

## Understanding Critical Discourse Analysis in Qualitative Research

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**Abstract:** *This article explores critical discourse analysis as a theory in qualitative research. The framework of analysis includes analysis of texts, interactions and social practices at the local, institutional and societal levels. It aims at revealing the motivation and politics involved in the arguing for or against a specific research method, statement, or value. It draws on the necessity for describing, interpreting, analysing, and critiquing social life reflected in text by using critical discourse analysis. The article recognises that Human subjects use texts to make sense of their world and to construct social actions and relations in the labour of everyday life while at the same time, texts position and construct individuals, making available various meanings, ideas and versions of the world (Lucke 1996:12). Drawing from literature, this study will explore programmes, various forms of critical discourse analysis, principles as well as advantages and disadvantages of using this theory in qualitative research.*

**Keywords:** *Critique, discourse, analysis, framework, conversations, concepts.*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Anyon (2009:3) argues that theory and educational research bridges the old-age theory divide by demonstrating how researchers can use critical theory to determine appropriate empirical research strategies, and extend the analytical, critical and sometimes emancipator power of data gathering and interpretation. Dressman (2008:9) further states that theory circumscribes methods of thinking about educational problems and inhibits creativity among researchers, policy makers and teachers. According to Suppes (1974:4), there are five kinds of arguments for using theory in educational research: i) argument by analogy (although the argument that the success of the natural sciences in the use of theory provides an excellent example for educational research, it does not follow that theory must be comparably useful as we move from one subject to the other); ii) reorganisation of experience ( a more important way to think about the role of theory is to attack directly the problem of identifying the need for theory in a subject matter); iii) recognition of complexity (one of the thrusts of theory is to show that what appear on the surface to be simple matters of empirical investigation, on a deeper view, prove to be complex); iv) Deweyan problem solving (inquiry is the transformation of an indeterminate situation that presents a problem into one that is determinate and unified by the solution of the initial problem); and v) triviality of bare empiricism (recording of individual facts and with no apparatus of generalisation or theory).

According to Maxwell (2010:2), no fact, investigation, or conclusion can be theory free. The issue is whether one is aware of the theory one is using and whether one is using it critically or uncritically. In order to understand any educational phenomenon, one needs to also look at the larger social, economic and political contexts within which that phenomenon is embedded, and seek out theories that connect there. Theories can be used not just to understand the individuals, situations and structures studied, but also to change them. One needs to avoid simply citing theory to support one's argument, and to actually incorporate theory into the logic of one's study and use it to deepen one's research process.

Formal learning and instruction strategies are inseparable. Yet learning theories only describe how learning occurs, but do not describe the specific methods and activities to follow in order to

accomplish the intended learning outcomes. For example, learning theories may describe the age at which a learner may learn punctuations, but the instructional theories will provide guidelines on how to execute the teaching of punctuations.

## **2. CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS (CDA) IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

According to Van Dijk (2006:252), critical discourse analysis is primarily interested in and motivated by the endeavour to understand pressing social issues. Wodak and Mayer (2009:7) argue that critical discourse analysis emphasises the need for interdisciplinary work in order to gain a proper understanding of how language functions in constituting and transmitting knowledge in organising social institutions. Rogers et al (2005:368) state that critical theories are generally concerned with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, race, class, gender, religion, education, and sexual orientation construct, reproduce or transform social systems. The Human subjects use texts to make sense of their world and to construct social actions and relations in the labour of everyday life while at the same time, texts position and construct individuals, making available various meanings, ideas and versions of the world (Lucke 1996:12). of analysis includes analysis of texts, interactions and social practices at the local, institutional and societal levels. Critical discourse analysis deals with long term analysis of fundamental causes and consequences of issues. Therefore, it requires an account of detailed relationships between text, talk, society and culture. Teaching and learning policies can be better understood by looking at the social issues of the community as well as the language and type of texts used.

