

PROMOTING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS THROUGH READING
COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES

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To my family, professors, and people who contributed with this
project, thanks.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	11
1. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM	12
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	14
3. AUTONOMOUS LEARNING MODEL DESIGN	36
3.1. PRINCIPLES FOR DESIGN	37
4. AUTONOMOUS LEARNING MODEL	38
4.1. ASSIGNMENTS	38
4.2. BLOG	54
CONCLUSIONS	56
RECOMMENDATIONS	57
WORKS CITED	58

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1 Graphic of Concepts	37
Figure 2 Blog Home	54
Figure 3 Blog Sections	55

GLOSSARY

ACTIVE READING: To read actively is a high order activity of the brain where the reader engages his mind, sets a goal and uses reading strategies. Critical thinking skills can be foster through active reading.

CRITICAL THINKING: Critical thinking is that mode of thinking - about any subject, content, or problem - in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skilfully taking charge of the structures inherent in thinking and imposing intellectual standards upon them.

CRITICAL READING: It is a form of skepticism that does not take a text at face value, but involves an examination of claims put forward in the text as well as implicit bias in the texts framing and selection of the information presented. The ability to read critically is an ability assumed to be present in scholars and to be learned in academic institutions.

CRITICAL THINKING SKILL: These are sophisticated methods of assessing beliefs, opinions, and assertions using science, logic, and reliable information. Instead of simply accepting arguments and conclusions, one questions and evaluates in an organized manner. These skills are useful in recognizing fallacies. A simply example of a critical thinking skill is the ability to tell the difference between an opinion and a fact.

READING STRATEGIES: The varied processes a reader uses to make meaning from written language (e.g., context, grammar, word patterns, and letter sounds). Students also use comprehension strategies by determining important information, using their background knowledge, asking questions as they read, visualizing, drawing inferences, making connections, and constantly checking for understanding.

RESUMEN

TITULO

EL USO DE ESTRATEGIAS DE COMPRESION DE LECTURA EN LA PROMOCION DE HABILIDADES DEL PENSAMIENTO CRITICO*

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PALABRAS CLAVES:

Lectura Activa, Pensamiento Crítico, Lectura Crítica, Habilidades del Pensamiento Crítico, Estrategias de Comprensión de Lectura.

DESCRIPCION

El siguiente es el reporte final del trabajo de grado en la modalidad de *Asistencia en Docencia*. El presente proyecto tiene como objetivo diseñar un Modelo de Aprendizaje Autónomo para fomentar la lectura crítica en estudiantes de la asignatura 21168 de Licenciatura en Inglés en la UIS, basándose en criterios seleccionados acorde al contexto de la clase y utilizando ICTs como herramienta de enganche.

Para diseñar un Modelo de Aprendizaje Autónomo que cumpla el objetivo propuesto, se han seleccionado conceptos claves relacionados con el pensamiento crítico y la lectura activa. Los pasos para crear el modelo se basaron en un método de 5 etapas para desarrollar las habilidades del pensamiento crítico. Estas etapas incluyen la selección, descripción y enseñanza de una serie de dimensiones del pensamiento crítico (habilidades) tomando en cuenta el nivel de inglés y las necesidades de los estudiantes. Para lograr este propósito, se requería la instauración de una serie de tareas de lectura activa sistemáticamente planeadas. Dichas tareas se basan el modelo de 3 estrategias de comprensión de lectura, donde las habilidades de pensamiento crítico escogidas son enseñadas implícitamente y revisadas por medio de un blog que promueve el uso de ICTs en la educación.

Este informe comienza señalando las características que un lector activo en niveles avanzados de educación debe tener para llegar a convertirse en un pensador crítico. Consecutivamente, el marco teórico explica elementos necesarios para el proceso de la enseñanza/aprendizaje de las habilidades del pensamiento crítico utilizando la lectura como la herramienta principal para alcanzar tal nivel de pensamiento. Seguidamente, hay una selección de conceptos claves para la creación del Modelo de Aprendizaje Autónomo y para la presentación final de las tareas. El reporte concluye con la descripción del blog en el cual los estudiantes de la asignatura 21168 tienen acceso a las tareas.

* Proyecto de Grado

**Facultad de Ciencias Humanas. Escuela de Idiomas. Director: Esperanza Revelo Jiménez.

SUMMARY

TITLE

PROMOTING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS THROUGH READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES*

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KEY WORDS:

Active Reading, Critical Thinking, Critical Reading, Critical Thinking Skills, Reading Comprehension strategies.

DESCRIPTION

This is the final report of the research project under the modality of *Teaching Practice*. The following project aims at designing an Autonomous Learning Model to foster critical reading in students of the 21168 subject in the ELT program at UIS, based on criteria selected according to the class context and applying ICTs as an engaging tool.

To design an autonomous learning model that would assist in the attainment of the aim, key concepts related to critical thinking and active reading were chosen. Steps to create the model were based in a 5 stage approach to developing critical thinking skills. These stages comprise the selection, description and teaching of a series of critical thinking dimensions (skills) taking into account students' level of English and needs. For this purpose, the creation of a set of active reading tasks systematically planned was necessary. These assignments are based on three reading comprehension strategies, where the chosen critical thinking dimensions are implicitly taught and reviewed through a blog designed to promote the use of ICTs in education.

This report begins pointing out the characteristics an active reader at high levels of education requires to become a critical thinker. Consecutively, the theoretical framework explains the necessary elements for the teaching/learning process of critical thinking skills using reading as a main tool to achieve this level of thought. Afterward, there is a selection of key concepts to create the Autonomous Learning Model and the eventual presentation of the assignments. It finally concludes with the description of the blog where students of the 21168 subject have access to the tasks.

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INTRODUCTION

Monographic research project presented as a component of the Teaching Practice Modality for the subject of Autonomous Learning/Teaching Models in the ELT program at UIS, focused on Critical Reading in Undergraduate ELT students at advanced levels. The intention of this project is to design a series of self-contained computer assisted reading tasks, aimed at the development of critical thinking skills and reading comprehension strategies using the content of the 21168 class.

This research work describes relevant aspects the teacher needs to take into consideration when encouraging the practice of critical thinking through active reading. After the description of reading needs in students, an autonomous learning model is suggested as a solution. Before the design of the model, a series of different concepts concerning active reading, critical thinking, critical reading, critical thinking skills and reading comprehension strategies were explained to provide an appropriate conceptual framework for the matter.

Then, based on the 21168 classroom context, some of these concepts were selected to create a sequence of reading tasks, which analyze the information of three texts assigned to the class. These tasks were particularly designed to stimulate students' critical thinking faculties while practicing active reading, in an autonomous CALL environment as blogging.

1. PROBLEM DESCRIPTION

Reading is a crucial element of learner study in higher education. There are many definitions of reading; the most common is that reading is the action of deciphering or interpreting a text, however reading is more an active process of comprehending, where students need to be taught strategies to read more efficiently (Grabe, 1991, p. 377). As an essential part of this process the reader understands the writer's purposes, identifies basic information, predicts, infers, argues and recognizes the writer's point of view (Calderón Agudelo et. al, 2007, p. 25). Nevertheless, these are the requirements for a basic stage of the reading comprehension process.

P. Ritchard (2007) states that, very often the ability to read, that is to decode the text on a page into understandable language, is taken as all that needs to be accomplished. Decoding is an element of the process, but understanding what has been decoded, and being able to do this in a highly effective manner, is a crucial element of the comprehensive skill of reading, especially in higher education settings.

Thus, as students advance in their educational level there is a much greater expectation and requirement, if they are to succeed in their professional fields, to read more independently and more widely than in any other studying time before. Senior students of the ELT program are expected to read technical texts applying both reading comprehension strategies and critical thinking skills. At these levels,

reading must be an active activity, where students have a purpose for reading, which means that they have set goals for their reading. Active reading is brain intensive and involves awareness, monitoring, assessing and correcting; it also includes developing an understanding of the organization of the text, reading selectively, connecting ideas to a context and reading thoughtfully and critically.

Nevertheless, many students read passively, failing to construct accurate comprehension with the guidance of a purpose or goal for reading. They lack monitoring skills, engagement in strategic action, flexibility to adapt and regulate their reading in different situations and control over their reading. They are neither able to find a relationship among facts of a problem nor to detect errors while reading. What is more, they tend to focus on a set of strategies they commonly use not considering any particular situation and fail to evaluate their outcomes and the achievement of their reading goals, if having them. (Dermitzaki et al. 2008)

For these reasons both teaching/learning roles and goals associated to the development of the reading comprehension process in advanced students today, are desperately in need of restructuring. (Paul, 1995). Some authors state that the educator needs a range of assessment strategies and instruments that reflect the dynamic, developmental nature of comprehension within the reader and with his interactions with other external dimensions such as activity, text, and context (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Gillet & Temple, 1994; Snow, 2003).

Additionally, while students' reading techniques may have been adequate in the past, tertiary level study often requires a new and better approach, if students are

to cope efficiently with the quantity of reading material with which they will be presented. Therefore, the more students are presented with active reading tasks, the better they might think and learn. A class focused on the development of learner autonomy, should undoubtedly, provide experiences in reading that promote students' critical thinking skills (York University). But in order to achieve these purposes, the teacher must have criteria: principles, standards, models or tests, where he can stand to accomplish that end.

