Theoretical-Functional Conceptions of Pedagogical Practices Related to Critical Reading in Secondary Education: A Hermeneutical Theorization from the DBAs of Language

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ABSTRACT:

This article aims to construct a hermeneutic theorization of the theoretical-functional conceptions of pedagogical practices related to critical reading in upper secondary education, based on documentary analysis of the Basic Learning Rights for Language in tenth and eleventh grades and the Curricular Guidelines for Spanish Language. Methodologically, a qualitative hermeneutic approach was adopted, articulated with grounded theory procedures proposed by Strauss and Corbin: open, axial, and selective coding, constant comparison, categorical integration, and theoretical saturation. The analysis identified five central categories: critical reading as sociopolitical positioning toward discourse; argumentation as the organizing rationality of criticality; multimodality as the semiotic expansion of reading; critical orality as intersubjective construction of meaning; and assessment as an ambivalent device between metacognition and institutional regulation. The findings suggest that critical reading in upper secondary education cannot be reduced to an instrumental competence or a textual comprehension skill; rather, it should be understood as a situated hermeneutic-discursive praxis aimed at forming subjects capable of interpreting, questioning, and producing meanings in relation to social, cultural, media, political, and ideological discourses. It is concluded that pedagogical practices related to critical reading demand an epistemological reconfiguration of the teacher's role, didactic mediation, and assessment, since criticality acquires formative density only when articulated with argumentation, problematization, multimodal production, and sociopolitical reading of language.

Keywords: critical reading; upper secondary education; pedagogical practices; grounded theory; hermeneutics; Basic Learning Rights; multimodality; argumentation.

1. Introduction

Critical reading is one of the most complex formative problems in contemporary education, particularly at the secondary education level, where students are expected to consolidate processes of intellectual autonomy, argumentation, social participation and discursive production. In societies characterized by the accelerated circulation of information, the expansion of digital media, the polarization of public opinion and the proliferation of ideological discourses, critical reading can no longer be understood as a school skill limited to the identification of main ideas, inferences or textual structures. Critical reading is installed, rather, as an epistemic, ethical and political practice through which the subject interprets the world, questions the regimes of truth that organize it and produces argued positions in the face of socially situated discourses.

From this perspective, critical reading is not a merely cognitive competence, but a form of relationship with language and reality. Critical reading implies understanding that texts, media, images, oral discourses and audiovisual productions are not neutral devices, but symbolic constructions crossed by intentionalities, ideologies, silences, hierarchies and power relations. For this reason, the problem of critical reading cannot be approached exclusively from the didactics of textual comprehension; it requires a broader reflection on the pedagogical, epistemological and functional conceptions that guide teaching practices.

The Basic Rights of Language Learning for secondary education introduce relevant elements for this discussion, by proposing that tenth grade students assume a critical and proactive position in front of the media, analyze cultural, social and ideological discourses, value worldviews and produce audiovisual texts articulating verbal and non-verbal resources. In eleventh degree, the emphasis shifts to the understanding of arguments, positions, fallacies, oral discourses and social, political and ideological implications. These elements allow us to infer that critical reading in secondary education is configured as a field of discursive, argumentative, multimodal and civic training.

However, this curricular horizon also presents tensions. The first tension is located between an emancipatory conception of critical reading and its possible reduction to measurable performance. The second is situated between the recognition of the ideological dimension of discourse and the persistence of pedagogical practices focused on literality, the reproduction of information and the correct answer. The third tension emerges between the multimodal expansion of the object of reading and the risk of assuming audiovisual production as a simple technical innovation, without problematizing its semiotic, cultural and political implications.

In this framework, this article is guided by the following research question: what theoretical-functional conceptions about pedagogical practices related to critical reading emerge from the hermeneutical analysis of the tenth and eleventh grade Language DBAs and the Spanish Language Curricular Guidelines?

