Biblical Reading and Critical Reading: How Do They Inform Each Other in Interpreting the Text?

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ABSTRACT: This article presents a comparative study of two reading approaches: biblical reading and critical reading. Three inquiry questions are addressed by the study: (1) what are the similarities and differences between biblical reading and critical reading? (2) are biblical reading and critical reading antithetical to each other or can they supplement each other? and (3) what do biblical reading and critical reading imply for reading instruction? The purpose of the study is to demonstrate how these two seemingly opposed reading approaches can inform each other in interpreting the text.

Keywords: biblical reading, biblical interpretation, critical reading, critical literacy, reading instruction, literacy instruction

RESUMÉ: Une étude comparative de deux perspectives, la lecture de la Bible et la lecture critique. L'étude soulève trois questions :
1) Quelles sont les ressemblances et les différences entre les deux lectures ?
2) Sont-elles contradictoires ou bien, peuvent-elles se compléter ?
3) Qu'apporteront ces deux lectures à l'enseignement de la lecture?
Apparemment contraires, ces deux lectures doivent prouver que les renseignements tirés de chacune d'elle peuvent aider l'autre dans l'interprétation.

Mots-clés : lecture de la Bible, interprétation biblique, lecture critique, alphabétisation critique, cours d'alphabétisation

Introduction

As a reader and, very likely, a researcher/practitioner in education, you may wonder why I did a comparative study of biblical reading and critical reading and how the study relates to your research/practice. To answer the questions, I have to unavoidably talk about myself a little bit. I am a Christian as well

as an advocate for critical reading grounded in Paulo Freire's (1984) critical literacy/pedagogy (more on this later). Like many other Christians, I believe that the Bible is the Word of God and that reading the Bible is trying to understand God's will. Therefore, little room is left for personal interpretation as the focus is on knowing what the "Author" means through the text. In contrast, as a critical reader, I believe that texts should be examined critically. A critical reader attempts not only to understand the author's meaning, but also to critique or problematize it. According to Michel Foucault (2003), problematization is the key element that is capable of describing the history or analysis of thought. He argues that problematization makes possible "the transformation of the difficulties and obstacles of a practice into a general problem for which one proposes diverse practical solutions" (Foucault, 2003, p. 24). Foucault denounces polemics which is present in three models: the religious model, the judiciary model, and the political model. The polemicist, according to Foucault (2003), is not interested in the search for truth.

> [Instead], he possesses rights authorizing him to wage war and making that struggle a just undertaking; the person he confronts is not a partner in search for the truth but an adversary, an enemy who is wrong, who is armful, and whose very existence constitutes a threat. For him, then the game consists not of recognizing this person as a subject having the right to speak but of abolishing him as interlocutor, from any possible dialogue; and his final objective will be not to come as close as possible to a difficult truth but to bring about the triumph of the just cause he has been manifestly upholding from the beginning. (p. 19)

Christianity as one form of polemics (i.e., the religious model) is critiqued by Foucault to be an obstacle to the search for the truth. Therefore, there seems to be a tug of war between biblical reading and critical reading.

The comparative study of biblical reading and critical reading, on the one hand, is my personal journey to explore the possibility of reconciling the religious part of me and my scholarly advocacy for critical literacy. Instead of dismissing my religious "subjectivity" in Peshkin's (1988) language, I want to make it explicit and have a critical discourse on it. Peshkin (1988) says it well in reflecting on his own subjectivity in research, "I do not thereby exorcise my subjectivity. I do, rather, enable myself to manage it – to preclude it from being unwittingly burdensome – as I progress through collecting, analyzing, and writing up my data" (p. 20). Acknowledging the existence of my religious subjectivity

in my scholarly practice allows me to encounter it in a positive way. I become mindful of its enabling and disabling potential when engaging in teaching and research as a teacher educator in education, in general, and in literacy education, in particular.

On the other hand, the comparative study of biblical reading and critical reading will benefit literacy researchers and practitioners who are interested in the similarities and differences between these two reading approaches and how they relate to reading instruction. Specifically, the following inquiry questions will be addressed by this study:

- What are the similarities and differences between biblical reading and critical reading?
- Are biblical reading and critical reading antithetical to each other or can they supplement each other?
- What do biblical reading and critical reading imply for reading instruction?