McGregor (2010:2) argues that critical discourse analysis challenges us to move from seeing language as abstract to seeing our words as having meaning in a particular historical, social and political condition. Hence critical discourse analysis studies real, and often extended, instances of social interaction which take particularly in linguistic form (Blommaert & Bulcaen 2000:448). According to Locke (2004:1), critical discourse analysis aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between discursive practices, events and texts, and wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power. It aims at revealing the motivation and politics involved in the arguing for or against a specific research method, statement, or value. Lucke (1996:13) declares that, because texts are moments of inter-subjectivity, that is, the social and discursive relations between human subjects, they involve writers and readers, speakers and listeners, individuals whose intentions are neither self-evident nor recoverable without recourse to another text. Critical discourse analysis is a tool to help members of a profession understand the messages they are sending to themselves and others and to understand the meanings of the spoken and written texts by others. The words of those in power are taken as “self-evident truths” and the words of those not in power are dismissed as irrelevant, inappropriate or without substance (McGregor 2010:2). This is an unacceptable perception since educators should also be engaged in the development of teaching and learning policies. Since texts are also located in key social institutions such as schools and offices of departments of education, critical discourse analysis emphasises the analysis of such original documents.

Critical discourse analysis is primarily positioned in the environment of language and its successes can be measured with a measuring rod of the study of languages. Language can be used to represent speakers’ beliefs, positions and ideas in terms of spoken texts like conversations. Written or oral messages convey meanings if we analyse the underlying meaning of the words. Analysis of underlying meanings can assist in interpreting issues, conditions and events in which the educators find themselves. Using words can direct/assist those in control of the education system. Critical discourse analysis can only make a significant and specific contribution to critical social or political analyses if it is able to provide an account of the role of language, language use, discourse or communicative events in the production of dominance and inequality (Van Dijk 2006:279; McGregor 2010:2). The focus of the theory and practice of critical discourse analysis is on structures of texts and talk. Critical discourse analysis tries to determine the relationship between the actual text and the processes involved in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Thus, this provides skills in critically analysing written text, that is, the way we write and what we say. McGregor (2003:2) argues that given the power of the written and spoken word, critical

discourse analysis is necessary for describing, interpreting, analysing and critiquing social life reflected in text. Educators' understanding of the language of learning and teaching is imperative for them to implement policies on teaching and learning.

According to Rogers et al (2005:371), the first goal of the analyst is to describe the relationships among certain texts, interactions and social practices; the second goal is to interpret the configuration of discourse practices; and the third goal is to use the description and interpretation to offer an explanation of why and how social practices are constituted, changed, and transformed in the ways that they are. The aims, choices and criteria of critical discourse analysis are to monitor theory formation, analytical method and procedures of empirical research (Van Dijk 2006:253). On the other hand, Lucke (1996:20) argues that critical discourse analysis can make transparent asymmetries in relations, revealing the textual techniques by which texts attempt to position, locate, define, and, in some instances, enable and regulate readers and addressees.

Discourse is socially constructive as well as socially conditioned; it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people (Wodak 2009:37). Lucke (1996:20) declares that the task or function of critical discourse analysis, thus, is to disarticulate and to critique texts as a way of disrupting common sense. Critical discourse analysis can be seen as aiming to critically investigate issues of related texts. It aims to help the analyst understand the social problems that are mediated by mainstream ideology and power relationships, all perpetuated by the use of written texts in our daily and professional lives. The context of language is crucial as it considers language as a social practice. Written and spoken texts should be analysed critically and constructively. Discourse analysis is something we do when we make judgements about the value and truthfulness of texts or conversations as well as relevant documents.

Discourse analysis is meant to provide a higher awareness of the hidden motivations in others and ourselves and, therefore, enable us to solve concrete problems, not by providing unequivocal answers, but by making us ask ontological and epistemological questions (Olson 2007:29). Thus, it will not provide absolute answers to a specific problem, but enable us to understand the conditions behind a specific problem and make us realise that the essence of that problem and its resolution lie in its assumptions, the very assumptions that enable the existence of that problem. It can be applied to any text, that is, to any problem or situation. Critical analysis reveals what is going on behind our backs and those of others and which determines our actions. It does not argue for or against the validity and truth of a certain research method, statement, or values, but focuses on the existence and message of texts and locate them within a historical

overcome various forms of power over or to gain an appreciation and social context.