In the particular case of subject 21168, students would have to develop those critical thinking skills while reading texts as assigned readings for the class. Here, they learn the importance of autonomy and its implications for L2 learning, as well as how to become autonomous learners themselves. In consequence, the criteria that will be chosen and applied in this model will be directed to form an active and critical reader in an autonomous context.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This classroom research project attempts to promote the development of critical thinking skills through active reading tasks systematically planned and reviewed through ICT resources, mainly blogging in senior students of the ELT program at UIS. According to the General Law of Education, law 115, in Colombia one of the main purposes of higher education is to promote critical, reflective and analytical abilities. Although students at university levels should be able to develop this kind

of thought, thinking critically is a skill that is not simply acquired, it ought to be promoted and practiced constantly through effective aids. A useful mean to foster critical thinking in this context is reading, and more specifically reading at an active level, so one question that requires a scientifically oriented response arises here: *How can teachers help students become critical thinkers through active reading?* In order to answer this question, some aspects and concepts relevant for this matter will be described, starting with a general concept of what active reading implies.

An active reader engages himself to process information in a skilful way. He maintains the communication and understanding of the information in order to create a systematic scheme of knowledge. (Miller & Cole, 2009). Also, when reading actively, the reader uses his own skills to build understanding. This includes setting realistic goals, selecting effective reading strategies, assessing, and evaluating the progress toward the goals and having motivation (Gourgey, 2001; Pressley, 2002; Zimmerman, Bonner, & Kovach, 1996).

According to Gourgey (2001) a good reader plans his activities from the beginning: subgoals and actions, through which he will increase the possibilities to achieve his main goal, this means acting metacognitively in advanced. Thus, when the real reading begins, the skilled reader is able to choose relevant information to his reading goals, to predict what follows to analyze and combine activities and information. An active reader is also interpretative, evaluative and monitors both

the reading and comprehension processes; he understands meanings, infers, looks for relationships and reformulates the text in his own terms.

Moreover, it is claimed that reading actively is one of the highest order activities that the brain processes (Nist, Olejnik & Holschuh, 2002), in this way, the reader tries to figure out the author's purpose in writing, he enters the author's mind and during this process he can come to discover his own mind –strengths and weaknesses. In order to recognize his own point of view relating to the reading, in other words in order to read his own mind, the reader must learn how to do second order-thinking, it means that he must be aware of his own thinking from outside.

Paul & Elder in their *Thinker's guide (2003)* state the eight basic structures of thought, which the reader must recognize in order to perform an active reading. These structures are called the elements of thought, they affirm that the thinking: has a purpose (goal, objective), raises questions (problem, issue), uses information (data, facts, observations, experiences), makes inferences (conclusion, solutions), utilizes concepts (theories, definitions, axioms, laws, principles, models), is based in assumptions (presuppositions, taking for granted), generates implications and consequences and embodies a point of view (frame of reference, perspective, orientation).

These elements enable the reader to think better, and when he can effectively move between what he is reading and what he is thinking, he will be able to change his mind when the logic of the information improves his point of view, creating as a result, his own systems of thought as he reads. In general, Active

Reading requires the development of thinking about reading, as well as intellectual skills that enable the reader to analyze and assess as he reads. It also demands the ability to question in special ways while reading, and when a student actively engages his mind in a skilled dialogue with the text he reads, disciplining his thinking as he reads, he is finally achieving depth understanding.

Now, in classroom contexts one of the main goals of the teacher in promoting students' active reading is to foster a critical stance to the context of the text (Alyousef 2005,p.143), in other words, the teacher cultivates students' critical thinking skills through reading. A basic concept of critical thinking describes it as the "careful and deliberate determination of whether to accept, reject, or suspend judgment about a claim" (Moore & Parker, 2005). It means that critical thinking is the process of evaluating what other people say or write to determine whether to believe their statements.

Scriven and Paul (1987) affirmed that critical thinking is the intellectual disciplined process of actively and skilfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information that comes from observation, experience, reflection, reasoning or communication as a guide to belief and action. It comprises, as well, the examination of the already mentioned Elements of Thought which are implicit in all reasoning.

Alternatively, other authors define critical thinking as the examination and test of propositions of any kind which are offered for acceptance, in order to find out

whether they correspond to reality or not, it also involves an attitude of being predisposed to consider thoughtfully the problems and subjects that come within the range of one's experiences, knowledge of the methods of logical inquiry and reasoning and skills in applying those methods. A critical thinker additionally examines any form of knowledge with supporting evidence and further conclusions and recognizes problems along with a method to approach them. (Glaser, 1941; Graham, 1906)

According to Paul & Elder (2007) critical thinking is that mode of thinking in which the thinker improves the quality of his/her thinking by skilfully analyzing, assessing and reconstructing it. Critical thinking is self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking. Thus, a critical thinker and reader not only understands the general point and structure of a text, but also gathers and assesses relevant information from the text using abstract ideas to interpret it effectively, proposes vital questions and problems formulating them clearly and precisely for the comprehension of the text, comes to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions testing them against relevant criteria and standards, and creates or modifies new mental schemas considering and accepting alternative interpretations.

McPeck (1981), on the other hand, considers critical thinking as the skill and propensity to engage in an activity with reflexive scepticism in a specific context. In contrast to the classical view of critical thinking as the mere acquisition, retention of information and possession of a set of skills, Paul (1987) asserts that critical

thinking involves processing those skills and the habit based on intellectual commitment of using them to guide behaviour.

Therefore, in a high level of education the reading skill is not aimed to texts with the mere purpose of informing the students, it is rather directed to academic purposes. At this point critical thinking and active reading work together as critical reading. This kind of reading refers to a careful, active, reflective and analytic way to approach the text. It means that the reader can make judgments about how a text is argued, he is able to stand back and gain some distance from the text he is reading. However the reader must read each text on its own merits, it means not imposing his prior knowledge or views on it. While reading, the student must evaluate ideas without distorting the meaning within the text. Additionally, critical thinking allows the reader to monitor his understanding as he reads, if the reader senses that the information is not appropriate (critical thinking), he examines the text more closely to test his understanding (critical reading) (Kurland, 2000).

At the same time to foster critical reading the teacher must promote both critical thinking skills and reading comprehension strategies. To this purpose he designs a course where teaching critical thinking dimensions or skills, strategies and attitudes constitute a significant goal. Beyer's (1988, 1987) approach to developing critical thinking skills comprises 5 stages that can be taken into account when planning an interdisciplinary course based on promoting a critical thought. These stages have to be planned by the teacher in advance:

1. Choosing the critical thinking dimensions you are going to promote: there are 5 important aspects to take into account when choosing the dimensions, the first one is that the dimension appliance in frequent in the student's life, the second one is its frequent appliance in other areas, the third one is that the dimension is based in operations already taught and that at the same time contribute as a training for more complex operations. The fourth aspect is the relevance of the study area concerning the chosen dimensions and finally the students' ability to manage the dimensions.
2. Describing the chosen dimensions. It is related to the creation of a descriptive model about the thinking process which includes identify the chosen dimensions, define the dimensions, description of the characteristics (procedure, rules, knowledge) and establishing a connection between the chosen dimensions and other dimensions.
3. Organizing an appropriate environment to promote critical thinking. There are three relevant aspects associated to this stage: an appropriate environment in the classroom: teacher's behaviour must harmonize with the objectives of teaching a critical thinking. Also, the subject matter related with the critical thinking teaching: the relationships between the subject matter and the thinking process have implications that should take into account for the learning-teaching process. And finally the applied teaching process: it is useful to organize the teaching process around cognitive strategies (problem-solving, decision-making and conceptualization)

4. Planning how to teach the chosen critical thinking dimensions: teaching critical thinking processes involves two phases and six stages. The first phase comprises: introduction, practice in context and autonomous use. The second phase includes: transfer, monitored practice in a new context and autonomous use.

5. To evaluate the teaching-learning quality of the critical thinking dimensions. The evaluation not only motivates students to learn, it also provides a judgment about the teaching-learning of the critical thinking dimensions all along the course. There are two recommended types of evaluation: written tests (exams, writings) and observation techniques.

In the first stage the teacher chooses a set of dimensions appropriate for the level in which he intends to apply the approach, Richard Paul et al. (1989) suggest a set of strategies which comprises 35 critical thinking dimensions. These strategies are divided into Affective and Cognitive Strategies; the first category is related to character features and disposition to think critically, which grows due to the thorough practice of cognitive strategies. Such strategies are related to critical thinking elementary skills and the processes involved in the development of those skills. Affective skills consist of nine dimensions:

1. **Thinking Independently:** Critical thinking is independent thinking, thinking for oneself, it implies using critical skills and insights to reveal and reject beliefs that are irrational. Independent thinkers are self-monitoring and strive to determine relevant information and when to apply a concept or make use of a skill.

2. **Developing Insight into Egocentricity or Socio-centricity:** Egocentricity means confusing what we see and think with reality, which means that we think we see things exactly the way they are, which implies an inability to consider other's points of view, a refusal to accept ideas or facts which would prevent us from getting what we want. This denies self-consciousness of one's own thought processes and is the opposite of critical thought which promotes self-awareness. The solution is to reflect on our reasoning and behaviour, to criticize our beliefs, to consider every relevant fact, to make consistent conclusions with the evidence and to listen carefully open-mindedly to others.

