this workshop will introduce you to critical thinking/reading and ensure you are better prepared to meet the demands of your PGCE year.

What is critical reading and why is it important?

Critical reading is inherently based upon critical thinking. A critical thinker will:

- question the initial concept
- invest time to read different perspectives
- analyse the evidence
- be aware that there are contrasting opinions
- understand the limitations of information



Let's think critically (a simplistic example)

Based on the one image, we could say that:

- all flowers are yellow
- all flowers are trumpet shaped
- all flower have a green stalk and leaves
- flowers only bloom when the sky is blue

Is this correct?

Of course not... This is one photographer's interpretation of a flower.

We base our understanding on a range of information that allows us to make an informed and evidence-based summary.

We synthesise the evidence and thinking critically to achieve our informed conclusion.



What is critical reading and why is it important?

To become critical readers, we need to apply the principles of critical thinking to our reading.



Facts v. Interpretation

To non-critical readers, texts and journal articles provide facts. Readers gain knowledge by replicating the statements within a text. To the critical reader, any single source provides only a single portrayal of the facts or an individual's "take" on the subject matter. Critical readers recognise not only *what* a text says, but also *how* that text portrays the subject matter. They recognise the various ways in which each and every source of information is the unique creation of an author.



A non-critical reader might read an education text to learn how to improve a specific aspect of their practice. A critical reader might read the same work to appreciate how a particular perspective can lead to a particular approach. A critical reader will question if this is a valuable perspective.

Why do we need to take a critical approach to reading?

- Remember author(s) will have made many decisions during the research and writing process, and each of these decisions is a potential topic for examination and debate, rather than for blind acceptance.
- You need to be prepared to step into the academic debate and to make your own evaluation of how much you are willing to accept what you read.
- A practical starting point, therefore, is to consider anything you read not as fact, but as the argument of the writer. Taking this starting point you will be ready to engage in critical reading.
- To enter that academic debate, you need to be informed and this means you need to read relevant research around that debate.

Criticality Vs Criticism

Remember that there is a difference.

The aim of critical reading is not to find fault, but to assess the strength of the evidence and the argument. It is just as useful to conclude that a study, or an article, presents very strong evidence and a well-reasoned argument, as it is to identify the studies or articles that are weak.

Criticality is an informed evaluation of the value of that source.

