
Fostering Critical Thinking Skills: Strategies for Use with Intermediate Gifted Readers

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Amidst the sea of educational reform—No Child Left Behind, Response to Intervention, and state testing—lies the gifted reader. We've all had them. The reader who devours all the books in your classroom library. The child who excels and surpasses his or her grade-level peers in reading assessments and activities. The reader who yearns for something more. As teachers, we want so badly to provide this for them, but oftentimes the pressures of instructing our struggling readers and ensuring that all of our students are meeting benchmarks get in the way. Sometimes we just don't feel qualified to teach our gifted readers, or we don't know where to start. Despite our own trepidations we, as teachers, owe our gifted readers the opportunity for that "something more." As with our struggling readers, our gifted readers should be met where they're at and be given the chance to grow. One way we can ensure that growth is by incorporating critical thinking skills into the instruction of our intermediate gifted readers.

The infusion of good critical thinking skills is important for all students because it

leads to increased academic rigor and deeper comprehension, but this is especially true for intermediate gifted readers who crave meaningful engagement with literature (McCollister & Sayler, 2010). In fact, "Because of their advanced cognitive abilities and interest in ideas, theories, and the abstract, gifted readers will desire to go deeper into ideas, to talk longer and in greater depth" (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986, p. 134). Gifted readers benefit from the integration of critical thinking into instruction. Three successful methods that can be used to foster critical thinking skills in intermediate gifted readers, and be differentiated to meet the needs of all learners, are as follow: (1) inquiry-based learning, (2) literature discussions, and (3) critical literacy. Before learning more about these methods, it is important to understand the characteristics and needs of gifted readers.

Gifted Readers

Characteristics of Gifted Readers

Young children and students in the primary grades may begin to exhibit characteristics of gifted readers early on. These characteristics might include learning to read very quickly after entering school or even prior to formal reading instruction (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986). Although teachers frequently recognize students' gifted abilities in the primary grades, often it is not until these students enter the intermediate grades that they might be formally identified as gifted readers. Because formal identification is usually done in the intermediate grades, this article will focus on gifted readers at the intermediate level, which for this purpose will include 3rd through 5th grades. Criteria and eligibility for gifted students vary widely from district to district. For this reason, gifted children are often identified in different ways and at different times. In addition, giftedness is not limited to one domain. A student may be gifted in one area, such as mathematics, but not in another

(Wood, 2008). Therefore, a gifted student may not constitute a gifted reader and vice versa.

Experts in the field of gifted education generally agree that gifted readers read and comprehend text two or more years above grade level (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986; Reis, 2008; Wood, 2008). Other characteristics of gifted readers are as follow:

- Exhibit voracious reading habits (Halsted, 1990; Reis, 2008; Vosslamber, 2002; Wood, 2008)
- Read a variety of literature (Halsted, 1990; Reis, 2008; Weber, 2010)
- Demonstrate the ability to incorporate background knowledge and experience (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986)
- Use advanced processing and higher-level thinking skills (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986; Reis, 2008; Weber, 2010; Wood, 2008)
- Use advanced language skills (Reis, 2008; Wood, 2008)
- Read to learn, rather than learn to read (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986; Wood, 2008).

Although these are common characteristics of gifted readers, they are not exclusive. Like all students, gifted readers differ in abilities and learning styles. They come from different backgrounds, and they might have different reading levels as well as varied interests (Weber, 2010). Just as teachers differentiate instruction for their regular students, they also need to differentiate instruction for gifted readers. Despite the variations among gifted readers, they share a few academic needs that are different from those of their peers.

Needs of Gifted Readers

With the ever-increasing demands being placed on teachers, they often complain about not having enough time to do all the things that they would like to do or know that they should do. Differentiating reading instruction is a time-intensive task, and teachers often place a majority

of their focus on their struggling readers. Because advanced and gifted readers are already at or above grade level and have met district and state benchmarks, they often get left behind (Weber, 2010; Wood, 2008). Regardless of this situation, it is important that every student make progress in the area of reading. Therefore, whether teachers are instructing district-identified gifted readers or those whom they believe to be gifted based on their professional opinion, it is important that teachers do not neglect the unique learning needs of gifted readers.