3. **Exercising Fairmindedness:** To think critically, we must be able to consider opposite points of view, and put ourselves in the place of others to understand them, recognizing when we are wrong. Critical thinkers realize the unfairness of judging unfamiliar ideas until they fully understand them.

4. **Exploring Thoughts Underlying Feelings and Feelings Underlying Thoughts:** To think with self-understanding and insight, we must understand the connections between thought and feeling, reason and emotion. A critical thinker realizes that his feelings would be different if he has a different

understanding or interpretation of the situation; he knows that thoughts and feelings are two different aspects of his response. The first step toward self-control and self-improvement is to understand ourselves which requires an understanding our feelings and emotions in relation to our thoughts, ideas, and interpretations of the world.

5. **Developing Intellectual Humility and Suspending Judgment:** Critical thinkers recognize the limits of their knowledge, they pose intellectual humility which is based on the recognitions that one should not claim more than one actually knows, it also implies the lack of intellectual pretentiousness, arrogance, or conceit. They are willing to reformulate conclusions in the light of new knowledge and qualify their claims appropriately.

6. **Developing Intellectual Courage:** To think independently and fairly, one must feel the need to face unpopular ideas, beliefs, or viewpoints. We need courage to admit that some ideas are erroneous and some of these ideas are strongly held in our social group. It will take courage to be true to our own thinking, for honestly questioning our deeply held beliefs can be difficult and sometimes frightening, and the penalties for non-conformity are often severe.

7. **Developing Intellectual Good Faith or Integrity:** Critical thinkers recognize the need to be true to their own thought, to be consistent in the intellectual

standards they apply, to practice what they advocate for others, and to honestly admit discrepancies and inconsistencies in their own thought and action. They believe most strongly what has been justified by their own thought and analyzed experience.

8. **Developing Intellectual Perseverance:** the principle involved in this dimension says that becoming a critical thinker requires time and effort. Critical thinking is reflective and recursive which means that we use previous experiences to re-consider or re-analyze problems. Besides, a critical thinker is willing to pursue intellectual insights and truths in spite of difficulties, obstacles, and frustrations; he recognizes the need to struggle with confusion and unsettled questions over time in order to achieve deeper understanding and insight.

9. **Developing Confidence in Reason:** This principle claims that the rational person recognizes the power of reason and the value of disciplining thinking in accordance with rational standards. It is also to reject standard ways of changing other's mind and to believe that with proper encouragement and cultivation people can develop the ability to think for themselves. Confidence in reason does not deny the reality of intuition; rather, it provides a way of distinguishing intuition from prejudice. When we know the source of our thinking and keep our minds open to new reason and evidence, we will be more likely to correct our prejudiced thought.

On the other side, the second category, Cognitive Strategies is sub-divided into two categories: Macro-Abilities and Micro-Skills. The Macro-Abilities refer to the processes of harmonizing the elemental critical thinking skills or Micro-Skills. The first one comprises seventeen critical thinking dimensions:

10. Refining Generalizations and Avoiding Oversimplifications: The principle says that critical thinkers try to find simplifying patterns and solutions, but not by misrepresentation or distortion. They clearly see the difference between useful simplifications and misleading oversimplifications. Besides Critical thinkers are not only clear, but also exact and precise, they understand the important relationship of evidence to belief and so qualify their statements accordingly.

11. Comparing Analogous Situations: Transferring Insights to New Contexts, states that an idea's power is limited by our ability to use it. A critical thinker has the ability to use ideas mindfully and transfers ideas critically to new situations. This allows him to organize materials and experiences in different ways, to compare and contrast alternative labels, to integrate his understanding of different situations, and to find useful ways to think about new situations. He can take knowledge apart and put it together in many different ways.

12. **Developing One's Perspective: Creating or Exploring Beliefs, Arguments, or Theories:** Open-minded critical thinkers learn to recognize that their ways of thinking and all other perspectives are a combination of insight and error. They learn to develop their points of view through a critical analysis of their experience, creating and exploring their own beliefs, reasoning and theories.
13. **Clarifying Issues, Conclusions, or Beliefs:** The involved principle asserts that before we can agree or disagree with a claim, we must understand it clearly. Critical thinkers recognize problematic claims, concepts, and standards of evaluation, making sure that understanding precedes judgment. They finally can raise the most appropriate questions, after being able to distinguish facts from interpretations, opinions, judgments, or theories.
14. **Clarifying and Analyzing the Meanings of Words or Phrases:** Critical, independent thinking requires clarity of thought. A clear thinker understands concepts and knows what kind of evidence is required to justify applying a word or phrase to a situation. He is able to supply clear, obvious examples and use the concept appropriately.
15. **Developing Criteria for Evaluation: Clarifying Values and Standards:** A critical thinker is aware of the process of evaluation which requires developing and using criteria or standards for evaluation, or making standards or criteria explicit. Hence, when developing criteria he should understand the object and purpose of the evaluation, and what function the thing being evaluated is

supposed to serve. Critical thinkers take into consideration different points of view when attempting to evaluate something.

16. Evaluating the Credibility of Sources of Information: Thinking critically involves recognizing the importance of using reliable sources of information and it also includes knowing when there is more than one reasonable position to be taken on an issue; a critical thinker compares alternative sources of information, noting areas of agreement and recognizes obstacles when gathering accurate and pertinent information.

17. Questioning Deeply: Raising and Pursuing Root or Significant Questions: The principle says that critical thinkers can pursue and contemplate the significance of an issue in depth, covering different aspects in an extended process of thought or discussion. They also can move between basic underlying ideas and specific details, use important issues to organize their thought and are not bound by the organization given by another.

18. Analyzing or Evaluating Arguments, Interpretations, Beliefs, or Theories: Critical thinkers use analytic tools to understand the reasoning behind it and determine its relative strengths and weaknesses. When analyzing arguments, critical thinkers recognize the importance of asking for reasons and considering other views. Also when giving or being given an interpretation, critical thinkers, recognizing the difference between evidence and interpretation, explore the

assumptions on which interpretations are based and propose and evaluate alternative interpretations for their relative strength.

19. **Generating or Assessing Solutions:** A critical problem-solver uses everything available to him to find the best solution he can. He evaluates solutions, not independently of, but in relation to one another (since 'best' implies a comparison). It implies taking the time to formulate problems clearly, accurately, and fairly, and also the causes of the problem at length. Critical thinkers must be flexible and creative thinkers as well, generating possible solutions in order to find the best one. They also take into account the interests of everyone affected by the problem and proposed solutions, thus they approach problems realistically.

20. **Analyzing or Evaluating Actions and Policies:** In order to develop one's perspective, one must analyze actions and policies and evaluate them. When evaluating the behaviour of themselves and others, critical thinkers are aware of the standards they use, so that these, too, can become objects of evaluation. They base their evaluations of behaviour on assumptions which they have reasoned through. Besides, critical thinkers examine the consequences of actions and recognize these as fundamental to the standards for assessing behaviour and policy. They can articulate and rationally apply principles.

21. **Reading Critically: Clarifying or Critiquing Texts:** A critical thinker reads with scepticism. But he does not doubt or deny until he understands. A critical

reader asks himself questions as he reads, wonders about the implications of, reasons for, examples of, and meaning and truth of the material. Therefore, he recognizes that reading a book is reading one limited perspective on a subject and that more can be learned by considering other perspectives.

22. **Listening Critically: The Art of Silent Dialogue:** The principle states that listening can be done passively and uncritically or actively and critically. Yet the critical thinker must learn how to listen actively and critically. Critical readers ask questions as they read and use those questions to orient themselves to what an author is saying. Critical listeners ask questions as they listen to orient themselves to what a speaker is saying.

23. **Making Interdisciplinary Connections:** the principle involved says that divisions of knowledge between different disciplines are not absolute; when considering issues which transcend subjects (and most real-life issues do), a critical thinker brings relevant concepts, knowledge, and insights from many subjects to the analysis. He makes use of insights from one subject to inform their understanding of other subjects due to the fact that there are always connections between subjects.

24. **Practicing Socratic Discussion: Clarifying and Questioning Beliefs, Theories, or Perspectives:** One of the characteristics of critical thinkers is questioning. They have many different kinds of questions and moves available and can follow up their questions appropriately. For them, questions are tools

by which goals are reached. When confronted with a new idea, they want to understand it, to relate it to their experience, and to determine its implications, consequences, and value. Furthermore, critical thinkers are comfortable being questioned. They don't become offended, confused, or intimidated.

25. Reasoning Dialogically: Comparing Perspectives, Interpretations, or

Theories: Dialogical thinking refers to thinking that involves a dialogue or extended exchange between different points of view, an example of dialogical thinking is Socratic questioning.

Critical thinkers need to be able to engage in an exploratory dialogue, proposing ideas, inquiring their roots, considering subject matter insights and evidence, testing ideas, and moving between various points of view.

26. Reasoning Dialectically: Evaluating Perspectives, Interpretations, or

Theories: Dialectical thinking refers to dialogical thinking conducted in order to test the strengths and weaknesses of opposing points of view. When thinking dialectically, critical thinkers can use critical micro-skills appropriately.

If we are to integrate our thinking, we need to assess which of the conflicting ideas we will provisionally accept and which we shall provisionally reject, or which parts of the views are strong and which weak, or how the views can be reconciled.