To answer these inquiry questions, I will first discuss the definitions of biblical reading and critical reading used in this study. Then a comparison of these two reading approaches will be made. Finally, the implications of these two reading approaches for reading instruction will be discussed in detail.

Biblical Reading: The Interpretive Journey

Because there are different assumptions about the nature of the Bible, there is more than one way of interpreting the Bible (e.g., see Mickelsen, 1977; Osborne, 2006; Zuck, 1991). For example, Robison (2013) lists four methods of interpreting the Bible, i.e., interpreting the Bible as (1) the Word of God, (2) a historical document, (3) Midrash, and (4) folklore. First, according to Robison (2013), the proponents of interpreting the Bible as the Word of God believe that the Bible is an inerrant document whose authors were inspired directly by God when they were writing their books. Second, those who interpret the Bible as a historical document view the Bible as having been written by human, fallible authors. The authors were motivated by a desire to promote their own religious, spiritual, and political beliefs and/or those of their faith group.

Third, the retired Episcopal Bishop Spong (1994) explains interpreting the Bible as Midrash as follows:

The Jewish way of saying that everything to be venerated in the present must somehow be connected with a sacred moment in the

> past…. It is the means whereby the experience of the present can be affirmed and asserted as true inside the symbols of yesterday. (pp. 8-9)

For example, in Exodus 14:5-28, the Hebrew people were trapped between the Red/Reed Sea and the approaching Egyptian army. Moses cried out to God who parted the sea so that the Israelites could pass in safety. According to a Midrash interpretation, the purpose of the parting of the Red/Reed Sea was to show the Israelites that God was on their side and that Moses could call on him for protection. However, it is not useful to ask whether the parting of the sea actually occurred.

The last interpretive method is reading the Bible as folklore. Dundes (1999) argues that "it is not a question of 'making' the Bible folklore; it is folklore… [because] the Bible clearly manifests the basic distinctive criteria of folklore: namely, multiple existence and variation" (p. 2). Dundes (1999) believes that some stories in the Bible were circulated for decades and even centuries as an oral tradition. During that time, each version of the story subtlety changed as it was circulated before it was finally recorded in written form. From the discrepancies among the various versions of the same story, he argues not only that the Bible contains folklore, but that the Bible is folklore.

In this study, Duvall and Hays' (2012) approach called the interpretive journey, which is aligned with interpreting the Bible as the Word of God, will be used for comparison in that it is widely quoted and used by scholars in the field of biblical interpretation. The interpretive journey consists of the following five steps (see Duvall & Hays, 2012, pp. 42-47):
1. Grasping the text in their town: What did the text mean to the biblical audience?
2. Measuring the width of the river to cross: What are the differences between the biblical audience and us?
3. Crossing the principlizing bridge: What is the theological principle in this text?
4. Consulting the biblical map: how does our theological principle fit with the rest of the Bible?
5. Grasping the text in our town: How should individual Christians today live out the theological principles?

To illustrate, let us look at a passage from the Bible and see how it is interpreted through the five steps of the interpretive journey listed above:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

Step 1: Grasping the Text in Their Town: What Did the Text Mean to the Biblical Audience?

The Book of Acts was written by Luke as a sequel to the gospel of Luke in the Bible. It records the acts of Jesus' apostles, focusing especially on Peter and Paul and other early Christian leaders. It is an account of the birth and growth of the early church. The episode recorded in Acts 2:42-47 depicts the early Christian community where people worshipped God, cared for one another, and grew spiritually.

Step 2: Measuring the Width of the River to Cross: What Are the Differences between the Biblical Audience and Us?

The fellowship of the early Christian believers resembles, to a certain degree, the church life we have now. However, there are some differences. First, we do not have apostles in the church who were eye witnesses of Jesus' work when he was on earth. Second, while the early Christians still saw many wonders and miraculous signs performed by the apostles, most of the modern-day Christians do not see miracles performed by fellow Christians. Finally, the early Christians met every day in the temple courts, but we do not have fellowship that frequently in most of the churches.

Step 3: Crossing the Principlizing Bridge: What Is the Theological Principle in this Text?

The theological principle that applies both to the early Christian believers and us is that God wants Christians to love and care for one another.

Step 4: Consulting the Biblical Map: How Does Our Theological Principle Fit with the Rest of the Bible?

God wants us to love one another as it is stated in 1 John 4:23, "And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us." Also, 1 John 4:7 says, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love

comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God." Therefore, the theological principle that God wants us to love one another is also reaffirmed in other places of the Bible.

