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A READER RESPONSE APPROACH IN COLLABORATIVE READING PROJECTS TO FOSTER CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

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Abstract
Reading has become a major concern of EFL educators. Reading does not only help students learn foreign languages, but it is also believed that it has a strong link with critical thinking skills. A reader response approach in collaborative works, adapted from literary theory, is believed to be beneficial for the students. Therefore, this study aims at investigating the answers to these two questions: (1) how are the collaborative reader responses implemented in Critical Reading and Writing II? and (2) To what extent does reader response approaches promote students' critical thinking skills? With these questions in mind, the researchers collect the data by involving 24 participants from CRW II (Critical Reading and Writing) class. The data gathered from classroom observations, online archives and students' reflections are analyzed descriptively, using qualitative case study method. It is hoped that the implementation of this approach can be useful not only to improve students' reading skills, but also to provide more opportunity for students to exercise their critical thinking skills.

Keywords: reader response theory, group projects, critical thinking skills

Introduction
A study revealed that in 2016 Indonesia ranked 60 out of 61 countries in terms of reading interest (Miller & McKenna, 2016). Reading then has become a major concern of educators. In the university context, reading first language (L1) texts can be hard for some students and it can be more painful for EFL students to read foreign language (L2) reading materials. One main reason is due to students' low reading interest, which automatically influences their reading habit. A research on students' reading habit was conducted by Iftanti in 2012. Her participants were 546 students of English Departments from five different state universities in East Java. She focused on their quantity of reading practice as a parameter of reading habit. The result indicates that 68.49% of the participants have low reading habit mainly due to inadequate reading exposure, limited linguistic, and cultural knowledge of the texts that hinder them from comprehension. Therefore, it is vital that language teachers help students develop their reading interest and habit.

Reading provides not only linguistic information, but this activity can also offer rich cultural insights of the language they are learning. It is confirmed by Grabe and Stoller who considered reading as the "central way to learn information" (2001).

Reading can be defined as "a complex ability to extract, or build, meaning from a text". Reading does not only help students learn language, but it is also believed that it has a strong link with critical thinking skills. Mohammadi, Heidari, and Niry (2012) find out that extensive reading encourages students to use metacognitive strategy which shows low positive correlation with students' critical thinking ability. However, Eftekhary and Kalayeh (2014) argue that there is actually a strong correlation between extensive reading and critical thinking skills. These skills are highlighted by Ristekdikti proposing that learning should focus on four goals of higher order thinking skills, including critical thinking skills.

Critical thinking skills are considered a necessity to face 21st challenges. With the advent of technology, information can be easily accessed through the Internet. Students who fail to analyze and evaluate myriad information can easily fall into hoax. Receiving information is not learning because students should be able to evaluate the information. Paul (1992) argues that critical thinking is beyond recalling information because it involves one's ability to analyze and evaluate the cognitive processes. Elder and Paul (1994) add that this is the ability to take charge of the thinking processes and to evaluate them. A more recent study, Masduqi (2011) mentions critical thinking involves meaning negotiation in the classroom discussion. A more recent work by Hughes (2014) mentions some elements of being critical, namely: understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating. His arguments concludes the arguments by former researchers who suggest that being critical deals with the ability to question, analyze and evaluate the thinking processes of the mind.

Considering the importance of critical thinking skills, foreign language teachers should provide learning environment which encourage students to practice their higher order thinking skills (HOTs). This need should be well-addressed in Critical Reading and Writing II, a subject offered to the 4th semester students of English Language Study Program, Sanata Dharma University. After completing this course, the students are expected to develop critical thinking skills on a variety of issues and write responsive, analytical, and argumentative responses to the texts. Generally, there are three phases in reading classes, namely: pre-reading activities, whilst-reading activities, and post-reading activities. The activities implemented in these phases can be designed to promote high order thinking skills, including critical thinking skills. With these goals in mind, the students are encouraged to make collaborative reading response.

