



**Teacher Conceptualisations and Implementations of Criticality in a UK  
University Language Teacher Education Setting: A Qualitative  
Investigation**

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British Council ELT Master's Dissertation Awards: Commendation



The University of Edinburgh  
Moray House School of Education

## Dissertation

# Teacher Conceptualisations and Implementations of Criticality in a UK University Language Teacher Education Setting: A Qualitative Investigation

Matriculation No. S1570850

Exam No. B078332

Word Count: 16449

Presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
award of Master of Science in TESOL

2015/16

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## Abstract

*The development of criticality in students has long been one of the key tenets of Western higher education. However, there is a lack of consensus on how precisely it should be conceptualised, and how best to implement its teaching. This study examines the ways in which postgraduate language teacher educators at a major UK university conceptualise criticality, and how these conceptualisations are manifested in their teaching methodology. To achieve this, a comprehensive review of literature was carried out in relation to the concepts of Critical Thinking, Critical Pedagogy, and Deconstruction; in order to establish a theoretical foundation for the conceptualisations that teachers may hold. Following this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with faculty members at the researcher's place of study, in order to obtain the rich, qualitative data required to provide an insight into this field. Foremost among this study's findings was that participants' conceptualisations of criticality are far less rigid than the prominent conceptualisations put forward by theorists. Furthermore, evidence was found that, while participants believed their classroom implementation to be broadly successful in developing students' criticality, there was room for improvement in this regard. The study concludes that, while the fluidity of these educators' conceptualisations of criticality has the capacity to be of great benefit to students, additional practical measures should be taken in order to minimise the potential confusion they can create, and maximise the development of learners' critical independency.*

# Acknowledgements

I wish to express my sincerest gratitude to all the people without whom this paper would not have been possible. Firstly, the ten people who gave up their valuable time to participate in this study, and provide me with an illuminating insight into this field. Equal thanks go to my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Maria Dasli, who was a constant source of support and advice throughout the research process.

I would also like to thank my mother, Denise, who has done countless things to help make transitioning back to the UK to complete these studies easier. Finally, thanks to my wife, Emma, with whom I have shared this experience. It's been a difficult year, but we made it!

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*The ultimate authority must always rest with the individual's own reason and critical analysis.*

- The Dalai Lama

# Chapter One: Introduction

## 1.1 Overview

This study aims to investigate UK university postgraduate language teacher educators' conceptualisations of criticality, and the ways that they implement these on an instructional level. To develop a foundation for this, this chapter presents relevant background information, before clarifying the research focus and explaining the rationale for choosing to study this area. Furthermore, the research setting and participants are briefly described, followed by a discussion of the value I perceive this research to hold. Finally, a brief synopsis of the forthcoming chapters is provided.

## 1.2 Background

According to Cardinal Newman, writing in the 1800s, the *raison d'être* of higher education is to “educate the intellect, to reason well in all matters, to reach out toward truth, and to grasp it” (Newman, 1982:95). However, as Dunne (2015) points out, particularly in a time when information has never been more abundant and accessible, this raises the question of how one should go about determining which of the many competing ‘truths’ presented on a topic is the ‘correct’ one. The answer that Western higher education appears to have arrived at, is to prioritise developing within students the ability for critical, independent thought (Great Britain Department for Education and Employment, 1998; Spellings, 2006; Walsh & Loxley, 2015). From this position, Barnett (1997:7) sets out their vision of criticality’s educational value, stating that the role of universities is to “develop capacities to think critically...to understand oneself critically and to act critically, thereby forming critical persons who are not subject to the world, but able to act autonomously and purposively within it”. However, while there is widespread agreement that it is a primary goal, and a profusion of literature exists on the topic, there remains a distinct lack of consensus on how precisely criticality should be conceptualised (Bailin et al., 1999). Indeed, the term ‘criticality’ is often used to refer to significantly different concepts (Banegas & Villacañas de Castro, 2016), and it has been argued that Western higher education has become preoccupied with debates over what precisely it entails (Fenwick & Edwards, 2014).

In considering the different ways in which criticality is conceptualised in this context, arguably the most commonly held conceptualisations relate to the extensive body of theory around Critical Thinking. This concept is closely linked to notions of reason and rationality (Scheffler, 1973; Siegel, 1988), and, in simplistic practical terms, emphasises developing cognitive skills in learners, such as analysis, evaluation and synthesis (Ennis, 1987; Halpern, 2002; Nentl & Zietlow, 2008; Siegel,

1988). A further major conceptualisation stems from Critical Pedagogy, a highly politicised concept which seeks to empower learners to bring about social transformation through developing awareness of societal imbalances (Benesch, 2001; Freire, 1970; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Rahimi & Sajed, 2014). For implementation, teachers must adopt a politically non-neutral approach (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 2003) and utilise negotiated, student-centred methods aimed at engendering collective student empowerment (Auerbach, 1995; Kincheloe, 2004; Moreno-Lopez, 2005). Finally, the concept of Deconstruction represents a less well-known conceptualisation, but one which some theorists believe plays an important role in the formation of educators' personal conceptualisations of criticality (Biesta & Stams, 2001; Burbules & Berk, 1999). Essentially, Deconstruction challenges the belief that meaning is fixed, instead contending that it is inextricably linked to the language used to create it, and thus is fluid, and always dependent on interpretation (Higgs, 2002; Pai & Adler, 1997). While many deconstructionists argue that it cannot be translated into a method for practical implementation (Derrida, 1991; McQuillan, 2000; Norris, 2002), it plays a major role in underpinning the pedagogical concept of intersubjectivity, which posits that meaning making occurs through a process of co-creation between all those involved in the learning process (Biesta, 1994, 1998; Petit, 2008).

### 1.3 Research Focus & Rationale

My interest in this field was sparked while working as an English Lecturer at a South Korean university. There, I realised that, despite my employer's expectancy that I teach in a 'Western style', higher education in that part of the world does not traditionally place the same emphasis on criticality as in the West, and therefore my students often did not respond well to this style of teaching. This interest was furthered during my most recent educational experience, as a student on one of the programmes focused on in this study. While my previous notions of criticality had been very closely aligned with the Critical Thinking conceptualisation, it was here that I developed a greater understanding of Critical Pedagogy and, less directly, Deconstruction. However, it became apparent that, while talk of 'criticality' among faculty members was ubiquitous, it was also somewhat ambiguous, and there was often a lack of clarity over what precisely was being referred to. Moreover, the difficulties that students from non-Western educational backgrounds often have in dealing with Western notions of criticality again became apparent, as I witnessed many of my peers struggle to fully grasp what was required in order to succeed.

Although there are extensive bodies of theory relating to different conceptualisations of criticality, there is a dearth of research into how people actually conceptualise and practically employ it (Mitchell et al., 2006; Rescher, 2006). Additionally, while Critical Thinking, Critical

Pedagogy, and Deconstruction all offer different conceptual bases, each has its own issues, and many of these relate to there being a similar lack of consensus on how they should be conceptualised, as is the case with criticality itself (Breuing, 2011; Fasko, 2003; Halonen, 1995; Hawkins & Norton, 2009; Norris, 2002; Ruiz & Fernandez-Balboa, 2005). Furthermore, in the case of Critical Pedagogy and Deconstruction, there is a lack of theoretical and empirical literature regarding how they may be most effectively implemented by educators (Abrams, 1989; Fobes & Kaufman, 2008; Lenz Taguchi, 2010). Moreover, there is evidence that, while there is almost universal consensus among university faculty that developing criticality in students is key (Bok, 2008; Paul et al., 1997), almost all fail to do so effectively (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Bok, 2008; Paul et al., 1997).

It is for the above reasons that I deemed criticality in postgraduate language teacher education to be an area worthy of further research. Thus, to meet the overall aims of this study and attempt to go some way towards filling the gaps in the existing theoretical literature and empirical research in this field, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How do postgraduate language teacher educators conceptualise and define criticality in the university setting under study?
2. What are the sources of these conceptualisations?
3. To what extent, and in what ways, does this influence their teaching methodology?

As is clear, questions one and two focus on conceptual issues, while question three is practically focused. However, key here is that all three questions are inherently interlinked, and it is my belief that by providing an insight into each, this study's potential contribution to the body of knowledge in this field will be maximised.

## 1.4 Research Setting & Design

The setting for this study is a major UK university, and target participants were faculty members of two of its postgraduate language teacher education programmes. This setting was chosen due to my being enrolled as a student on one of these programmes during the 2015-16 academic year. While the ease of access this provided was a factor in choosing this setting, the primary reasons were that it was here that my interest and awareness of the issues in this field were crystallised, and the opportunity that conducting research at my place of study presented to triangulate data gathered with my own experiences.

Given the phenomenological nature of the research aims (Bryman, 2012), a qualitative study that was both constructivist and interpretivist in its approach was deemed to be the most appropriate method to investigate them (Gray, 2004). Accordingly, semi-structured interviews were

selected, due to the scope they provide to collect expansive, in-depth data from participants (Gibson & Brown, 2009). Data was then analysed and categorised using thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2009), before employing a combination of both inductive and deductive reasoning to hypothesise, in relation to relevant literature, the most plausible explanations for these themes (Charmaz, 2006). Finally, to provide additional insight, findings were triangulated with my own reflections on my experiences as a student.

## 1.5 Value

This research hopes to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of criticality in the field of postgraduate language teacher education in a number of ways. Firstly, by giving an insight into teacher educators' individual conceptualisations of criticality, and how these relate to the bodies of theory around Critical Thinking, Critical Pedagogy, and Deconstruction. Secondly, by examining the instructional methods teacher educators use, and considering how these are influenced by the conceptualisations that they hold. And finally, by establishing the degree to which teacher educators consider their instructional implementation to be successful, and evaluating the factors which affect this. Through this exploration, it is hoped to build up a rich picture of criticality and its pedagogical implications in this university setting.

## 1.6 Chapter Synopsis

The following chapter reviews literature which covers the bodies of theory, instructional techniques, and relevant issues related to Critical Thinking, Critical Pedagogy, and Deconstruction. Chapter three presents an in-depth discussion of the philosophical and methodological approaches utilised in this research, as well as covering issues relating to researcher positionality, trustworthiness, ethicality, and limitations. Chapter four presents the findings that emerged from the data, and synthesises these with relevant literature, in order to hypothesise on their most likely explanations. The final chapter summarises these findings, and discusses both their wider pedagogical implications, and potential practical applications. Lastly, recommendations for further research are made.

# Chapter Two: Literature Review

## 2.1 Overview

As discussed in the previous chapter, the term ‘criticality’ is often used in relation to different conceptualisations, and to describe different phenomena (Banegas & Villacañas de Castro, 2016). This literature review will examine the key theories, issues, implementation guidelines, and empirical studies in relation to the two most prominent conceptualisations of criticality within the field of education: Critical Thinking (CT) and Critical Pedagogy (CP). Additionally, this review will explore a third conceptualisation, that of Deconstruction, which, although not as prominent as CT and CP, may hold a high level of significance for criticality in education (Biesta & Stams, 2001; Burbules & Berk, 1999).

By exploring areas of literature in relation to these topics, it is hoped to provide readers with a better understanding of the key concepts involved in this field, and that a clear focus and justification for further research into this area will have emerged.

## 2.2 Critical Thinking

### 2.2.1 Defining and Conceptualising Critical Thinking

Critical Thinking (CT), described by Cottrell as “a complex process of deliberation which involves a wide range of skills and attitudes” (2005:2), has long been proclaimed as one of the most important aspects of Western higher education (Bailin & Siegel, 2003; Ennis, 1987; Facione, 1990; Paul, 1984; Siegel, 1988). Illustrating this, polls of US university faculty conducted by Bok (2008) and Paul et al. (1997) found that approximately 90% believed developing students’ CT ability to be their primary goal. Nonetheless, it has been claimed that “critical thinking scholarship is in a mystified state” (Halonen, 1995:75), due to a lack of consensus regarding how precisely to define and conceptualise it (Banegas & Villacañas de Castro, 2016; Fasko, 2003; Halonen, 1995). Paul et al. (1997) provide support for this, finding that only 19% of faculty who claimed CT to be their primary goal were able to give an accurate conceptualisation of it, while a mere 9% appeared to be teaching it effectively.

For many educators, Bloom’s Taxonomy, a categorisation of thinking skills developed in the 1950s, represents an important framework for conceptualising, implementing, and assessing CT (Krathwohl, 2002). Bloom’s Taxonomy divides cognitive learning skills into six stages: ‘lower order’

skills of knowledge, comprehension, and application; and 'higher order' skills of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. It is the latter skills which are required for CT (Nentl & Zietlow, 2008).

For some, however, conceptualising CT as solely a set of cognitive skills is insufficient, and it is argued that a broader change of perspective is also required (Barnet & Bedau, 2011). Support for this can be found from Ennis (1987, 1996) and Siegel (1988), who favour a 'dispositional view' of CT, which argues that developing CT skills must be complemented by developing a tendency to employ them. However, Burbules & Berk (1999) opine that this conceptualisation remains limited, due to a lack of clarity over what is required in order to develop such a tendency, something they posit must surely be dependent on learners' institutional and social contexts.

However, while there is undoubtedly a lack of consensus on a conceptualisation of CT, Davidson (1998) and Rezaei et al. (2011) contend that there is actually a great deal of commonality between the many conceptualisations in existence, pointing to the emphasis which they all place upon both the processes and outcomes of learning.

### 2.2.2 Rationality, & the Specifist/Generalist Debate

The views that CT is "the educational cognate" of rationality (Siegel, 1988:32) and that CT and rationality are "coextensive with the relevance of reasons" (Scheffler, 1973:107) serve to demonstrate how the two concepts are often viewed as synonymous. However, Dunne (2015) opines that 'rationality' is a nebulous concept, since the degree to which any thought may be considered rational is dependent on the information available at a specific point in time. For many CT theorists, such concerns simply serve to reaffirm the importance of developing dispositional, rather than skills-only, CT (Paul & Elder, 2005; Scriven & Paul, 1987). However, others argue that this alone is insufficient for achieving rationality, and that it is necessary also to establish whether the criteria for achieving dispositional CT are generalizable, or context and subject-specific (Ballin et al., 1999; Bailin & Siegel, 2002; Burbules & Berk, 1999; Dunne, 2015).

