



The Significance of Critical Thinking in Classrooms

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Abstract

While stating that the need of the hour is to develop critical thinking ability among our teachers, the author avers that critical thinking is one of the life skills which every classroom must provide with ample opportunities for the students to develop and become capable of using critical thinking in this competitive world. The world is getting both more technical and more complex day by day, that's why the necessity for education increases for each growing generation. The skill of thinking critically is generally accepted as a very vital stage in every field of learning, particularly in the last decades. As a result this study draws a general suggestion on the significance critical thinking in classrooms.

Key Words: Critical Thinking, Thinking.

“Critical thinking is reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do”

— Robert Ennis

Introduction

What is critical thinking, and why is it so important? The Critical Thinking Community defined critical thinking as “the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and /or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action” (Scriven & Poul,2007,p.1) . Thinking critically will boost creativity and enhance the way you use and manage your time (Hader, 2005). Critical thinking can provide you with a more insightful understanding of yourself. It will offer you an opportunity to be objective, less emotional, and more open-minded as you appreciate others' views and opinions. By thinking ahead, you will gain the confidence to present fresh perspectives and new insights into burdensome concerns.

Nature of Critical Thinking

Critical thinking consists of mental processes of discriminant, analyzing and evaluating. It includes all possible processes of relative tangible intangible items in order to form a solid judgement that reconciles scientific evidence with common sense. Such critical thinking is based on concepts and principles, not on hard and fast or steps-by-step procedures. Thus critical thinking is principle based not procedure base.

Critical thinking may be distinguished, but not separated, from emotions, desires and traits of mind. Failure to recognize the relationship between thinking, feeling, wants and traits of mind can easily lead to various forms of self-deception, both individual and collective. A person without intellectual traits of mind will have weak critical thinking ability whereas a person with fair mental traits will have a strong sense of critical thinking. Thus critical thinking requires intellectual humility, empathy, integrity, courage, autonomy, confidence and other intellectual traits. Therefore critical thinking means correct thinking in the pursuit of relevant and reliable knowledge about the world. A person who thinks critically can ask appropriate questions, gather information, reason logically from this information and come to reliable and trustworthy conclusions about the world that enables one to live and act successfully in it.

True critical thinking is higher order thinking, enabling a person to judge between political candidates analytically, evaluate need for nuclear power plant, assess the consequences of global warming etc. hence critical thinking enables an individual to be a responsible citizen who contributes to society and not merely and not merely a consumer of social resources.

Critical Thinking

When the term of ‘Critical Thinking’ is searched, it is understood that there are meanings of it which are suggested in the frame of philosophy and psychology sciences but in general sense this term has not got a definite meaning. ‘Critical’, derived from the Greek word *kritikos* meaning to judge, arose out of the way analysis and Socratic argument comprised thinking at that time. (McGregor, 2007) and then the word *kritikos* passed to Latin as ‘Criticus’ that is the type of spreading to world languages from it (Hançerlioğlu, 1996). According to Critical Thinking Cooperation (2006) critical thinking is an ability which is beyond memorization. When students think critically, they are encouraged to think for themselves, to question hypotheses, to analyze and synthesize the events, to go one step further by developing new hypotheses and test them against the facts. Questioning is the cornerstone of critical thinking which in turn is the source of knowledge formation and as such should be taught as a framework for all learning. Students are frequently conditioned in their approach to learning by experiences in teacher-centred, textbook-driven classrooms (Sharma & Elbow 2000). This situation is a disturbing case for contemporary educators, and for this reason they would rather choose the latest models and methods which are more effective in directing students to thinking.

Characteristics of a Critical Thinker

Raymond S. Nickerson (1987), an authority on critical thinking, characterizes a good critical thinker in terms of knowledge, abilities, attitude and habitual ways of behaving. According to him the following are the main characteristics of a good critical thinker: uses evidence skillfully and impartially organizes thoughts and articulates them concisely, distinguishes between valid and invalid inferences, understands the difference between reasoning and rationale, attempts to anticipate probable consequences of alternative acts, understands the idea of degree of belief, learners independently, applies problem solving techniques, questions one’s own views, is sensitive, and aware of the fact that one’s understanding is always limited etc.,

When we take a look to the definitions about critical thinking, approximately we can infer a general idea about the features of the individual who thinks critically. Critical thinking individuals are people who research, question, refuse the information’s as it is, active, think analytically and synthesis, evaluate the information and explain with true basis, treat open-minded and aware of thinking processes. If you develop the ability to analyse people’s attempts to persuade so that you can accurately interpret what they are saying or writing and evaluate whether or not they are giving a good argument then you can begin to liberate yourself from accepting what others try to persuade you off without knowing whether you actually have a good reason to be persuaded (Bowell & Kemp, 2002). Anyway this part is a very explanatory and descriptive one in emphasizing both the importance of critical thinking and characteristics of critical learners. Paul and Elder (2008) revealed a list about the characteristics of critical thinkers. They list the characteristics of critical thinkers as: Raises vital questions and problems, formulating them clearly and precisely; Gathers and assesses relevant information, using abstract ideas to interpret it effectively; Comes to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards; Thinks open-mindedly within alternative systems of thought, recognizing and assessing as need be, their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences; Communicates effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems. (Paul & Elder, 2008, p. xxiii)