Studies mentioned the positive links of reading and critical thinking skills (Eftekhary & Kalayeh, 2014, Liaw, 2007, and Mohammadi et al., 2012). One effective approach to motivate students to read is reader-response approach. Writing reading response requires students to choose a text and give responses through writing. It is developed from reader response theory which is considered effective to engage readers in reading and responding to the text (Chou, 2015). Chou (2015) further argues that reader response journal motivates and fosters students' engagement. Furthermore, Lee (2012) also suggests that students experience meaningful learning when they are engaged in reading response activities. In contrast with Chou, Biglari (2017) conducts a quantitative study and finds that reader response does not improve students' comprehending or

vocabulary, but it decreases students' anxiety. The finding is partially contradictory with the findings of other studies (Chou, 2015 and Lee, 2012). However, this research assumes that if reader response succeed in decreasing students' anxiety, students will be more motivated to exercise their critical thinking skills through reader response. When students collaborate to give responses, they are to engage in receiving, analyzing and evaluating information as well as distributing tasks among the group members. Using collaborative reading response activities in the classroom hopefully may not only increase students reading interest, but also develop their critical thinking skills.

Reader Response Theory

Reading is a vital skill in learning a foreign language. Studies indicate that the implementation of reader response theory is vital to keep the students engage with the text (Kelly et. al. 1996, Roessing, 2009, Lee: 2012). It helps students interact with the texts from a personal perspective (Kelly et. al. 1996), helps them to organize ideas (Cohen, 2007; McIntosh, 2006), reduces anxiety (Bilgari, 2007) and promotes critical thinking (Carlisle, 2000; Gonzales and Courtland, 2009; Mizuno, 2005)

Studies have elaborated some benefits of reading response theory in promoting thinking skills. Carlisle (2000) finds out how reader response provides opportunities for students to give personal critical responses. His finding is in line with Gonzales and Courtland's study (2009) showing relationship between reader response and critical thinking skills. This approach, according to Mizuno (2015), results in a positive effect on reading cognitive processes. It is assumed that Indonesian students who study English will benefit from this approach as it helps students to engage with the texts, allows students to express personal interpretation of the texts, and encourages critical thinking skills. To fill the gap of these studies, further research on the implementation of reader response theory in Indonesian setting should be conducted.

Critical Thinking Skills

Writing and reading skills are usually taught separately in EFL classes. However, recent studies have elaborated benefits of integrating reading and writing. From reading, students gain new information related to both linguistic and socio cultural knowledge. Readers constantly make meaning by reading process (Day & Bamford, 2002). After reading L2 sources, students are able to analyze and synthesize the texts. In other words, students can give their responses in the form of writing. Zhao and Hirvela (2015) found out that understanding the complex reading and writing relationship is crucial for successful textual production. The English Language Education Study Program of Sanata Dharma University offers Critical Reading and Writing II for the fourth semester students. This course is designed to facilitate students to access into a large amount of reading through which students acquire information, which thus enhances the progress of their knowledge and the development of their critical thinking skills. In addition, this course involves the skills to plan the building up of information, the skill to create

mind mapping and the skill of note taking, summary making and syntesizing. The skills are integrated to develop critical reading skills on a variety of educational and social issues and to write responsive, analytical, and argumentative essays in response to social enterprises.

Critical thinking is an old topic, but it is still a debatable topic among scholars. It can be traced back to Socrates' era. He emphasizes on the importance of questioning methods (Masduqi, 2011). Paul (1992) argues that critical thinking is beyond recalling information because it involves one's ability to analyze and evaluate the cognitive processes. Elder and Paul (1994) add that this is the ability to take charge of the thinking processes and to evaluate them. A more recent study, Masduqi (2011) mentions critical thinking involves meaning negotiation in the classroom discussion. A more recent work by Hughes (2014) mentions some elements of being critical, namely: understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating. His arguments concludes the arguments by former researchers who suggest that being critical deals with the ability to question, analyze and evaluate the thinking processes of the mind.

Educators must provide environment which encourages students to build critical thinking skills to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Students should be able to exercise high order thinking skills, including critical thinking skills. Cromwell (in Masduqi, 2011, p. 193) mentions that "the main purpose of advanced education is the enhancement of student thinking." Teachers should consider more than grammar rules or vocabulary, but should prepare students to exercise their higher level of thinking skills.

Studies have highlighted the importance of critical thinking skills in language learning. However, research on how a reader response theory in collaborative projects encourages students to exercise their critical thinking skills in Indonesian context has not been explored widely. The respondents of this study are students who are equipped to teach English when they graduate. It is vital to encourage them to exercise their critical thinking skills. Therefore, this study emphasizes on the importance of giving opportunities for students to do collaborative reading projects by questioning, analyzing, evaluating and sharing information in groups.