Step 5: Grasping the Text in Our Town: How Should Individual Christians Today Live Out the Theological Principles?

We call Christians in the church brothers and sisters. It shows the relationship we have with them through Jesus Christ. We are not only friends, but fellow brothers and sisters. Therefore, we should love one another as a family. This love can be practiced in our lives through, for example, helping those who are financially in need, caring for those who are physically challenged, praying for the mentally and emotionally destressed, and so on.

Critical Reading: Four Dimensions of Critical Literacy

Like biblical reading, critical reading is a general term that needs to be narrowed down as there are many approaches to critical reading. In this study, the four dimensions of critical literacy are used to demonstrate how texts can be analyzed critically. Critical literacy has its roots in the work of Paulo Freire. Freire is one of the most influential scholars/practitioners that has contributed to the development and advancement of critical literacy. In his Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire (1984) proposes that literacy education embodied in reflection and action is meant to empower the underprivileged through a dialogical process. He argues that educators should teach students to read both the word and the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Freire's pedagogy has not only resulted in a revolutionary impact on the people, especially the poverty class, of his native country (Brazil), but also changed the conception of literacy education in the world.

Building on Freire's work, Anderson and Irvine (1993) define critical literacy as "learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one's experience as historically constructed within specific power relations" (p. 82). Hence, the goal of critical literacy "is to challenge these unequal power relations" (Anderson & Irvine, 1993, p. 82). In parallel, Lankshear and McLaren (1993) believe that critical literacy makes possible, among other things, "a more adequate and accurate 'reading' of the world, [so that] people can enter into 'rewriting' the world into a formation in which their interests, identities, and legitimate aspirations are more fully present and are present more equally" (p.

xviii). Literacy education perceived from this critical slant is no longer merely the instruction of literate skills such as reading and writing. It is broadened to include the fostering of the ability to problematize and redefine ideologies depicted in the texts and power relations experienced in our daily lives.

Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) reviewed a range of definitions of critical literacy that appeared in the research and professional literature for a span of three decades and synthesized them into four dimensions: (1) disrupting the commonplace, (2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (4) taking action and promoting social justice. The first dimension, disrupting the commonplace, is to question the routines, beliefs, habits, theories, practices, etc. that we encounter and are used to in our lives. It focuses on interrogating our everyday world, including "how social norms are communicated through the various arenas of popular culture and how identities are shaped by these experiences" (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2008, p. 8). To paraphrase Luke and Freebody (1997), this dimension interrogates texts by asking how the texts try to position us. The second dimension, interrogating multiple viewpoints, is meant to make difference visible and subject it to critical scrutiny instead of striving for consensus and conformity. Luke and Freebody (1997) suggest that multiple and contradictory accounts of an event be juxtaposed to investigate whose voices are heard and whose voices are missing. The third dimension is focusing on the sociopolitical issues such as gender bias, bullying, and poverty that are related to students' lives. It goes beyond the personal concerns and attempts to situate them in the sociopolitical contexts/systems (Boozer, Maras, & Brummett, 1999). The last dimension is taking action and promoting social justice. It is aligned with Freire's (1984) proposition that literacy learners should be actors rather than spectators in the world. The purpose is to empower the underprivileged to challenge unequal power relations, redefine them, and take action to transform their status quo. While each of the four dimensions has its own focus, Lewison et al. (2002) argue that they are actually intertwined. For example, action can be hardly taken without first disrupting and recognizing the biased norm.

To see the four dimensions of critical literacy in action, let us look at *Little Red Riding Hood* as an example. As there are several versions of the story, I will briefly present Leanne Guenther's (2015) online version to avoid confusion. The story revolves around a little girl called Little Red Riding Hood. She walks through the forest to bring food to her grandmother. Despite her

mother's reminder, the girl dawdles along the way to pick some flowers for her grandmother and even talks to a stranger (a wolf). She tells the wolf she is on her way to see her grandmother, who lives through the forest, near the brook. While the girl is picking the flowers, the wolf goes to the grandmother's house and gains entry by pretending to be the girl. He swallows the grandmother whole and disguises himself as the grandma, waiting for the girl. A few minutes later when the girl arrives, she notices that her grandmother is very strange. When the wolf jumps out of bed and is about to eat her, Little Red Riding Hood realizes the person in the bed is not her grandmother, but a wolf. Her cry for help is heard by a woodsman who is chopping logs nearby. He grabs the wolf and makes him spit out the poor grandmother who is a bit frazzled by the whole experience. The woodsman knocks out the wolf and carries him deep into the forest where he will not bother people any longer. Then Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother have a nice lunch and a long chat. Now let us see how the four dimensions of critical literacy can be used to analyze this text.