Favouring specificity, McPeck (1981), contends that thought processes are inherently tied to their particular subject and content, and therefore promotes the development of CT skills which are specifically tailored to the subject and context within which they are being applied. Conversely, other CT theorists maintain the generalist view that numerous types of content and data *can* be analysed in similar ways (Norris, 1992; Siegel, 1988; Talaska, 1992). Inevitably then, this debate raises further issues for educators in terms of understanding how CT may be most effectively implemented and assessed.

### 2.2.3 Cultural Bias

A further debate centres around the argument that CT, and the notions of rationality which underpin it, are culturally biased towards Western concepts of knowledge, and thus are neglectful of other cultures' "ways of knowing" (Burbules & Berk, 1999:4). For example, Olson (1992) contends that CT is conceptually intertwined with literacy, and therefore it is both unfair and futile to attempt to judge the thought-processes of those within traditionally non-literate cultures, such as Inuit and Aboriginal peoples, against CT criteria.

In response, and based on the belief that CT can be a tool which enables us to overcome cultural bias, Paul (1990, 1994) adapts his conceptualisation of CT to incorporate an understanding of the importance of fostering dialogues between cultures, and attempting to view issues from other perspectives. Interestingly, this appears to show Paul acknowledging the importance of cultural and contextual factors in criticality, which, as is explored later in this chapter, is something proponents of Critical Pedagogy place great importance upon.

### 2.2.4 A Transcendental Critique?

Critiquing from a primarily linguistic standpoint, Biesta & Stams (2001) assert that CT essentially constitutes a 'transcendental critique', that is, an attempt to employ criticality through an application of abstract criterion which are entirely independent of the system in which they are being applied (Biesta & Stams, 2001; Kant, 1992; Rockmore & Zeman, 1997). However, based on Apel's (1980) contention that all language is linguistically mediated, Biesta & Stams (2001) argue that transcendental critique is intrinsically flawed, since all valid claims to truth must be inextricably intertwined with the language that is used to make them, therefore rendering illogical any attempt to operate a concept of truth which is removed from this system. This view provides a brief insight into the deconstructionist position on criticality, which will be explored in later sections of this chapter.

### 2.2.5 Instructional Approaches to Critical Thinking

Ennis (1989) proposes a typology of four different instructional approaches to CT: *general, immersion, infusion, and mixed*. This section will now describe each of these approaches and provide an evaluation of their potential implications for theorists and educators.

The *general* approach involves teaching CT as a standalone subject, which learners can later apply to their main areas of study (Ennis, 1989; Halpern, 2002; Lai, 2011; Van Gelder, 2005). However, as discussed earlier, some theorists do not believe that the same CT skills are reliably



transferrable to different content and contexts, and it can therefore be inferred that these theorists would view this approach as being flawed.

The *immersion* approach integrates CT implicitly with learners' course content, in the hope that they will naturally acquire CT ability through deep engagement with their course subject matter. (Ennis, 1989; Kamin et al., 2002; Lai, 2011). The *infusion* approach is highly similar to the *immersion* approach, with the key difference being that the CT elements are made explicit to learners (Ennis, 1989). Tellingly, Ennis (1989) states that these approaches are most favoured by McPeck, a proponent of the specificist view on CT, presumably since they emphasise the importance of developing subject and context-specific forms of CT.

Finally, the *mixed* approach involves pairing the general approach with one of either the *infusion* or *immersion* approaches. In this way, the teaching of CT is directly linked to course content, and teachers combine separate CT-only instructional sessions with sessions in which these skills are applied to course content. (Behar-Horenstein & Niu, 2011; Ennis, 1989; Lai, 2011; McCarthy-Tucker, 1998).

### 2.2.6 Empirical Studies into CT Instructional Methods

While it must be noted that an earlier review of 27 empirical studies concluded that instructional interventions of any kind had little impact on the development of learners' CT ability (McMillan, 1987), two more recent reviews *have* found evidence of a positive impact of instruction on CT development: Abrami et al.'s comprehensive review of 117 studies (2008), and Behar-Horenstein & Niu's review of 42 studies (2011).

Considering Ennis' (1989) typology of instructional practices (see above), Abrami et al. (2008) found the *mixed* approach to be the most effective in developing CT ability, particularly in cases where the CT elements were made explicit (i.e. combining the *general and infusion* approaches). The researchers also reported use of the *general* and *infusion* approaches alone as having a positive impact on development of CT skills. Importantly, it was the *immersion* approach, in which CT teaching "is regarded as a by-product of instruction", which was found to be the least effective (ibid.:1121). Additionally, it was found that, where educators had received specialised training in CT instructional methods, their ability to develop said skills in their students was significantly enhanced. These findings led Abrami et al. (2008) to conclude that it is essential for CT teaching to be explicit rather than merely implicit, and to argue for CT instructional methods to be included in teacher training programmes.

Behar-Horenstein & Niu (2011) provide support for the above findings; concluding that the most effective instructional approaches are those in which CT is made explicit, and that teacher training plays an essential role in enabling educators to develop these skills in learners. Aside from this, perhaps the most interesting aspect of this study is its finding that it is the implicit *immersion* approach, which both studies found to be least effective, that is most commonly employed by educators.

## 2.3 Critical Pedagogy

### 2.3.1 Defining and Conceptualising Critical Pedagogy

Based on the belief that second language education is an inherently political act, and focusing purely on linguistic content represents a trivialisation of the learning process, Critical Pedagogy (CP) provides an alternative conceptualisation of criticality (Benesch, 2001; Janks, 2010; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Pennycook, 1990a). CP may essentially be defined as “an attitude to language teaching which relates the classroom context to the wider social context, and aims at social transformation through education” (Akbari, 2008:276).

CP began as a response to perceptions that traditional education assists in perpetuating ideological hegemonies within societies, through preventing learners from developing the social consciousness required to bring about societal change. (Eisner, 2002; Kincheloe, 2004). In practical terms, it is believed that this occurs through teaching which reinforces support for the existing hegemony, an emphasis on meritocracy and assessment performance, and promotion of vocational attitudes (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Brookfield, 2005; Popkewitz, 1991).

Paulo Freire, one of the earliest and foremost CP theorists (Kincheloe, 2004), strongly rejected what he termed ‘the banking model’ of education, whereby students are considered merely as “empty vessels” to be filled with information (1970:79). Instead, Freire argued for educators and students to collaborate towards an understanding of ‘the truth’ through dialecticism, that is, a discourse in which both are critical co-learners and willing to tolerate contradiction (Ma-Kellams et al., 2011; Sadeghi, 2008). Freire believed dialecticism to be key in helping students to develop the ‘critical consciousness’, that is, “the recognition of a system of oppressive relations, and one’s own place within that system” (Burbules & Berk, 1999:5), necessary to facilitate social transformation. Giroux (1983, 1988, 2016) later expands on this by stating that CP must not only offer a ‘language of critique’, but also a ‘language of possibility’, in the form of a discourse for the creation of counter-hegemonic practices.

As CP has developed and grown in popularity, its scope has increased to encompass issues of oppression due to factors such as age, gender, race, and sexuality (Stevens, 2002). Nonetheless, there is evidence that many educators struggle to accurately conceptualise it, and to develop coherent plans for its effective implementation (Ruiz & Fernandez-Balboa, 2005).

### 2.3.2 Undemocratic, Indoctrinary, & Dogmatic?

CP views the classroom as a socio-political environment, and, based on the belief that neutrality serves to perpetuate existing hegemonies, requires educators to take a non-neutral stance (Freire, 1970, 1998; Giroux, 1988, 2003; McLaren, 2003). However, this has been criticised as being undemocratic and indoctrinary. For example, Freedman claims the goal of CP “is not to bring out students’ independent thoughts...but to alter students’ ways of thinking to conform with a preconceived notion of what constitutes critical thought” (2007:444). Evidence for this may be found in Freire’s work, where he unequivocally states his desire for students to agree that poverty is caused by “asymmetrical social and economic distribution of wealth” (Freire & Macedo, 1995:390). Biesta & Stams (2001) also critique CP from this perspective, stating that, as with CT, it involves the application of criteria to the subject matter, however in this case, the criteria are likely pre-determined by the educator’s perception of the truth, and not open to change. Thus, they conclude, Critical Pedagogy constitutes ‘critical dogmatism’ (ibid.).

In response, Roberts (2000) argues that encouraging learners towards a particular worldview is not problematic, provided the principles of dialecticism are adhered to. However, Freedman (2007) opines that true dialecticism is an impossibility, since although a teacher may attempt to assume an equal role in classroom dialogue, their status means their contributions inevitably carry greater weight.

### 2.3.3 Critical Pedagogy & Rationality

Expanding upon the above issues, Ellsworth (1989) states that one of the main instructional methods critical pedagogues use involves developing rationalistic thinking skills in learners which are very much similar to those of CT. Yet, in this case, this is done under the assumption that all learners will ultimately arrive at the same conclusions; that everyone has a right to freedom from oppression caused by societal imbalances, and CP represents a way of achieving this (ibid.). However, Ellsworth argues that employing rationalism to combat oppression is futile, since notions of rationality are intertwined with the social constructs created by the existing hegemony, and thus simply reinforce it (ibid.). This issue, and those described above, raises major questions for educators in terms of

establishing how CP may best be implemented, and, for some perhaps, over whether it is right to implement it at all.

### 2.3.4 Instructional Approaches to Critical Pedagogy

While the body of CP theory is substantial, there is surprisingly little guidance in terms of instructional approaches (Fobes & Kaufman, 2008). Taking this into account, this section will now look at instructional guidance which *has* been provided in relation to two key areas: critical literacy, and materials selection and development.

Critical literacy involves developing learners' ability to understand the socially constructed meanings embedded within texts, along with the sociocultural contexts within which they are produced (Kincheloe, 2004; Moreno-Lopez, 2005). Practically, this means first understanding that a 'text' may take many forms, ranging from books to video games (Kellner & Share, 2009), and using dialecticism to encourage learners to approach them in a critical manner (Coffey, 2010; Shor, 1992). Auerbach (1995) advocates that successful implementation of dialecticism for critical literacy requires a focus on diversity, cultural sensitivity, recognition that empowerment must be collective, and, most importantly, an ongoing awareness of the power relationships existent within the educational process.

Regarding class materials, Rashidi & Safari (2011) stress the importance of allowing learners to drive the learning process, by giving them an input on their selection and development. Moreover, they posit that materials should be utilised in a way that encourages inductive, explorative learning, with the aim of encouraging learners to effectively question their own realities within their context (ibid.:255).

### 2.3.5 Barriers to Implementation

*"[Critical Pedagogy] is both a form of practice and a form of action...This joining together of process, content, and outcome makes Critical Pedagogy uniquely problematic for both learners and teachers" (Fobes & Kaufman, 2008:27).*

For the reasons described in the above quote, effective implementation of CP has often proven hard to achieve. In the second language classroom, there is evidence that educators continue to focus solely on linguistic matters, believing consideration of the socio-political aspects of language learning to be beyond their remit (Crookes & Lehner, 1998; May, 2011; Pennycook, 1990b). Furthermore, as noted by Fobes & Kaufman (2008) and Shor (1996), it is entirely possible that language learners may not see, nor wish to see, themselves as agents for social change. These issues have led to CP theorists recommending changes in teacher training programmes, in order to

properly equip teachers for CP instruction (Day, 2004; Kennedy, 2005; Piggot-Irvine, 2006). Nonetheless, it may be argued that if there is no appetite for CP among students, the extent to which a teacher has been trained in it may be rendered irrelevant.

### 2.3.6 Empirical Studies into CP Instructional Methods

To date, there is a dearth of empirical research into the instructional approaches used by critical pedagogues, and the effectiveness of these approaches (Breuing, 2011; Hawkins & Norton, 2009; Pennycook, 1999; Sahragard et al., 2014). Taking this into account, this section will highlight selected studies which do provide some such insights.

Considering successful implementations, Rogers et al. (2009) found utilising critical literacy in a U.S adult literacy programme was successful in developing a greater critical awareness of economic and class disparities, leading students to develop an understanding of “how to be advocates for action” (ibid.:136). However, the researchers stressed that innovative forms of teacher training were required to achieve this, such as teacher inquiry, study circles, and the creation of “teacher activist groups” (ibid.:127). Pessoa & Freitas (2012) also found success when implementing CP in a Brazilian university language centre, attributing this to carefully preparing the critical agenda, and challenging students through the use of “theory-based counter-hegemonic understanding” (ibid.:764).

Less successfully, Sadeghi (2008) implemented CP in an Iranian EFL classroom by engaging students with topics traditionally considered to be taboo, to which they encountered major student resistance. However, the researcher maintained that the implementation could still be considered a success, arguing that it is sufficient simply to engage students in a transformative dialogue, even if they ultimately reject it. Supporting this view, Shin & Crookes (2005) implemented CP in EFL classrooms in South Korea, finding that learners valued the dialectic elements most, since it enabled them to develop their opinions through interaction with others. However, in line with the view that some learners may be unwilling or uninterested in embracing CP, Schoorman & Zainuddin (2008) studied responses to CP among indigenous ethnic minorities in Guatemalan EFL classes, finding that the vast majority maintained that social transformation was not a factor in their desire to develop their linguistic skills.

Lastly, looking at teacher resistance, and suggesting a potential gap between theory and practice, Chun (2016) attempted to guide a teacher in the implementation of CP in a Canadian university English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programme. The researcher reported that the

teacher regularly reminded them of the need to make CP theory more accessible, and frequently requested that clearer guidance be provided on how it may be effectively implemented.

## 2.4 Deconstruction

### 2.4.1 Defining and Conceptualising Deconstruction

Whereas traditional Western philosophy promotes the existence of fixed areas of certainty which serve as anchor points for all knowledge (Levinas, 1989), the philosophy of Deconstruction contests this, challenging us to doubt previously accepted truths, even those “without which we literally do not know how to think and act” (Burbules, 1995, cited in: Burbules & Berk, 1999:13). Thus, Deconstruction, developed by Jacques Derrida, one of the foremost 20<sup>th</sup> century intellectuals (Salerno, 2004), provides another conceptualisation of criticality in education.

Rooted in poststructuralism, which essentially views all knowledge as textual, Deconstruction challenges traditional notions of the relationship between knowledge and language, and posits an alternative approach to reading and understanding texts (Powell, 1997). While Derrida (1991) himself acknowledges that defining Deconstruction is problematic, Pai & Adler (1997) offer a helpful starting point, stating that it essentially involves challenging the idea that meaning is fixed. Key here is Derrida’s concept of ‘*différance*’, which asserts that all words are relative, and meaning is a feature of that relativity, resulting in language itself being inherently unstable (Higgs, 2002). Given this instability, Derrida contends that interpretation of language is a freeform activity, dependent on the interpreter and their context, and therefore meaning remains in a constant state of flux and contradiction (Caputo, 1997; Derrida, 1981a; Sarup, 1993). For deconstructionists, it is the interplay of these differences which construct meaning, thus posing a challenge to positivism and traditional phenomenological thought (Lucy, 2004; Sarup, 1993).