Because gifted readers usually make up only a small percentage of students in a classroom, they benefit from homogeneous grouping (Wood, 2008). Teachers tend to put students in mixed ability groups, which is beneficial for most students. Although this heterogeneous grouping is not harmful to gifted readers and may be advantageous from time to time, “gifted readers prefer and should be grouped with peers who work at similar ability levels” (Wood, 2008, p. 21). The advantage of grouping gifted readers together is that it makes it easier to differentiate curriculum and instruction for this particular group.

Regardless of the content being taught, gifted readers require appropriate pacing (Reis, 2008; VanTassel-Baska, 2003; Wood, 2008). Some teachers believe that gifted learners act out or misbehave because they are bored. Appropriate pacing will ensure that this does not happen and that the needs of the gifted reader are being met: “The gifted typically enjoy a rapid pace that matches their mental quickness” (VanTassel-Baska, 2003, p. 4). Although this may be true, gifted readers still need explicit instruction focused on higher-level thinking and processing (VanTassel-Baska, 2003; Wood, 2008). Along with differentiated curriculum and appropriate pacing comes independence and student choice. Gifted readers are often creative thinkers and should be given various options to display their learning. Sally M. Reis (2008), an expert in the field of gifted education, notes that independent

reading choices and writing options as well as independent study and project opportunities are important strategies for differentiating instruction and curriculum for gifted readers.

Lastly, gifted readers need to be exposed to challenging literature (Reis, 2008; Wood, 2008). As mentioned previously, gifted readers have reached a point where they are reading to learn rather than learning to read (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986; Wood, 2008). Because gifted readers have already acquired the necessary skills to read text, most typical basal readers and reading textbooks will not meet their needs (Wood, 2008). Gifted readers need to be given opportunities to build on previously learned comprehension strategies and expand their vocabulary. They need to be taught how to think more deeply about texts. One way that they can be taught how to do this is through the use of critical thinking skills. Before looking at how to incorporate critical thinking skills into the instruction of gifted readers, it is important to understand what critical thinking means and why it is necessary and beneficial for students.

Critical Thinking

Defining Critical Thinking

Critical thinking requires students to think more deeply about what they read and learn. Dr. Richard Paul and Dr. Linda Elder (2008), experts in the field of critical thinking, define critical thinking as “the art of analyzing and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it” (p. 2). Critical thinkers are open-minded and are able to generate questions, interpret abstract ideas, draw conclusions, and effectively communicate their thinking to others (Paul & Elder, 2008). Students who think critically have a strong sense of metacognition. Because critical thinking forces students to go beyond surface-level comprehension, it requires determination and rigor. Critical thinking is not an innate skill, and, therefore, it needs to be explicitly taught (Johnson, 2001; White, 2010).

Importance of Critical Thinking

Students need to be challenged beyond simple comprehension strategies and taught how to think critically. This is important for all students, but it is even more important for gifted readers who are often able to utilize critical thinking skills earlier than their grade-level peers. As gifted readers become more familiar with critical thinking skills and are able to use them consistently, they are able to make connections across subject areas and disciplines. Critical thinking boosts academic growth through asking questions, evaluating, problem solving, and making decisions (McCollister & Sayler, 2010). Although it may look different when used with regular education students, critical thinking increases academic rigor for *all* students, which is the ultimate goal for educators. Teachers want their students to leave their classrooms as capable, thoughtful thinkers who are able to apply what they know to other situations.

Teachers might shy away from teaching critical thinking to their gifted readers because they, themselves, do not feel that their own skills are adequate, but David A. White (2010) states that “teachers will teach themselves while they teach their students—a collaborative endeavor improving everyone involved in it” (p. 19). As teachers venture forward and begin to incorporate more critical thinking into their instruction, they will find that their students will become more thoughtful consumers of information; and teachers will grow in their own critical thinking skills and in their ability to develop those skills in their students. Specific strategies that teachers can use to foster critical thinking in intermediate gifted readers include inquiry-based learning, book discussions, and critical literacy.