First Dimension: Disrupting the Commonplace

On the surface, the story warns kids not to talk to strangers to avoid getting in trouble. However, this is not enough for a critical reader who should also examine and problematize any norm or stereotype (i.e., the commonplace) usually embedded in the text. For example, both Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother in the story are portrayed as gullible and weak as opposed to the wolf who is mean and the woodsman who is brave and strong. It seems to suggest that women are not smart and physically strong and need to be protected by men. Therefore, one of the stereotypes embedded in the story is the gender bias against women that should be disrupted and examined critically.

Second Dimension: Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints

The second dimension is concerned with whose voice is heard and whose voice is silenced. Without doubt, Little Red Riding Hood is the main character of the story. Yet her voice is hardly heard in the story, but replaced by the narrator's. She is portrayed from the perspective of the narrator as naïve and helpless, but this is not a fair representation of a girl or woman in reality. Therefore, this dimension argues that other perspectives or viewpoints on women should be presented. For example, stories about women as scientists and athletes should be told to show that women can be intelligent as well as physically strong.

Third Dimension: Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues

This dimension explores sociopolitical issues in the text. Specifically, a critical reader does not only look at the story on the personal level but also moves one level up and sees how it connects to the society as a whole. For example, *Little Red Riding Hood* presents a story an individual reader can relate to. As mentioned previously, the reader may learn the moral of not talking to strangers. However, a critical reader takes a step further to investigate the connection of the story to sociopolitical issues. In this case, gender bias is one of the social issues embedded in the story. The story alludes to a social conception of, or a stereotype about, women that still exists in our society.

Fourth Dimension: Taking Action and Promoting Social Justice

This dimension is about taking informed action against oppression to promote social justice. One possible action readers will take, after critically reading *Little Red Riding Hood*, is to question practices of injustice in our society against women due to their gender. Another possible action can be becoming actively involved in social movements to promote women's rights. The point is that a critical reader does not only aim to gain knowledge but also puts knowledge into practice.

Similarities and Differences

After the definitions of biblical reading and critical reading were clarified for the sake of comparison, now let us look at the three inquiry questions one by one. This section will address the first inquiry question: what are the similarities and differences between biblical reading and critical reading?

Similarities

Comprehending a text is one of the most basic steps shared by most, if not all, approaches to reading, including biblical reading and critical reading. Without correctly comprehending what is read, we can hardly do anything with the text such as applying what is learned to practice. The first three steps of the interpretive journey in biblical reading discussed previously are concerned primarily with comprehending the text. Recall that the interpretive journey begins with reading the text carefully, including its words, syntaxes, contexts, etc., in an attempt to understand what the text means to the biblical audience (step one). Then the differences between the biblical audience and us as

readers are analyzed in the second step. In fact, the audience is not limited only to the biblical audience if the text is a non-biblical text. For example, if we as adults read a book that has been written specifically for teenagers, the target audience is the teenagers. Then we need to know the differences between the teenagers (i.e., "biblical" audience) and us while reading and interpreting the book in this second step. Step three is crossing the principlizing bridge, that is, finding the theological principle in the text. Again, the theological principle of a biblical text is equivalent to the main idea of a non-biblical text. In other words, step three is to discover the meaning intended by the author. This is done by reviewing the differences found in step two, identifying the similarities shared by the biblical audience and us, returning to the meaning for the biblical audience found in step one, and trying to identify a broader theological principle/main idea reflected in the text.

Simply put, the first three steps of the interpretive journey ask the following three questions: (1) what does the text mean to the biblical audience (or target audience)? (2) what are the differences between the biblical audience (or target audience) and us? and (3) what is the theological principle (main idea) in the text? Looking for the main idea of a text or the meaning intended by the author is actually the most basic step for any kind of reading, whether biblical or otherwise. Although the four dimensions of critical literacy in critical reading do not explicitly contain this component, it is implied. Otherwise, there would be no way of doing any critical reading which is built initially on the comprehension of a text. For example, the first dimension of critical literacy is disrupting the commonplace. The commonplace can mean the main idea stated clearly or embedded implicitly in the text. A critical reader is to disrupt the main idea by looking at the text in a new light. Yet without understanding the main idea, i.e., the meaning intended by the author, it is impossible to problematize it. Therefore, comprehending a text is the basic component shared by biblical reading and critical reading as well.