Central to deconstructionist criticality is its emphasis on re-examining things presented as universal certainties, and considering what may have been excluded, ignored, or silenced (Arhin & Cormier, 2007; Biesta & Stams, 2001). From this perspective, binary oppositions of meaning, such as good and evil, true and false, inside and outside, etc., exist within every term in language (Harland, 1993). Furthermore, Derrida posits that these binaries exist in what he terms a ‘*violent hierarchy*’, with one always holding power over the other (Royle, 2000). Thus, the role of Deconstruction is not to attempt to bring these binaries together, but to oscillate between them (Harland, 1993; Royle, 2000).

#### 2.4.2 Deconstruction, Critical Thinking, & Critical Pedagogy

As illustrated above, Deconstruction presents a far deeper conceptualisation of criticality than those of CT and CP. Indeed, Burbules & Berk (1999) opine that while Deconstruction has more in common with CP than CT, these concepts' insurances on thinking and acting in particular ways represent precisely the notions of fixed meaning which Deconstruction seeks to challenge, leading them to question the degree to which true criticality can be achieved through CT and CP (ibid.).

Nonetheless, it is helpful in understanding the deconstructionist position to consider it in relation to Biesta & Stam's (2001) assessment of CT and CP as, respectively, 'transcendental critique' (see 2.2.4) and 'critical dogmatism' (see 2.3.2). Unlike transcendental critique, deconstructionist criterion for criticality do not come from within, "through a test of performative consistency" (ibid.:69), yet nor do they come from some "allegedly safe place outside", as is the case with critical dogmatism (ibid.:69). Instead, Deconstruction suggests that CT and CP are not, as they purport to be, standalone ways of achieving criticality, but rather, they are reliant on context and interpretation to give them validity (ibid.). By taking this position, it is hoped to break open the concept of criticality, allowing it to question its own assumptions, and bring into consideration those factors which have been excluded or silenced, thus creating "the possibility for the unforeseeable" (ibid.:70).

#### 2.4.3 Implementing Deconstruction in Education

According to Derrida and other purists, Deconstruction cannot be translated into an instructional method (Derrida, 1991; Norris, 2002), since the notion of a 'method' implies a pre-planned, systematic, and fixed process, contradicting the very essence of Deconstruction (Beardsworth, 1996; McQuillan, 2000). Nevertheless, others have taken a more practical perspective, and it is these which shall now be explored.

Describing the role of a 'responsible educator', Biesta (2006) provides guidelines for teaching criticality from a deconstructionist perspective. For Biesta, educators must not teach criticality without consideration of context, (as they believe is the case with CT), but nor should they engage learners in a way that attempts to engender a specific kind of subjectivity (as they believe is the case with CP) (ibid.). Instead, Biesta opines that educators must balance openness and engagement, and posits that Deconstruction is a valuable tool for achieving this (ibid.).

Proposing a specific methodology, Ridderhoff (2002) sets out a three-step process for deconstructing a text, beginning by asking learners to highlight and discuss its most obvious ideas. Next, they are encouraged to recognise the text's unsaid elements, and categorise those in one of four ways: (1) what is unsaid because it is unimportant, (2) things which go without saying, (3) things

which are better unsaid, and, (4) things not thought of by the text's creator(s). Finally, learners are encouraged to make syntheses between the different unsaid aspects, with the aim of revealing the text's 'true' meaning.

Deconstruction also manifests itself in education through its underpinning of the concept of intersubjectivity, which asserts that meaning is not fixed and created through transfer from educator to learner, but rather, is fluid and created through group interaction (Petit, 2008). Thus, intersubjectivity takes the view that "education *is* social interaction" (Biesta, 1998:93), and, as with Deconstruction, challenges the traditional Western prizing of objectivity and positivism as "the final arbiters of truth" (Berzoff & de Lourdes Mattei, 1999:373). Biesta (1994), opines that successfully implementing intersubjectivity involves accepting two key principles: first, since meaning is socially co-constructed, the same input will not always lead to the same output from learners, and second, that intersubjectivity is not a way of shaping learners' identities, but of bringing out learners' own identities. However, in line with deconstructionist principles, Biesta (1994) acknowledges that creating effective classroom intersubjectivity is complicated by a high dependency upon context. Nonetheless, Wells posits that what is important "is not the achievement of intersubjectivity, so much as the ongoing attempt to achieve it" (1988:350).

#### 2.4.4 Issues Regarding Deconstruction in Education

A major criticism of Deconstruction is that, since it is not a fixed process, it can be inferred that any interpretation of a text must be considered equally legitimate, and also open to limitless further deconstructions (Abrams, 1989). This suggests there cannot be any one reading of a text which represents its 'truth', something which, in many cases, is demonstrably untrue (Sweetman, 1999). In response, Derrida argues that there are indeed 'correct' and 'incorrect' ways of deconstructing a text, based on the extent to which a particular interpretation is "suggested by the text itself" (1981b:130). Nonetheless, Sweetman (1999) opines that this fluid conceptualisation of possible 'truth' means that deconstructionism treats logic and rationality as arbitrary concepts.

A further prominent criticism is that Deconstruction creates only an endless cycle of questioning, and never produces any form of action (Abrams, 1989). For critical pedagogues, this is especially problematic, since, for them, criticality must facilitate action towards creating freedom from oppression (Freedman, 2007). However, Derrida (1976) argues that such views are reliant on the idea that Western conceptualisations of knowledge and 'truth' can be entirely broken away from, a notion he terms '*end*'. However, for Derrida, '*end*' is an impossibility, since there are no other conceptualisations of language or thought which can replace them (Bradley, 2008). What he believes *is* possible, however, is '*closure*', that is, demonstrating these concepts' "conceptual or



theoretical exhaustion”, by remaining within their parameters, but doing so in a deconstructive way (ibid.:146). Thus, deconstructionists believe it is precisely the cycle of questioning which helps learners reach the deeper levels of criticality needed to go beyond fixed meanings and teacher authority, leading to changes both in educational power relationships, and ultimately also in wider contexts (Higgs, 2002; Standish, 2001).

#### 2.4.5 Empirical Studies into Deconstruction Instructional Methods

Given the opposition to attempts to create instructional methods for Deconstruction, it is perhaps unsurprising that there is a dearth of empirical research into its classroom implementation (Lenz Taguchi, 2010). Therefore, this section will provide an insight into pertinent studies of instructional methods based around the principles of intersubjectivity (see 2.4.3).

In first looking at studies which found evidence of positive learning outcomes, Haneda (1997) and Muramatsu (2013) studied university-level language learners, finding that intersubjectivity was beneficial in fostering both individual agency, and a collective sense of community. Supporting these findings, Watanabe & Swain (2007) and Storch & Aldosari (2012) found that intersubjective group work was beneficial in overcoming differences in linguistic proficiency among participants. Finally, highlighting another benefit of intersubjectivity, Markee (2005) found that it brought about off-task interactions, such as the use of humour, which the researcher believed aided learning, on the grounds that “off-task interaction may be closer to learners’ real-life interactional needs than on-task interaction” (ibid.:212).

Considering negative effects, Leki (2001) and Morita (2004) studied content course groups comprising native and non-native English speakers at Western universities. Both found that non-native speakers were often unable to influence group interactions, leaving them feeling marginalised and, sometimes, that their individual identities had been co-constructed by their native speaking peers. Highlighting another potential negative impact, DiNitto (2000) found that learners from traditionally teacher-led educational backgrounds often mimicked this during intersubjective group work, with dominant students assuming the ‘teacher’ role, to the detriment of their whole group.

Finally, while some of the above studies suggest that the intersubjective approach may be more suited to learners from some linguistic and educational backgrounds than others, Peng’s (2011) longitudinal study of a Chinese student of Medicine and English demonstrates how learner beliefs may evolve through exposure to the intersubjective approach. The researcher found that the participant initially favoured teacher-led classes, but, as their exposure to communicative, intersubjective methods continued, they ultimately came to favour these.

## 2.5 Conclusion

This review of literature relating to criticality in education serves to highlight the potential bases of the conceptualisations of criticality that educators hold, and for the instructional decisions they make in this regard. While all three conceptualisations have a significant body of theory to support them, each are fraught with their own issues. Furthermore, in the case of CP and Deconstruction, the theory and empirical evidence relating to implementation is far from substantial.

While CT & CP are often presented as being in direct opposition to each other, this review has demonstrated that, as well as their differences, they also share a degree of common ground. In putting forward its own conceptualisation, Deconstruction provides a fascinating critique of both CT and CP, arguing that each alone is insufficient for true criticality and understanding of meaning. However, Deconstruction is esoteric in its nature and its practical value to educators is hampered by disagreement among theorists regarding whether it can be translated into an instructional method.

The following chapter will now go on to detail and discuss the specific research methods utilised in order to capture data aimed at providing a greater insight into this field.

# Chapter Three: Methodology

## 3.1 Overview

The theoretical approach and research design used to collect and analyse data is highly dependent on the specific research questions posed (Thomas, 2009). Accordingly, this chapter provides detailed description of the theoretical perspectives, sampling, data collection, and data analysis methods developed and employed in order to meet this study's aims. Additionally, a clarification on my own perspective in relation to the research's subject matter is provided, along with a discussion of the study's trustworthiness and ethical implications. Finally, the research's limitations will be described.

## 3.2 Research Questions

As described in the previous chapter, there are significant bodies of theory relating to three different conceptualisations of criticality in education: Critical Thinking, Critical Pedagogy, and Deconstruction. However, it has been demonstrated that there is a dearth of research, particularly in relation to language teacher education, into how teachers form their individual conceptualisations and how this influences their instructional implementation. Therefore, the following three research questions were formulated in order to provide a greater insight into this area:

1. How do postgraduate language teacher educators conceptualise and define criticality in the university setting under study?
2. What are the sources of these conceptualisations?
3. To what extent, and in what ways, does this influence their teaching methodology?

## 3.3 Philosophical Position

This qualitative study is both constructivist and interpretivist in its approach, since it seeks to investigate social phenomena and the creation of meaning by those involved (Bryman, 2012). In this case, this relates to developing understanding of participants' "culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998:67). Regarding methodology, the study constitutes phenomenological research, due to its emphasis on investigating the subject matter from participants' perspectives on their own context-specific social reality (Gray, 2014), which, in this case, is a postgraduate language teacher education setting. Furthermore, elements of both inductive and deductive reasoning were combined in order to take an 'abductive' approach, described by Richardson & Kramer as "the process of associating data with ideas" (2006:500).

Employing abductive reasoning meant first scrutinising the data and considering all possible theoretical explanations for it, before developing hypotheses which I believed represented the most plausible explanations (Charmaz, 2006).

One way this study may be conceptualised is as an ‘instrumental’ case study (Stake, 1995). Whereas ‘intrinsic’ case studies are based around the researcher’s interest in the case itself, ‘instrumental’ case studies are focused on investigating specific factors regarding particular phenomena (in this case, criticality in higher education), and use the case as a means of achieving this (Grandy, 2010; Stake, 1995). However, Yin (2003) contends that case studies must involve the collection and analysis of a number of data points pertaining to the case. Therefore, since this study utilises only one data collection method, I believe that, while it holds characteristics of an instrumental case study, it cannot be said to fully constitute this form of research.

### 3.4 Setting & Sampling

The research setting was chosen due to my being enrolled as a student on one of the two programmes under focus. Discussion of the reasoning for this decision is contained within the first chapter (see 1.4), and the ethical implications in relation to this are discussed later in this chapter.

The target participants were faculty members of two postgraduate language teacher education programmes at this university setting, hereafter referred to as ‘Programme 1’ and ‘Programme 2’. This constitutes a form of criterion sampling, whereby all who met the aforementioned criteria were invited to take part (Bryman, 2012). Of the twenty faculty members meeting the criteria, ten agreed to participate. Interviews were conducted over a two-week period in June 2016, each taking approximately 30-40 minutes to complete. For a sample interview transcript, see Appendix D.

	Programme	Years on Programme	SLTE Experience	ESL Teaching Experience
Participant A	Programme 1	6	6	20
Participant B	Programme 1	4	10	26
Participant C	Programme 1	1.5	3.5	18
Participant D	Programme 1	4.5	4.5	10
Participant E	Programme 1	2.5	14.5	9
Participant F	Programme 1	2.5	2.5	10
Participant G	Programme 2	8	8	20
Participant H	Programme 2	6	6	11
Participant I	Programme 2	5.5	5.5	0
Participant J	Programme 2	6.5	6.5	0

**Figure 1: Participant Information Table:** Programme employed on / Years working on programme / Total years of experience as a Second Language Teacher Educator / Total years of experience as an English Second Language Teacher.

The decision to include both programmes<sup>1</sup> was made following a thorough review of their documentation, which led me to believe that significant differences in their theoretical underpinnings exist. As demonstrated in the table below<sup>2</sup>, there is compelling evidence, due to its emphasis on cultural, political, and contextual factors, the impact of language learning, and compulsory study of the use of text and discourse in language education, that Programme 2 theoretically aligns itself with CP. Conversely, while Programme 1’s language is more neutral, its emphasis on teaching methodology and the critical skills required at master’s level suggests it leans more towards CT. It is also important to note that, for the 2015-16 academic year, the cohort of both Programmes 1 and 2 were predominantly made up of students from non-Western educational backgrounds, comprising 94% and 86% respectively of the total enrolment.