Teaching Critical Thinking

Every pupil should have an effective skill of critical thinking, and they must not accept anything for granted but how can you teach thinking critically to students? There are several ways of organizing for instruction in critical thinking: We can teach a separate course or unit, we can infuse critical thinking into all that we teach, or we can use a mixed approach. The first approach of a separate course or unit requires materials that teach specifically for critical thinking dispositions, skills, and knowledge. The downside is that there may be little transfer from what the program or materials teach to the rest of the curriculum. Infusion, the second possible approach, requires that critical thinking be taught as an integral part of all subject areas (Wright, 2002). Teachers had better be equipped with high critical thinking skills. Critical thinking is not equal with intelligence and shouldn’t be misunderstood with it. Critical thinking is skill which can be developed (Walsh and Paul, 1988). As well as critical thinking can be developed, it can be searched and analyzed with its different dimensions, so this shows that many scientists or experts hypothesize about critical thinking, because the vitality of critical thinking has been realized by many people recently.

Process of Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is the process of analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating the authenticity, accuracy and worth of information and arguments gathered through observation, experience, reflection and logical reasoning. It is the ability to make evaluations and judgement based on logic and ideas, rather than on intrinsic value.

Passi and others (2004) have identified several micro-skills under the process of critical thinking such as comparing, evaluating, hypothesizing, logically deducing, distinguishing facts and opinions, classifying, estimating, interpreting, identifying pros and cons, identifying propaganda, justifying, identifying assumptions, observations,

prediction, reorganization, inductive reasoning, setting criteria, sequencing, translating, summarizing, synthesizing and exploring implications. By completing any one or more of these micro skills, the process of critical thinking is completed.

Teaching of Critical Thinking

The key to see the significance of critical thinking in the class room is in understanding the significance of the critical thinking learning. To learn is to think, to think poorly is to learn poorly and to think well is to learn well. To learn any content one must think intellectually in content area. That means to say that to learn science must think scientifically or to learn history one should think historically. This type of content learning occurs in two phases. The first occurs when learners construct the basic ideas, principles, theories that are inherent in content in their minds. This is a process of internalization. The second occurs when learners effectively use those ideas, principles and theories as they become relevant in learner's life. This is a process of application. Good teachers cultivate critical thinking at every stage of learning. Hence the teachers must ask Socratic questions students to enable them to think critically and answer. Some typical Socratic questions may be like; (a) what you mean by this? (b) why did you say so? (c) how do you come to this conclusion (d) how is this different from that? (e) why is this issue so significant? etc. Of course, there are many other possibilities of asking such Socratic questions. The key is that the teacher who fosters critical thinking invariably fosters reflectiveness in students by asking such questions which stimulate their thinking to construct new knowledge.

In order to teach critical thinking in the classroom a teacher can follow the methods.

Lecturing

The subject matter must be presented in such a way that information flows continuously with logical organization. This presentation must encourage every student to think critically not only to understand the material but also to analyze and apply it to new situations.

Laboratories

Students inevitably practice critical thinking during laboratory experiments of sciences subjects as they are during the experiments on the basis of scientific method.

Homework

Traditional or special homework sets an opportunity for a student to think critically before he attempts the given assignment.

Desk work

If desk work is given in the classroom itself, there is a scope for the teachers to instill the spirit of critical thinking by intervening during the process of solving the given problems.

Term Papers

The best way to teach critical thinking is to ask students to write. Writing forces students to organize their thoughts, contemplate their topic, evaluate their data in a logical fashion and present their conclusions in a persuasive manner. Good writing is the epitome of good critical thinking.

Discussion

Divide the entire class into two groups and provide a topic for discussion. This is to be done under the proper supervision of a teacher.

Examinations

Examination questions can be devised in such a way that each question promotes critical thinking rather than mere memorization.

Conclusion

Critical thinking is no doubt necessary in every field of life, but especially for professions that occupy with people. Finkelman (2001) took the attention and emphasized the importance that the people who work in the field of human health, especially the people who directly intervene to the person's life like psychologists, counsellors and educationalists have to be critical thinkers in both practice and management. In order for teachers and counsellors to be able to implement critical thinking into their classrooms they must first be committed to critical thinking and its philosophy. Thus, it is in the need of the hour to develop critical thinking ability among our students. Critical thinking is considered as one of the life skills;

therefore every classroom must provide ample opportunities for the students to develop it and become capable of using it in this competitive world.

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