Inquiry-Based Learning

Inquiry-based learning engages students in the learning process and results in meaningful

understanding. Owens, Hester, and Teale (2002) note that “school has traditionally focused on having students answer questions; inquiry-based learning turns that on its head, involving children in formulating engaging questions and then participating in various language and literacy experiences to answer them” (p. 616). Many students can memorize facts and regurgitate them back for tests and quizzes only to forget them later, but the type of engagement exhibited in inquiry-based learning will result in new understandings and connections to the world. In addition, “classroom inquiry nurtures social responsibility, and living a socially responsible life means to live a life of inquiry” (Wolk, 2009, p. 666).

Inquiry-based learning begins with an essential question, which then compels students to work through a process to “explore and address the real-world problem articulated by the question” (Wilhelm, 2007, p. 8). After the question has been asked, students then work through the cycle of inquiry that incorporates investigating, creating, discussing, and reflecting in order to find a solution to the problem or an answer to the question (Bruce & Bishop, 2002). The cycle of inquiry-based learning can take on various forms and can be adapted to meet the needs of diverse learners, as well as classroom teachers.

Approaches to Inquiry-Based Learning

Inquiry-based learning is most successful when it develops from topics that are of interest to students, but it can also be beneficial for teachers to be more directly involved by providing guidelines and topics from which students can choose (Owens et al., 2002). Teachers can decide to approach inquiry differently depending on time and flexibility of the curriculum. Regardless of the specific approach used, an inquiry approach in general “is a powerful alternative supported by current research. It ‘uncovers’ the same curricular content by putting students in the position

of operating on and interpreting the required material” (Wilhelm, 2007, p. 9). While printed text is still a viable option to use with inquiry-based learning, technology motivates and sustains student interest, provides unique resources and types of information, and affords opportunities for extending students’ reading and writing practices into multimedia composition and comprehension (Owens et al., 2002).

Inquiry Through Technology

Whether inquiry topics are self-selected by students or provided by the teacher as part of a larger learning focus, technology can be a valuable tool. The Internet can be used to research and investigate topics using websites, videos, and online encyclopedias; this research can be done on computers or iPads. Students can then create projects or other means to share their learning by designing *PowerPoint* presentations, posters, brochures, or videos. Later, students can be given opportunities to discuss and reflect on their findings using technology tools like blogs or wikis. Before attempting to implement inquiry-based learning in the classroom, it is important to understand how it is different from a typical research project. Owens et al. (2002) clarify the difference between the two:

Students select a topic of interest to research; they formulate questions about the topic; gather, sift, and synthesize information, and finally do something with it. The last component is often the most difficult aspect for many students, but it is what distinguishes inquiry-based projects from typical school research projects. Inquiry involves more than reporting on a topic, it requires students to move beyond the Who, What, Where, When questions that so often form the basis of classroom research projects. . . . They are pushed to expand their understandings by creating new connections. (p. 617)

For example, Mrs. Smith's 4th-grade class is learning about the different regions of the United States and is currently focusing on the Southeast region. The textbook gives an overview of the region, touching on some historical places and landmarks that shape the region, but it does not go very deep into any one part. Mrs. Smith forms small interest groups of gifted readers based on the various topics and locations that relate to the Southeast region, and since inquiry-based learning is beneficial for all learners, Mrs. Smith can also choose to teach the unit using an inquiry approach with the entire class.

Small groups then work together to write an essential question. A group inquiring about Montgomery, Alabama, and the Civil Rights Movement might ask the question, "Why did the United States need a Civil Rights Movement?" Mrs. Smith may need to assist groups in order to help them focus and refine their questions. Groups then use technology to investigate and research their chosen topics, while searching for answers to their essential question. Once the groups have acquired a sufficient amount of research and evidence, they then select a means in which to share their inquiries with others.