	Programme 1 (Total Faculty: 14)	Programme 2 (Total Faculty: 6)
Course Overview	“[Programme 1] aims to produce reflective and talented teaching and learning professionals whose skills, knowledge and practice are informed by world-leading research and critical discussions and debate.”	“This programme provides the opportunity to develop specialist knowledge and enhance existing pedagogical expertise. Highly flexible, and suitable for recent graduates and professionals alike, we offer a range of study options that can be tailored to your career aims.”
Course Aims / Outcomes (Selected)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “To provide thorough theoretical foundations related to how research can inform theory and practice of TESOL.”</li> <li>• “To consider the application of practice in light of new theories in TESOL.”</li> <li>• “To develop an understanding of research, as well as practices required for critical engagement, and related skills, at master’s level.”</li> <li>• “Engage in critical discussion of a range of theories related to second language learning and teaching.”</li> <li>• “Demonstrate the ability to apply theory to practice in second language teaching contexts.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Engage critically with key theories of learning and assess how they impact on learning in language.”</li> <li>• “Show a critical awareness of the ways in which engagement with linguistic and literary theories of culture impact on and alter modes of interaction and communication within the learning context.”</li> <li>• “Synthesise knowledge of institutional and political contexts, their social effects and their impact on student learning and course design.”</li> <li>• “Craft...innovative and creative research proposals for meaningful learner engagement with language programmes.”</li> </ul>
Mandatory Courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Second Language Teaching Curriculum”</li> <li>• “TESOL Methodology”</li> <li>• “Language and the Learner”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Text, Discourse, and Language Teaching”</li> <li>• “Language in Use”</li> <li>• “Language and the Learner”</li> </ul>

Figure 2: Programme Information Comparison Table<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Initially, I hoped to also include a third, smaller, programme, in order to cover the full range of postgraduate language teacher education programmes offered by this university. However, due to its faculty members being unavailable for interview, it was unfortunately necessary to exclude this programme.

<sup>2</sup> I acknowledge that, in providing this information, the location of the study will likely be revealed to many readers, thus compromising participants’ confidentiality and anonymity. Therefore, the potential for this was explicitly stated in both the participant information sheet (Appendix A) and the research consent form (Appendix B). For a more detailed discussion of this ethical issue, see section 3.8.

<sup>3</sup> References are not provided for this table due to reasons of privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity (see 3.8).

### 3.5 Positionality

In a study such as this, where the researcher is the primary data collection instrument, abductive reasoning is used to generate findings, and these findings are triangulated with the researcher's own reflections, it is essential for the researcher to document their personal position in relation to the subject matter. This is in order to limit the potential for this to influence the research process (Foote & Bartell, 2011; Kvale, 1996; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). Accordingly, and building upon the discussion of my motivations for researching this field contained within chapter one, the following paragraph outlines my personal position on the issues under study.

Firstly, I consider my own conceptualisation of criticality to be mostly aligned with CT, and believe this is since all my educational experiences as a student have been within Western contexts. However, my current studies have led me to develop a far greater understanding of CP, and I believe this has helped me become a more well-rounded and culturally sensitive teacher. Nonetheless, I retain a scepticism over whether the degree of politicisation of the classroom which it proposes is practicable given the parameters that most teachers work within, or indeed, is desired by most students. Finally, considering Deconstruction, I must make clear that it is not a conceptualisation of criticality with which I was greatly familiar prior to undertaking this study. I therefore consider myself to be entirely without bias in this respect.

### 3.6 Data Collection

In line with the study's phenomenological design and aim of providing insights into complex human issues, semi-structured interviewing was selected as the data collection method. Semi-structured interviews are considered to be extremely effective in gathering rich, detailed data, which carries significant depth of meaning (Cousin, 2009; Gillham, 2000; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Key to achieving this, and in line with the inductive characteristics of this study, is their flexibility, which gives the interviewer freedom to adapt their questioning to participants' responses, allowing for deeper discussion, and thus richer data to be gathered (Gray, 2004).

Informing the question design process and planning of the interview format, was the adoption of Holstein & Gubrium's (1995) concept of 'active interviewing'. This constructivist approach to interviewing posits that, along with the participant, the researcher is unavoidably also an active part of the meaning-making process (*ibid.*). Therefore, active interviews are designed and conducted on the basis that meaning, knowledge, and 'truth' are created via the interview itself, rather than the interview being simply a method of establishing an external form of 'truth' (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997; Kvale, 1996) Thus, the active interviewer's role is to "direct and harness the

respondent's constructive storytelling" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995:39). In practical terms, this meant developing broad, open-ended questions to maximise interaction, allowing participants freedom in terms of the discussion's direction, sharing one's own thoughts (where appropriate), and asking probing follow-up questions in order to gain greater insights into participants' perspectives.

Interview questions were formulated based on the review of literature, analysis of the two programmes' documentation, and my own reflections on my experiences as a student in this setting. Following this, and in line with the deductive aspects of the study, questions were revised and sequenced into an interview guide (Appendix C), taking into account Kvale's (1996) recommendation that the guide be structured to give equal consideration to both the thematic elements of the research, which relate to the theoretical concepts under study, and the dynamic elements, which emphasise creating a positive, flowing interaction between participant and researcher.

Finally, prior to beginning data collection, a pilot interview was conducted with a peer, in order to highlight any flaws in the data gathering process (Kvale, 2007). Following this, a number of adjustments were made to further improve and refine the research instrument.

### 3.7 Data Analysis

Interview data was analysed using thematic analysis, one of the most common approaches to qualitative data analysis (Bryman, 2012). Since interviewing was the only data gathering method utilised, it was considered essential to maximise the quality and richness of the data obtained from it. Therefore, a comprehensive, two-cycle format of thematic analysis was devised, based upon the recommendations of Saldaña (2009).

The first cycle involved what Strauss & Corbin (1990) describe as 'open coding', in which basic themes that emerged from the data were established. Practically, this first involved coding individual data sets with information about the participant they were gathered from, such as the number of years they have worked on their respective programmes (Lofland et al., 2006; Saldaña, 2009). Next, structural coding, considered to be particularly suited to analysing interview data (Saldaña, 2009), was employed to assign broad labels to sections of data, allowing them to be easily indexed for use during later stages of the analysis (Namey et al., 2008). Finally, descriptive coding was used to summarise general topics within the data, allowing for a group of key words to be established, forming the basis for deeper analysis in the second cycle (Turner, 1994).

The second coding cycle was then implemented in order to achieve a far greater level of thematic, categorical, theoretical, and conceptual analysis of the data (Saldaña, 2009). This involved pattern coding, where labels were used to group similarly coded data and attempt to assign

meanings to these groupings (ibid.). This cycle was invaluable in developing major themes, such as identifying the different ways in which participants conceptualise criticality.

Lastly, to further illuminate the data gathered, and increase the trustworthiness of the research by cross-checking it with an observational perspective (Merriam, 2009), where appropriate, themes were triangulated with my own reflections on my experiences as a student on one of the two programmes.

### 3.8 Trustworthiness

Whereas the quality of quantitative research tends to be measured against criteria of validity and reliability (Bryman, 2012), Lincoln & Guba (1985) propose that qualitative research be measured against criteria of 'trustworthiness'. Trustworthiness is divided into four criterions: *credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability*. The measures taken to satisfy each of these will now be discussed.

The first criterion, *credibility*, seeks to establish that the account of social reality provided by a study is a feasible one (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, it is the triangulation of data gathered from participants with my own reflections on my experiences as a student (see 3.6) which aims to ensure this study's credibility. *Transferability* describes the degree to which a study's findings may be applicable in other settings and contexts. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Accordingly, I believe that the rich, detailed data gathered in this study provides readers with sufficient information to enable them to judge the extent to which the findings are transferrable (Geertz, 1973; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore, this study's case study characteristics (see 3.2) provide a measure of what Bassey (1981) describes as 'relatability'. 'Relatability' describes the likelihood that readers from other contexts will be able to relate to at least some of the situations and issues covered, and thus benefit accordingly from the findings (ibid.). *Dependability*, which parallels the concept of reliability in quantitative research (Bryman, 2012), sees Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue for an extensive system of record keeping throughout the research process, so that the study may then be audited by peers. While this is impracticable in this case, the piloting of the research interview (see 3.5) can be said to represent a degree of peer auditing. Additionally, I believe that the triangulation of interview data with my own experiences also provides *dependability*, since it reduces the potential for error in the findings (Gray, 2004). Finally, *confirmability*, while acknowledging that total objectivity in social research is an impossibility, seeks to ensure that the researcher prevents their personal views and opinions from influencing the research process (Bryman, 2012). It is to this end that a positionality statement has been included in this chapter (see 3.4).



### 3.9 Ethical Considerations

Key to maintaining ethicality was ensuring that fully informed consent was obtained from participants, by providing them with sufficiently detailed information upon which they could determine whether they wished to take part (Crow et al., 2006). Therefore, all potential participants were given a comprehensive information sheet (Appendix A), which outlined the research aims, type of information being requested, and how their data would be used and stored. Additionally, it provided assurances that individual anonymity would be preserved, and reaffirmed that participation was entirely voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time. Having given verbal assent, participants were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix B), confirming their understanding of the information provided in the information sheet and willingness to participate (Gray, 2004).

The primary ethical issue pertaining to this study is that, although the research setting is not explicitly stated, since it is the researcher's place of study, programme information has been provided (see 3.3), and data is triangulated with the researcher's own experiences as a student, it is likely that many readers will be able to ascertain the true setting. This potentially compromises participants' privacy and confidentiality (Gray, 2004). Therefore, it was vital to ensure, through the information sheet and consent form, that all participants were made fully aware of this possibility, while assuring them that their individual data would remain fully private, confidential, and anonymised through the use of pseudonyms (*ibid.*). It is for this reason that course documents quoted in this chapter (see 3.3) have not been referenced or included in the bibliography.

Finally, to provide an opportunity for debriefing, and maximise the benefit of participation through the provision of potentially useful information (Israel & Hay, 2006), all participants were asked if they wished to receive a summary of the study's findings upon its completion.

### 3.10 Limitations

It has been argued that "no single method of research fully captures any particular phenomenon" (Tellis et al., 1999:121), and it is generally agreed that triangulation through the use of multiple data collection methods increases the quality of findings (Gray, 2004). Thus, it is important to acknowledge that, aside from the degree of triangulation provided through relating data to my own reflections, the use of only one data collection method constitutes a significant limitation of this study. Accordingly, it would have been beneficial to have utilised a series of overt, non-participant, classroom observations (Flick, 2009) as an additional method of data collection. However, during the time period in which data was being gathered (June 2016), classes at the

university under study were not in session, and therefore this was not possible. Similarly, the study would have benefitted from a documentary analysis of teachers' classroom materials (Punch & Oancea, 2014). However, it was determined that this would only be effective in conjunction with the aforementioned observations, since analysing materials without observing how they were utilised was likely to result in inaccurate assumptions being made.

Finally, Lipscomb (2012) questions the value of using abductive reasoning (see 3.2) in qualitative research, arguing its use essentially means that any findings established ultimately only amount to mere 'supposition' on the part of the researcher, and thus they "cannot sustain or justify substantive action guiding claims" (ibid.:254). However, I believe that, given the scope and subject matter of this study, the findings need not generate any concrete guiding actions for it to be deemed successful. Rather, the study may benefit readers simply by providing an exploration of this field, and positing *suggested* pedagogical implications and practical applications of its findings.

### 3.11 Conclusion

Having outlined the theoretical approaches and research methods utilised to explore the research questions, the upcoming chapter goes on to set out the findings that emerged following analysis of the interview data. These findings are discussed in relation to relevant theoretical literature and empirical evidence, in order to, in line with the principles of abductive reasoning, hypothesise on the most plausible explanations for their occurrence. In doing so, it is hoped to maximise the potential insight into the issues under study.

## Chapter Four: Findings & Discussion

### 4.1 Overview

This chapter reveals the findings of interview research conducted among ten faculty members across two postgraduate language teacher education programmes at a major UK university, in order to gain an insight into their individual conceptualisations of criticality, and how this impacts on their teaching methodology. Questions used to guide the interview can be found in Appendix C, and a sample interview transcript can be found in Appendix D.

Having been analysed using a comprehensive process of thematic analysis, the interview data is organised into descriptive themes and, wherever possible, participants' verbatim quotes are provided to support these. Themes are then synthesised with relevant literature and triangulated with my reflections as a student on one of these programmes, in order to provide a firm basis for the discussion of implications and applications which will follow in the final chapter.

### 4.2 Theme 1: Broad Consensus on the Value of Criticality

Believe Developing Criticality is <i>the</i> Primary Goal of their Teaching	Believe Developing Criticality is One of Several Key Goals
Participant B (Programme 1)	Participant A (Programme 1)
Participant C (Programme 1)	Participant D (Programme 1)
Participant F (Programme 1)	Participant E (Programme 1)
Participant G (Programme 2)	Participant H (Programme 2)
Participant I (Programme 2)	Participant J (Programme 2)

Figure 3: Participants' perceived importance of developing students' criticality skills.

When asked to describe how important they felt developing their students' criticality was, there was a consensus among all ten participants in terms of its high value. 50% stated it was their primary goal, as illustrated here:

Oh, I think that's the goal for the whole programme isn't it? You have to teach students how to be critical, and then have them be evaluated on how critical they are. (Participant C)

It [criticality] runs through pretty much everything. (Participant B)

For the other 50% of participants, criticality represents a key aim among several, as described by Participant A, "I think it has to be one of the main goals", and, in more detail, by this participant:

It's definitely one of the major goals, along with the language skills, the teaching skills, the learning skills...So I'm interweaving between a focus on what I'm trying to do with my students in each of the classes. (Participant E)

While these findings demonstrate that all participants place a high importance on criticality, they nonetheless contrast to an extent with the findings of Bok (2008) and Paul et al. (1997), who

found that 89% and 90% respectively of US university faculty believed developing criticality to be the single primary goal of their teaching. Although it must be noted that these studies focused only on the CT conceptualisation of criticality, the subsequent two themes demonstrate that there does not appear to be any correlation between the type of conceptualisation of criticality a teacher holds, and the degree to which they prioritise it. This may be explained through Ellsworth’s (1989) claim that many CP educators attempt to implement it through the teaching of cognitive skills which are highly similar to those favoured by proponents of CT. If one accepts this view, it is therefore possible that the decision-making processes involved in terms of determining the importance of criticality may also be similar.

From my experience as a student, I can certainly attest to the high value that all faculty members I encountered appeared to place on criticality. Additionally, I did not observe any discernible pattern between the way a teacher appeared to conceptualise criticality and the degree to which they prioritised it. However, during the second semester, I became aware of a variation in the degree to which the subject matter of different option courses focused on criticality, and therefore believe that the particular courses that faculty members teach on may be a contributory factor in determining the extent to which they prioritise criticality.