The objective of the article is to construct an interpretative theorization on these conceptions, from a qualitative, hermeneutical and grounded perspective, which allows understanding critical reading as a pedagogical praxis of meaning, discursive positioning, multimodal production and citizenship training.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Critical reading as a sociocultural and political practice

Critical reading has been approached from various theoretical traditions that coincide in questioning the reduction of reading to a technical operation of decoding. From critical pedagogy, Freire (1970) argues that reading the word implies reading the world; therefore, reading is a practice of historical awareness, problematization of reality and social transformation. This perspective shifts the act of reading from the individual psychological plane to the political field of meaning production.

Cassany (2006), from the perspective of critical literacy, argues that critical reading involves identifying the author's intentions, recognizing the present and absent voices, analyzing the interests that run through the text and understanding the social place from which the discourse is produced. Critical reading, understood in this way, is not limited to understanding the explicit content, but requires questioning the mechanisms of discursive construction of reality.

Van Dijk (2009), from the critical analysis of discourse, provides a fundamental understanding: discourses participate in the reproduction or questioning of social power. Consequently, teaching critical reading implies training subjects capable of identifying how language legitimizes inequalities, naturalizes ideologies, organizes social representations and produces forms of symbolic domination.

From these perspectives, critical reading can be conceptualized as a sociocultural and political practice that articulates understanding, interpretation, suspicion, argumentation, and positioning. It is not only a matter of reading texts, but of interpreting discourses situated in historical, institutional and cultural plots.

2.2. Pedagogical practices and hermeneutic mediation

Pedagogical practices are historical configurations of knowledge, power, subjectivity and action. They are not simple teaching techniques, but ways of organizing the relationship between knowledge, the teacher, the student, language and the world. In the case of critical reading, pedagogical practice defines what is meant by reading, what type of reading subject is intended to be formed, which texts are legitimized, which questions are privileged, and what forms of evaluation are considered valid.

A pedagogical practice oriented towards critical reading cannot be limited to comprehension guides, literal questionnaires or structural identification exercises. It must generate conditions for students to problematize discourses, contrast sources, argue positions, recognize ideologies, interpret images, listen critically and produce texts with social intentions. In this sense, the teacher acts as a hermeneutical mediator: he does not deliver closed meanings, but opens up possibilities of interpretation, confrontation and reconstruction of meaning.

Hermeneutical mediation requires recognizing the student as a historical subject, bearer of previous experiences, beliefs, languages, memories and positions. Therefore, reading critically also implies confronting one's horizon of understanding. Critical reading not only transforms the student's relationship with the texts, but also with himself and with others.

2.3. Multimodality and contemporary critical literacy

The expansion of digital, audiovisual, and transmedia media has profoundly transformed the ways of reading and producing meaning. Kress (2010) argues that contemporary communication is organized through multiple semiotic modes: word, image, sound, movement, spatiality, color, gestures, and design. In this context, critical reading must be broadened towards a multimodal literacy capable of analyzing how different systems of signs produce meanings.

Multimodality should not be understood as a simple diversification of teaching resources, but as an epistemological transformation of the object of reading. Critically reading a cartoon, a video, a digital news item, an advertising image or an oral intervention involves interpreting complex forms of articulation between verbal and non-verbal codes. In this sense, contemporary critical literacy requires analyzing not only what is said, but also how what is communicated is organized visually, soundly, gesturally and technologically.

Multimodal production, therefore, can be constituted as a critical practice when it allows the student to represent, question and resignify the world. However, if it is reduced to the technical production of audiovisual formats, it loses its emancipatory power. The pedagogical key is not in making multimodal products, but in

problematizing the ways in which these products construct reality, identity, memory, culture and power.

2.4. Argumentation, orality and trial formation

Argumentation is a central component of critical reading, as it allows us to examine reasons, justify positions, distinguish facts from opinions, identify fallacies and construct well-founded points of view. Paul and Elder (2003) conceive of critical thinking as a disciplined form of reasoning that evaluates information, inferences, assumptions, and consequences. From this perspective, argumentation is not only a discursive technique, but a condition of intellectual autonomy.

However, school argumentation runs the risk of becoming excessively formalized when it is reduced to rigid schemes of theses, arguments, and conclusions. Critical reading requires a situated argumentation, sensitive to the context, to the ethics of dialogue and to the power relations that run through the discourse. At this point, orality acquires a fundamental importance.