The second sub-category in the Cognitive strategies is the Micro-Skills or basic critical thinking skill which involves nine dimensions:

27. Comparing and Contrasting Ideals with Actual Practice: This principle states that the self-improvement and social improvement are presupposed values of critical thinking. A critical thinker recognizes gaps between ideals and practice and so works to minimize these gaps.

28. Thinking Precisely About Thinking: Using Critical Vocabulary: An essential requirement of critical thinking is the ability to think about thinking, to engage in what is sometimes called "metacognition". At this level Critical thinkers are able to use analytical vocabulary (such terms as 'assume', 'infer', 'conclude', 'criterion', 'point of view', 'relevance', 'issue', 'elaborate', 'ambiguous', 'objection', 'support', 'bias', 'justify', 'perspective', 'contradiction', 'consistent', 'credibility', 'evidence', 'interpret', 'distinguish') .Thus, we are in a better position to assess reasoning when we can use analytic vocabulary with accuracy and ease.

29. Noting Significant Similarities and Differences: A critical thinker becomes sensitive to significant similarities and differences; this fact influences how he experiences, describes, categorizes, and how he reasons about things, becoming in this way more careful and discriminating in his use of words and phrases. Also he learns to hesitate before accepting an analogy or comparison.

30. Examining or Evaluating Assumptions: This principle affirms that when all the elements of reason or behaviour are made explicit, it is easier to evaluate such reasoning or behaviour. Critical thinkers do not simply accept assumptions, they question and evaluate them first and consider alternative information.

31. Distinguishing Relevant from Irrelevant Facts: According to this principle, critical thinkers focus their attention on relevant facts. Whether or not something is relevant is often unclear; relevance must often be argued. Furthermore, a fact is only relevant or irrelevant in relation to an issue. Information relevant to one problem may not be relevant to another.

32. Making Plausible Inferences, Predictions, or Interpretations: Thinking critically involves the ability to reach sound conclusions based on observation and information. Critical thinkers look beyond, to see what the facts and concepts imply.

33. Giving Reasons and Evaluating Evidence and Alleged Facts: Critical thinkers can take their reasoning apart in order to examine and evaluate its components. They know on what evidence they base their conclusions and its relevance to the issue because not everything offered as evidence should be accepted; it can be complete or incomplete, acceptable, questionable, or false. In addition they are comfortable being asked to give reasons.

34. Recognizing Contradictions: A critical thinker is consistent and removes contradictions from his beliefs; he can identify specifically where opposing arguments or views contradict each other, distinguishing the contradictions from compatible beliefs, thus focusing his analyses of conflicting views.

35. Exploring Implications and Consequences: Critical thinkers can take statements, recognize their implications, what follows from them, and develop a more complete understanding of their meaning. They can explore both implications and consequences at length.

In addition, another crucial aspect in fostering critical thinking is the role of metacognition, briefly mentioned before as one of the dimensions (28). According to Port Louis (2007) "The term metacognition means knowledge about one's own learning or knowing how to learn. Metacognition is a mental activity which turns the other processes or states into reflexive objects. The characteristics of metacognition are planning the thinking trajectory, self observation during a plan execution, conscious adjustment and evaluation (Grangeat and Meirieu, 1997).

Swartz and Perkins (1990) claim that there are three levels of metacognitive thinking, where the teacher reinforces student's metacognitive processes, and the student is aware of the type of knowledge and the context. The first level is *Awareness Use*, which involves knowledge of the type of thinking used and when to use it by means of recognizing what is about to be done. The second one is *Strategic Use*, where particular conscious strategies must be used to promote

effective thinking; to accomplish this level the teacher must follow all the stages of an already formulated plan regarding any determined kind of thinking. Finally, the last level refers to the *Reflexive Use*. At this point the student examines his own thinking functioning before, during and after the process, asking himself how to carry out an intellectual task and how to improve his performance. The means for the reflexive use are descriptive, to describe how to think, and normative, to reflect on the most effective methods of thinking.

Now, up to this point we have seen that critical thinking and active reading can function together in fostering a reading comprehension process where the student makes extensive use of his thinking skills and at the same time he is aware of it. However in order to motivate students to be really involved in the process the teacher has to promote students' engagement in active reading designing **appropriate instruction using reading techniques or methods**. In other words, the reader uses reading strategies or approaches, planned in advanced by the teacher, which must help students to become purposeful, and in control of their own reading comprehension process. Some authors state a set of strategies which are useful for the reading process.

According to Carrell et al (1989, p. 647), there are two metacognitive strategies for reading comprehension: the first one is semantic mapping (SM) which is a tool to asses students' schema, where categories and associations are displayed in a map, which is a good activity for pre and post-reading activities. The second one,

the experience-text-relationship (ETR) method comprises three steps: 1. experience, an activity where the students relate his/her knowledge with the intended text. 2. Text step, the students read some pages of the text and answer some comprehension questions. 3. Relationship sequence: student finds the relationship between the contents of the text and their outside experience and knowledge.

Paul (2007) presents the SQ3R and SQ4R strategies. The first one stands for **S**urvey **Q**uestion **R**ead **R**ecite/**R**ecall, **R**eview and in the second one the fourth R stands for **w**Riting or **R**ecord. This author also suggests the Muscle reading strategy which specifies more text highlighting and note-taking, the PREP strategy (Preview, Read to understand, Process to learn) and the S-RUN strategy (Survey, Read, Underline, Note-take). Another reading comprehension strategy is Developing a "Map" of Knowledge (Paul & Elder, 2003) where the student takes first ownership of the primary ideas for they are a key to understand the other ideas, and at the same time the student starts to think within the system of the text as a whole. A final worth mentioning strategy is the QUASAR ATTACK method (Giller, 2009), which stands for Question, (Be) Active, Analyze, Reflect, Systems and where the student scan the text, survey the text, and skim the text.

Most of these techniques have the basic reading comprehension structure, which comprises a pre-while-post reading activity, in order to assess and guide the students through the critical thinking process. Furthermore, the pre-reading activities are based on the Schemata theory which can be seen as the organized background knowledge, which leads us to expect or predict aspects in our

interpretation of discourse (Paul & Elder, 2003), in other words a schema is all the pre-knowledge the student has relating to the content of a text, and which facilitates the student the comprehension of the text. Reading comprehension depends crucially on the reader's ability to relate information from the text to his/her own existing background knowledge. Thus we can say that through a methodological approach based on the Schemata theory, the student gets engaged from the beginning of the activity, which leads him/her to become a fluent, effective and critical reader.