### 4.3 Theme 2: Combining Conceptualisations

<b>CT</b>	<b>Participant H (Programme 2)</b>
<b>CP</b>	
<b>Deconstruction</b>	
<b>CT &amp; CP</b>	
<b>CT &amp; Deconstruction</b>	<b>Participant A (Programme 1) Participant C (Programme 1) Participant D (Programme 1) Participant F (Programme 1)</b>
<b>CP &amp; Deconstruction</b>	<b>Participant G (Programme 2) Participant I (Programme 2) Participant J (Programme 2)</b>
<b>CT, CP, &amp; Deconstruction</b>	<b>Participant B (Programme 1)</b>

Figure 4: Participants’ initially stated personal conceptualisations of criticality.

When directly asked to describe how they conceptualise criticality, nine participants provided clear and easily categorisable responses. The other participant, Participant E, indicated that their conceptualisation incorporated CT, but that they felt this alone was insufficient. However, they were unclear on what else they felt their conceptualisation encompassed. It is important to note

that all four participants who described holding a CT/Deconstruction conceptualisation were faculty of Programme 1, and that the second most common conceptualisation, combining CP and Deconstruction, was held by three of the four members of Programme 2. This broadly supports my assessment of both programmes' documents, which led me to believe Programme 1 is more closely aligned with CT, and Programme 2 with CP (see 3.4). Most interestingly, only one respondent, Participant H, gave a conceptualisation which remained entirely within the parameters of a single prominent conceptualisation of criticality. All other responses suggested that participants' conceptualisations involved a combination of two or more conceptualisations. Looking first at the CT/Deconstruction conceptualisation, for two participants, it took the following forms:

It's a higher order thinking skill, absolutely. It's a cognitive skill, and my firm belief is that everyone has it, and everyone's doing it. But sometimes they may not be able to instrumentalise it...Obviously, in an academic sense, you know, you read a statement and you question, for example, what is the context in which this statement was made? Who made the statement? What do they mean by this? What do they mean by that? (Participant A)

[Criticality is] questioning. And I think we do it in our daily lives all the time. I think an obvious real world example is anything we hear in the media, we all question that, even if we don't vocalise our questioning of it. We always think, what's the bias? Who's reporting it? How have they chosen to report it? What have they chosen to exclude? (Participant F)

These quotes strongly suggest the placement of a high value on CT skills, and particularly dispositional CT, whereby higher-order thinking skills are not just learnt, but incorporated into one's attitudinal approach to life (Ennis, 1987; Siegel, 1988). However, the fact that both these participants also appeared to incorporate the deconstructionist notion of needing to be able to recognise the underlying and unsaid elements of texts (Arhin & Cormier, 2007; Biesta & Stams, 2001), implies a belief that CT alone is insufficient for effectively developing criticality in students. One possible explanation for this may be that, in line with Biesta & Stams' (2001) position that CT represents a 'transcendental critique', these participants recognise the limitations of attempting to apply analytical criterion which exist independently of the system in which they are being applied. Notwithstanding their reasons for believing CT alone to be inadequate, it is possible to infer that their incorporation of elements of Deconstruction into their conceptualisation represents an attempt to compensate for the deficiencies which they perceive in CT.

The remaining two participants whom posited a CT/Deconstruction conceptualisation (C & D) both stressed the importance of combining analytical thinking skills with one's own experience:

I think, to me, being critical is being able to evaluate, to judge...as well as, you know, looking at something, an aspect from your perspective, and then

unpacking it, and interacting that with your own experience, with what you know, I think that's criticality. (Participant C)

This suggests a more extensive incorporation of Deconstruction, as there appears to be an embracement of the concept that meaning is not fixed (Pai & Adler, 1997), and that it is therefore important to encourage learners to give consideration to their own interpretation (Caputo, 1997; Derrida, 1981a; Sarup, 1993).

Moving on to the CP/Deconstruction conceptualisation, Participant G summarised this from their perspective:

I think it's important to engage people who work in learning communities with [Critical Pedagogy], and to foster in their own learners a sense of inquiry and a sense of not accepting what the words appear to say, rather than what the words are actually meaning. So, I think there has to be... for some people, a bit of a mind shift in the way that they view texts...I think that, for me, is the way to try and influence the way that young people can develop their criticality, so that they are much more alert to the way that use of language is very much related to the exercise of power. It's also very much related to the development of you as an individual...because you're not so susceptible to manipulation by texts as you might be if someone hasn't given you the tools...to find the layers of implication and meaning that lie within them. (Participant G)

Participants I & J both closely concurred with this view:

I think when...students are learning with criticality, they are beginning to understand that whatever they are talking about, whatever the topic is, is not neutral. It is politically, socially, culturally situated, morally situated as well. (Participant I)

Learning criticality...means looking at the text from lots of different perspectives, and seeing where you situate yourself in it. (Participant I)

So I think [criticality] is very much to do with awareness, because that is to do with power, and I think we need to empower people to understand that they don't just accept something, and to come to it with an open and critical mind. (Participant J)

I think criticality in its purest sense is engaging critically with something...[and] understanding not just what the messages are that are being conveyed to us, but how those messages are constructed. (Participant J)

Given Burbules & Berk's (1999) view that Deconstruction shares similarities with CP, it is perhaps unsurprising that these participants described their conceptualisation as incorporating both. However, another possible explanation is that that these participants recognise the potential for a CP-only conceptualisation to lead to accusations that their approach is based too heavily around their own notions of 'truth', and thus constitutes 'critical dogmatism' (Biesta & Stams, 2001; Freedman, 2007). Therefore, in order to negate this, and assist in the creation of the dialecticism

needed for effective implementation of CP (Ma-Kellams et al., 2011; Sadeghi, 2008), they also incorporate Deconstruction. Alternatively, this conceptualisation may simply highlight the dearth of guidance for the implementation of CP (Fobes & Kaufman, 2008), as critical pedagogues seek to utilise another conceptualisation, albeit one that itself has been claimed to not be a method (Derrida, 1991; Norris, 2002), in order to assist in achieving their goals.

Lastly, it is important to consider Participant B, who described a conceptualisation incorporating elements of all three prominent conceptualisations. Discussing, respectively, CT, CP, and their view on how Deconstruction plays a role in successfully completing assignments:

In terms of Critical Thinking skills...I would see that in terms of Bloom's Taxonomy. (Participant B)

Connected to that, but perhaps different, is the idea of the relationship between everything we say, do, think about ourselves and then the wider social and political context. I think it's the ability to relate external factors, socio-political factors, to the things we say and do. (Participant B)

So, [for example], at a very simple level, understanding behaviourism as underlying a particular approach to teaching methodology...and seeing that those are not ideas in a vacuum, but they're actually related to what's going on outside in society. (Participant B)

The fact that nine participants stated that their conceptualisation of criticality involved a combination of different prominent conceptualisations, yet only one combined CT and CP together (while also incorporating Deconstruction), raises an interesting question as to why this may be. One possible explanation is that much of the literature around criticality, and the respective criticisms of each concept, appears to suggest that CT and CP are in direct opposition to each other, and entirely incompatible (cf. Bailin et al., 1999; Dunne, 2015; Fobes & Kaufman, 2008; Freedman, 2007; Rahimi & Sajed, 2014).

#### 4.4 Theme 3: Shifting Conceptualisations

Initial Conceptualisation		Revised Conceptualisation	
CT	Participant H (Programme 2)	CT	
CP		CP	
Deconstruction		Deconstruction	
CT & CP		CT & CP	
CT & Deconstruction	Participant A (Programme 1) Participant C (Programme 1) Participant D (Programme 1) Participant F (Programme 1)	CT & Deconstruction	Participant A Participant C
CP & Deconstruction	Participant G (Programme 2) Participant I (Programme 2) Participant J (Programme 2)	CP & Deconstruction	
CT, CP & Deconstruction	Participant B (Programme 1)	CT, CP & Deconstruction	Participant B Participant D Participant F Participant G Participant H Participant I Participant J

Figure 5: Participants' revised conceptualisations of criticality (Red denotes participants who altered their conceptualisation).

When asked to give their views on the prominent conceptualisations of criticality which they had not appeared to include within their own conceptualisation, two of the four participants holding a CT/Deconstruction conceptualisation expressed unfavourable views of CP. In line with the positions of Biesta & Stams (2001) and Freedman (2007), for one participant it was CP's politicisation of the classroom which they viewed as detrimental:

I think that's a very negative way of looking at it, isn't it? It [should be] only positives that come out of being critical. I think...when we talk about bringing Critical Pedagogy into the classroom, it's more of a defiance. Which is, I don't think that's the right way of looking at it. (Participant C)

In Participant A's view, the problem with CP lies not with its politicisation of the classroom itself, but with the dialecticism required to implement it. For them, the adjustment in the balance of power between educators and learners that dialecticism requires (Freire, 1970; Ma-Kellams et al., 2011; Sadeghi, 2008) is not possible to achieve in this institutional context, thus aligning them with the views of Freedman (2007). When asked to elaborate on this, they commented:

Because it's a learning outcome, it's an assessment criteria (sic), so it's not really something that is just exercised or performed, it's something that's evaluated by somebody else...So in any learning and teaching situation, I think the inequity remains. It can be confused a little bit, and I think that's what Critical Pedagogy tries to do, but, especially when it comes to assessment, assessment very quickly puts the power in one part of the field and not the other. (Participant A)



For the other two participants holding a CT/Deconstruction conceptualisation, their view of CP was not unfavourable. Rather, they suggested that CP and Deconstruction were essentially synonymous, with Participant F stating, “Yeah, so critical [pedagogy] in the sense of...trying to look at any sort of textual data and trying to identify power imbalances”, and Participant D summarising this position succinctly, “I see them as being very similar, Critical Pedagogy and Deconstruction”. While these responses may be said to reflect the similarities between CP and Deconstruction (Burbules & Berk, 1999), the issues some participants have in distinguishing between the two may also serve to highlight the dearth of accurate, concise, and implementable definitions of both (Royle, 2000; Ruiz & Fernandez-Balboa, 2005).

Considering the three participants holding a CP/Deconstruction conceptualisation, all were critical of CT-only approaches. Fascinatingly, however, all appeared to now suggest that CT *does* play some role in their conceptualisation of criticality. Illustrating this, one participant remarked:

Well I absolutely do not agree with [CT-only conceptualisations]. I’ve seen in some of the critical documents for schools, that it’s been written about, critical literacy, as if it is just ‘information literacy’. It’s not information literacy, that’s part of it, it’s not Critical Thinking, although there are elements of that.  
(Participant J)

Along similar lines, Participant I commented:

[Critical Thinking] is that business of saying ‘there is this schema, and you can apply it across the way’, and I’m not quite sure how that works...you might pose it as a set of questions that you might use to approach something in a different context, but I think it’s limiting. (Participant I)

From the above quotations, it is possible to infer that these participants’ main objections to CT conceptualisations of criticality are not with CT per se, but specifically with the generalist approach to it (Norris, 1992; Talaska, 1992), since there appears to be an acknowledgment of the value, to a degree at least, of a more context-specific approach to CT (McPeck, 1981).

Lastly, continuing the trend of participants appearing to recognise the value of conceptualisations of criticality which they had not previously included within their own conceptualisation, Participant H, who had initially expressed a CT-only conceptualisation, now intimated that they valued all three conceptualisations, and, moreover, that any apparent confusion in conceptualisation among faculty was simply an issue of terminology:

A lot of researchers will give different names to different things, but to me it’s all part of the same big story, you know. You have to be rigorous, objective, to show that you’re actually just analysing the facts, but you’re aware of what may be influencing things, and that what somebody tells you they believe may be influenced by something else they believe...So you’ve always got an infinite regression, and you have to be aware of that...but, at some point, you have to

say 'OK, I'm going to make an analysis and draw conclusions based on that'.  
(Participant H)

As the above quote crystallises, this theme demonstrates that several participants appeared to alter their personal conceptualisation of criticality once asked to give their views on the prominent conceptualisations which they had initially appeared not to include. Again, this provides support for the existing literature, which highlights the confusion and difficulties created by a lack of a concise, comprehensible, and implementable conceptualisation for each of CT, CP, and Deconstruction (Banegas & Villacañas de Castro, 2016; Derrida, 1991; Fasko, 2003; Halonen, 1995; Royle, 2000; Ruiz & Fernandez-Balboa, 2005). Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, it also suggests that, while standalone conceptualisations of each concept are workable on a theoretical level, for educators seeking to develop criticality in learners, a far less bounded conceptualisation is required.

During my studies, I recall several occasions where I felt confused over what precisely faculty members were referring to when they used the terms 'criticality', 'Critical Thinking', and 'Critical Pedagogy'<sup>4</sup>, with it often appearing as if they were used interchangeably. Prior to undertaking this study, I held a similar opinion to Participant H, believing the issue was simply a terminological one. However, through the course of this research process, I have come to believe that, for some faculty, there may be a confusion on a conceptual level, particularly in terms of the differences between CP and Deconstruction. Furthermore, and even if the issue is merely terminological, I believe that there may be a dearth of understanding among faculty in regard to how this lack of clarity impacts on students' learning.

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<sup>4</sup> I can recall very few instances in which the term 'Deconstruction' was explicitly used.

## 4.5 Theme 4: Instructional Approaches

Explicit, Integrated, Teaching of Criticality	Communicative, Questioning, Student-Centred Approaches
<p><b>Participant A</b> (Programme 1)  <b>Participant B</b> (Programme 1)  <b>Participant D</b> (Programme 1)  <b>Participant E</b> (Programme 1)  <b>Participant F</b> (Programme 1)  <b>Participant G</b> (Programme 2)  <b>Participant H</b> (Programme 2)  <b>Participant I</b> (Programme 2)</p>	<p><b>Participant A</b> (Programme 1)  <b>Participant B</b> (Programme 1)  <b>Participant C</b> (Programme 1)  <b>Participant G</b> (Programme 2)  <b>Participant I</b> (Programme 2)  <b>Participant J</b> (Programme 2)</p>

Figure 6: Participants' most commonly described instructional approaches to teaching criticality.

When asked how they implemented their conceptualisation of criticality on an instructional level, the most frequent response (eight participants) involved a strong emphasis on the importance of making criticality elements as explicit as possible, and integrating these with course content. Discussing lecturing techniques, Participant D stressed, "I try my hardest in my lectures to give examples of Critical Thinking skills", while Participant B stated, "I try now to use the language of the assessment criteria". In workshops, Participant I described the importance of having "a clearly defined task, or a clearly defined area of thinking we are going to examine", while Participant E explained how they "try to coach people through [their] reading...because it's really difficult at the beginning if nobody supports your reading". Finally, Participant G gave an insightful summary of this general favouring of explicit approaches over implicit approaches:

Rather than seeking to work in a way which was presenting discreet bits of knowledge as revealed truth, which was the older style, I think criticality is [now] based on working with students to say, well, 'here are some things, some questions, some key questions that will help you understand another way of looking at it'. (Participant G)

These findings provide evidence that the most common approach to teaching criticality skills among participants corresponds with Ennis' (1989) 'infusion' approach, in which criticality skills are taught explicitly, and integrated with course subject matter. While noting that Ennis' description of the infusion approach refers only to the teaching of CT, it appears that the majority of participants utilise this technique to implement their personal conceptualisation of criticality, whatever that may be.