Differences

Purpose. The purposes of these two reading approaches are different. The purpose of the interpretive journey is to understand the meaning of the biblical text and how it applies to us while the four dimensions of critical literacy are concerned primarily with investigating power relations and making the voice of the marginalized heard to promote social justice. In other words, the former seeks the meaning of the text intended by the author while the latter seeks to deconstruct the text from a different perspective,

especially from the perspective of the marginalized. In fact, the difference in their purposes also leads to other differences between these two reading approaches, including their ends of investigating multiple viewpoints and taking action, which will be discussed subsequently.

Multiple viewpoints. While both reading approaches share the aspect of valuing different perspectives (i.e., consulting the biblical map in the interpretive journey and investigating multiple viewpoints in the four dimensions of critical literacy), they part ways in their ends. Step four of the interpretive journey is consulting the biblical map. That is, we need to see if the theological principle we have found in step three is also applicable in, or consistent with, other parts of Scripture. Looking at multiple places of Scripture is similar to investigating multiple viewpoints. The end of doing this is to see if the theological principle is applicable in other parts of Scripture. If not, reasonable doubt is cast on the theological principle. It may not be a principle applicable throughout Scripture, but in a specific context only. Therefore, consistent meaning is sought after in this case. On the contrary, investigating multiple viewpoints in the four dimensions of critical literacy is geared toward finding difference. The end is to make silenced voices heard and to promote different voices as opposed to the voice presented by the author.

Taking action. Taking action is the praxis part of reading a text. It is part of both biblical reading and critical reading. In the interpretive journey, it is the last step of the journey: How do we live out the theological principle? It asks the reader to apply the theological principle in real-life situations. Taking action, in this sense, means taking action to live out the theological principle or lesson learned from the text. Taking action is also the last dimension of critical literacy. However, instead of living out the theological principle intended by the author, action is taken to promote social justice. The action is not necessarily aligned with the meaning intended by the author. In fact, the action is usually taken against the author's intention. This is especially true when the author's intention is to perpetuate the status quo at the cost of the marginalized. Therefore, while both reading approaches are action-oriented, their agendas are distinct.

Antithetical or Supplementary

The comparative analysis of biblical reading and critical reading above shows that these two reading approaches share the same goal of identifying the main idea of the text, but differ in

their purpose and application. Yet are these two reading approaches antithetical or supplementary to each other? This is the second inquiry question brought up at the beginning of this article and will be addressed in this section.

On the one hand, it is undeniable that there exist differences between biblical reading and critical reading. For example, a biblical reader tries to identify the main idea of the text and applies it accordingly, but a critical reader is concerned about deconstructing and "rewriting" the text after identifying its bias. On the other hand, these two reading approaches are supplementary to each other and are both needed in interpreting texts regardless of their differences.

Suppose that you as a college student are given a course syllabus on the first day of attending my class. I ask you as well as other students to read the syllabus carefully to understand what you are expected to do. Therefore, you pay close attention to each word of the syllabus, especially to the requirements of all the assignments, including such details as the assignments' word fonts, page lengths, due dates, etc. Your purpose is to make sure that you understand what I expect you to do for each assignment in order to get a good grade. In other words, in reading the syllabus this way, you play the role of a biblical reader, trying to understand the meaning of the syllabus and follow its requirements accordingly to receive a good grade.

However, you may read the syllabus like a critical reader as well, trying to not only understand what the syllabus says, but also find if there are discrepancies in it. For example, you wonder if you can purchase the first edition of the textbook because it is a lot cheaper and there may not be much difference in contents between the first edition and the second edition. You also doubt that most of the students, including you, can complete the writing project in three weeks and wonder if more time should be given for this assignment. Reading the syllabus this way, you play the role of a critical reader in an attempt to understand what the syllabus says and to evaluate its validity. You also plan to ask me questions or even have a conversation with me about the possibility of making changes to the syllabus if the requirements are not reasonable.

