

Questions for Thought and Discussion

Across the body of interviews, it is clear that the founders and exemplary practitioners of critical discourse analysis (discourse studies) collectively and strongly resist any attempt to codify, stabilize, normalize, and institutionalize the field as a single “discipline.” Instead, as Lillie Chouliaraki suggests, they call up a vision of multiple, variable, personally motivated and instantiated efforts to address social experiences and practices through the doing/making of analyses. For teachers of Critical Discourse Studies working in university-based contexts, among students who may be seeking a more stable body of “how-to” expertise, how might such open-ended approaches to inquiry be taught? What kinds of theoretical and epistemological groundwork might be laid for students as a course gets underway?

The interviews affirm that whether an analytical approach is ethnographic, multimodal, socio-cognitive, systemic-functional, historical, Marxist, semiotic, sociological, or any other, Critical Discourse Analysis begins with questions and/or problems. In educational settings, these questions have to do with schooling, teaching, and learning. From your own experience, generate three or four questions you have about what you perceive to be going on around you in an educational domain. How might this be framed in a way that can be answered through an analysis of discourse practices?

Tuen van Leeuwen and Tuen van Dijk both stress the non-restrictive, non-prescriptive nature of CDA as “a method.” James Paul Gee offers the “seven building tasks” and “tools of inquiry” as sets of questions that might be asked of a body of data. Norman Fairclough uses his ideas about genres, discourses, and styles to address questions. Select a small piece of text or discourse that interests you and try out both ways of exploring what it seems to be up to as a social practice. Which way led to more interesting and meaningful interpretations?

Discourse analysts are what Gunther Kress might call “motivated signmakers,” too. If, as James Paul Gee suggests, social goods are at stake in all human expression, what is at stake for the analyst? How does this relate to what Luisa Martín Rojo says in the “Approaches” section about preferring the term “problematizing” to “revealing” with respect to what CDA should be attempting to do?

James Paul Gee suggests that practitioners of discourse analysis often fail in their reckoning with context. In the first place, context is “everything that’s there.” Figuring out how much of “everything” to include and describe—how far out to extend the contextual boundaries in a given analysis—is the first question. Second, in every local and particular social situation, context “exists prior to speaking and is created by speaking.” Gee asks: how can we capture a moment in which some things are fixed and some things are being created in and through interacting *in situ*? Pick one of your research questions and experiment with the effect of variously construed and described

contexts. What effect do different contextual boundaries have on your thinking about your question?

James Collins, Luisa Martín Rojo and Carmen Caldas-Coulthard encourage us to think reflexively about our own cultural contexts as well how our work as researchers may privilege some kinds of people and exclude other kinds of people. In what ways is your work as a critical discourse analyst privileging some voices and excluding others? In what ways does your own cultural background limit your interpretations?

If we take up Gunther Kress's call to think about curricular design in service to the needs of students for future social practices, how might critical discourse analysis contribute to courses of study in this or that context? What kinds of questions can teachers and scholars pose that will help all students feel empowered to have their hand on the rudder?

James Collins calls for future work in Critical Discourse Studies to move beyond the dominant framing of Europe and North America and to seek to understand the relationships between the global south and global north. Viewers of this video may notice that the majority of participants are, indeed, from the North Atlantic. Practically speaking, in what ways can the people who constitute the loosely bound group of people who refer to themselves as critical discourse analysts seek out and connect with scholars and teachers from places not represented here in order to address more transglobal questions?