The value of this emphasis on making criticality explicit to students is supported by the reviews of empirical studies into CT instructional methods conducted by Abrami et al. (2008) and Behar-Horenstein & Niu (2011), which both conclude that this is significantly more effective than methods in which criticality is left implicit. However, since all participants only described situations in which their teaching of criticality is integrated with course content, this also suggest a way in

which instruction may potentially be improved in the future. This is due to Abrami et al.'s (2008) finding that, in addition to explicitness, the *most* effective way of developing criticality skills also involves the employment of sessions which solely focus on criticality, before these skills are applied and integrated with course content.

The second most common instructional approach described (six participants) was the employment of communicative, student-centred approaches, which seek to encourage learners to question the information they are presented with. For example, Participant A stated, "I would always try to invite people to ask questions about whatever it is we are looking at", and later added, "...so yeah, I hope to open up spaces for questioning". Giving greater detail on their approach, Participant C stated:

I think that I tend not to have an authoritative classroom methodology, where I give and they take. I hope that I, as I say I wanted to, give students more chances to speak out, to ask, and to give out their opinion, their evaluation. Not teacher-centred. (Participant C)

The most interesting aspect of this finding is that it was not possible to accurately categorise any of these six participants' responses as one of either Critical Pedagogy's dialecticism (Freire, 1970; Makellams et al., 2011; Sadeghi, 2008) or deconstructionist intersubjectivity (Berzoff & de Lourdes Mattei, 1999; Biesta, 1994, 1998; Petit, 2008). Given that Participants A & C's personal conceptualisations did not include CP and, indeed, they were sceptical of its value (see 4.3, 4.4), one might assume that what they are referring to is intersubjectivity. Alternatively, however, this finding may serve to highlight a fascinating contradiction on their part, as despite their previous statements, they do actually incorporate elements of CP into their teaching, in the form of dialecticism. This difficulty in categorising instructional techniques is further demonstrated in the responses of the remaining four participants (B, G, I, & J) who indicated that, in line with their conceptualisations of criticality (which all include both CP and Deconstruction), they actively combine elements of each. Most explicit in this was Participant J, who outlined how they combined both Deconstruction and dialecticism in order to achieve CP-related goals:

We introduce lots of texts...and we get [students] to work in small groups...and we ask them to discuss whose voices we hear, who's got the loudest voice here? Whose voices are silent? So if I've chosen an advert from a [national context], it's not hard to work out whose voices are silent. So we've deconstructed a text, but then we reconstruct it from different perspectives, so whose perspectives are privileged here? How could we change this message, and give a different perspective? (Participant J)

This theme yet again highlights the issues around the lack of consensus on conceptualisations of the different forms of criticality, particularly in regards to CP and

Deconstruction. Furthermore, it again serves to highlight how, while in a theoretical sense the three concepts are separate, from a practical perspective, the divisions between them are far less defined. Moreover, it may suggest that even if teachers do not subscribe to a particular conceptualisation on a theoretical level, they may be willing to utilise elements of it for practical purposes, if they believe it is beneficial to their students.

#### 4.6 Theme 5: Success & Failure

Summative Assessment	Student Feedback
Participant A (Programme 1)	Participant B (Programme 1)
Participant B (Programme 1)	Participant D (Programme 1)
Participant C (Programme 1)	Participant F (Programme 1)
Participant D (Programme 1)	Participant J (Programme 2)
Participant E (Programme 1)	Participant H (Programme 2)
Participant F (Programme 1)	Participant I (Programme 2)
Participant G (Programme 2)	
Participant H (Programme 2)	
Participant I (Programme 2)	
Participant J (Programme 2)	

Figure 7: Participants' most commonly described measures of success of criticality teaching.

When asked to discuss how effective they believe their instructional methods are in developing students' criticality skills, three participants indicated they did not consider it possible to accurately judge this within the timeframe of a one-year master's programme:

I don't have a good measure of success, because I think success of teaching is a long-term thing...especially at this level. (Participant A)

I think it would be more suitable to spread things over 24 months, even if it was still full-time. (Participant F)

Considering potential reasons for these views from a CT perspective, it may be possible to attribute them to an awareness of the length of time required to develop the all-encompassing change of perspective that is required to successfully acquire dispositional CT (Barnet & Bedau, 2011). Alternatively, from a CP perspective, they may reflect the significant amount of time it is likely to take to overcome the effects on students of exposure to traditional educational methods, particularly in terms of their reinforcement of 'accepted truths' (Brookfield, 2005; Popkewitz, 1991).

Three other participants responded by describing their belief in the importance of continually seeking to improve their instructional methods, with Participant B stating, "I spend a lot of my time sitting here thinking 'how am I going to make this better next year?'" and Participant I remarking, "we spend a lot of time, [another faculty member] and I, talking about how we are

teaching, how we are going to teach". Participant D went further, expressing a desire for additional training in this area:

I guess I'm just learning on the job, as a [Job Title], we have no real faculty training in developing Critical Thinking skills in students. (Participant D)

These comments may, of course, simply reflect the attitude of any good educator in maintaining a desire for self-improvement. Nonetheless, since each of these three participants included Deconstruction in their conceptualisation of criticality, they may also be explained in terms of reflecting an awareness of the difficulties posited by Biesta (2006) in achieving a balance between an openness to students' differing interpretational subjectivities, and the need to ensure that students take part in specific forms of critical engagement.

Given the above discussion, it is perhaps curious that all participants ultimately went on to express that they felt their instructional approaches were broadly successful in improving their students' criticality skills, particularly given Paul et al.'s (1997) finding that the vast majority of university faculty do not teach criticality effectively. When asked how they were able to measure this success, all ten cited assessment, either in the form of summative course assignments<sup>5</sup>, or dissertation:

Each year when students do their [assignments], it's really encouraging to see how they have taken some of the frameworks and applied them. (Participant G)

It's when they come to do their dissertation and you see they've actually been influenced a lot by this. (Participant H)

Since summative assessment provides a quantifiable measure of the degree to which students are able to demonstrate criticality skills, such responses are to be expected. However, the second most frequently mentioned gauge for evaluating the effectiveness of instructional methods, student feedback (six participants), is far more subjective. Interestingly, when asked to give examples of the feedback they had received, almost all were able to recount several examples of cases in which the feedback was negative:

With personal tutees, a lot of students come with questions about Critical Thinking, and, you know, asking 'what do I do?' (Participant D)

They [students] keep hearing this term [criticality] being used, and they'll often complain because they don't know at all how to define it. (Participant F)

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<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, Participant J explained they had moved away from the traditional four thousand-word end-of-semester assignment, and instead utilised four smaller assignments, carried out at regular intervals as the course progressed. The participant stated they had implemented this system due to their belief that it allowed students to develop their criticality skills more effectively, through allowing them to gradually build their understanding of the course subject matter, and to receive additional teacher feedback.

I've never had anybody overtly say, 'I don't want to do this' or 'this isn't the right way to do it'. Though, I have had people write in their journals, 'I'm struggling with this'. (Participant J)

This apparent contradiction between participants stating that they felt their instructional methods were successful, yet recalling many situations in which they received negative feedback, may be entirely coincidental. Alternatively, since all the participants who cited feedback as a measure of success included CP within their conceptualisation, this may represent them adopting a similar view to Sadeghi (2008), who argues that CP may be deemed successful simply providing students are given an opportunity to engage in a dialogue towards facilitating transformation, regardless of whether they actually do engage. In any case, this finding serves to highlight the difficulties caused for learners by the lack of consensus on a definition of each of the three prominent conceptualisations of criticality, and the ambiguity of the term 'criticality' itself.

Finally, when asked what they felt were the main contributory factors in some students not successfully developing criticality skills, the most commonly cited issue (nine participants) centred around the fact that the vast majority of students on the programmes came from non-Western educational backgrounds (see 3.4):

Because, individually [the students] have had such different experiences before they came into my class. (Participant E)

It takes a long time to put across the message that you can disagree with each other and the tutor. (Participant I)

However, it is important to also note that the majority of participants felt that it was their programme, or the wider university, which was at fault for this. Illustrating this, Participant F remarked, "given the trajectory of how internationalisation is happening, there's not enough reciprocal attempts to understand the strengths in the [educational] systems that many of our students are coming from", while Participant A commented specifically on how the university might seek to improve this issue:

So I think, obviously, the problem is that they are measured by some measure of criticality that may not be clear to them. I think that's an issue, not of criticality, I think it's an issue of evaluation in higher education, I guess. (Participant A)

While all participants felt that their instructional approaches to developing criticality in learners were broadly successful, these findings nonetheless highlight barriers to student development which may potentially be explained through the criticisms of CT as being culturally biased (Burbules & Berk, 1999; Olson, 1992), and through student resistance to CP-related concepts (Fobes & Kaufman, 2008; Shor, 1996).

As one of the few Western students on these programmes, I am not ideally placed to comment on the potential struggles in developing criticality skills that students from non-Western educational backgrounds may have. However, through peer interactions in workshops, on group assignments, and socially, I certainly became aware that many often do find it difficult to understand and implement the kind of criticality required to succeed on their programme. Therefore, it is encouraging to see that these issues are recognised by faculty, and efforts are being made to overcome them. However, I would argue that, while a Western educational background certainly gives a strong grounding for engaging with CT-related criticality, aside from perhaps helping one to more readily adopt a questioning attitude, it does not necessarily provide a major advantage when it comes to engaging with CP-related notions of criticality. Indeed, I initially struggled to comprehend some CP-related concepts myself. Therefore, I would argue that while students' educational backgrounds are undoubtedly a major factor in situations where these educators feel their teaching of criticality has been unsuccessful, there are also other factors at play.

#### 4.7 Conclusion

The findings presented and discussed in this chapter demonstrate the numerous key insights which arose from the data. Foremost of these is that the participants appear to hold, and operate, far more fluid conceptualisations of criticality than are put forward by CT, CP, and Deconstruction. The final chapter will now go on to summarise the study's findings in greater detail, and discuss their implications both for this particular research setting, and wider pedagogy.



## Chapter Five: Conclusion

### 5.1 Overview

This closing chapter summarises the study's findings and puts forward what I believe to be its main pedagogical implications. Following this, potential practical applications of this research are discussed, before concluding by making recommendations for future research in this field.

### 5.2 Summary of Findings

As set out in chapter one, the first two of this study's three research questions sought to ascertain how language teacher educators in this setting conceptualise criticality, and the reasons for this. In response, the findings have demonstrated that all these educators place a high importance on criticality, yet they conceptualise it in varying ways, and ways which transcend the boundaries of any one of the prominent theoretical conceptualisations. In evaluating the reasons for this, a possible degree of confusion on a terminological and/or conceptual level, particularly in regard to the distinction between CP and Deconstruction, has been identified. However, the primary reason has been hypothesised to be that while CT, CP, and Deconstruction are workable individually on a theoretical level, for educators seeking to develop criticality in their students, it is often necessary to use elements of each in order to achieve this.

Regarding the third research question, which sought to establish how teachers practically implement the teaching of criticality in their classrooms, the findings have shown that, regardless of how they conceptualise criticality, by making its teaching explicit, these educators are using methods which are empirically evidenced as being effective. Furthermore, many of these teachers reported using student-centred, dialogic methods, which are supported by the general principles of both CP's dialecticism and Deconstruction's intersubjectivity. However, while all participants stated their belief that their instructional methods were broadly successful, there is evidence to suggest that there remains room for improvement in this regard.

### 5.3 Pedagogical Implications

The philosopher Richard Peters' perspective on teaching and education provides a useful lens through which to view the findings of this study. For Peters, 'teaching' and 'education' are not necessarily coextensive, since anyone who leads a class may be said to be 'teaching', yet whether that teaching is successful, whether 'education' is taking place, can only be determined in relation to the learner (Peters, 1967). From this perspective, successful education requires the teacher to consciously engender a process of transformation within learners (English, 2010). Key to achieving this transformation, is an understanding of how one 'interrupts' the learner (Biesta, 2009; Peters,

1967, 1977). The concept of 'interruption' is described by Meyer-Drawe (1982:520) as a "confrontation with one's own experiential history", and relates to situations where learners encounter something which goes against their expectations or desires, both of which are formed by their existing knowledge and worldview. For Peters, these 'interruptions' are the very essence of education, as the teacher encourages learners to move towards embracing unfamiliar things, and thus brings about transformation (English, 2010; Peters, 1967, 1977).

Adding another dimension to the lens through which this study's findings will be viewed, Biesta (2015) describes two ways in which the education profession has been democratised. Firstly, learners are no longer seen as mere objects for educators' interventions, but as holding significant power in a dialogue with them. Secondly, there is now a strong demand for evidence-based measures of learning (ibid.). In response, and to ensure the value of the profession is not diminished, Biesta (2015) sets out his vision for modern professional educators, positing that their driving purpose must be, similar to how Peters suggests, to engender 'educatedness', that is, "the promotion of cognitive and moral independence in students" (ibid.:11-12).

Considering measurable learning outcomes, Biesta (2015) contends that, while it would be errant for educators to base their approach around these, there must be recognition of a need to incorporate them. Therefore, I believe that one reason for the finding that all participants held CT as part of their conceptualisation of criticality, is that CT skills can be measured through assessment with relative ease. Support for this comes from the fact that all participants cited assessment as a primary measure of the effectiveness of their teaching. However, I believe the primary reason for this finding is that the higher order thinking skills which CT emphasises (Nentl & Zietlow, 2008) play a key role in providing the skills necessary to achieve the 'cognitive independence' which Biesta (2015) expounds, and in enabling learners to respond positively to the 'interruptions' that their educator presents them with (Peters, 1967, 1977).