The group investigating the Civil Rights Movement might choose to create a *PowerPoint* presentation with photographs of the movement, factual evidence, and hyperlinks to videos which contain interviews of people who experienced these historical events. The group may also choose to write a skit to dramatize their learning and videotape it using an iPad or Flip camera. The students could then use their video to create an iMovie or similar multimedia presentation that incorporates music, text, and transitions. After they have shared their learning, this group may conduct a class discussion about the Civil Rights Movement or possibly post some discussion points on the class website where students can blog their responses or participate in an online discussion. This example of Mrs. Smith's classroom affirms the thinking of Owens et al. (2002) who state that "students

are no longer limited by the materials available at their school . . . nor are they confined to studying topics presented in their social studies or science textbooks. Instead, they can use these as starting points from which to extend and refine their exploration" (p. 620). Although the integration of technology helps make this possible, it also poses some challenges.

It is clear that technology can offer many avenues for inquiry, but it can also present safety and management issues. Although school districts usually have safeguards in place to protect students while browsing the Internet, these safeguards are not always 100% effective. One way to ensure that students are visiting only teacher-approved websites is to find or create a WebQuest, which is "an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information learners interact with comes from resources on the Internet" (Dodge, 1997, p. 1). WebQuests contain an *introduction* that sets the stage, a *task* that is attainable and engaging, a set of *information sources*, a description of the *process, guidance* in the form of questions or assignments, and a *closure* that brings closure to the quest and summarizes student learning (Dodge, 1997). Providing students with the opportunity to inquire and learn on their own is a valuable experience, so whether teachers choose to use a guided approach, such as a WebQuest, or one that allows for more student independence, it is important to provide the students with explicit instructions and proper modeling. Owens et al. (2002) provide general guidelines to use when integrating technology with inquiry-based learning. The following are their ABCs of observations and lessons learned as a result of their experiences with inquiry-based learning (pp. 623-624):

- **"A: Approach with enthusiasm"** – It is important for students to see that the teacher is enthusiastic about the inquiry task and that this enthusiasm is evident as he or she models the inquiry process.

- “**B: Beware of hyperleaping**” – It is easy for students to get sidetracked while searching on the Internet. For this reason, it is important to teach students how to narrow the focus of their topics so that their research can be concentrated and meaningful. A well-written essential question will help with this.
- “**C: Critical thinking skills**” – Students need to know how to question sources and decide whether or not they are appropriate to the task. They need to be taught how to evaluate websites and Internet sources for their validity and accuracy.
- “**D: Delve into topics while protecting students**” – As mentioned previously, even with numerous safeguards in place, Internet research can still result in inappropriate material. Teachers need to be aware of what websites students are visiting and should provide students with student-friendly search engines. Teachers may want to preview websites in advance and provide students with a list of approved websites for research, possibly in the form of a Web-Quest as cited previously.
- “**E: Expand horizons**” – Nowadays students tend to be pretty “tech savvy” and can often easily find their way to their favorite websites. It is important for teachers to help students realize that there are many other interesting and informative websites available that will support their research and offer new perspectives and opportunities to learn.
- “**F: Facilitate the process**” – The most important thing the teacher needs to do is fulfill the role of facilitator. The teacher should be consistently modeling the process, checking in with students, asking questions, and helping students move along in the inquiry cycle.
- “**G: Go for it**” – Teachers should not be apprehensive about inquiry-based learning or the integration of technology that goes

along with it. Rather than expecting to be able to do it all at once, teachers should focus on starting small by experimenting with and refining parts of the process until they feel confident with the cycle as whole.

When properly modeled and purposefully planned, technology can certainly enhance inquiry-based learning; however, Owens et al. (2002) emphasize that technology “is not the focus of the learning, but it provides an essential vehicle for getting to the destination. . . . The inquiry—what the student wants to learn—provides the fuel for the vehicle. Without fuel, the vehicle is useless” (p. 620). Technology can be that vehicle that takes students beyond memorization and surface-level learning to help them develop their critical thinking skills. Literature discussions serve as another way to extend and refine students’ thinking.

Literature Discussions

There is always power in rich conversation, especially when that conversation is centered on literature. Just as some adults enjoy participating in book clubs, children also enjoy getting together to talk about books. Students not only enjoy book clubs, but meaningful classroom and small-group discussions about literature help students develop important academic and social skills. Literature discussions help students clarify thoughts, solve problems, revise their thinking, and make connections; they also teach children what it feels like to belong and how to get along with others (Cole, 2003). Literature discussions can take several forms and may differ from one another, but regardless, “as kids are motivated to substantiate, validate, investigate, and evaluate their responses for book talks, they are internalizing a real life process that will be carried across the curriculum” (p. xviii). Despite how literature discussions are structured, it is clear that they benefit students both socially and intellectually. One specific framework for

literature discussions that will be explained further is Socratic seminars.