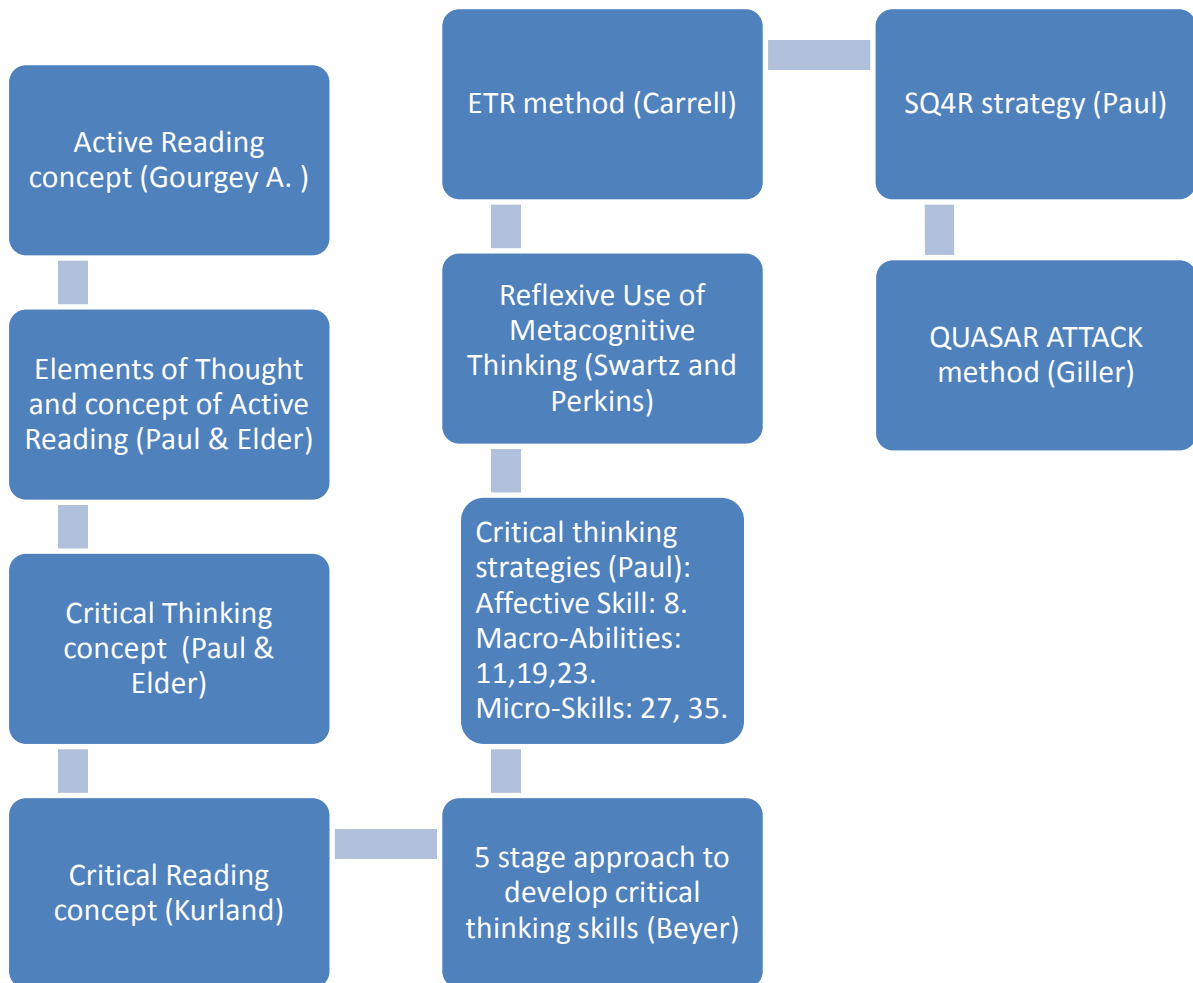
3. AUTONOMOUS LEARNING MODEL DESIGN

This model was specially created for students in 21168's class, the criteria used to decide which concepts were more appropriate to choose, was based on this class context. This course is taken by ninth level students in the English Teaching Program of the Universidad Industrial de Santander and as part of the contents of the course students have to analyze cognitive theories of language learning, information related to autonomy and to learning processes. During the course they go through different reading material associated with these matters; three of these texts were chosen for the model: "*A Cognitive Theory of Learning*", "*Cognitive Accounts of Second Language Acquisition*" and "*Turning Language Studied into Language Learned: Considering How the Brain Processes Information*". Former students of the course had difficulties in analyzing the mentioned texts; therefore a tool designed to guide them through the reading was needed.

Taking into account this context, among the concepts described in the theoretical framework, those suitable to promote effective reading and critical thinking were chosen to design the autonomous learning model aimed for students of 21168's class (high level education students).

3.1. PRINCIPLES FOR DESIGN

Figure 1 Graphic of Concepts



Source: Author

Additional conceptual tools chosen for the design of the autonomous model:

- ICT: Information and Communication Technologies. The implementation of ICT enables the learner independence and the learner environment can be extended beyond the physical constraints of the classroom.

For this autonomous model the type of ICT that will be used is Blogging which turns learning into a learner-centred approach. Besides, Blogs have been well received in education due to their multimedia features, interactivity, and ability to support cooperative and autonomous learning (Sun, 2009).

The tasks will be posted in a blog created specifically for the 21168 class students.

- TBL: Tasked-Based Learning Approach. TBL's lessons are based around the completion of a central task and the information studied is determined by what happens as the student complete it.

The Task-Based Learning approach will be the methodological component for the organization of the tasks in the blog.

4. AUTONOMOUS LEARNING MODEL:

4.1. ASSIGNMENTS:

The autonomous learning model comprises three assignments each one designed for one of the texts chosen and based on a reading method.

- First assignment:

-Text: “A COGNITIVE THEORY OF LEARNING”.

-Method: ERT. In this method students have to make use of their pre- knowledge of the text. Then they read the text and answer some questions related to the information and finally student ought to find the relationship between the text and their outside experience, in this case L2 learning.

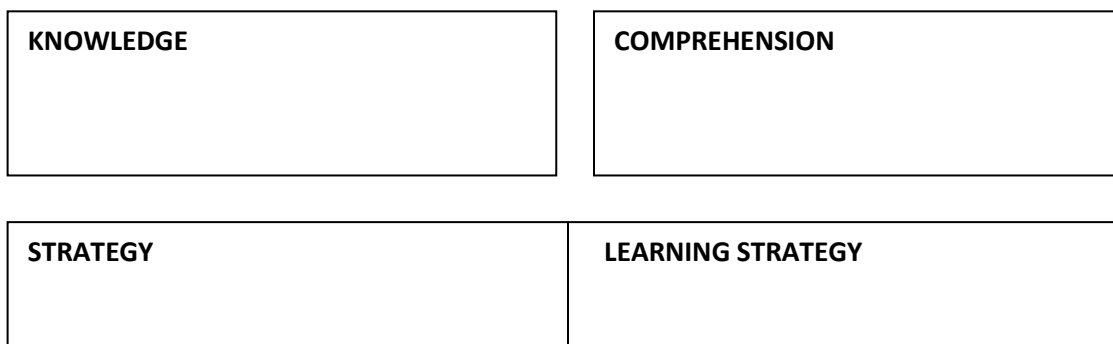
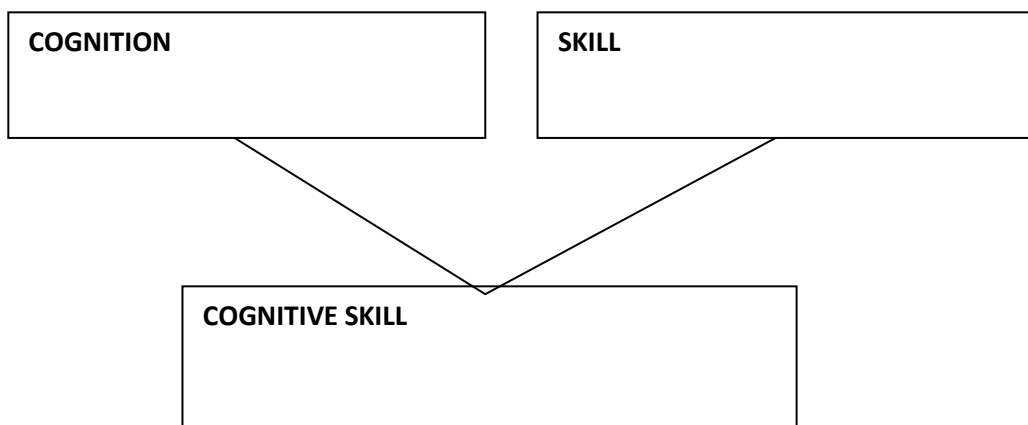
-Tasks: The first point is the goal for the reading. For each reading student need to have a goal and try to accomplish it at the end of the reading and analysis of the information, but for this assignment the goal is already set as a model for next assignments. In the second task students provide their knowledge to basic concepts used in the text. This is part of the pre-knowledge stage of the model or *Experience stage*. The text was divided in four sections to make the information easier to analyze. For each section there are a series of questions where students provide meaning of concepts, theories, models, etc, presented in the text and at the same time connect the information with L2 learning. The two last tasks are intended to direct students into reflection of the information learned. Here students compare their pre-knowledge with knowledge they acquired after reading the text, and finally they are encouraged to write questions and doubts to discuss in class.

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

ASSIGNMENT FOR “A COGNITIVE THEORY OF LEARNING”

1. GOAL FOR THE READING: To understand the interaction and relationship between language and cognitive theory related to second language acquisition processes, and connect it with autonomous learning.
2. BEFORE READING: Provide a meaning for the following concepts using ONLY your knowledge:



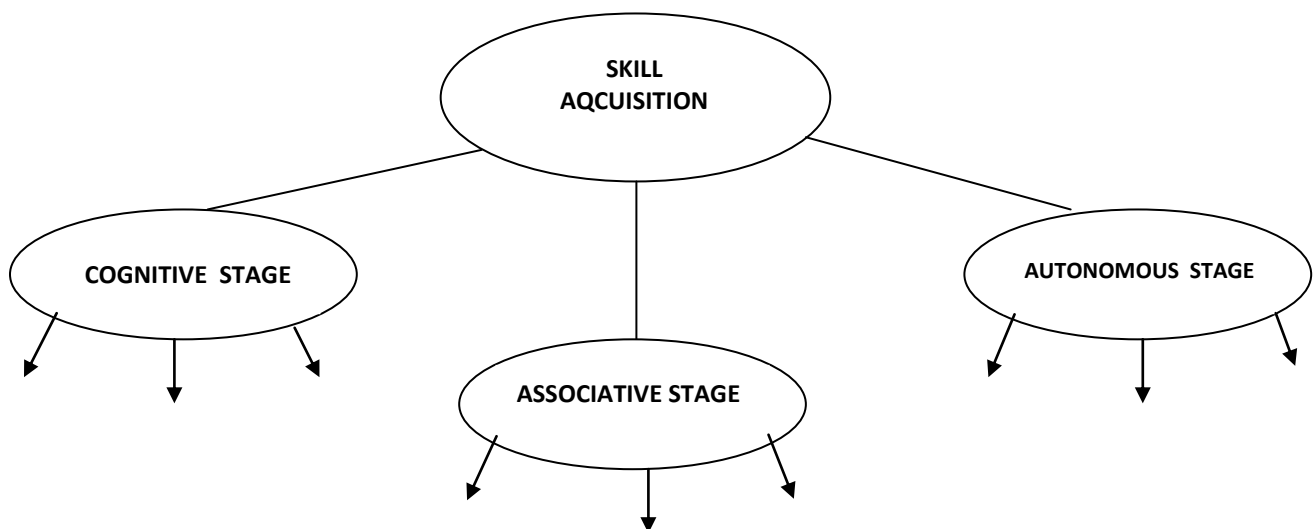
- What is the relationship between cognition and learning a second language?