The object of critical discourse analysis is to uncover the ideological assumptions that are hidden in the worlds of our written text or oral speech in order to resist and that we are exercising power over unbeknownst to use (McGregor 2010:4). It aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships between discursive practices, texts, and events and wider social and cultural structures, relations, and processes.

McGregor (2010:3) argues that critical discourse analysis tries to unite and determine the relationship between three levels of analysis, namely:

- The actual text.
- The discursive practices.
- The larger social context that bears upon the text and the discursive practices. According to Van Dijk (2006:259), the theory and practice of critical discourse analysis focus on the structures of text and talk, namely:
  - Power enactment and discourse production: understanding and explaining power, relevant discourse structures involves recognition of the social and cognitive processes of their production. Even when present as participants, members of less powerful groups may also otherwise be more or less dominated in discourse.
- The socio-cognitive interface between dominance and production.

- Discourse structures and strategies in understanding: the justification of inequality involves the positive representation of the own group, and the negative representation of the others.

Critical discourse analysis looks to establish connections between properties of texts, futures of discourse practice (text production, consumption and distribution), and wider sociocultural practice (Fairclough 1995:87). The purpose is to analyse “opaque” as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language (Blommaert & Bulcaen 2000:448). Its other purpose is not to provide definite answers, but to expand our personal horizons and make us realise our own shortcomings and make unacknowledged agendas or motivations as well as that of others. It studies real and often extended, instances of social interaction which take partially linguistic form. It is a resource for people who are trying to cope with the alienating and disabling effects of changes imposed upon them. This theory is about critically analysing spoken or written texts in the form of interactions, discussions, conversations or communications of topics under study.

### **3. A FURTHER UNDERSTANDING OF THE THEORY OF CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

Discourse analysis is a qualitative method that has been adopted and developed by constructionists (Fulcher 2010:1). Locke (2004:5) describes discourse as a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning. On the other hand, McGregor (2010:2) refers to discourse as expressing oneself using words. Van Dijk (2006:252) argues that critical discourse analysis requires true multidisciplinary and an account of intricate relationships between text, talk, social opinion, power, society and cultures. It is necessary for describing, interpreting, analysing, and critiquing social life reflected in text by using critical discourse analysis. Discourse analysis can be characterised as a way of approaching and thinking about a problem. It is making the world meaningful. Interpretation arises from an act of reading or analysing which makes meaning of a text.

Locke (2004:5) argues that discourse is a coherent way of making sense of the world as reflected in human sign systems including verbal language. He further describes discourse as a concept that is in an active relation to reality. Language signifies reality in the sense that discourse is in a passive relation to reality, with language merely referring to objects which are taken to be given in reality (Locke 2004:6). Discussions and conversations with the people involved with teaching and learning policies can bring about the reality of the situation on the ground. Since language is a social and cultural instrument, our sense of reality is socially and culturally constructed (Fulcher 2010:2). Language is the heart of critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis can be seen as a political intervention with its socially transformative agenda and thus is appropriate for a study of education policy in the post-apartheid era in South Africa.

According to Fulcher (2010:7), discourse analysis can be seen as a way of understanding social interactions. Furthermore, Fulcher (2010:4) states that a discourse is a particular theme in the text, especially those that relate to identities, for example, such as a statement that reiterates a view or claim that men find weddings dull. The research begins with a research question and not a hypothesis. A conversation or piece of text will be transcribed and then deconstructed. The investigator will attempt to identify categories, themes, ideas, views, and roles within the text itself. The aim is to identify commonly shared discursive resources, that is, shared patterns of talking.

However, according to Locke (2004:7), discourse implies ways of being and doing as well as ways of signifying. Discourses are ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking and reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles by specific groups of people. Locke further states:

- Discourse is shaped and constrained by social structure (class, age, ethnicity and gender) and by culture.
- Discourse helps shape and constrain our identities, relationships and systems of knowledge and beliefs.
- Systems are shaped and constrained by the language and worlds espoused by us and by others.