Socratic Seminars

Socratic seminars are one way to incorporate meaningful student discussion into the instruction of gifted readers. The term *Socratic seminar* “is derived from an ancient form of discourse—Socratic dialogue: Through doubt and systematic questioning of another person, one gets to ultimate truth” (Tredway, 1995, p. 26). Centered around questioning, Socratic seminars allow students to have deep, thoughtful conversations that require them to think and participate as active learners. Tredway recognizes the critical thinking that emerges through the use of Socratic seminars:

As students consider different—and often conflicting—ideas, they “make meaning,” that is, they think deeply and critically about concepts; look at ethical quandaries; and develop moral principles. They thereby refine their critical thinking skills and deepen their collective understanding of the material they discuss—the main objectives of the process. (p. 26)

Socratic seminars and questioning help develop the critical thinking skills that teachers want gifted readers to possess. The goal of critical thinking is instituting a higher level of thought. Socratic seminars cultivate that higher level of thought through self-directed questioning. Socratic questioning demonstrates the importance of questioning as part of the learning process, and it promotes digging beyond the surface of ideas and appreciating how questioning encourages deep learning (Paul & Elder, 2007). In order to incorporate Socratic seminars into the classroom, it is important to understand how they work.

Tredway (1995) suggests that an effective Socratic seminar be conducted using the following process:

- **Students read a common text before the seminar.** For the purposes of gifted readers, teachers would want this text to be quality literature; however, Socratic seminars can also be conducted with science, social studies, or even math-related texts.
- **The teacher, also known as the facilitator, presents the opening question.** The teacher should prepare this question ahead of time, and it should be a text-related question that requires students to “evaluate opinions and make decisions” (p. 26).
- **Students participate in a conversation about the opening question.** They must use evidence from the text to support their thinking as they agree and disagree with other members of the group: “Students do not raise their hands, but use body language, eye contact, and mutual respect to ‘read’ the seminar process” (p. 27).
- **The remaining questions presented in the seminar will then be based on students’ ideas in response to the initial question.** Because the teacher is only the facilitator, his or her job is to guide the students to a deeper understanding of ideas, help group members learn to respect the point of view of others and the seminar process, use questioning (as necessary), paraphrase students’ ideas, and help students solve problems if they come to roadblocks in the process.

Tredway also mentions having some students act as observers of the discussion. These students evaluate the components of the discussion and whether or not the Socratic process is truly being exhibited. Depending on the number of gifted readers in a classroom, teachers may choose to include observers, but with small groups of gifted learners, most Socratic seminars will consist of only a few students with a teacher acting as the facilitator.

Socratic seminars can be a wonderful tool in the education of gifted readers. They can be used as a framework for literature discussions

that promote critical thinking. Paul and Elder (2007) note the connection between critical thinking and Socratic seminars:

Both critical thinking and Socratic questioning share a common end. Critical thinking provides the conceptual tools for understanding how the mind functions (in its pursuit of meaning and truth); Socratic questioning employs those tools in framing questions essential to the pursuit of meaning and truth. (p. 36)

Although Socratic seminars are just one framework for meaningful literature discussions, they are an efficient way to promote critical thinking with gifted readers. Regardless of the type of literature discussion structure used, it is important that gifted readers spend time discussing quality literature as a means to develop their higher-level thinking skills. Literature discussions can also be woven into critical literacy, which is another way to foster critical thinking skills in gifted readers.