If CT prepares learners for 'interruption', I would argue that it is CP and Deconstruction which actually constitute these interruptions, and hence why all participants' conceptualisations combined CT with either one or both of these. While the learner has more power than in the past, Biesta (2015) maintains that the role of professional educators is not simply to service the needs which learners perceive themselves to have, but also to play a role in defining what those needs are. Naturally, this is highly subjective, but Biesta (2015) opines that professional educators must be allowed to make these judgements on an individual basis, using their expertise to determine what will lead to the greatest education of their students. I believe that it is from this position that the finding that some participants included CP within their conceptualisation of criticality, while others

did not, may be explained. This is since it is a decision entirely based on the individual educator's subjective, professional judgement as to whether or not utilising elements of CP would be beneficial to the interruption, and hence education, of their students.

So, what then of Deconstruction? And why did all participants include this within their conceptualisation? In my view, the answer again lies in the way in which these educators seek to 'interrupt' their students and develop their cognitive and moral independency, but this time in a far more complex way. Meirieu (2008) posits that while educators should take a role in determining what may be beneficial for their students, over time, learners should be encouraged in the ability to make these determinations autonomously. It is on this basis that I believe it is only through Deconstruction that true critical independency can be achieved. Key to understanding this view, is the deconstructionist thought of the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, who believes that Western philosophy and ontology attempt to subsume the '*other*', that is, that which lies beyond one's comprehension, into a state of sameness with that which does lie within one's comprehension, a notion he terms '*totality*' (Davis, 1996). However, Levinas contends that '*totality*' treats the '*other*' in an abusive, immoral, and unethical way (Davis, 1996), and instead argues that we must embrace the '*other*' through the way in which Deconstruction conceives of meaning-making as fluid, relative, and interpretive (Davis, 1996). This, Levinas believes, allows the '*other*' to reveal itself in its fullest and truest sense, but in a way which inevitably "infinitely overflows the bounds of knowledge" (Levinas et al., 1996:12). Essentially then, through Deconstruction, we may acknowledge that the nature of the '*other*' goes far beyond any idea that a person may have about it, a concept Levinas defines as '*infinity*' (Davis, 1996).

Therefore, since all participants' conceptualisations incorporate Deconstruction, I believe, on a theoretical level, they can be said to be doing their utmost to bring about the most effective and beneficial 'interruptions' in their learners, and in doing so, are very much on the right track for leading them towards the highest forms of criticality, and thus, "cognitive and moral independence" (Biesta, 2015:11-12).

## 5.4 Practical Applications

While I contend that, on a conceptual level, these educators are well-placed to develop the highest forms of criticality in their students, there is evidence of room for improvement on an implementational level. Thus, while only one participant explicitly expressed a desire for this, I believe there is a strong case that these educators' ability to improve their students' criticality skills would be significantly enhanced if they were provided with training specifically focused on techniques for teaching criticality (Behar-Horenstein & Niu, 2011).

Furthermore, one of the main issues which has come to the fore in regards to implementation is that, whether due to conceptual or terminological issues, there is often a lack of clarity among students regarding precisely what educators are referring to when they talk about 'criticality'. Therefore, I would recommend that teachers be conscious of this issue, and make effort to be as specific as possible in this regard. Additionally, since what it means to be 'critical' can vary slightly from course to course within each programme, one way to compensate may be for educators to include some form of course-specific 'Criticality Statement' in each course's student handbook. By providing information on criticality in relation to the specific content and context of each course in this way, I believe the potential for a lack of clarity among learners in this regard would be significantly reduced.

Another way in which these programmes may look to improve their implementation of criticality teaching is through the adoption of Ennis' (1989) 'mixed' approach. This approach, found to be the most effective method of developing criticality (Abrami et al., 2008; Behar-Horenstein & Niu, 2011), comprises separate instructional sessions focusing solely on criticality, before these skills are then applied to specific course content. However, I believe that time and workload constraints preclude educators from operating this approach on an individual basis. Therefore, one way to achieve this may be to expand the existing Research Methods courses, which all students of the graduate school are required to take. These courses already place a focus on skills of analysis, evaluation, and interpretation, and therefore I believe extending these to allow teachers more time to emphasise the transferrable nature of these skills, and allow students to practice doing so, represents a practical and effective way of implementing the 'mixed' approach across both programmes.

## 5.5 Recommendations for Further Research

Building upon the discussion of this study's limitations in chapter three, it is important to bear in mind that this research deals only with how teacher educators *believe* themselves to conceptualise and implement criticality. While I feel strongly that a valuable insight into this area has been provided by researching on this basis, it is undeniable that this study would be enhanced were it to have incorporated classroom observations (Flick, 2009), and a documentary analysis of teaching materials (Punch & Oancea, 2014), in order to establish whether participants' beliefs correspond with practical reality.

However, to achieve the greatest expanse of insight into this field, it is necessary to consider again Peters' (1967) view that the success of teaching can only truly be measured in relation to the learner. On this basis, I strongly recommend that further research into this field incorporates

learners' perspectives. This might take place through the gathering of qualitative interview data from students, or through quantitative questionnaires, which would perhaps allow the researcher to gather data from a much larger sample. Alternatively, this could involve a longitudinal content analysis (Bryman, 2012) of the assignments completed by students during their period of study. By analysing the progression of students' performances in relation to the criticality-related elements of each assignment's respective marking criteria, the researcher would be able to obtain systematic and quantifiable evidence of the impact and effectiveness of teachers' conceptualisations and implementations of criticality on their learners.

## 5.6 Closing Comments

Criticality has long been a cornerstone of Western higher education, and there is little to suggest that this will change in the future. Also unlikely to change, is the disagreement among educators on what precisely it should entail. However, through this study, I believe it has been demonstrated that this lack of consensus need not be as problematic as is often suggested. Far more important, in my view, is that, rather than being required to 'sing from the same hymn sheet', professional educators be permitted to be just that, utilising their own knowledge and experience to conceptualise criticality in ways which they believe best meet their students' needs. Of course, this approach can lead to a lack of clarity for learners, but I believe that the solution to overcoming this lies not in seeking conceptual uniformity, but in assisting educators to understand how best to implement their individual conceptualisations on a practical level.

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## Appendices



## Appendix A: **Participant Information Sheet**

# Participant Information Sheet

**Programme:** XXXX

**Research Project Title:** Teacher Conceptualisations and Implementations of Criticality in a UK University Language Teacher Education Setting.

**Research Investigator:** XXXX

## **What is the purpose of the study?**

While developing criticality is generally seen as one of the key aims of higher education, there is significant evidence that university educators conceptualise and implement it in many different ways. This research project aims to make a contribution to the understanding of university language teacher educators' conceptualisations of criticality, how those conceptualisations are formed, and how they are implemented in the classroom.

## **How will the study be conducted?**

This study will be conducted in the form of a one-to-one interview with the researcher at a location of the participant's choosing, and will take approximately forty minutes to complete. The interview will be audio recorded, and later transcribed for analysis.

## **Do I have to take part in the study?**

There is no obligation to take part in this research. You can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason, and there will be no adverse consequences if you do so. However, once data has been collected and included in the research paper (anonymously), it cannot be withdrawn.

## **What are the potential disadvantages or risks in taking part?**

The only potential issue for participants is that, while the institutional setting under study will, of course, not be named in the final report, due to the fact that the institution is the researcher's place of study and elements of the data gathered will be triangulated with the researcher's own experiences as a student, it may be possible for some readers of the report to ascertain the true setting of the study. However, please be assured that privacy and confidentiality of all individual data will be fully maintained through the use of pseudonyms.

## **What are the potential advantages or benefits to taking part?**

It is hoped that, by providing an insight into the relationships between differing conceptualisations and implementations of criticality, this study may provide participants with useful information on how the teaching of criticality can be carried out more successfully. Therefore, all participants will be provided with an opportunity to receive a summary of the study's findings, once it is completed. There is no payment offered for participation in the study.

**How will the data be used?**

The results will be summarised, analysed and reported in a Master's level dissertation, and may later be submitted for publication in an academic or professional journal.

**What happens to the data after the study is completed?**

As stated above, all the information you provide is confidential and data presented in the research paper will be fully anonymised through the use of pseudonyms. During the course of the study, all data will be stored on the researcher's personal computer and on a cloud server, both of which are password protected. Upon completion of the study, all audio recordings will be deleted, along with all interview transcripts.

**Where can I obtain further information, or complain about the study?**

This research project has been approved by the Edinburgh University Research Ethics Board. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please contact:

[Researcher Contact Details]

Alternatively, you can contact the research supervisor:

[Research Supervisor Contact Details]

**Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.**

## Appendix B: Interview Consent Form

# Interview Consent Form

**Research Project Title:** Teacher Conceptualisations and Implementations of Criticality in a UK University Language Teacher Education Setting.

**Research Investigator:** XXXX.

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the above research project. Ethical procedures for academic research undertaken from UK institutions require that interviewees explicitly agree to being interviewed, and to how the information contained in their interview will be used. This consent form is necessary to ensure that you understand your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation. Please read the accompanying **information sheet** and then sign this form to certify that you approve the following:

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time.
- I understand that the transcript of the interview will be analysed by the research investigator.
- I understand that any data which I provide will remain confidential and will be fully anonymised in the research paper.
- I understand that it may be possible for readers of the research paper to ascertain the location of the study.
- I understand that anonymised data cannot be withdrawn once it has been included in the research paper.
- I understand that I will not receive any payment or other benefit for my participation.
- I consent to being audio recorded as part of the study.
- I understand that all audio recordings and interview transcripts will be stored on a hard drive and cloud server, accessible only by the research investigator, and that these will be fully deleted upon completion of the study.
- I consent to being a participant in this study.

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**Participant's Name (Print)**

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**Participant's Signature**

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**Researcher's Signature**

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**Date**

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**Date**

## Appendix C: Interview Guide

# Interview Guide

## Preliminary

- *Briefly outline purposes of research again and why participant has been asked to take part.*
- *Reaffirm that participant can withdraw at any time and does not have to answer any questions they are uncomfortable with.*
- *Ask participant to read and sign consent form.*

## Part One: Participant Attributes

- Please could you say your name, job title, and the name of the programme(s) you currently teach on.
- What is your highest academic qualification, and in what subject?
- How many years have you taught on this programme(s)?
- What courses do you teach on within this programme(s)? (clarify if they teach on L&L)
- After achieving your doctorate (or highest qualification) have you taught on any other postgraduate language teacher education programmes? Where/how long?
- Have you, at any time in your career, worked as a language teacher? Which language(s)? Where? Type of institution(s)? Duration?

## Part Two: Defining & Conceptualising Criticality

- In simple terms, could you describe your personal conceptualisation of 'criticality'?
- Could you now please expand on that definition in more detail?
- To what extent would you agree that developing criticality in your students is the major goal of your teaching?
- What would you say are the major factors that have influenced you in your current conceptualisation of criticality? (e.g. university marking policy, previous education)
- Do you feel your conceptualisation has changed over time? How/why?

## Part Three: Other Conceptualisations (ask as appropriate)

- To what extent are you familiar with the Critical Thinking/Critical Pedagogy/Deconstruction - based positions on criticality? (provide brief explanations if necessary)
- What are your views on these conceptualisations? (strengths & weaknesses, how might they be beneficial?)

## Part Four: Implementing Criticality in the Classroom

- How does your conceptualisation of criticality influence your teaching methodology (on this programme(s))?
- Could you give some examples of how you incorporate criticality into your teaching? (e.g. do you make it explicit? i.e. through explaining you are going to teach critical thinking skills or pointing out aspects related to politics etc.?)
- Can you tell me how you are able to measure the effectiveness of year teaching in developing students' criticality skills?

## Closing

- Do you have anything else you wish to add?
- Thank you for your time. Would you be interested in receiving a summary of this study's findings once it has been completed? (confirm email address).

## Appendix D: Sample Interview Transcript



## Participant J

**Interviewer:** Could I please first of all ask you to say your name, job title, and the name of the programme that you currently teach on.

**Participant:** [Name], I teach on several master's programmes, so mainly I teach on the [Programme Title], but a lot of our option courses take a lot of [Programme Title] students. I teach on the [Programme Title], which is the XXXX, and I do some research teaching on other programmes.

**Interviewer:** And your job title?

**Participant:** I'm the [Job Title] and the [Job Title].

**Interviewer:** Thank you. And could I ask, what is the general field of your doctorate?

**Participant:** For my own doctorate I looked at listening. I came to understand that there was huge literature in libraries about reading and writing in L1 and L2, but there was very little real research done into listening. So I looked at listening, I had done a lot of work on listening from a psychological perspective, listening as an individual cognitive process. So in my doctorate I looked at it from a sociocultural perspective. And that's just exactly what I did. So I looked at, it ended up being quite a huge study. I got ten former students, because I used to be responsible for training teachers of English, so I got ten former students that I knew really quite well, I was looking at what good teachers did, I wasn't interested in, you know, negative things. I wanted to see what are people doing that's working well, and why it is working well. So I was very careful to select students who had gone through who were really good students, who I knew had maintained their reputations and were good teachers, and they very kindly agreed to plan lessons focusing on different aspects of listening and create plans for me in exactly the same way as they did when they were students here, so I had a really good sense of what their aims and objectives were, and then I could watch a lesson in the same way as I always would to see how it worked out. So I went in over an extended period of time and watched all ten of them teach a series of lessons, and then I interviewed the ten and I got each of them to identify four children in their groups. This was first and second year in Scottish secondary schools, I gave them no help to make this decision, and it ended up being very interesting. I asked them to identify two children who they thought were good listeners and two who were less successful listeners, and I focused quite a lot of my attention during the observation on those kids, and then I interviewed them as well. So that's what my thesis was about.

**Interviewer:** Great, thank you. And, can I ask how many years have you taught on the [Programme Title]?

**Participant:** Since it started, I think six or seven years now. It was quite a new one, the [Programme Title] was already validated and running and the [Programme Title] came in to us at around about the same time from a different bit of the university. So we used to just have one programme and now we've got three.

**Interviewer:** OK. And, within that programme, which are the main courses that you tend to teach on?

**Participant:** I teach on what is one of the compulsory courses, which is [Course Title], in semester one. And in semester two, I teach on two optional courses, one is called [Course Title] and the other one, which I think will be of interest to you, is [Course Title], I'm the course organiser for that one.

**Interviewer:** Excellent. After achieving your doctorate, have you taught on any other postgraduate language teacher education programmes at other institutions?

**Participant:** I've done the odd individual seminar or lecturer, but only one-off things, but not like a teaching contract at all.

**Interviewer:** Right, thank you. And finally for this section, can I ask, have you at any time in your career worked as a language teacher?