- Education policies on teaching and learning are shaped by differences in social structures, relationships as well as different languages spoken in South Africa.

According to Fairclough (1995:43), language is a material form of ideology, and language is invested by ideology. Lucke (1996:12) argues that critical discourse analysis shares with sociolinguistics and ethnomethodology the assumption that language should be studied in a social context. Discourse is a complex of three elements, namely, social practice, discursive practice (text production, distribution and consumption), and text, and analysis of a specific discourse calls for analysis in each of these dimensions and their interrelations (Fairclough 1995:74). Critical discourse analysis of written and spoken texts operates in two ways, namely, critically and constructively. Texts are located in key social institutions, that is, families, schools, churches, work places, mass media or government. Human subjects use texts to make sense of their world and to construct social actions and relations in the labour of everyday life while at the same time, texts position and construct individuals, making available various meanings, ideas and versions of the world (Lucke 1996:12). In face-to-face events in classrooms, discourse often unfolds in an uneven, contested, and unpredictable social configurations.

Critical discourse analysis tends to begin from a post-structuralist (reaction against structuralists' claims to scientific objectivity and universality) scepticism towards the assumption that people have singular, essential social identities or fixed cultural, social class, or gendered characteristics (Lucke 1996:14). Discourses are dynamic and cross fertilising, continually relocated and generated in everyday texts. Every text is a kind of institutional speech act, a social action with language with a particular shape and features, forces, audience and consequences (Lucke 1996:15). All texts are made of recurrent statements, that is, claims, propositions and wordings. People construct meaning on the basis of their prior experiences with language and texts, their available stock of discourse resources.

All texts are indeed multidiscursive (have significantly different meanings or connotations according to their use within different discourses), that is, they draw from a range of discourses, fields of knowledge and voices. Critical discourse analysis calls into question the very possibility of a nonideological statement or text on several grounds. All texts can be said to be normative, shaping, and constructing rather than simply reflecting and constructing.

The purpose of critical discourse analysis can be to make transparent to readers and listeners the devices with which texts position and manipulate them (Lucke 1996:19). It can make transparent asymmetries in those relations, revealing the textual techniques by which texts attempt to position, locate, define, and in some instances, enable and regulate readers and addressees (Fairclough 1995:79). The construction of official knowledge in schools involves discourses that transverse a range of texts and sites, from the legislative and policy documents prepared by civil servants, to curriculum texts prepared by academics, teachers and corporate publishers, to classroom lessons and informal talk, to the actual speech and writing undertaken by students for formal evaluation (McGregor 2010:28). Its principal effect is to establish itself as a form of common sense, to naturalise its own functions through its appearance in everyday texts. The task or function of discourse analysis is to disarticulate and to critique texts as a way of disrupting common sense. It is something we do every day when we make judgements about the efficacy, value, and truth claims of everyday conversations, commercials or textbooks.

#### **4. PROGRAMMES IN CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000:448) propose a three-dimensional framework for conceiving of and analysing discourse, namely:

- Discourse-as-text, that is, the linguistic features and organisation of concrete instances of discourse.
- Discourse-as-discursive-practice, that is, discourse as something that is produced, circulated, distributed, consumed in society.
- Discourse-as-social practice, that is, the ideological effects and hegemonic processes in which discourse is a feature.

Critical discourse analysis advocates interventionism in the social practices it critically investigates. It should make proposals for change and suggest corrections to particular discourses. The meaning of a text does not come into being until it is actively employed in a context of use. In other words, discourse can be seen as the process of activating a text by relating it to a context in use. Contextualisation of a text is actually the reader's reconstruction of the writer's intended message. The observable product of the writer's discourse is actually a text. Discourse as discursive practise addresses multiple facets of research including textual, contextual, design and methodology. These approaches have been developed to examine ways in which knowledge is socially constructed in classrooms and other educational settings.