Collaborative activities in learning language are considered beneficial (Pastor & Perry, 2010; Ning, 2011; Pasaribu, 2016). These activities place learners as the center of the learning process. When students discuss the goals, plans and targets in groups, they interact with the thinking process of other students. When working in groups students may also clarify, compare and analyze information—skills which are needed to think critically.

This approach is also believed to reduce anxiety of high anxious students. When working with peers, students tend to express their ideas. This is in line with Pasaribu's study (2016) arguing that students gain more self-esteem when they receive feedback from their friends. Sastrapratedja (2013) and Pastor and Perry (2010) also consider working in groups as an effective learning strategy because it is less threatening and less formal than lectures.

Collaborative approach in language learning also boosts students' motivation. A study by Hurst et. al. (2006 in Ning, 2010) articulate how enthusiastic the students are when joining the journal discussions in groups. When working in groups,

students are actively involved in the interactions among group members. Ning (2010) also mentions that it "builds up a well-structured and supportive learning environment". Therefore, this approach provides a highly motivating environment for the learners. In this study, students are to work in groups when responding to the text they choose. Because each student has different roles, they see the tasks from different perspectives. Not only do they need to explore linguistic or social knowledge of the discourse, but they also have to exercise their collaborative skills in doing the projects.

Although some studies have investigated the importance of extensive reading and critical thinking, there has been only little research has been done to figure out how collaborative reader response encourage students to exercise their critical thinking skills in Indonesian context. Therefore, this study aims at finding out how using collaborative reading response can help Indonesian students exercise their critical thinking skills. To investigate the link between these two variables, this study involves students from Critical Reading and Writing II class, English Language Education Study Program, Sanata Dharma University. This study discusses related documents which cover reading skills, reader response theory, and critical thinking skills. Furthermore, it also elaborates the methods used in elaborating the collaborative reader response activities and how they foster students' critical thinking skills.

Method

To elaborate the answers to the research questions, this study used a qualitative method in collecting the data. By using this method, the researchers analyzed verbal data. The research was conducted in the English Language Education Study Program of Sanata Dharma University involving 24 CRW II students. The first research goal--elaborating the implementation of a reader response approach in collaborative reading projects—was investigated qualitatively by observing the class, analyzing students' posters and students' reflections. The second research question related to the link between a reader response approach and critical thinking was investigated by scrutinizing the students' reflections. The researchers developed the questions based on Hughes (2014) and Ennis Weir (1985) to know how students assessed their own critical thinking skills. Finally, the data were compared and contrasted with other similar studies in the discussion section.

Findings and Discussion

Students may face difficulties not only because they have low reading interest, but they may have limited linguistic and cultural knowledge of the texts which can hinder them from comprehension. However, they need to deal with these challenges because reading does not only help students learn language, but it is also believed that it has a strong link with critical thinking skills. Tasks may encourage them to

read and develop their critical thinking skills. Ellis in Thomas and Reinders (2010) mention that task-based learning involves "making meaning, real-world authentic language use, focus on four language skills, learners in cognitive skills and communication-based learning outcome." On the other hand, reader response approach encourages students not only to interpret the writers' purposes in creating the text, but they also create meaning by using their background knowledge when interacting with the text. In this case, readers are encouraged to play an active role in interpreting the meaning of the texts. This table shows how task-based learning goes hand in hand with reader response approach.

Table 1. Task-based learning and reader response approach

Task-Based Learning	Reader Response Approach
Involving a plan	Planning in doing the project
Making meaning	playing an active role in interpreting the meaning of the texts
Real-world authentic language use	reading authentic English texts
Focusing on any or four language skills	Focusing on language skills.
Engaging learners to use cognitive skills	Giving a positive impact on the cognitive process of reading
Communication based learning outcome (Reinders, 2010)	

In this study, students are to work in groups when responding to the text they choose. Because each student has different roles, they see the tasks from different perspectives. Not only do they need to explore linguistic or social knowledge of the discourse, but they also have to exercise their collaborative skills in doing the projects. Critical thinking skills are considered a necessity to face 21st challenges. With the advent of technology, information can be easily accessed through the Internet. Students who fail to analyze and evaluate myriad information can easily fall into hoax or false news. On the contrary, critical students are able to analyze and evaluate information they get from the texts.