3. Read the first section of the text (from the main title to the sub-heading *Production Systems*) and answer the following questions:

- What is a learning strategy according to Weinstein and Mayer?
- According to the psychology cognitive paradigm, how is information stored and acquired in memory? Explain it through a chart.
- What is the role of learning strategies in this paradigm?
- Anderson (1983, 1985) proposes a theory for cognitive skill acquisition: “Comprehensive Model of Cognitive Skill Learning”, in this theory he describes how information is represented in memory. What to kinds of knowledge has he presents? Describe them.
- What kind of knowledge is Language Acquisition, and why?

4. Read the second section of the text (from the sub- heading *Stages of Skill acquisition* to the sub-heading *Complements to the stage-related theory of learning*) and answer the following questions:

- Anderson (1983, 1985) describes three stages of skill acquisition. Describe them in the follow network tree writing relevant aspects of each stage:



- Briefly explain the difficulties of Anderson's theory related to :
 - Rule-bound
 - Single-Process
 - Ineffective instructional approaches.
- Do you think there could be any other difficulty or weaknesses with the theory? If any explain your point of view.

5. Read the third section of the text (from the sub-heading *Language Comprehension* to the sub- heading *Language Production*) and answer:

- Anderson proposes three *processes for comprehension* and three *stages of Language production*:

Are they similar in some aspects? What are the differences? Could the processes for comprehension be applied for language production? How?

Clark and Clark suggest another model for language production very similar to Anderson's:

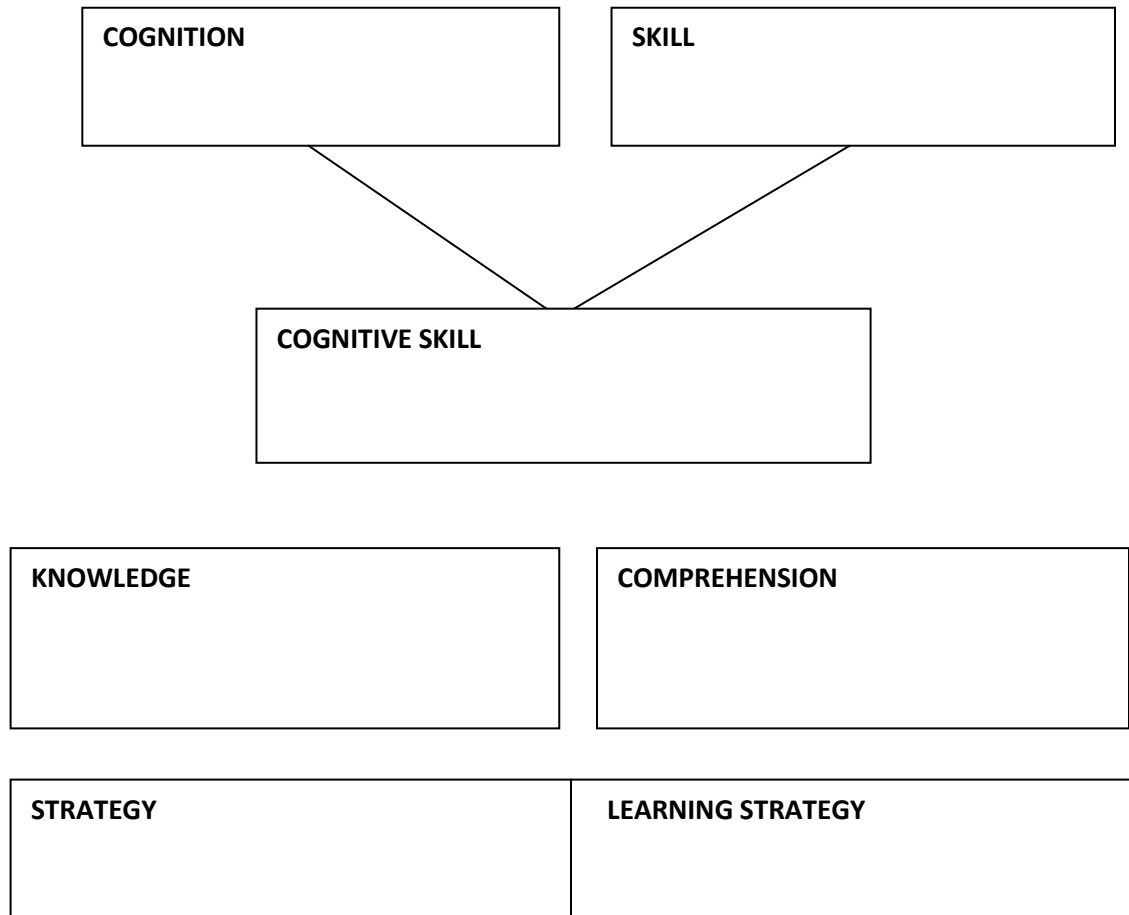
For an autonomous learner of L2, Would this model be sufficient? What changes would you make? What would you add?

6. Read the fourth section of the text (the sub-heading *Learning Strategies as Cognitive Skills*)

- Why are learning strategies used?
- Among the learning strategies mentioned, Metacognitive, Cognitive and Social Affective strategies, which would be more effective to promote autonomous learning in L2? Why? Provide examples of the strategies you chose applied to autonomous second language learning.
- What is the importance of a GOAL to use strategies?

7. Reflecting on what you learned:

- What would be the role of an active learner?
 - How could you guide a learner to become active and autonomous?
 - Which of the text's concepts, models, strategies, etc. would you apply for your students?
-
- Remember the concepts you provided at the beginning based on your own knowledge. After reading and analyzing the text *A Cognitive Theory of Learning* you can give more extensive explanations of these concepts. Add those ideas you learned and compare them to those you had at the beginning.



8. What questions or doubts do you have on *The Cognitive Theory of Learning*? Write them down for a class discussion.

- Second assignment:

-Text: “ *COGNITIVE ACCOUNTS OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION*”

-Method: SQ4R. In this method students **S**urvey, **Q**uestion, **R**ead, **R**ecite/**R**ecall, **R**eview and **wR**ite or **R**ecord.

-Tasks: The first task is related to the first stage of the method: *Survey*. Here students give a general look to get a first idea the information, and then they set their expectations. In the second task students established their goal for the reading. For the third task, the reader create a question based on the title of the text, this question will be kept in mind during all the reading so students do not forget the reading focus. The fourth task is the *Reading* stage. While reading students take notes and try gather information to answer the question. The fifth task is about concepts provided in the text; students recall the meaning answering some questions. The sixth task reviews the main ideas of the text. Using a *Map of knowledge*, students organize those ideas and also compare if the predictions the made at the beginning were correct. In the seventh task students create a chart where they review all the theories presented in the text, in order to check if they understood the main aspects. In the last tasks students analyze the information they learned and review how they accomplished their goal. During these tasks students have to consider the information from their own point of view and relate it with the language acquisition context.

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

ASSIGNMENT FOR “COGNITIVE ACCOUNTS OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION”

1. Before reading:

Read the title. Give a glance over the sub- headings and read the final paragraph.

- What do you think is the central theme?
- Can you identify some main ideas?

Find highlighted or italicized words, take a look to the figures and tables. Read the summary or conclusion of the text. According to this:

What do you expect to learn from the text?

2. Set a goal for your reading:

(Something you expect to accomplish at the end by reading this text)

3. Read the title again. Turn the title into a question and keep it in mind during all the reading.

4. Read the text. While reading try to look for material to clarify arguments and assumptions, to evaluate them and to answer your own questions (pay special attention to arguments). Take notes of your reading in order to answer the question you formulated at the beginning and to accomplish your goal.

5. After reading answer the following questions:

- What is the difference between linguistics and cognitive theories related to L2 learning?
- According to the cognitive theory provide a meaning for:

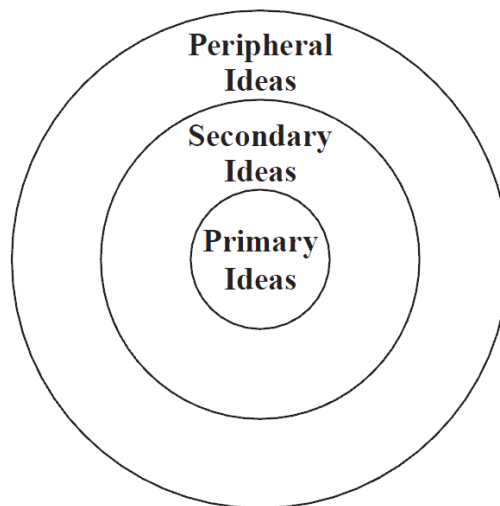
- Interlanguage

- Explicit and implicit knowledge. What is their relationship?

- Input and output

- Fossilization
- Consciousness
- Awareness
- Capability
- The socio-psychological dimension of the Multidimensional Model
- Communication strategies.

6. Look over your notes check if your ideas about the central topic and main ideas were right. If they were not right or incomplete add the information you think necessary to have a general understanding of the text. Develop the *Following Map of Knowledge*:



7. Create a chart or conceptual map where you describe cognitive theories of second language acquisition presented in the text. Include the following information:

- Name of the model
- Advocator(s)
- Focus
- Main theories, concepts, ideas and contributions to language acquisition.
- Weaknesses, arguments against, difficulties etc,
- The model point of view of: interlanguage, explicit/implicit knowledge or learning and second language acquisition.
- Add any experiment or investigation developed to reinforce or weaken the theory/model, look at the tables and figures first.