## **5. DIFFERENT FORMS OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

### **5.1 Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis is about trying to identify meaningful categories or themes in a body of data (Fulcher 2010:5). Howitt and Cramer (2010:211), state that in thematic analysis the task of the researcher is to identify a limited number of themes which adequately reflect their textual data. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns of (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke 2006:79). A theme is a cluster of linked categories conveying similar meanings and usually emerges through the inductive analytic process which characterises the qualitative paradigm. By looking at a text, the researcher asks whether a number of recurring themes can be abstracted about what is being said, for example, consistency or blame. Data familiarisation is a key to thematic analysis. After familiarisation, the researcher can code his/or data. In the results section of the report, the themes abstracted are collated and reported. Themes that were identified in this study were analysed and reported and recommendations made.

### **5.2 Print Text Analysis**

According to Locke (2004:25), texts can be analysed in the following ways:

- *Prosody*: critical discourse analysis allows for binaries to be exposed and contested.
- *Contextualisation signals*: reinforcing authority by a form of reiteration.
- *Cohesion*: stitching a text together into a meaningful whole. These devices include conjunctions, pronouns, demonstratives, ellipsis, adverbs and repeated words and phrases. Conjunctions serve to establish relationships of either co-ordination or subordination.
- *Discourse organisation*: the ways in which sentences cohere into larger units and in with the organisation of the paragraphs themselves.
- *Thematic organisation*: motifs that underpin the discursive structure of editorial and advance its position.

In this study the text was analysed by looking at the kind of the text, the contents, settings, characters, plot, message and the researcher's viewpoint.

### **5.3 Oral Text Analysis**

According to Locke (2004:74), analysing oral texts include the need to recognise prosodic features (variations in pitch, loudness, tempo, emphasis and rhythm); paralinguistic features (pauses, gaps, restarts, giggling, laughing); kinetic signals (hand movements, nods of the head, facial expressions and shift in gaze). In oral analysis, as in most communication, the parties follow two basic norms of cooperation and coherence (Barnett 2006:110). Okot (2007:4) concurs that in order to properly understand and interpret the meanings of text, we must place it within the context of a particular community and the circumstances under which the text is rendered. In terms of paralinguistic clues such as body language, facial expressions or proxemics (personal space), the speaker have more resources to convey meaning (Brenes 2005:5). Analysis aims to uncover ways in which particular speech-acts serve to position members of a conversation and in turn how these positions work to constitute various storylines.

## 6. CONDUCTING CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Since discourse analysis is basically an interpretive and deconstructing reading, there are no specific guidelines to follow. However, one can make use of the theories of Jacques Derrida (deconstruction), Michael Foucault (genealogy and social criticism and analysis), Julia Kristeva (feminist interpretations of current social practices), or Fredric Jameson (post modernism). McGregor (2010:5) argues that critical discourse analysis does not have a unitary theoretical framework or methodology because it is best viewed as a shared perspective encompassing a range of approaches framing the details into a coherent whole, namely:

- Choosing and placing specific photographs, diagrams, sketches, and other embellishments to get readers' attention;
- Using headings and keywords to emphasise certain concepts by giving them textual prominence;
- Leaving certain things out completely, counting on if it is not mentioned, the average reader will not notice its absence, and thereby not scrutinise it;
- Using certain words that take certain ideas for granted, as if there is no alternative;
- Manipulating the reader by using selective voices to convey the message that certain points of view are more correct, legitimate, reliable, and significant while leaving out other voices.
- It is imperative to use a variety of strategies in order to attract attention in conversations or discussions.

Mc Gregor (2010:5) mentions the following techniques of critical discourse analysis that can be used to facilitate sentences, phrases and words:

- Topicalisation, that is, in choosing what to put in the topic position, the writer creates a perspective or slant that influences the reader's perception;
- Sentences can also convey information about power relations;
- Nominalisation, that is, converting a verb into a noun;
- Presupposition can also occur at the sentence level in the form of persuasive rhetoric that can be used to convey the impression that what an agent of power says carries more weight;
- Insinuations, that is, when the facts, or the way the facts are presented, are challenged, the originator of the discourse can readily deny any culpability;
- Connotations, that is, even one word can convey strong meaning;
- Modality, that is, the tone of the text is set with the use of specific words to convey the degree of certainty and authority;
- Phony register, that is, writers can deceive readers by affecting a phony register, one that induces mistrust and scepticism.