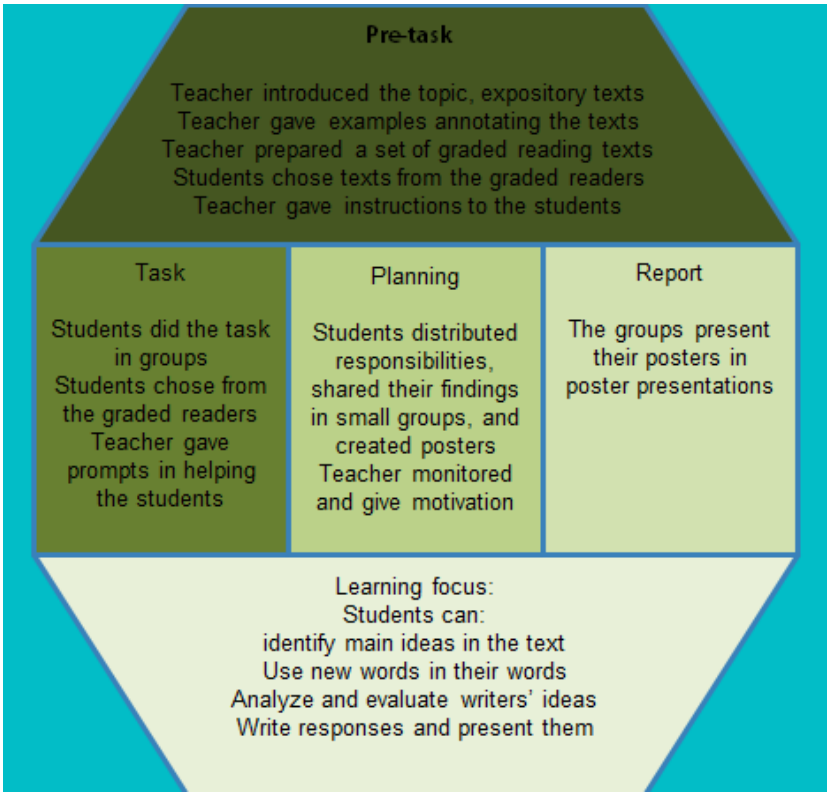


Figure 2. Reader response 1

In the first reader response activity, the teacher prepared a set of graded reading texts focusing on expository texts, divided the students into groups and gave instructions to them. Afterward, they individually chose a text from the set of graded readers. They did some vocabulary and reading comprehension activities. After reading and doing individual activities, the lecturer divided them into groups of four students. They shared the information they have learnt and chose an article they wanted to respond to. After deciding the texts for their reading response e-poster project, they worked collaboratively by dividing roles in the groups. One student became the leader of the group who assigned roles and distribute responsibilities to the members of the group. The roles of the students in a group are the word wizard who finds new words and make them into sentences; the inspector who searches social and cultural information about the text; and a navigator who reflects on the text by connecting the texts with their experiences.

The focus of the second reader response activity was different. It focused on narrative texts. The teacher gave an example of a short story, divided the students into groups, and gave instructions to them to read and discuss the short story and find other short stories from recommended website on the internet.