Critical Literacy

Definition and Purpose

Because it contains the word *critical*, one would think that critical literacy simply means incorporating critical thinking into literacy, but it is more than that. Critical literacy requires the use of critical thinking skills, yet it compels students to “think beyond the printed page and critically analyze the author’s message” (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004b, p. 13). Critical literacy practices stem from the social justice pedagogy of Brazilian educator and influential theorist Paulo Freire. Freire (1995) discusses the idea of the “banking concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits” (p. 53). Unfortunately, this is what happens in many classrooms; teachers talk and provide information, and students are expected to listen and take it all in without

questioning any part of it. Freire goes on to stress the importance of inquiry by stating, “For apart from inquiry . . . individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (p. 53). If teachers want their students to be more than just collectors of information, it is important that they incorporate critical literacy into the classroom.

Principles of Critical Literacy

McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004b), authors of *Critical Literacy: Enhancing Students’ Comprehension of Text*, provide the following four Principles of Critical Literacy, as well as some practical ideas for implementation:

1. **“Critical literacy focuses on issues of power and promotes reflection, transformation, and action.”** When readers pick up a text, they are aware of the fact that the author has chosen the topic and determined how to approach it. As they exhibit critical reading, they may use their power to further examine the perspective of the author and reflect about whose voice is missing or disregarded.
2. **“Critical literacy focuses on the problem and its complexity.”** Critical readers ask questions and seek alternative solutions as a means to more fully understand a situation.
3. **“Techniques that promote critical literacy are dynamic and adapt to the contexts in which they are used.”** After using a specific approach to critical literacy, either presented by McLaughlin and DeVoogd or from somewhere else, a teacher may realize that it is not working fully in his or her own classroom. At this point, the teacher can adapt the method to make it more pertinent to his or her students and present learning situations.

4. “**Examining multiple perspectives is an important aspect of critical literacy.**” When students are able to look at a text from various perspectives, they are able to expand their understanding of diverse beliefs and positions. (pp. 14-16)

Critical Literacy Roles

Within the context of critical literacy, there are three distinct roles: (1) teacher, (2) student, and (3) text. The teacher’s role begins with his or her own personal knowledge of critical literacy. The teacher can then educate students about critical literacy by modeling it in different situations throughout the school day, and by providing access to a range of texts that support critical literacy. The students’ role is to be “open-minded, active, strategic readers who are capable of viewing text from a critical perspective” (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004a, p. 56). And lastly, the text plays a part in the success of critical literacy: “Texts that have a critical or different perspective of an original text can help students become critically aware. These texts should challenge whatever text or ideal is being considered” (p. 56). If each role is carried out correctly, effective critical literacy can take place in the classroom. A variety of methods can be used to accomplish this task.

Methods for Implementation

McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004b) provide a framework for critical literacy lessons. This five-step direct instruction process begins with the teacher explaining what the critical literacy strategy is and how to use it. He or she then demonstrates how the strategy is used and guides the students to work in groups to construct responses. The teacher then monitors the students as they practice applying the strategy with a partner or independently, and finally, the teacher facilitates a whole class discussion in order to reflect on how the strategy

benefits students’ abilities to read critically. The two main critical literacy strategies are *Problem Posing* and *Alternative Perspectives* (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004a, 2004b).

Problem Posing (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004a, 2004b) can be used with a variety of text and media. After students have read a text or viewed some sort of media, such as a video, students participate in critical literacy by asking questions that require critical analysis. McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004b) provide the following questions:

- *Who is in the text/picture/situation? Who is missing?*
- *Whose voices are represented? Whose voices are marginalized or discounted?*
- *What are the intentions of the author? What does the author want the reader to think?*
- *What would an alternative text/picture/situation say?*
- *How can the reader use this information to promote equity? (p. 41)*

One adaptation to *Problem Posing* is *The Rest of the Story* (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004b), which urges students to use their schema to examine what is missing from a text and to research that missing perspective. For example, in the intermediate grades, a gifted reader might be asked to read a text about the Civil War such as the nonfiction book *The Boys' War: Confederate and Union Soldiers Talk About the Civil War* (Murphy 1993), which shares first-hand accounts of boys, 16 years old or younger, who served in the Civil War. Students may not be aware of the fact that many women disguised themselves as men and also fought in the war. Information about the perspective of women who fought is missing from this book. Students would then research information about the perspective of women soldiers in the Civil War. A text such as *I'll Pass for Your Comrade: Women Soldiers in the Civil War* (Silvey, 2008) might be

used to help students learn *The Rest of the Story* about the people who fought in the bloodiest conflict in American history. Students' research could then serve as the foundation for a critical discussion about the Civil War. Another adaptation to *Problem Posing* is *Switching* (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004a, 2004b), which requires students to identify biases within a text and then imagine an alternative version of the text by switching some part of it. *Switching* can be done by changing the following elements (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004b):