The various techniques and approaches can assist in arousing the reader's attention and look specifically for what is appropriate and relevant. The way the discussions or conversations are presented is of paramount importance.

## 7. PRINCIPLES OF CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Wodak (2007:15) mentions the following principles of critical discourse analysis:

- Approach is interdisciplinary;
- Approach is problem-oriented rather than focused on specific linguistic items;
- Theories as well as methodologies are eclectic, that is, theories and methods are integrated, which are adequate for an understanding and explanation of the object under investigation;
- Study always incorporates fieldwork and ethnography to explore the object under investigation as a precondition for further analysis and theorising;

- Approach is adductive - a constant movement back and forth between theory and empirical data is necessary;
- Multiple genres and multiple public spaces are studied, and intertextual and interdiscursive relationships are investigated;
- Historical context is always analysed and integrated into interpretation of discourses and texts;
- Categories and tools for the analysis are defined in accordance with all these steps and procedures and also with the specific problem under investigation;
- Grand theories might serve as a foundation; in the specific analysis, middle range theories serve the aims better;
- Results should be made available to experts in different fields and, as a second step, be applied, with the goal of changing certain discursive and social practices.

Van Dijk (2006:252) indicates that critical discourse analysis requires true multi-disciplinarity and an account of intricate relationships between texts, talk, social opinion, power, society and culture. It is primarily interested and motivated by urgent social ideas, which it hopes to better understand through discourse analysis.

## **8. ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

In this study the researcher critically analysed the various advantages and disadvantages of critical discourse analysis in order to make appropriate decisions about alternatives or recommendations. Morgan (2010:4) stipulates the following advantages of critical discourse analysis:

- The techniques can reveal often unspoken and unacknowledged aspects of human behaviour, making salient either hidden or dominant discourses that maintain marginalised positions in society;
- It can reveal or help to construct a variety of new and alternative social subjects positions that are available, which in itself can be very empowering to the most vulnerable individuals;
- Critical discourse analysis can provide a positive social psychological critique of any phenomenon under the gaze of the researcher;
- It has a relevance and practical application at any given time, in any given place, and for any given people: discourse analysis is context specific;
- Understanding the function of language and discourse enables positive individual and social change, therefore it presents a critical challenge to traditional theory, policy and practice in many contexts;
- A reflective stance is incorporated wherein researchers cannot be neutral observers.
- However, Morgan (2010:4) indicates the following disadvantages of critical discourse analysis:
  - The array of options available through the various traditions can render issues of methodology problematic, as each tradition has its own epistemological position, concepts, procedures, and a particular understanding of discourse and discourse analysis;
  - Meaning is never fixed and everything is always open to interpretation and negotiation;
  - Similarities and differences between concepts may cause confusion for new researchers as well as the more experienced. When the confusion dissipates, there should be an explanation of concepts and justification for their use in each and every analysis;
  - It may disrupt longstanding notions of selfhood, gender, autonomy, identity, choice, and such disruption can be very disturbing;
  - Each tradition has been critiqued, for example, conversation analysis is said to be narrow. Foucauldian discourse is said to be too broad;
  - The general lack of explicit techniques for researchers to follow has been indicated as a hindrance.

Discourse analysis and critical thinking is applicable to every situation and every subject, no technology or funds are necessary. Authoritative discourse analysis can lead to fundamental changes in the practices of an institution, the profession, and society at large. However, discourse analysis does not provide definite answers. It is not a hard science, but an insight or knowledge based on continuous debate and argumentation (Olson 2007:31).

### 9. CONCLUSION

In this article the researcher has explored how critical discourse analysis is conducted. The researcher highlighted the fact that critical discourse analysis is primarily positioned in the environment of language and its successes can be measured with a measuring rod of the study of languages. Language can be used to represent speakers' beliefs, positions and ideas in terms of spoken texts like conversations. Written or oral messages convey meanings if we analyse the underlying meaning of the words. Analysis of underlying meanings can assist in interpreting issues, conditions and events in which the educators find themselves. Using words can direct/assist those in control of the education system.

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