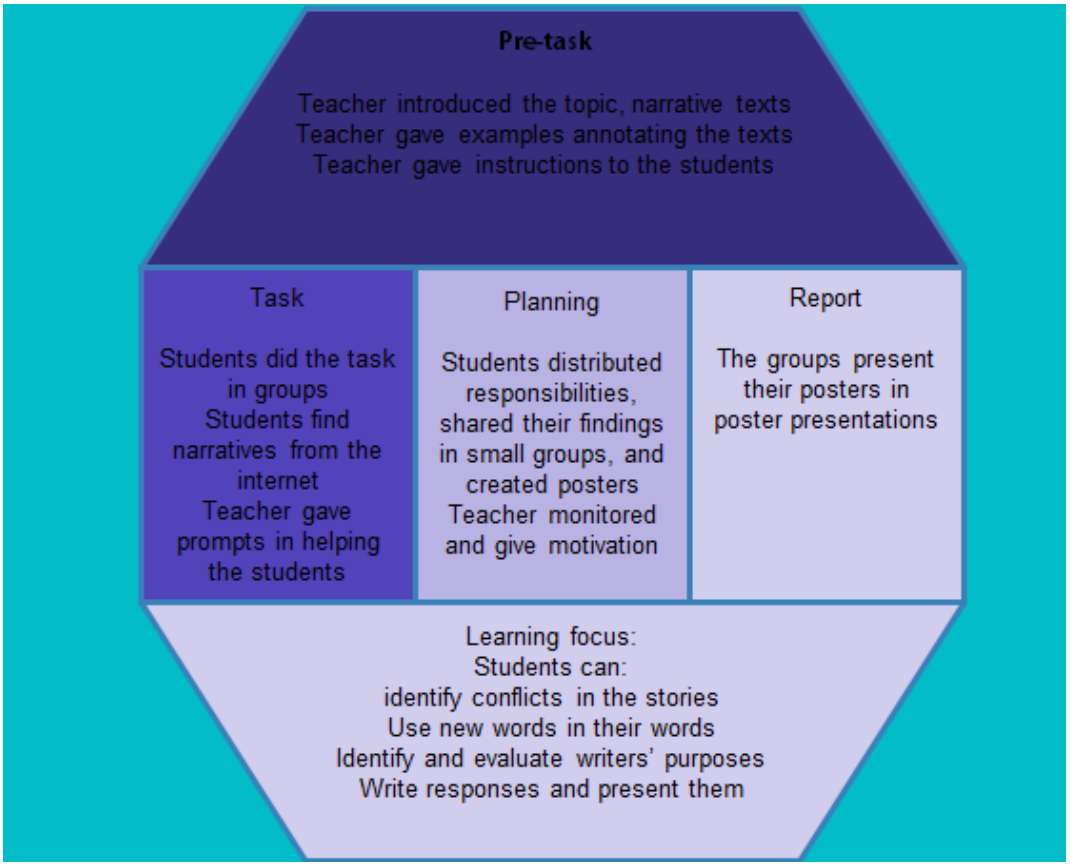


Figure 3. Reader response 2

After choosing a short story individually, they shared in a group of four. They discussed the plot and characters of the short story they chose. After deciding the texts for their reading response narrative e-poster project, they chose a project leader. The leader assigned roles and distributed responsibilities to the members of the group. The roles were similar to the first reading response project: a leader, a word wizard, an inspector, and a navigator. The purposes of making this project were to help students to be able to identify conflicts in the stories, use new words and evaluate writers' purposes. After making the posters, the students presented them to the class.

Reader response 3 focused on argumentative texts, so the teacher gave examples of argumentative texts. The topic that the teacher gave ~~is~~ was "standardized test". The first article supported standardized test and the second one questioned the benefits of standardized tests. The students read the articles, made a mindmap of the text, found two controversial articles with contradicting points of view from the internet. The students discussed their mindmap in groups and chose one article from the members of the group that they found thought-provoking. In this third project, they needed to evaluate the text and choose one side with which they agreed more. Like the other projects, they presented their posters.

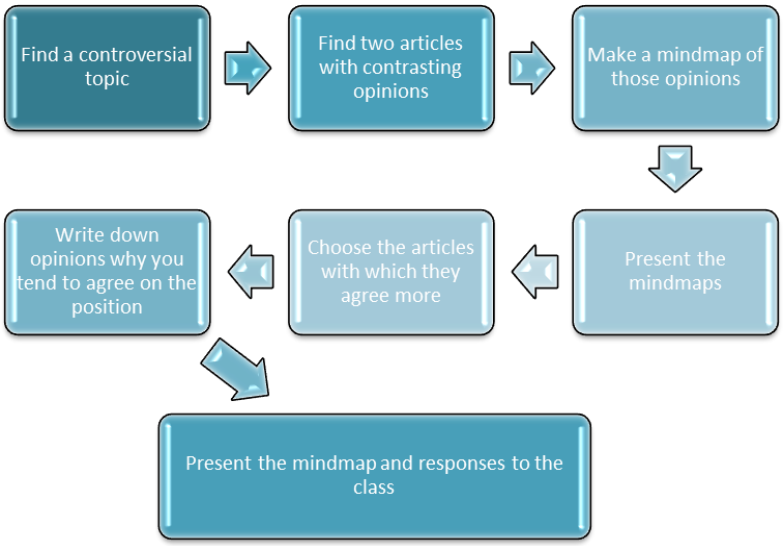


Figure 4. Reader response 3

Through these cycles, the students were active in constructing meaning of the text inside the classroom and outside the classroom while they were doing group projects. As suggested by Masduqi (2011), critical thinking involves meaning negotiation. Students were given responsibilities to see the text from different perspectives, the word wizard constructed the meaning from the text, the navigator constructed the meaning from their experience and the inspector constructed the meaning from the social and cultural information of the text.