- **Gender** – Change the gender(s) of the main character(s) within the story.
- **Theme** – Create a new story with an opposite or different theme as a means to look at the story in another way.
- **Setting** – Tell the story from a different time, place, or even social class.
- **Body-Style** – Change the image of the characters from tall to short or from fat to thin.
- **Clothing** – Change the clothing or style of dress of the characters.
- **Emotion** – Imagine a story in which the characters' emotions are different.
- **Ethnic/Race** – Change the characters' ethnicities or races.
- **Language** – Tell the story using accents, vocabulary, and expressions from a different language or dialect.
- **Relationship/Organization** – Change the relationships among characters from friends to family members or enemies.

Alternative Perspectives (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004a, 2004b) is another strategy to implement critical literacy. This strategy consists of exploring the viewpoints of different characters in a text or people in real-life situations. These characters or people may be real or imagined, and various formats can be used to portray their perspectives. McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004b) present four different ways to help readers create *Alternative Perspectives*:

1. **Alternative Texts** – Alternative texts represent a perspective that is different from the one the reader is reading. The reader creates an alternative representation—either written, oral, or performed—of the text or the information learned. Students tell the story by substituting one character for another or by telling the story from a perspective different from the main character.
2. **Juxtapositioning** – This includes examining two contrasting texts or pictures next to each other to make the contrast between them obvious. This helps students understand that one thing can be perceived in many different ways.
3. **Mind and Alternative Mind Portraits** – This is a technique in which readers examine two points of view; both may be within the text or one may be within the text and the other is missing. Students then draw the silhouettes of two heads and add words, drawings, or collages within them that represent each person or character's perspective.
4. **Theme-Based Focus Groups** – These groups help students investigate bias and critically analyze how authors view events from different points of view. As mentioned previously, if students are reading and studying about the Civil War, they will be presented with two points of view—that of the North and that of the South. Students could be placed into two groups with one focusing on researching the point of view of the North and one focusing on researching the point of view of the South. Students within these two groups would then mix together and contribute ideas about the Civil War based on the information they gathered.

Strategies such as these are designed to help teachers incorporate critical literacy into the classroom. Critical literacy is an important component to fostering critical thinking skills among gifted readers, but it can also be

adapted and used within whole class settings. McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004a) sum up the importance of critical literacy in the following:

Reading from a critical stance requires both the ability and the deliberate inclination to think critically about—to analyze and evaluate—information sources (e.g. texts, media, lyrics, hypertext); meaningfully question their origin and purpose; and take action by representing alternative perspectives. The goal is for readers to become text critics in everyday life. (pp. 53-54)

Conclusion

Despite the advanced abilities of gifted readers, teachers can use some of the strategies presented to differentiate instruction for these students and continue to provide them with opportunities for growth in the area of reading. Taking learning beyond the classroom and allowing students to participate in inquiry-based learning through the integration of technology will motivate students to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the world and work together to solve problems and acquire new learning. Incorporating meaningful literature discussions, possibly with a Socratic seminar structure, will engage students in critical thinking about texts and promote the social development of gifted readers. Lastly, incorporating critical literacy into the instruction of gifted readers enables them to take a critical stance when presented with texts and various media. It encourages them to question the things that they read and hear and think more deeply about the perspectives of others. Using these strategies to foster the critical thinking skills of intermediate gifted readers will enable them to carry those abilities into other areas of the curriculum as well as into real-life situations.

Looking back at that sea of educational reform, we know that it is not going away. In some way or another, it will always be there.

There will forever be new initiatives to put in place and benchmarks to be met, and the gifted readers will still be there, too. It is important that they are not left floating aimlessly through the tides.

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