Therefore, you can read the syllabus biblically or critically as demonstrated above. Alternatively, you can also play the roles of both a biblical reader and a critical reader in reading the syllabus with purposes of trying to understand and follow the syllabus, on the one hand, and to discuss it with me if any questions arise or if discrepancies are found, on the other hand. Therefore, biblical

reading and critical reading are not antithetical to each other. Instead, they supplement each other in helping us decode the text.

Implications for Reading Instruction

The comparative study of biblical reading and critical reading helps us better understand these two reading approaches. It also hints at new possibilities for reading instruction. As a result, an important question we need to ask is: what do biblical reading and critical reading imply for reading instruction? In what follows, I will explore this third inquiry question from three different angles.

Reading for a Purpose

Having a distinct purpose is the driving factor that distinguishes biblical reading from critical reading. Therefore, reading for a purpose should be taught in reading instruction. With a different purpose in mind, the reader can read a text biblically, critically, or in another other fashion. It is not only the text itself, but also the reader's purpose that dictates how the text is read. For example, a reader can read a poem aesthetically, i.e., simply to appreciate the beauty of its words and verses or the imagines/pictures it evokes in his/her mind. Unlike a poem, a science book is another genre that contains, most likely, facts that are not supposed to be read aesthetically, but analyzed critically. In this sense, the text itself does have an impact on how it is read.

A text can also be read differently, depending on the reader's purpose. Suppose that the purpose of reading a poem is to critique the poet's view on women's education. With this specific purpose in mind, the reader will read the poem critically, trying to identify and deconstruct the poet's bias against women's education. Traditionally, reading instruction focuses on what the author means through the text rather than on what purpose the reader has for reading the text. Since the reader's purpose has a tremendous impact on how the text is read, it should be emphasized in reading instruction as well.

Reading to Explore Multiple Viewpoints

Examining multiple viewpoints is an important component in both biblical reading and critical reading. In biblical reading, multiple viewpoints are explored in step four: consulting the biblical map. The purpose is to see how the theological principle fits with the rest of the Bible. In critical reading, the reader investigates different viewpoints to see whose voices are heard and whose voices are silenced. Though these two reading approaches

diverge in their purpose, both of them agree on the importance of comparing multiple viewpoints before jumping to conclusions.

Therefore, in reading instruction, learners should be taught to consider viewpoints other than the author's to have a better understanding of the text. Often times, learners are asked to look in the text and find what the author means instead of reading between the lines to see if the claims made by the author are valid or aligned with what he/she says elsewhere in the text. Looking for unrepresented voices in the text is also important for the reader to understand whose viewpoints are relativized. Exploring multiple viewpoints, therefore, is an important reading skill to teach in reading instruction to help learners grasp the text at a deeper level.

Reading to Take Action

In traditional reading instruction, reading is usually equated to the learning of such skills as decoding words, reading fluently, identifying the thesis statement, and so on. In other words, reading is the process of learning and applying a set of skills in comprehending the text. Taking action, however, is an inseparable component of both biblical reading and critical reading and should be part of reading instruction as well. In biblical reading, action is taken to apply what is learned. In critical reading, action is taken to change the status quo and promote social justice.

Therefore, the instruction of reading skills is not sufficient unless action is also involved. Taking action for a biblical reader is living out what is learned from the text. It can mean, for example, helping in the soup kitchen or volunteering in a food drive to help the poor. However, what does taking action mean for a critical reader? Does it mean that the reader should become a social and political activist to promote social justice? This is actually quite a daunting idea to even think about for most educators and learners. While taking an activist role to strive for social justice is not necessarily excluded, it is not the only way. Action for a critical reader can encompass "reading resistantly, communicating new lines of thinking, and pushing others to question how they come to see the world" (Van Sluys, 2005, pp. 22-23). In other words, taking action can mean making a change in our reading habit. This is not merely a skill to master but an attitude toward, and a transaction with, the text and the world around us.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the similarities and differences between biblical reading and critical reading. It is important to note

that the comparative study of these two reading approaches is not meant to suggest that one approach is better than the other, but to show what we can learn from both of them. While these two approaches share some similarities, there is one distinct feature that separates them apart – it is the purpose of reading the text. The same text can be read or interpreted differently with different purposes in mind. A biblical reader focuses on discovering the meaning intended by the author and how it applies to his/her own life while a critical reader seeks to find difference and helps us see the text from a new perspective. Despite their differences, we can certainly learn from both reading approaches in that reading serves a variety of purposes, whether biblical, critical, or otherwise.

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