The challenges identified were that the students as a team had to make up their mind and united each idea into one agreed idea. They also had to make good sentences, so the audience would not feel confused. The benefits were that they tried to make a good teamwork and provided new information for some team members. Furthermore, the reflection written by the students revealed that group discussion enriched their understanding towards texts. Besides, they could play active roles in meaning negotiation, which trained them to practice critical thinking skills.

Reader response and critical thinking skills

Bloom's taxonomy has been continuously updated including by his students (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001 as cited by Xu (2011)). Hughes (2016) introduces stages of learning: understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating. Students are considered able to exercise their critical thinking skills when they do these stages of learning. The terms which are introduced by Hughes (2006) have similarities with the classification synthesized by Anderson and Krathwohl as cited by Xu (2011)).

Table 2. Stages of critical thinking skills

Remembering	Retrieving, recognizing, and recalling relevant knowledge from long-term memory.
Understanding:	Constructing meaning from oral, written, and graphic messages through interpreting, exemplifying, classifying, summarizing, inferring, comparing, and explaining
Applying	Carrying out or using a procedure through executing, or implementing.
Analyzing	Breaking material into constituent parts, determining how the parts relate to one another and to an overall structure or purpose through differentiating, organizing, and attributing
Evaluating	Making judgments based on criteria and standards through checking and critiquing.
Creating	Putting elements together to form a coherent or functional whole; reorganizing elements into a new pattern or structure through generating, planning, or producing.

The students were motivated to read the text of their own choice. When reading the texts, they were required to summarize what they read. They were challenged to extract the main ideas of the texts. Specifically, they were asked to make outlines from the paragraphs in the texts and make summaries using their own words. When they found difficult words, they needed to share using their own sentences to the whole class. After the projects, the students were asked to evaluate their ability in exercising critical thinking skills.

The students were able to identify the main arguments in Reading Response Project #1 (expository texts) and Reading Response Project#3 (argumentative texts). They also stated that they identified conflicts in Reading Response Project #2 as highlighted in their reflections below:

1. I should read again and again to understand the story, I get much information.
2. Before making the posters, I need to make sure I understand the story by reading it for several times.
3. I have to understand the story because there are a lot of unfamiliar words that I have to know in order to understand the story
4. All of us read the story first. We read the story while identifying the conflicts in the story. After that we discuss it together to decide what

sentences will be written on the poster. Then we do they analyzing step to make sure that we have the same understanding.

5. The story makes me realize that there are lots of cultural and social differences between one country and another, even abou some trivia things that sometimes we really didn't give attention to. For example, the story mentions about some tribal hat that is originally from America. Sometimes we didn't really care about it, unless it becomes viral. That is why we should read as many books or articles as possible so that we can be aware about others.

One major problem that hindered comprehension was the lack of vocabulary as stated in Data 3. Therefore, the students were motivated to list difficult vocabulary found in the text and put them into sentences (see Data 6). In this case the students applied the story by making sentences using difficult vocabulary from the text.

6. The challenges are we, as a team must make our minds, our idea become one big idea, which is mean our idea. We had to made a good sentences, so that the audience will not feel confused. The benefits are, try to make a good team work, try to provide the information that maybe not all of us have already know about that.

In addition, they could express their feelings related to the texts and apply the values they found in the text with their life. In this case, a student mentioned that she had to be responsible in whatever she did.

7. Having found the moral values, I try to apply them in my life. I discuss it with my group members to evaluate our findings and opinions.
8. I apply the story in my life that we have to be responsible about what we do. But I pity them because they have to work hard in ten years but eventually the necklace was imitation.
9. From her presentation she further explained that it is fine to admit that we were wrong as long as we were responsible for it.

Reader response approach put the readers in the central place of meaning interpretation. This interpretation might enter into readers' awareness (Rosenblatt, 2004) and influence their responses and real life applications.