Critical listening allows us to recognize that oral discourses also produce ideology, identity and legitimacy. Critical listening involves interpreting postures, accents, silences, emphasis, sociolinguistic variants, communicative intentions and relationships between interlocutors. Thus, critical reading expands towards a hermeneutic of the voice, where the classroom becomes a discursive community of respectful confrontation and collective construction of meaning.

3. Methodology

The study was developed from a qualitative approach of hermeneutical orientation, supported by procedures of the grounded theory proposed by Strauss and Corbin (2002). This methodological articulation made it possible to interpret the explicit and implicit meanings present in the curricular documents, as well as to construct emerging theoretical categories through a systematic process of codification.

The documentary corpus was made up of the DBAs of Language of the tenth and eleventh grades and conceptual fragments of the Curricular Guidelines of Spanish Language. These documents were assumed as pedagogical and curricular texts that not only guide teaching, but also produce certain conceptions about language, reading, argumentation, evaluation and the formation of the subject.

The analytical procedure was developed in five moments. First, a decomposition of units of meaning was carried out, taking complete sentences and significant paragraphs as units of analysis. Second, open coding was applied to identify concepts, latent meanings, and emerging codes. Third, axial coding was carried out to relate codes by affinity, causality, complementarity, dependence, and tension. Fourth, selective coding was carried out to integrate the categories into explanatory constructs with a higher level of abstraction. Finally, theoretical saturation was evaluated through the recurrence, conceptual density and explanatory capacity of the categories.

Table 1. Methodological coding matrix

Analytical phase	Procedure applied	Interpretive purpose	Categorical product
Analytical decomposition	Segmentation of significant sentences and paragraphs of the DBAs and Curricular Guidelines	Identify minimum units of meaning related to critical reading, discourse, argumentation, multimodality, and evaluation	Documentary units of analysis
Open Coding	Identification of explicit and implicit concepts and latent meanings	Name emerging pedagogical and discursive phenomena	Initial codes
Axial coding	Relationship between codes by affinity, causality, opposition, complementarity or dependence	Construct intermediate categories with conceptual density	Axial categories
Selective Coding	Integration of categories into central explanatory cores	Formulate a substantive theory on critical reading in secondary education	Central Category
Theoretical saturation	Review of recurrence, density and explanatory robustness	Validate the hermeneutical consistency of the findings	Emergent theoretical construct

4. Results

4.1. Critical reading as a socio-political position vis-à-vis discourse

The first emerging category allows us to understand critical reading as a practice of socio-political positioning. In the tenth grade DBAs, the student is called upon to assume a critical and proactive position in the face of the mass media, analyze their social influence, evaluate worldviews and recognize ideological positions. This curricular formulation shifts reading from textual comprehension to the critical interpretation of discourses that participate in the shaping of public opinion.

The latent meaning of this category lies in the conception of the reader as a subject of judgment. The student does not appear as a receiver of information, but as an interpreter who must recognize intentions, ideologies, discursive strategies and social effects. Critical reading is thus a practice of epistemological vigilance in the face of the discourses that circulate socially.

This category is close to the critical analysis of discourse, in that it recognizes that language is not neutral. However, it also shows a tension: although the need to analyze ideological discourses is declared, it is not always explicit how pedagogical practices should address the power structures that produce such discourses. Consequently, there is a risk that critical reading will be reduced to issuing opinions about the media, without reaching a deep understanding of the relationships between discourse, hegemony and subjectivation.

From a second-level theoretical inference, it can be argued that this category configures a socio-political conception of critical reading, in which reading is equivalent to disputing socially produced meanings. Pedagogical practice, therefore, must be oriented towards forming readers capable of interrogating not only the content of the text, but also the historical and ideological conditions of its production.

4.2. Argumentation as an organizing rationality of criticality

The second emerging category places argumentation as the functional axis of critical reading. Eleventh grade DBAs emphasize understanding the social, political, and ideological arguments, positions, facts, opinions, fallacies, and implications of speeches. This recurrence allows us to infer that criticality is conceived as an evaluative rationality, aimed at examining the quality, coherence and relevance of the reasons that sustain a discourse.