**Participant:** A second language teacher?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Participant:** I have, at the very beginning of my career. I hadn't worked as a second language teacher, but before I came here I taught in secondary schools, and when I was training I did TEFL qualifications, and then when I went into schools there were quite a few children coming in for whom English was not their first language, so I got quite involved in teaching them. But, I haven't particularly held a post teaching L2.

**Interviewer:** So can I ask what were you teaching in the school?

**Participant:** I was teaching English.

**Interviewer:** OK, and for how many years would you say you did some kind of TEFL work in addition to your main job?

**Participant:** It was additional in the sense that I was responsible for children in my department. When I was a class teacher they were in my class, when I was the head of department they were in my department. We got a lot of, we were quite lucky, we got a fair amount of specialist help from people whose job that actually was, especially if children came in with no English at all. But, because I had done TEFL qualifications, I found that very helpful, I became quite involved with that. So I actually did that all the way through, probably for the best part of the 16 or 17 years I was in the school.

**Interviewer:** And was that a case of providing additional support in the existing English lessons, or were they separate classes?

**Participant:** I did additional support within existing English lessons. So, differentiating what I was doing to help children at different stages in their language acquisition. Other people's responsibility was to, on occasion, pull them out and work with them on something.

**Interviewer:** OK, so onto the first main section of the interview, the title of this section is 'Defining and Conceptualising Criticality'. So to start with, and I know this is maybe quite a difficult question, in simple terms, could you please describe your personal conceptualisation of criticality?

**Participant:** I think that sounds like a simple question, and actually it's complex. I think criticality in its purest sense is engaging critically with something, and by that I mean having an open mind and a questioning attitude to what we're actually reading or hearing, and understanding not just what the messages are that are being conveyed to us, but how those messages are constructed, how we as readers or listeners are being positioned by linguistic choices or visual representation in visual texts, how are we being positioned to respond in certain ways. So criticality, to my mind, whether I'm thinking about teaching criticality to postgraduate students who are doing doctorates, or children in schools, its similar but at different levels. And, it's exactly what I've just said, it's what these writers are saying, how they're saying it, how we are being manipulated often as audiences towards adopting a particular position. So I think it's very much to do with awareness, because that is to do with power and I think we need to empower people to understand that they don't just accept something, and to come to it with an open and critical mind. And it's exactly the same with students who are reading literature. Just because something is published in a journal or a book, doesn't mean we have to just accept it unquestioningly. So it's understanding content, it's understanding how

meaning is being constructed, teaching them a meta-language to do that, and that comes with confidence I think and just takes a bit of time. And encouraging readers and listeners to have the confidence and skills and power to challenge what they're reading.

**Interviewer:** Thank you. And then, can I ask to what extent do you agree that developing criticality in your students is a major goal of your teaching?

**Participant:** I think it is one of the major goals in my teaching. From my experience of working here, with a lot of students from different cultural contexts, it has just not been their experience. So, I think they simply don't understand what we mean when we say 'critical engagement'. Fortunately, they're very able, and with a bit of help and support, they come to understand. It's exactly the same for learners for whom English is their first language, a lot of them have great difficulty in being critical, and a lot of our students whether they're in schools or universities, to begin with, think of 'critical' as being negative, you've got to find something wrong with something, and in actual fact, it may well be that on occasion, but it isn't simply that. You know, being critical is having the skills to understand the things that I've mentioned before.

**Interviewer:** So going back to your personal conceptualisation, what would you say are the major factors in helping you reach that conceptualisation, and perhaps how has that changed over time?

**Participant:** I think what happened was that I've always been aware, and when I was working in schools with twelve year-olds through to eighteen year-olds, I always taught about language and how language was working. So that the students I was teaching, began to understand, you know, how language was being used to manipulate or to create a particular impression, or to do all sorts of things. But I probably, I mean I was doing it, but I probably, because I hadn't done all the academic reading that I've now done, I couldn't have put a label on what I was doing. And then when I came here and realised that I was having to do a significant amount to teach the students to be critical, and to have an awareness of criticality, and that then being developed by my own reading. So I think I've been doing it the whole of my professional career, but I'm much more aware of what I'm doing now, and I can anchor it much more securely in academic literature. So it's a process as opposed to a one-off thing, and it's taken quite a long time. I became very interested, because a lot of the teaching I do obviously is on language courses, I became very interested in critical literacy. Now I know that there are people who are quite worried about that, and I heard one colleague say that they, as in those of us who teach on that course, are just pushing their Marxist views on this, this and this. And actually that couldn't be further from the truth, because what we're doing is helping students to step back and become more critical.

**Interviewer:** So moving on to the next section, you just talked there about the critical literacy and critical pedagogy approach, and the accusation that it can be, some people would say, that professors push their left wing views onto students, but do you feel that it is open to that potential abuse?

**Participant:** I think, like anything you teach, anything is open to abuse. I don't make any bones about the fact that I think I've reached a position in my head in which I think it is a really important set of skills to teach to everybody, whatever age and stage we're at. I understand why people think what they think, but sometimes I think the views are quite ill-informed. You know, to comment on a course which they have absolutely no idea what happens in the course and how it's taught, I think is just absolutely classic (laughs)... it's people having views on something that actually they just don't know enough about. We're careful with the students, those of us that teach it, we're similar but we're very different, which is quite interesting, and we frequently introduce ideas and concepts but we put it back to the students and get them to work with it, and then come back to us and talk to us about how useful something is, different ways of thinking about it. But it is a course that's new, it's only ran for a couple of years, and it gets the best evaluations, and the students find it transformative, and that I think speaks volumes.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, I know some people who took it and they spoke very highly of it.

**Participant:** Yeah, and it forces people to think. The students wrote a weekly journal for us about how they were feeling about each session, and they write things like 'I came away today and it was just all buzzing in my head, I had never heard or thought about any of those things before, and of course they're important, and why didn't I know about this?'. Well, how could they if they hadn't done something to help them into it.

**Interviewer:** OK, thank you. So without putting words into your mouth, this critical pedagogy/critical literacy area is kind of really where your conceptualisation of criticality lies?

**Participant:** It significantly shapes it, although I'm not for the minute suggesting that there aren't other things which have an impact on how I conceive of and think and define criticality, but like anything, it's complex and it means different things to different people.

**Interviewer:** Can I ask what you think about a view of criticality that is based purely on thinking skills, a set of skills which can be learned and applied universally, how do you feel about that?

**Participant:** Well, I absolutely do not agree with that. I've seen in some of the critical documents for schools, that it's been written about, critical literacy, as if it is just 'information literacy'. It's not information literacy, that's part of it, it's not critical thinking, although there are elements of that. I think criticality is a much bigger and more complex concept than either one of those other things, and yet these terms are used quite interchangeably. But they're used by people who just don't know about critical literacy, or about critical pedagogy.

**Interviewer:** OK, and one other slightly different conceptualisation of criticality before we move on. Can I ask to what extent are you familiar with the deconstructionist view on criticality?

**Participant:** I'm familiar with it, yes.

**Interviewer:** Can I ask, do you feel that that has any particular strengths or weaknesses for teaching criticality skills, particularly in the language teacher education classroom?

**Participant:** I think it is very important, if we are thinking about deconstruction, that it has to go hand-in-hand with reconstruction. It isn't enough just to deconstruct something, that's the first stage. So what I seek to do in the sessions that I do and what my colleagues do, is we teach about deconstruction in a way that is accessible to the students we're working with. So we're careful, we choose texts that we think are accessible to them, we teach them a range of approaches to deconstructing texts. So we look at printed texts, we look at media texts, and we teach them a meta-language for deconstructing. And again, many of the students have not been taught those things. Now, I don't go as far as discourse analysis or critical discourse analysis. Although we do all of that in [Course Title] in semester one, so we look at all those different approaches to discourse analysis, we do one a week. And sometimes we return to texts we have used and come at it in a different way, but by the end of that, a lot of the students who have done that choose then to do the [Course Title] course. So they're drawing on different approaches to the discourse analysis. Sometimes, you know, I'll do all the obvious ones like Gee and Fairclough, but I'll also do critical approaches in terms of literary and linguistic features, I do a session on media, and I'm teaching them a meta-language, because a lot of the students, they're quite good usually on the language, but probably less so on the literature, which I found odd. But it's their background, it's not a criticism. So we teach them a lot of terminology and that's empowering. And you begin, gradually, to deconstruct texts. And the assignment actually, although we've done quite a different approach to the assessment. So rather than one big assignment, we've got four small assignments, and the thinking is that success and work for each one will inform the next one. That's what we've done.

**Interviewer:** That's interesting, I didn't know that.

**Participant:** That's what we've done there. Now, there's criticisms of that as well, but on the whole, we ask students every year if that approach has worked for them, and if not, what would be better. And the students have all come back and said 'yes, we like that'.

**Interviewer:** And why did you feel initially that the standard kind of end of semester assessment wasn't appropriate for this course?

**Participant:** We were very aware that we were teaching something that many of the students would never have thought about before. Now that's not the case in any of the other courses. What we're doing is looking at language in a very different way to what students are used to. And so what we decided to do was, we decided we have to have so many words summatively assessed. So we did two things, we asked for the students to write a journal each week, and the journal entries were open and the assignments when they come in are closed, so only staff can see them and respond. The thinking then was that, it's quite high stakes, one single assignment at the end, so if we ask students to do something, especially if we've taught them, like media analysis, very few of them knew much about that, so if you have an assignment which is a short piece of analysis, only a thousand words, then the feedback we give can support, can encourage. So, we give formative feedback even though it's a summative task, because it's got to inform the next one. Now, the students liked that. And we had a lot of discussions about how to assess, and we talked in our feedback about what they had done, we talked about what worked and what was good, but we also always moved on and said "to strengthen it you might have considered doing this, this and this". So we see it as very formative.

**Interviewer:** Very interesting.

**Participant:** Now, your question was about deconstruction. Deconstruction was really important, but it's only half the story. So as we move through the course we teach all about deconstruction, but then we begin to fill in reconstruction. And there's a lot in the literature now of how different people on different studies have looked at that. So we look at those studies, we introduce lots of texts and work with the students to do that, then we get them to work in small groups to do a reconstruction of something, and we ask them to discuss whose voices we hear, who's got the loudest voice here? Whose voices are silent? So if I've chosen an advert from a [national context], it's not hard to work out whose voices are silent. So we've deconstructed a text, but then we reconstruct it from different perspectives, so whose perspectives are privileged here? How could we change this message, and

give a different perspective? So, you know, a woman who doesn't have a voice behind a burqa, so that's what we do. But we also do it in Western contexts, so we give an example which the students end up loving, be careful how you use this, because it will be very easy to identify me, [example removed to preserve participant anonymity]. So the students brought about change, and that's reconstruction. And it's to do with power, who's got the power, who's silenced, who's views are privileged, who don't we hear here?

**Interviewer:** Interesting, because one of the biggest criticisms of deconstruction is that you just end up in an endless loop of questioning and deconstructing, and nothing gets enacted, there's no outcome. Which is what critical pedagogy really needs.

**Participant:** Yeah, that's exactly what critical pedagogy is about. Does that make sense?

**Interviewer:** Yes, it does. Thank you. I've experienced this in another class where two of your students demonstrated how to [removed to preserve participant anonymity].

**Participant:** I'm glad you enjoyed that, and that's a good point, because I choose texts which are very challenging, but part of the message is that we can teach five and six year-olds to be critically literate. So I used fairy tales and all sorts of things, which can be fabulous. And the nice thing is that you can use those texts across the board. For example, one student did a lovely assignment looking at transformations of a familiar and popular fairy tale, and analysed it from a feminist perspective. So you can do it at any level at all.

**Interviewer:** But, it can be applied at any...

**Participant:** Exactly, it can be applied at any level, and five year-olds can reconstruct, twelve year-olds can, master's students can.

**Interviewer:** OK, that's really helpful. OK final section now, actually you've answered most of these questions already. One final question then, have you ever encountered situations where you feel your attempts to teach criticality have been particularly unsuccessful, so for example you've met real resistance from students or something like that.

**Participant:** That's an interesting one. Sometimes when they write-up their weekly journals, they're rehearsing in their head that they're not seeing the point of something. And I suppose then that that is a bit of resistance, there is a bit of resistance going on. And it's interesting to read that. I've never had anybody overtly say "I don't want to do this" or "this isn't the right way to do it". Though, I have



had people write in their journals, "I'm struggling with this", and a large part of me thinks that it's because it's different, they're not used to thinking like that. So I'm very careful how I respond, I just pick up the points that they're making. And I don't tend to get into any sort of, he-said she-said sort of thing. But what I do try to do is to pick up some of the points they are making and say 'maybe a different way to think about this is such and such'. And so, I try to do it like that, and I'm very aware that everybody can see this, so it's really quite important. The students are entirely entitled to their own opinions, but always their opinions have to be informed. So, no I've never had any overt resistance, but I've had some students who are clearly struggling to make the shift.

**Interviewer:** Thank you very much. Just to close, I'll ask if there's anything else on this topic area that you'd like to add?

**Participant:** Not really, I think that criticality and critical literacy go hand-in-hand with critical pedagogy. And, I don't really think we can think and talk about critical literacy without thinking about critical pedagogical approaches that we need to use, and that's why we decided to call the course [Course Title]. So, in our sessions we very deliberately model what we mean by critical pedagogy, so we don't have a lecture and then a two-hour seminar, we do a three-hour morning instead. And sometimes, not all the time, it starts off with a short PowerPoint presentation of key things and then we maybe move on to something. But [teachers on this course], we're instinctively similar teachers ourselves, that we take something and we interact with the class as if we were teaching, we tell them what we're doing, "OK this is how we would do this in a class room". So, they're operating on two levels, they're thinking about the critical literacy that's going on, but they're thinking about the ways in which we're handling that as teachers. Also, at the end of our sessions, we always stop and get the students to tell us how they feel it's gone that day, and we encourage them to be constructively critical, which a lot of them find quite hard to do, they're not used to their teacher saying 'tell me what went well and what didn't go so well'. But by the end of the nine taught sessions, they've seen us teach in a whole range of different ways, and we make the point very clearly to them that there's no one right or wrong way of doing this, there's just different ways of doing it. We're different types of teachers because we're different types of people, and they will find their way, which might not match anything that we've done.

**Interviewer:** But if it's an informed way...

**Participant:** Exactly, that's exactly right.

**Interviewer:** Well, thanks very much for your time.

**Participant:** It's a pleasure.