8. Did the text fulfill your expectations? What other information different from what you expected did you learn?
Review your goal to know how you accomplished it.
9. Which of these models/theories, concepts, skills, stages etc, could you apply in a classroom to promote autonomous learning of second language acquisition?
10. Choose an argument you consider insufficient to support a concept or theory, and explain what deficiencies you find. What could be a possible solution or change?
11. Write down your doubts, questions and points you consider relevant, for a further class discussion.

- Third assignment:

-Text: *“TURNING LANGUAGE STUDIED INTO LANGUAGE LEARNED: CONSIDERING HOW THE BRAIN PROCESSES INFORMATION”*

-Method: QUASAR ATTACK. With this method students establish Questions, are Active, Analyze the information and Reflect on what they learned, also use Systems for practical reading such as scanning, surveying, and skimming the text.

-Tasks: The first three tasks constitute a pre-reading activity where students question the relevance and importance of the text; also they set the reading goal and do a skimming exercise to get a general idea of the text. In the next tasks students analyze the structure and content of the text, in this way they can have more effective control of the information. The sixth task is about considering the evidence presented in the text, students organized the information on evidence they gather in a chart. The seventh task is for analysis of the information in the text; students complete a conceptual map with some of the main concepts and theories, they can add information they consider relevant and is missing in the map.

In the two final tasks student evaluate the information they learned in the text and find arguments to support their point of view against or in favour. Finally students connect the information with real world and put it in context.

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

ASSIGNMENT FOR “TURNING LANGUAGE STUDIED INTO LANGUAGE LEARNED: CONSIDERING HOW THE BRAIN PROCESSES INFORMATION.”

BEFORE READING:

1. Read heading and sub-headings and ask yourself:
 - Why do I need to read this text? Write reasons why you think this text is relevant for L2.
 - What do you expect to find in the text?
 - What information about brain processes related to language do I already know?
2. Set your goal for this reading. Take into account L2 acquisition and Autonomous learning.
3. Skim the text to get a more general idea of the contents. Write a summary about your first impressions on the text, and about what you think are relevant ideas.

READ THE TEXT:

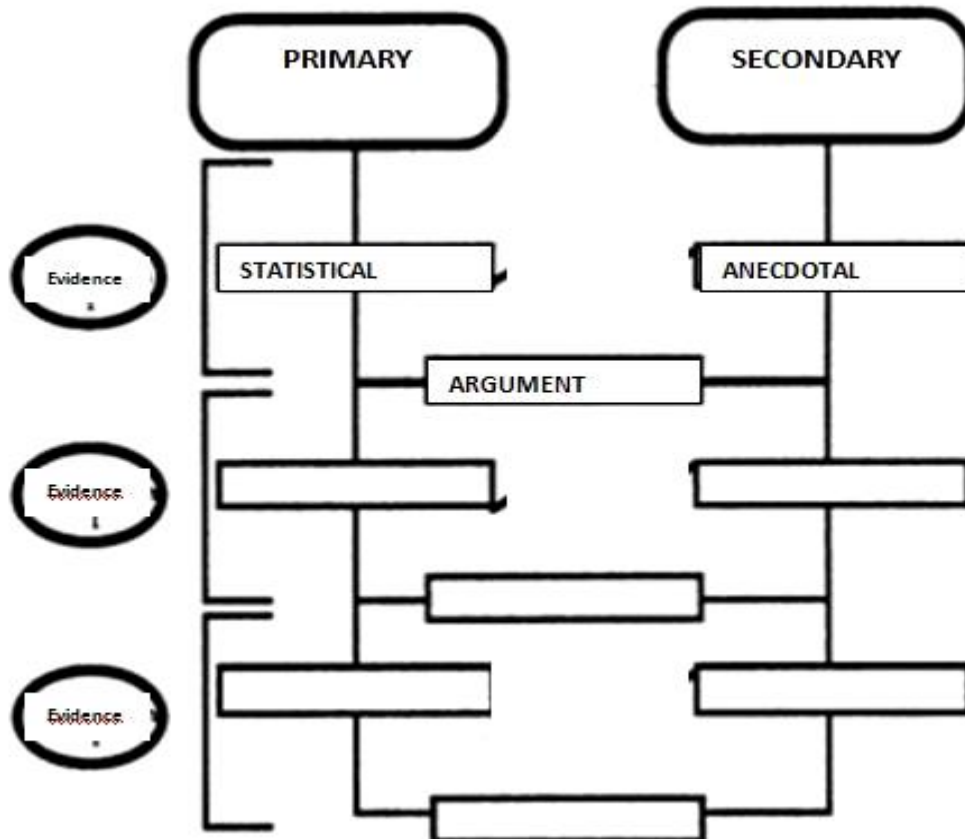
4. While reading, analyse the structure of the text. Answer these questions:
 - How is the information organized?
 - Is the chapter broken down into appropriate sub-headings?
 - Do the sub-headings give me an overview of the structure of the chapter?
 - Does each section have additional and supporting material or evidence or examples after summary statements? What examples?
 - What contributions does the text bring for L2 learning?
 - How could it be useful for you?
 - Do you think the information is suitable and credible? Consider the date when the article was written, is it up to date? Can you find some extra information on this matter?
5. Analyse the content of the article:
 - What is the author’s purpose?
 - What are the central claims of the text? List them.

- What is the main evidence for each claim?
- What assumptions lie behind the evidence or arguments?
- Do you think the assumptions are founded on adequate proof?
- What are the **general** weaknesses or strengths?

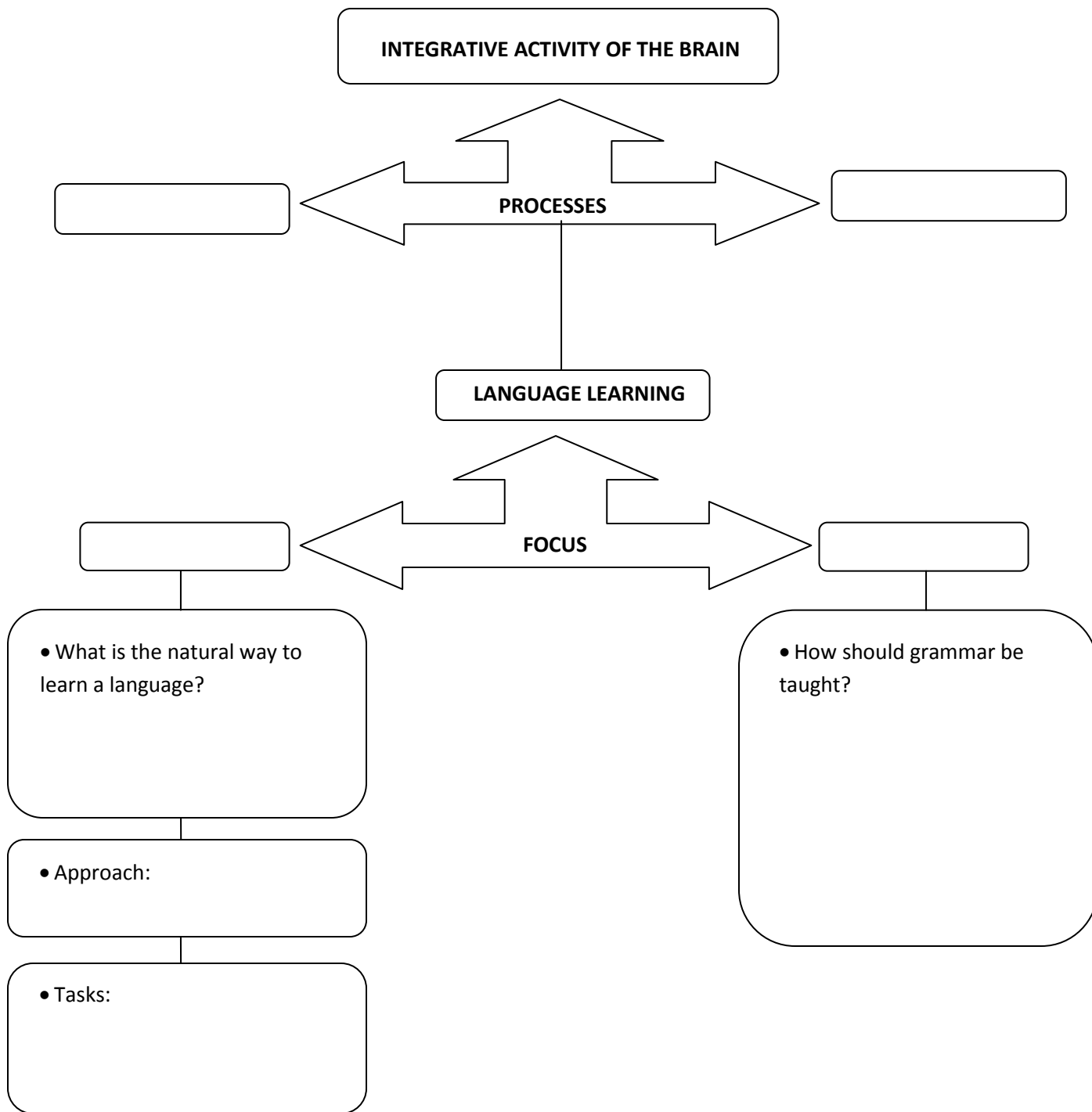
6. Now consider the kind of evidence provided by the author:

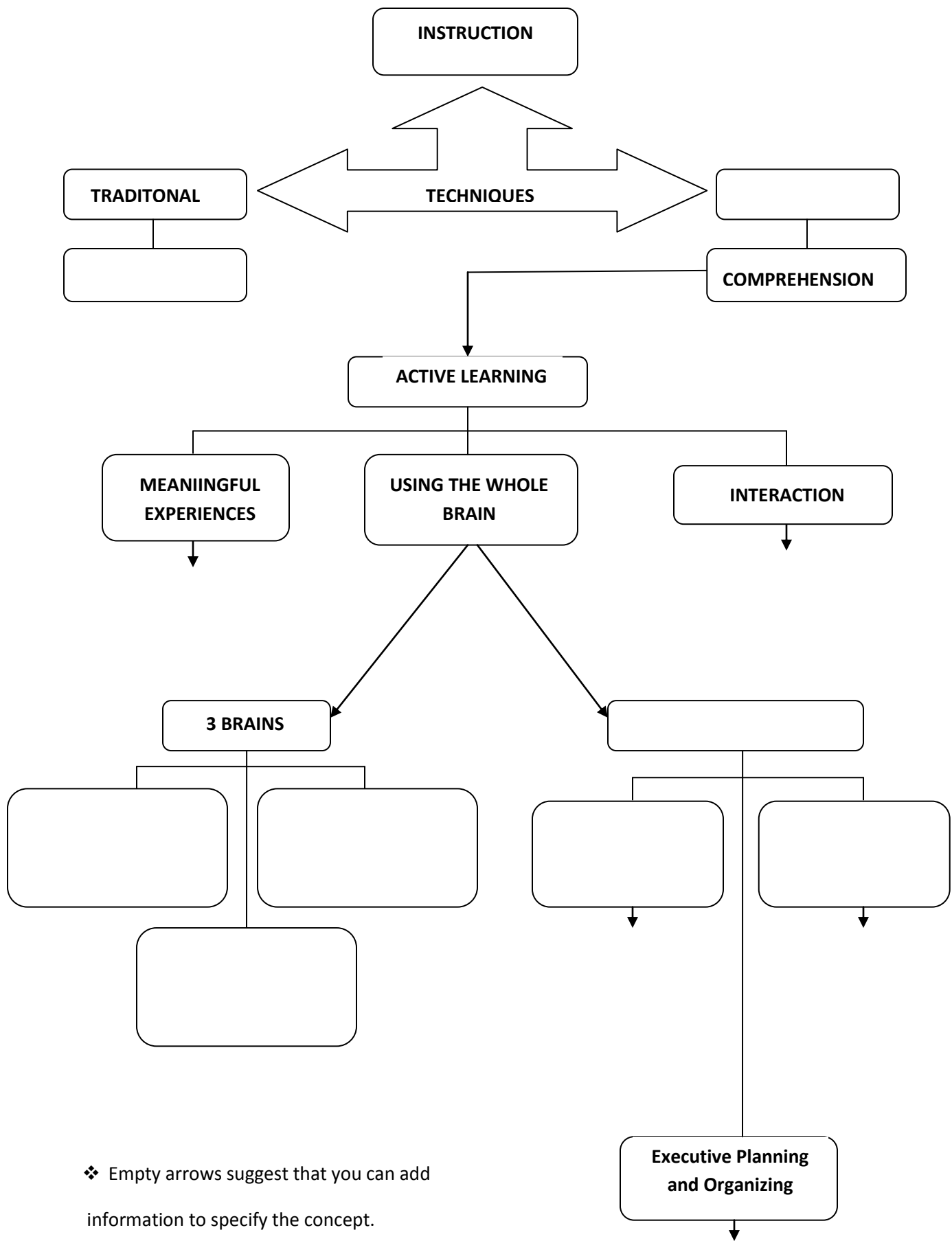
- Primary or Secondary sources – these could be different for different subject disciplines
- Is the evidence statistical?
- Is it anecdotal?
- How does the author use this evidence to develop the argument?
- How is it connected with central ideas and themes?

Use this graphic to organize the information:



7. Taking into account the concepts learned in the text, complete these conceptual map:





- ❖ Empty arrows suggest that you can add information to specify the concept.
- ❖ Add any extra concept you consider significant.

8. What is your evaluation?

- Consider /decide if the arguments /evidence presented in the text are strong or weak.
- Do you think it could have been done differently or differently supported?
- Can you spot any gaps, un-argued assumptions or inconsistencies?
- Look at the conclusions and ask yourself if the evidence supports the conclusions.

9. Final considerations:

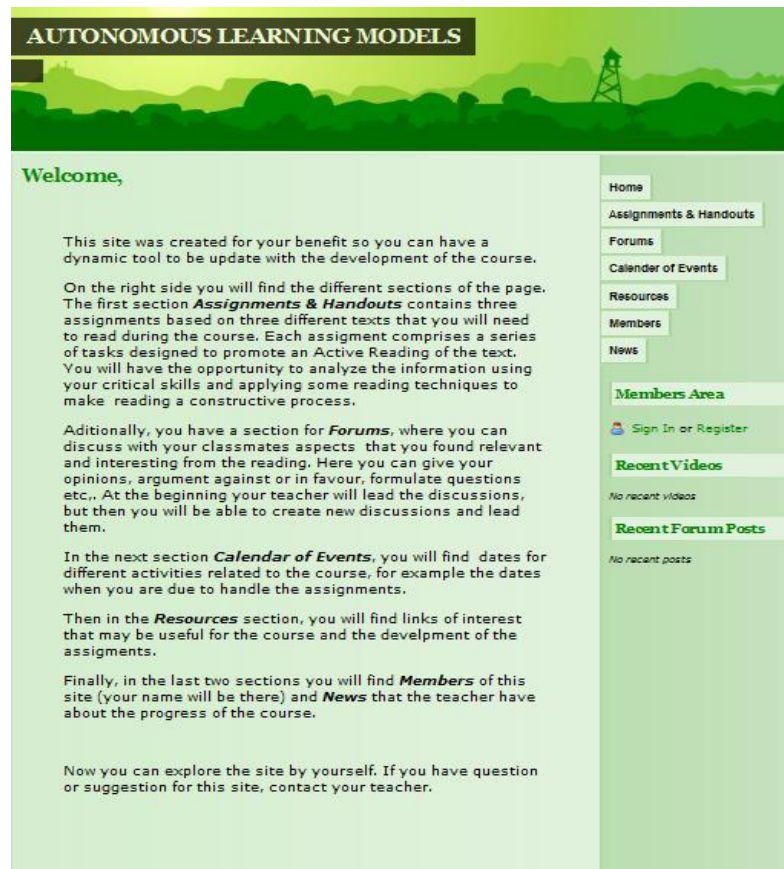
- How would you use this information in L2 acquisition? Choose those concepts, ideas, methods, theories you consider relevant to promote autonomy in a L2 student?
- Write down doubts or questions the texts arouse to debate in class.

4.2. BLOG:

A blog was designed in order to allow students access to the assignments. The purpose of the blog is to encourage the use of ICTs for educational purposes, also this is a space created especially for students of 21168's where they will be able to discuss and extend topics exclusively related to the course. The blog comprises various sections mainly focused on the analysis of the reading material assigned for the class.

In the *Home Page* there is a short introduction directed to students with a description of the whole site:

Figure 1 Blog



Source: Author

On the right side of the page students will find a sidebar with a link for every section. There are seven sections including *Home Page*, *Assignments & Handouts*, *Forums*, *Calendar of Events*, *Resources*, *Members*, *News*. Every assignments is posted in a different link in the *Assignments & Handouts* section, they also have the opportunity to participate and create *Forums* to discuss with other members of the class ideas, concepts, theories or arguments mainly based on the reading texts and relevant for L2 acquisition.

Figure 3 Blog Sections



Source: Author

There is also a *Calendar* with dates for course activities, as well as section for *Resources* with links of interest for students related to the contents of the course and tips for active reading. In the last two section *Members* and *News*, there will appear the names of the students of the class and news about the contents, pending discussion or information posted by the teacher.

NOTE: This blog was designed at www.webs.com. If you want to visit the site you can find it at <http://21168.webs.com/>, *Autonomous Learning Models' site*.

CONCLUSIONS

Critical thinking involves reasoning, thus students trained to be critical thinkers, reason about what they are learning to analyze information with logic. They understand that there is a difference between constructing knowledge by using logic or by memorizing. However, to accomplish this advanced level of thinking in students, there must be a contribution from both teacher and students, thus it is concluded that:

- The role of the teacher in teaching critical thinking implies learning how to design instruction so that students can manage the logic of their own thinking while they are thinking and as a result to improve.
- As the mind is not able to discipline by itself, students must be aware of their own process and take the necessary steps to become a critical thinker.
- One of the most effective tools to foster critical thinking is Active Reading. Because it involves the use of all the elements of the thought, as well as strategies for reading comprehension, it can be an instrument to promote critical thinking skills.
- Special instruction is required in order to make Active Reading an appropriate field for the development of critical thinking skills in advanced college students. Criteria to create the appropriate methodology must be chosen according to students' needs and context.

RECOMMENTATIONS

Monitoring the development of the tasks is recommended to determine students' level of accomplishment. Also, further research is necessary to improve the effectiveness of the assignments, as some changes may be necessary to accommodate to students' needs and progress.

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