Argumentation appears as a device of intellectual autonomy. The critical student must distinguish between information and manipulation, between opinion and argument, between evidence and fallacy. This orientation is especially relevant in contexts of disinformation, polarization and massive circulation of persuasive discourses.

However, the category presents an important epistemological tension. Critical reading can be impoverished if argumentation is reduced to a formal classification of fallacies or logical structures. Identifying a fallacy does not necessarily imply understanding the social conditions that make such reasoning effective. For this reason, argumentation must be articulated with a hermeneutic of context, an ethics of dialogue and a political reading of discourse.

The doctoral inference that emerges from this category is that critical reading requires an expanded argumentative rationality: logical, because it evaluates reasons; hermeneutics, because it interprets meanings; ethics, because it recognizes the other as an interlocutor; and political, because it understands that every argument participates in power disputes.

4.3. Multimodality as a semiotic expansion of reading

The third emerging category corresponds to multimodality as an expansion of the object of reading. Tenth grade DBAs propose the production of audiovisual texts in which verbal and non-verbal elements are articulated, as well as scripts that characterize cultures, contexts, and relationships of meaning. This orientation recognizes that meaning does not circulate exclusively in written texts, but also in images, sounds, movements, planes, gestures and audiovisual formats.

The epistemological importance of this category lies in the fact that it broadens the notion of reading. Critical reading no longer means just interpreting words, but understanding complex semiotic assemblages. A caricature, a video, a film, a digital news item or an audiovisual discourse produces meanings through visual, sound and narrative resources that require critical analysis.

However, multimodality contains a pedagogical ambivalence. It can become critical practice when it allows the analysis of stereotypes, cultural representations, discursive silences and social imaginaries. But it can also be reduced to superficial innovation when it is limited to producing audiovisual products without reflection on the meanings they produce.

The doctoral inference derived from this category is that contemporary critical reading should be understood as critical multimodal literacy. This literacy does not only consist of using different formats, but also of problematizing the ways in which visual, sound, and verbal signs configure realities, identities, and power relations.

4.4. Critical orality and intersubjective construction of meaning

The fourth emerging category recognizes orality as a space for critical reading. In eleventh grade, the DBA states that the student must understand the arguments of his interlocutors, infer dialectal, social and geographical variants, and analyze ideological implications of the discourses he hears. This perspective gives epistemological status to listening.

Critical orality breaks with a school tradition that has privileged the written text as the main object of reading. From this category, listening is also reading: reading voices, accents, silences, emphasis, intentions, positions and relationships

between interlocutors. The oral word becomes a territory of social interpretation.

This category has a high pedagogical relevance because it turns the classroom into a discursive community. Critical reading does not occur only in the individual relationship between student and text, but in the interaction with other subjects who think, argue, contradict and resignify. In this sense, criticism is not monological, but dialogical and intersubjective.

Tension arises when orality is evaluated solely from formal criteria of fluency, clarity or structure, without paying attention to its political and cultural dimension. A critical pedagogy of orality must value linguistic variants, the experiences of subjects and situated forms of construction of meaning.

From this category it is inferred that critical reading must be extended towards a hermeneutic of the voice. The critical student not only reads written texts; interprets interlocutors, communicative contexts, social marks of speech and discursive positions.

4.5. Evaluation of critical reading: between metacognition and institutional regulation

The fifth emerging category relates to evaluation. DBAs introduce learning evidence, analysis criteria, discrimination between facts and opinions, identification of fallacies, and evaluation of oral interventions. This orientation seeks to make critical learning visible through observable performances.

Assessment can play a formative role when it promotes metacognition. In this sense, evaluating critical reading implies helping the student to review their interpretations, justify their inferences, recognize the quality of their arguments, and become aware of their own discursive processes.

However, this category also reveals a contradiction. Critical reading, due to its open, situated and problematizing nature, cannot be completely enclosed in rigid indicators. When evaluation becomes a control mechanism, it can tame criticism and transform it into an expected school performance. The student then learns to appear critical, rather than to think critically.

The doctoral inference is that the evaluation of critical reading must be processual, dialogic, situated, and argumentative. It should not be limited to verifying correct answers, but to understanding how the student constructs, problematizes and sustains meanings in the face of complex discourses.