Analyzing involves identifying the organization of ideas in the texts. When students are able to analyze texts they are able to relate one part to the others or relate the text to other texts. They can also read between the lines to know the writer's purpose in writing the text. One student stated that they could analyze the aspect of the text (9). In reading narrative texts they could also identify the conflict in the story (10). Some students also were able to relate one text to other texts. They analyze that narrative texts share some similar patterns (11).

10. Afterward […], I analyze the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects.
11. All of us read the story first. We read the story while identifying the conflicts in the story. After that we discuss it together to decide what sentences will be written on the poster.
12. I connect the story "Mist Girl" with the legend from Indonesia. The short story has a similar plot with "Jaka Tingkir", a story from Indonesia so I can predict the end of the story.

Data 12 indicates that reader response allow reading to happen from a socio-cultural context (Brooks, 2006). The students' culture and reading history influences their analysis of the text shown in the responses (Beach, 1993). Students were developing their thinking skills by analyzing materials from their backgrounds and reading history.

When students were given goals, in this case reader-response projects, they worked together to analyze the texts. The group can bridge their information gap in reading particular text with their peers. Students were also encouraged to share their evaluation of the text to their peers. They further evaluated how the texts made them feel.

13. I think the poster fosters my evaluating thinking skills, since I can connect it with my personal life.. I compare the values of the story with real life experiences.
14. I think if I am the character (Matilda), I will do the same thing. It is going to be different in the first step to solve it. Maybe I will tell the owner first and discuss the solution together so that it will not be a burden for everyone.
15. By presenting the poster we knew that we shouldn't do what bill weaver do. We should think about the future event that will occur if we did something. But I didn't blame Bill at all, because he couldent clearly think about what he did because he is too tired.
16. I connect the text with what is happening in our society. I feel heartbroken when I hear some news about thieves who are being hurt physically. It seems like our society is already blinded by wrath and twisted justice.

The statements shows how students engaged actively with the authentic texts they read. Through text evaluation, they had active interactions with the texts and they shared them to their peers. In other words, reader response approach allowed students to develop social engagement with their peers.

The final phase of this collaborative project was creating posters and presenting them to the class. The students were to work together with their friends in making posters to report the summary, new vocabulary, social context of the texts, and the connection between personal life and the texts. The students were motivated in creating the poster because they were active in organizing ideas so that the poster covered all the elements required for the projects. Since the students shared mutual goals, they confirmed their understanding of the text and integrated their perspective with that of their peers. The students did not only engage with the texts, but they also engaged with different perspective from their peers in making the posters (Data 17).

17. Last but not least, the fun and challenging part, creating the poster. It is fun because we use our creativity, and it is challenging at the same time to pour our ideas clearly and concisely to the posters.
18. Finally to foster my critical thinking we need to create the foster after we understand, apply, analyze and evaluate the story.
19. The activity fosters my ability to create a poster. How to make the poster interesting for people I think about the things I should write in the poster. Should I add pictures or anything that support the poster and its content?

The reflections showed how students were motivated in doing the poster. They were guided through the project to reproduce the meaning of the text. As reflected in data 18 and 19, they did not passively receive the information in the text, but they also provided summary and written responses of the texts through posters. Zhao and Hirvela (2015) found out that understanding the complex reading and writing relationship is crucial for successful textual production. Readers actively constructed meaning of the text (Tyson, 2006) from different social and cultural perspectives, which can be an indicator of critical thinking skills.

Conclusion

Reading skills are not only central to learning a language, but they are linked with thinking skills. Accordingly, a reader response approach was adapted in Critical Reading and Writing II so that students did not only enjoy reading, but also exercised their critical thinking skills. In this approach, readers play central roles in negotiating and constructing meaning. This approach was implemented in three e-Poster projects. Students worked in groups with different roles: leaders, word wizards, inspectors, and navigators. They read the texts with different purpose in mind and they shared what they learnt from the text to the group. After group discussion, they created posters and presented them to friends in the class. The activities were considered beneficial in improving students' motivation to read and critical thinking skills. They were able to understand the texts, apply difficult words in their own sentences, analyze the parts of the texts, evaluate the texts and their understanding, and finally reproduce meaning of the texts by creating posters. Further studies should focus on sets of authentic texts which are available for different students with different reading skills. Furthermore, how this reader response approach can finally enhance students' reading habit needs to be taken into account for future research.

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