5. Discussion

The results allow us to affirm that the tenth and eleventh grade Language DBAs configure a broad conception of critical reading, in which media analysis, understanding of ideologies, argumentation, orality, multimodality and discursive production converge. This conception distances itself from reductionist approaches focused exclusively on literal comprehension and opens up possibilities for a language pedagogy oriented towards critical citizenship training.

In dialogue with Freire, the findings allow us to argue that critical reading retains an emancipatory dimension when it is articulated with the reading of the world. However, this emancipatory power depends on pedagogical practice not reducing criticality to school technique. Critical reading requires problematizing the social conditions in which discourses are produced and circulated.

From Cassany, the category of critical literacy allows us to understand that texts must be analyzed as social practices. DBAs move in this direction by proposing the valuation of worldviews, ideological positions, and media discourses. However, the pedagogical challenge is to prevent this analysis from being limited to a superficial identification of points of view.

In relation to Van Dijk, the results show the need to articulate critical reading with the analysis of discursive power. The school must not only teach how to understand texts, but also how to recognize how discourses legitimize inequalities, produce social representations and organize forms of symbolic domination. This perspective is central so that critical reading is not diluted in opinion.

Since Kress, multimodality appears as an essential field for contemporary critical reading. DBAs recognize audiovisual production and verbal and non-verbal resources; However, the contribution of multimodal theory allows us to deepen the need to analyze how semiotic modes construct meanings and subjectivities.

Finally, since Paul and Elder, argumentation and the identification of fallacies are necessary, but not sufficient, elements. Critical reading requires intellectual standards, but also historical awareness, ethical sensitivity, and socio-political understanding. Critical thinking cannot be neutral when applied to discourses crossed by interests, exclusions and struggles for meaning.

6. Emergent theorizing

The central category derived from the analysis can be formulated as follows:

Critical reading in secondary education is configured as a hermeneutical-discursive, socio-political and multimodal praxis, through which the student interprets, problematizes and produces meanings in the face of socially situated discourses, through processes of argumentation, critical listening, ideological analysis, textual production and reflective evaluation.

This theorization integrates three levels:

First, an epistemic level, according to which critical reading constitutes a form of situated knowledge. The student not only understands information; it builds judgment, confronts perspectives and resignifies its relationship with the world.

Second, a didactic-functional level, in which pedagogical practices must organize experiences of discursive analysis, media reading, argumentative debate, multimodal production and reflective evaluation.

Third, a critical-political level, where reading is understood as a practice of denaturalization of ideologies, problematization of discourses and formation of critical citizenship.

This substantive theory allows us to overcome the instrumental understanding of critical reading and place it as the organizing principle of a pedagogy of language oriented to discursive consciousness.

7. Conclusions

The documentary analysis carried out allows us to conclude that the theoretical-functional conceptions of pedagogical practices related to critical reading in secondary education are configured around a broad understanding of language as a social, historical, cultural and ideological practice. Critical reading does not appear only as a comprehension skill, but as a positioning practice in the face of media, political, cultural, oral, audiovisual and argumentative discourses.

Likewise, it is concluded that argumentation constitutes one of the functional nuclei of critical reading, but its pedagogical treatment must avoid formalism. The identification of arguments, positions, and fallacies only acquires critical value when it is articulated with the analysis of the context, the ethics of dialogue, and the understanding of the power relations that run through discourses.

Multimodality emerges as an essential dimension of contemporary critical reading. However, its pedagogical power depends on its not being assumed as a simple technical production, but as a critical analysis of the ways in which images, sounds, gestures, planes and words produce social representations.

Critical orality is another relevant finding. Critical listening implies reading positions, accents, variants, intentions and ideologies present in the voice of the interlocutors. For this reason, critical reading must be understood as an intersubjective, dialogical and situated practice.

Finally, the evaluation of critical reading must be rethought. It is not enough to measure performance through closed evidence; it is necessary to build evaluative processes that favor metacognition, argumentation, ethical reflection and the problematization of meanings. Evaluating critical reading should not mean taming criticism, but rather making visible the

process by which the student learns to think, interpret and position himself.

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